



Chinese
Heritage
Association of
Australia

澳洲華人歷史文物會

Exploring and Sharing
the History and Heritage of
Chinese who have come to Australia

Dear Members and Friends,

Now that we've passed the winter solstice, the days are getting longer, not that the temperatures are necessarily getting that much warmer. We did have wonderful weather on Saturday when my sisters and I went to Moore Park to celebrate the centenary of our high school moving to the site after the Zoological Gardens moved to Taronga. Our school was actually founded in 1883, three years after the passage of the Public Education Act in New South Wales. I remember participating in the "80 to 80" celebrations when I was teaching in Braidwood.

We've also seen a change in COVID-19 numbers with a different variant popping up. Unlike the strain that affected a lot of younger people earlier in the year, attributed to people being able to move about more freely, this time there seems to be a greater effect on older people. If you're entitled to a booster or an additional booster, it's a great time to do so, plus we're being told that it's still not too late to have a flu shot if you haven't already had one.

History Week

The theme of History Week this year is "hands on history". Our speaker is Dr Ian Hoskins, the historian for North Sydney Council, who will be speaking on the Chinese in North Sydney, 1880-1940, including the market gardens in the area. The talk will be at the start of History Week, on Saturday 3rd September at 2:30 in the Henry Carmichael Theatre at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts. For details, please check the flyer at the end of this newsletter.

MOCA Grant

Last Sunday morning, Margaret and I were at MOCA for a major funding announcement. Ben Franklin, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Arts, and Regional Youth, and Mark Coure, Minister for Seniors and Multiculturalism, announced on behalf of the NSW Government the awarding of funding to MOCA for the refurbishment of 744 George Street. The funding amounts to about half of what is required for the refurbishment but I know it will go a long way to the redevelopment of the interior of the building.

A reminder that the pop-up exhibition, *Stories of Home*, is on until 23rd September, with the exhibition being open Wednesday to Friday weekly. You still have the opportunity to contribute a photograph that reflects your own story of home at the Museum or to contribute a short piece on your story of home via the links on the website at <https://www.moca.com.au/>.

MOCA is looking to opening its doors in 2023.



Members of MOCA's original Committee – Dr John Yu, Peter Hack (back row), Dr Stephen FitzGerald, Cheryl Cumines, Daphne Lowe Kelley and Susan Leong – with Margaret Yung Kelly and Man Yee Leonfore



Members of the MOCA Board with Tony Stephens, Executive Director of MOCA, and Ministers Franklin and Couré.

CHAA's 20th Anniversary

CHAA's Committee is meeting this week to make some decisions on where and when we will celebrate this important anniversary. The Marigold Restaurant's closing has meant that we will need to find a new venue; with that in mind, members of the Committee having been talking to other Chinese Australian associations as to where they have recently been holding major functions. At the moment we are looking at November although I know there are already some dates that have been pencilled in by other groups.

***Intersectional Lives* – Alanna Kamp Book Launch**

In March 2017 Dr Alanna Kamp was our guest speaker, speaking on the topic *Family Roles and Responsibilities of Chinese Australian Women in White Australia, 1901-1973*. This was related to research she had conducted as part of her PhD studies, with many of the interviews being conducted with members of the Chinese Women's Association.

Alanna's work has come together in her book *Intersectional Lives* which was launched on Friday 29th July in Parramatta. As well as the launch, there was a panel discussion featuring fellow historian Dr Sophie Loy-Wilson and CHAA member Daphne Lowe Kelley, one of the interviewees in the book, who spoke about the generations of her own family. Some CHAA members were able to attend the launch in person while Margaret and I attended via Zoom, as did a number of others.

Alanna has suggested that her book might be more suitable for libraries to buy; as it has been published by Routledge which specialises in academic books, it is probably a little more expensive than the average person might want to spend on a book but would undoubtedly be suitable for a library.

Uluru Statement of the Heart

CHAA has been asked if it will participate in a joint resolution of multicultural associations in support of the Uluru Statement of the Heart. This is an important statement which speaks to the recognition of Australia's First Peoples in the Constitution.

The Committee has discussed this but would like your input. Please let me know your thoughts.

Looking for Mary Seah Family Members

The Australian Dictionary of Biography is preparing an article on Mary Seah (1905-2000), the renowned 'Angel of Changi', a Singaporean Chinese woman who in World War II risked her life to provide food, medicine, and other supplies to Australian prisoners of war. She migrated to Australia in 1967. A copy of her obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 March 2000, is attached and has more information about her.

The article will be published in the ADB Online's open website and in the forthcoming print Volume 20 of the ADB. The dictionary is a scholarly resource featuring concise biographies of individuals who have been significant in Australian history.

The author of the article, Darryl Bennet, is keen to get in touch with people who knew Mary Seah or have information about her life. In particular, he needs to make contact with members of her family who may be interested in helping with this project.

His email address is darryl.bennet@anu.edu.au and his mobile number is 0400 357 130.

Information about the Australian Dictionary of Biography can be found here: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/>

Vale

Australia lost three members of its entertainment industry in the past week with the loss of Gunditjmara and Bundjalung man and singer-songwriter Archie Roach, Judith Durham, the unique and gifted voice of the Seekers and Olivia Newton-John, who was the bouncy heroine of *Grease* and numerous other films and recordings and a warrior in the fight against cancer. All three had faced ill-health in recent times and will be missed, especially as voices of their respective generation.

