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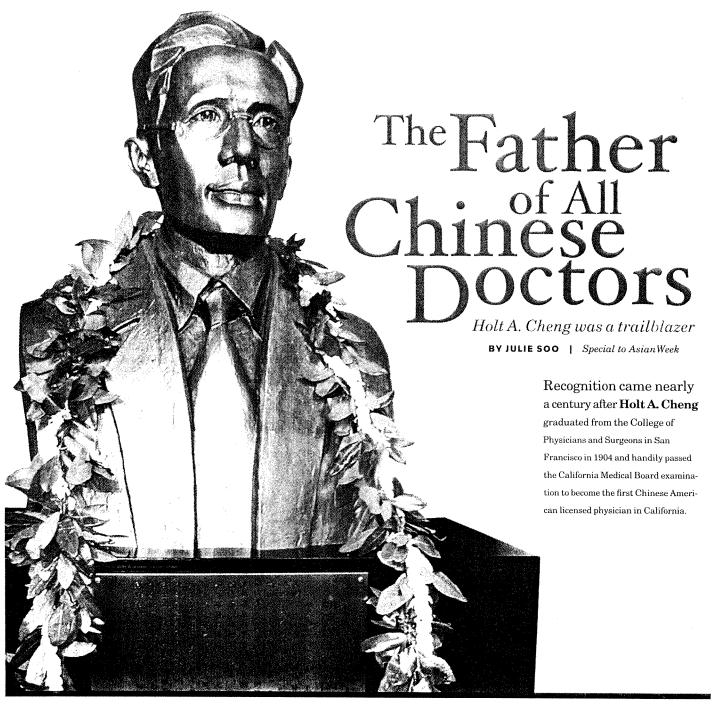
Picky Eater honors **National** Chicken Month

Plaque becomes rallying point



DIMPLED CHADCourt recalls

the recall election



Surrounded by three generations of Chengs at a formal San Francisco Medical Society ceremony on July 26, Dr. Homer Cheng, Holt's 76-year-old son, said tears came to his eyes when he received a copy of a November 2002 letter.

The correspondence from Dr. Robert Lull, then president of the 135-year-old San Francisco Medical Society, written to Dean Ling of Guang Hua College (part of the medical school Holt Cheng founded) announced that the San Francisco Medical Society would honor Cheng. Even though he never practiced as a doctor in San Francisco, he would retroactively become a member of the society.

"This has to be the greatest honor my father could receive in the United States," says Homer Cheng. "Although he may not have accomplished all he set out to do in his relatively short life, I believe he accomplished quite a bit. In fact, I am sure my father is smiling down on us today, here in San Francisco as well as the Guang Hua campus in Guangzhou, China."

'Enterprising Chinaman' with No Queue

Dr. Holt Cheng first made news headlines on Aug. 8, 1904, in *The San Francisco Call* newspaper. Although his picture was prominent, the compliments were backhanded and even his name was butchered. The newspaper described "Chang A. Holt" of 804 Stockton St. as an "enterprising Chinaman" who "enjoys the distinction of being the first Chinaman admitted to practice by the Board of Medical Examiners of California. ... He has been Christianized and wears no queue."

The article told of Cheng's journey as an

8-year-old sent to the Hawaiian Islands in 1886 to work for an uncle, who was a grocer in Hilo, and his subsequent desire to become a medical doctor: "With much money in his pocket, the slant-eyed boy then sailed to America. He commenced upon his studies immediately and applied himself as busily as ever to the fulfillment of his purpose."

Cheng indicated his desire to bring his Western medical training to the people of his birthplace in Guangdong Province. The San Francisco Call wrote: "He will cure their bodies of physical ills, teach them the advantages of civilization and instruct them spiritually."

