

# Currents

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## Update

### Yee Fow Center for History, Culture, and Trade

There is a story that lies just beneath the surface. It's a story buried, of the first Asian Americans to this country, the Chinese pioneers who came to Yee Fow. It's a story of a people who moved mountains seeking their fortune in Gum Shan. And, it was through their efforts that the United States was united with the Transcontinental Railroad. It's a story of a people who parted the waters building the delta levees. And, it was through their efforts that California is a state of world class agriculture. It was through their efforts that some of the first civil rights laws were established in America. And, it was through their efforts that the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is one of the finest places to live.

I say this story is buried, because like so many sacred places of our Chinese Californian pioneers, much of our chapter in history has been Driven Out, torn, set on fire, and scattered under rock and rubble. Certainly, Chinatowns across America have been burned then diagnosed as dying for longer than some people live. Every few years, someone writes the obituary for another Chinese neighborhood. But our stories must rise from the ashes and remain. It is time to put names and faces to the sacred places of the Chinese in California.

In the past 9 months Sacramento city officials, city commissioners, Thomas Enterprises and community organizations throughout California have vetted the issue of the Chinese heritage at the Railyards, the largest infill redevelopment project in all America and the grounds of the early California Chinese pioneers of Yee Fow.

In the evening of December 11, 2007, the Sacramento City Council Meeting was flooded with support to commemorate the region's rich Chinese heritage with a Chinese Garden and a Yee Fow Center for History, Cultural and Trade. Organizations joined in unity along with the Friends of the Yee Fow Museum. With CAPITAL, APAPA, OCA, the JACL and up to 40 API supporters in the audience, and many more watching from home, the Mayor and Council acknowledged the importance of the Yee Fow project and gave their assurances to work with the community to make it a reality.

That night, the Asian and Pacific Islander communities were successful in establishing the important Chinese story buried within the Railyards. The Mayor and City Council also agreed that the Chinese history must be addressed. Asians stood united defending their historical legacy and engaging in the American process.

And though there are extraordinary demands, this moment will define us as Chinese and Asian Americans in California, our greatest days are still ahead of us and this generation of API must unite to meet our rendezvous with destiny. We must choose to step outside of the shadows of the Chinese Exclusion Act and weave our stories into the fabric of the great American tale.

Sacramento has a great opportunity to establish a unique center that will honor the history of the region while positioning it for economic growth in the future. A Chinese American center of history, culture, and trade will not only honor the workers who built the Central Pacific Railroad but will also tell the story of the Chinese in California, provide a rich and diverse entertainment venue, and segue into opportunities to partner with China in terms of trade and tourism.

The Yee Fow Center for History, Culture, and Trade will represent, both symbolically and actually, a Chinese Garden in which will grow not only understanding of the heritage and contributions of the Chinese to California and Sacramento's history, but will also grow businesses and trade relationships with China to impact the state's economy.

In the last few years, over 170 trade delegations from China that have visited California; New York, the next closest state, entertained 64 delegations. With the demise of the State's Trade and Commerce Agency, Sacramento, as the state capitol, has a chance to utilize the Yee Fow Center to receive these delegations in a modern, professional, and sensitive Center that honors their presence and reinforces California's position as a critical Pacific Rim trading partner.

A Yee Fow Center for Chinese American History, Culture, and Trade Advisory Board has been meeting since December 18, 2007 with this in mind. The meetings have been taking place at Stantec Inc., formerly Chong Partners Architecture. The board consists of State and local officials, commissioners, business leaders, members of CAPITAL, APAPA, OCA, CASC, SCCF and others.

The intersection between our stories and the places they are told is an intrinsic part of our identity. We must carry on the legacy of our Chinese pioneers by creating sacred places. Just as Marysville, Stockton, and San Francisco, the Sacramento Railyards and the stories of our ancestors of Yee Fow is one of those sacred places.

In the words of Richard Rich, Development Director for Thomas Enterprises, "We hope the idea of a Trade Center grows into a magnificent office tower. The vision of a renewed Chinese presence in downtown Sacramento anchored by the Chinatown Mall, a Museum and Cultural Center and a Trade Center office tower, connected by gardens and streetscapes, populated by streetfront tenants, offers the Chinese-Asian communities great visibility, prominence and the "urban mass" to create a marketable identity."

More information regarding Stantec Inc.'s benchmarks and massing for the Yee Fow Center for History, Culture, and Trade can be found at: <http://www.yeefowmuseum.org>