National Bowel Screening Campaign

The Cancer Council, along with the Federal Government, will be running an intensive advertising campaign over the next four weeks, highlighting the importance of the free bowel screening test for adults aged 50-74. They are particularly targeting multicultural communities as there is a general reluctance amongst some community groups to do the free test.

For more information, go to <https://www.cancer.org.au/bowelscreening>.

That's all for now.

Cheryl Cummins

President



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The Chinese in North Sydney 1880-1940

Few people are aware that present-day North Sydney – formerly St Leonards – was home to a small but vibrant community of Chinese market gardeners and grocers in the last decades of the 19th century, before the consolidation of Chinatown on the south side of Sydney Harbour.

More than 30 shops in Mount Street, on Lane Cove Road (now the Pacific Highway), on Military Road, Blues Point Road and in Crows Nest were operated by Chinese grocers and green grocers. Several market gardens in Cammeray were worked by Chinese men before the spread of suburbia in the early 1900s.

Join North Sydney Council historian Dr Ian Hoskins for an illustrated talk about this fascinating aspect of Sydney's Chinese heritage.



Ah Sing's Grocery Store, Willoughby Road, Crows Nest. c 1905

Source: Dr Ian Hoskins, North Sydney Council



Higginbotham North Shore Map c 1895
Courtesy State Library of New South Wales

DATE: Saturday, 3rd September 2022
TIME: 2.30 – 4 pm
VENUE: Sydney Mechanics School of Arts,
Henry Carmichael Theatre,
280 Pitt St Sydney NSW
COST: \$10 CHAA members, \$15 non-members
BOOKINGS: Kathie – 4861 3078 or dblunt@bigpond.net.au

Light refreshments included

Mary Seah, AM, The Angel of Changi [Back to top](#)

From the Sydney Morning Herald, 14th. March, 2000.

The Angel of Changi, 1905 - 2000.

She was only 150 cm. tall, with an innocent Chinese face, shy manner and soft voice, but Mary Seah, who died, aged 94, was also a determined and resilient woman, not to be underestimated. She was a heroine of WW2, the woman known as the Angel of Changi, by all those whose lives she helped to save. Seah sneaked food and medicines to the prisoners at the Japanese camps, risking her life; she could easily have been executed by the Japanese and was tortured by them on several occasions.

She was born in Singapore, her father left home to seek work in China when she was three and young Mary grew up in boarding school, where she learned very quickly to fend for herself. She was betrothed by her parents when she was 17. Seah followed her mother's career of midwife and social work. She was sharp enough to realise that it would be a good idea to be fluent, and literate, in several Asian languages, as well as in English.

When Singapore fell in 1942, Seah, then 36, was single handedly raising nine children aged between 5 and 18 (she had walked out on an irascible husband) by working up to 22 hours a day. Then her 16 year old son, Kim Tee, was taken by the Japanese. She would search endlessly for him at various camps but found no trace of him.

What she did find was the many prisoners crammed into Singapore jails. She decided it was her job to do her damndest to help them. She knew they needed food and medicine if they were to survive the overcrowded incarceration in Singapore's hot and humid weather.

To the Japanese, she was the hawkler who sold coconuts, and the like, to prisoners. When the guards weren't looking, she would quickly pass food (from her own family ration), medicines, radio parts - whatever the prisoners needed. Eventually she fell under Japanese suspicion and she was tortured. She was beaten from lam to midnight, or left to dehydrate in the sun. A Japanese officer pricked her neck with his sword, while threatening to behead her on the spot. She persuaded him that she could relieve the irritating sores on his face.

Her cure worked and the delighted Japanese officer granted whatever she wanted. She modestly asked for a pass for the camps.

After the war, Seah, then 40, reinvented herself, making money in real estate, and kitten breeding for a former Sultan of Johore, who became a great family friend.

Two decades after World War 2, she accepted an invitation from grateful POWs to visit Australia. A quiet holiday, catching up with old friends in Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney produced widespread coverage and many functions in her honour.

As political and racial instability increased in Singapore in the 1960s, she thought more of living permanently in Australia, eventually arriving here on Christmas Day, 1967, and settling in Brisbane. There she shared her modest home for 30 years with three granddaughters, their mothers being tied to jobs in Singapore. Eventually they wound up those jobs and were reunited with their children, while Seah became an Australian citizen.

She was often a guest at Anzac Day events, and various POW bodies were keen to have her made an OBE for her wartime bravery. She declined, arguing that she had merely tried to help people, not to seek glory for herself. Those who owed their lives to her, worked quietly, and on Australia Day, 1996, she was made AM.

Seah frequently foiled continued media interest in her by pretending to be the maid, who could only comprehend a little English, when reporters were on the phone. She agreed to one TV interview where the reporter discovered that this shy, demure lady, was quite stubborn. She would not take off her sunglasses. Mary is survived by eight children, Florence, Joseph, Kim Tuan, Kim Bee, Winnie, George, Rosalind and Andrew.

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