Upon his return to China, Cheng was invited to the Imperial Palace in Peking and was awarded the special degree of Medical Ju Ren, the fourth highest scholarly degree given by the palace. He was appointed as

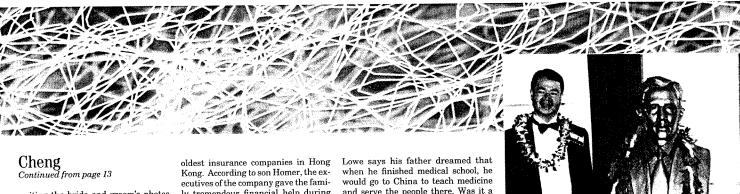
the expectant secretary of the Grand Secretariat and head master of the Imperial Army Medical College in Canton. In June 1909, Cheng represented the Imperial Chinese government at the International Leprosy Conference in Bergen, Norway.

Marriage on the Front Page

Nearly six years after his California medical induction, Cheng again made Bay Area news headlines. On the front page of the March 23, 1910, Oakland Tribune, it announced Cheng and Edna Lee as a "prominent Chinese couple who will be married March 29th in the First Baptist Church, according to American customs."

This time, the coverage was more accepting, even if a cartooned character of Cupid

Cheng continued on page 14



uniting the bride and groom's photos was shown with a queue, a Chinese cap and slanted eyes. The Oakland Tri-bune described Edna, the daughter of Rev. and Mrs. Tsai Leong Lee, not only as a "pretty and winsome girl" but also commented on her scholarly accomplishments. Edna was a student at San Francisco's Lowell High School until the 1906 earthquake and subse-

quently graduated from Oakland High School in 1908. At the time of marriage, the newspaper said, "Miss Lee is one of the most brilliant students in the University of California, which she entered with the class of 1912." The college coed sacrificed her education and career for her husband and kinfolk by making the family home in Canton, where son Homer and six other children were born. Well beyond the role of wife and mother, she took an active part in her community and taught English to the Guang Hua medical stu-

China's Western Medical School

Cheng's story first came back to San Francisco attention in 2002. San Francisco State University Asian American Studies professor Lorraine Dong learned of him after offering a letter of congratulations to the Guangdong Guang Hua Medical College in Guangdong, in honor of its 94th anniversary.

Cheng founded the Guang Hua Medical Society in 1908, which became the Guangdong Guang Hua Medical School in 1909 (and the Guangdong Guang Hua Medical College in 1929). At the time, there were very few medical doctors in Imperial China trained in Western medicine. Living under Manchurian control and colonialism, Cheng fought for the right to medical care for all citizens.

Run by a Chinese staff, Guangdong Guang Hua employed all Chinese pro fessors and was the first Chinese medical school to admit women students. Cheng served as the medical school's first president, never accepting compensation, except from his private practice patients, during his 23-year tenure.

Not only had Cheng been a successful doctor, he was an astute businessman. He was one of the founders of the Hong Nian (Healthy Life) Life Insurance Company, one of the largest and

ly tremendous financial help during the first part of the war before the Japanese occupied Hong Kong.

Cheng retired in 1931 due to health problems. After the Japanese bombed his son Homer's elementary school, the family relocated to a friend's home in the Guangxi Province, deep within the mountains. The temporary village

refuge became their home for an eight-year ordeal. Cheng died there in

1942 with Edna and Homer at his side. No medical care was available and his physician son opines that his father died of cancer or liver disease.

Training a Doctor in Exclusionary America

"What if America was more welcoming? What could Holt Cheng have accomplished?" ponders professor Lorraine Dong. "Those of us in Asian American studies always wonder: What if we did not have this cloud over us - racism and discrimination? How successful might we really be or how much might we really contribute?"

Dong said that even today, many U.S.-born Chinese find great success in China or Asia that they can't seem to attain here.

Still an open question in the Cheng story is how he was able to enter a medical school in San Francisco, given a growing anti-Chinese sentiment. Dong believes that religion may have been at play.

"Holt Cheng was Christian. Students then, especially international students, were usually sponsored by the church," Dong says. In that backdrop, San Francisco's Chinese Hospital, still a thriving institute today, was chartered in 1899, the year before Cheng's admission to medical school.

Homer Cheng also points out that his father's Affidavit of Travel stated, "Never been a laborer," indicating an educated or mercantile class outside of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 restrictions. Ironically, the act was extended "indefinitely" in 1904, the year of Holt Cheng's graduation, before its repeal in 1943.

History of Going Back to China

San Francisco native Dr. Rolland

and serve the people there. Was it a similar philosophy that took Holt Cheng back to China?

"Back then, immigrants were committed to 'a cause,' " Lowe says. "They vowed to serve their community back in China."

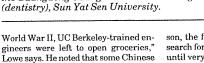
Lowe ultimately did not serve a community in China, but has been serving the San Francisco Chinese community professionally and socially for over four decades.

"At the time I finished medical school in 1955 and finished training in 1963, the environment in China had changed, so I didn't follow my father's wishes," Lowe says. "I realized that I could still help the Chinese community, but in San Francisco."

Lowe went on to become the first Chinese American elected president of the San Francisco Medical Society and only Chinese American to be elected president of the California Medical Association.

Lowe says not so long ago, discrimination was so severe that Chinese Americans could not find jobs despite their professional training. "During

Above left (inset): Holt A. Cheng yearbook photo from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of San Francisco, class of 1904. Below: Holt Cheng's photo in the registrar's office.



Homer H. Cheng, M.D. (right), son of Holt Cheng and h

Cheng, M.D. (right), flank a replica of the bust of Holt C the Guangdong Guang Hua Medical College of Stomate

gineers were left to open groceries,' found success in the "melting pot," but that often meant becoming part of the 'old boys network.'

Back in his day, Lowe says that only five Asian Pacific Americans were admitted to a medical school's class of 75 students. Today, 25 percent of medical school students nationally are APAs a percentage, Lowe says, that many people think would only apply to a state like California.

"What is the legacy of someone like Holt Cheng?" Lowe asks. "I think it concerns the obligation to improving our community; the spirit of giving back;

"Today, many seem less committed to community and look for personal comfort. Chinese Americans have great opportunities in the U.S. and a great number are successful because of the

sacrifices for we and because of the working-for-we-and-not-me spirit."

Father-Hero Missing in History

That "we" spirit could have been revolutionary. The founder of modern China, Sun Yat Sen, and Holt Cheng could have crossed paths.

Thus far, no documentation has firmly established a relationship, but Homer Cheng said his mother, Edna, also known as Li Ligie, was a friend of Madam Soong Qing Ling, one of the famous Soong sisters and the woman who married Sun in 1911. Sun went on to become the father of democracy in China and the father of the Republic of China.

Sun and Cheng were trained in the United States as medical doctors. Both were born in China's Xiangshan County in Guangdong Province. Both traveled to the Hawaiian Islands, San Francisco and New York.

Homer Cheng is now 76 years old. For the soft-spoken and humble

son, the fifth child : search for his father until very recently.

For years, he had torical indexes for " and found little or no came inspired again keynote speech givnoted Chinese Amer tivist, at the 90th an the Chinese Amei liance in May 2002 nese Americans a missing in history

"It was the first Francisco Chinese had attended," "Frankly, I was ove ing in Ohio, where nese, and then seeil and how friendly th

Shot in the Dark

By mere chance, ber Joyce Chan n same dinner. Move father "MIH." she is

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says. "In my book, MIH, missing in h each new detail, I lighted, excited and formation that I h fore, about my hist culture. I learned

Homer's son, Lo Rex Lee Cheng, a father's continuing family, including

American should !

ple do.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. HOMER CHENG



his son, Rex Lee Cheng that sits at tology

of Holt Cheng, the r's story eluded him

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, I called this history nistory. As I learned I was surprised, dedangry. I learned inand never known beory, my heritage, my i things that every know, yet so few peo-

os Angeles physician appreciates what his g quest means for the his two sisters, also doctors.

"I didn't know a lot about my grand-father because my father didn't know, he only had bits and pieces of information," Rex Lee Cheng says. "My father is

"Wilder, Wise and Wakefield in Husted's Directory of Honolulu, 1899. A book evidences Chang Ho as part of Sun Yat Sen's Chinese Revolutionary Team in Hilo in 1903.

thinking of going back to China one

more time for the 95th anniversary of

and his parents' life as immigrants from China, he says, "When you look

back and try to put yourself in their

shoes, what stands out are their sur-

vival skills. Their choices were not al-

ways appealing but were necessary to

Joyce Chan and Homer Cheng con-

"My friends think this new hobby

tinue to search for more clues in the

has become an addiction," says Chan.

achieve their ultimate goals."

Dr. Cheng and Sausage

Holt Cheng story.

the Guang Hua Medical College." Reflecting on his grandfather's life Chan chuckles, "We can thank Holt Cheng for having lop cheurng (Chinese sausage)." One of the San Francisco Chinese-language newspapers dated March 15, 1910, notes that at a Chinese Chamber of Commerce banquet, "President Tan expressed gratitude to Dr. Cheng, who persuaded the U.S. government to repeal the ban on Chinese sausage import. He signed a document to prove that Chinese sausage was not harmful to one's health."

"It is so exciting each time I make a discovery so I can connect one [more] piece of the puzzle with a new finding," Chan says. "One of the Guang Hua alumni wrote in a letter, 'You have brought glory to the Chinese people



Untangling Chinese Family Roots

Genealogist offers some tips

BY JULIE D. SOO Special to AsianWeek

eanie Low, a San Francisco-based genealogist and lecturer for the National Genealogical Society, specializes in Chinese American history and offers tips on how to begin a search for family history. Additional help can be gleaned from her book China Connections: Finding Ancestral Roots for Chinese in America. Much of Chinese American history for families whose ancestors came through San Francisco, particularly during the Chinese Exclusion Act era (1882-1943) and earlier, and up to pre-1965 immigration, is housed at the U.S. National Archives & Records Administration (NARA), Pacific Sierra Region offices in San Bruno, Calif.

• Talk to relatives. If the first-generation immigrant entered before 1965, find out what port that ancestor entered, the name at entry and the year. If the person left and returned to the United States, find out the latest year of entry.

• If the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) investigated the subject person sometime between the '50s and the '70s concerning resident status, naturalization or confession and amnesty, an Alien File, or "A-File," was created. These documents are not open to the public and a Freedom of Information Act records request must be made to the INS (now the Department of Justice's Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services). Be able to provide the naturalized name or any other name used, the port of entry and the naturalization year.

If the subject person is still alive, that person must execute a notarized document giving the researcher permission to access the documents. If the subject person is

deceased, a copy of the death certificate or signature of the executor giving permission to access the documents is required.

The U.S. government began keeping A-Files in 1944 under the authority of the Alien Registration Act of 1940.

• If the subject person entered the United States before 1965 and was not investigated, the immigration documents are most likely at

NARA and can be located through a name index database.

Researchers may call ahead and make an appointment with NARA staff. The staff may conduct a search, pull files and have documents available prior to arrival at the NARA offices.

· As with the Holt A. Cheng case, variations of his name have come into play. If a name does not appear, try flipping the name around. (Many Chinese surnames were mistakenly documented as first names and many given names were used as last names by immigration officials.) Try variations in spelling. Also keep in mind the "paper sons" issue: After records were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake and fire in '06, many Chinese used false documents and adopted a U.S. "sponsor's" surname to immigrate under the guise of being a son, a "paper son" or son in name only. Talking to relatives will reveal whether the current surname is the original family name or a "paper name." The Chinese character surname is usually the true family name. Many families with paper names revert back to the true family name upon naturalization.

Often, a search at NARA returns a number of people by the same name. Have other identifying information available, such as other individuals who may have immigrated at the same time or photos of the subject person at the age of entry. Researchers may want to copy photos from NARA to show relatives for positive identification.

• Other places to search include:

 U.S. census records from 1790-1930. Note that the 1890 census records were lost in a fire.

 Look to individual Chineses communities. Many family and benevolent associations and the community-at-large keeps records.

If the subject person came through San Francisco from 1892 to the 1930s, look to the Chinese Business Partnership registry. Immigrants during those years were required to register with the INS through this registry so that the INS could enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act, albeit with rather loose criteria: "working with hands" meant a laborer subject to the act as compared to a "business partner."

- If the subject person died between 1870 and 1933 in California, the INS compiled a list to compare with any entering immigrants allegedly using false identification. Low adds that placing family history within the larger historical context will aid in successful searches.