

Members' Newsletter – May, 2015
澳洲華人歷史協會會訊
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Edited by: Michael Williams

Zhongshan County receives historic treatment



Chen Diqui (far right) with historians at the
Ma Family ancestor hall.

The end of 2014 saw Zhongshan County, Guangdong visited by not one or two, but by four prominent historians of Chinese Australia. This company of Australian historians had just attended an international conference hosted by the Qiaoxiang Cultural Centre of Wuyi University, Jiangmen. At the conclusion of the conference the four historians travelled to Zhongshan County under the guidance of Dr Michael Williams, who had in previous years undertaken much historical research in Zhongshan County while he was studying at the University of Hong Kong.

The four historians were supported throughout their trip by the helpful and knowledgeable Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs, who supplied transport and interpreters that helped to make this all too short trip as valuable in historical research as it was enjoyable for all concerned.

The beautiful and professionally designed Museum of Commercial Culture was one of the first stops where much was learned about the long history of Zhongshan County in business and overseas trade. This museum is located in the walking

street of Shekki (Sunwen West Road Pedestrian Street) where many historic buildings have been preserved for the education and enjoyment of all.

Why was Zhongshan County of interest to these Chinese Australian historians? It is well known that the people of Taishan and more generally those of the Siyi (now Wuyi) group of districts have played a prominent role in the history of the Overseas Chinese. However the people of Zhongshan County have also played a role that, while perhaps lesser in numbers, has been of great significance in terms of business endeavours and successful individuals. This is a role and a history that has been especially interesting in Australia.

Naturally much of this history is well known to the people of Zhongshan County themselves and the Australian historians were very lucky to have one of Zhongshan County's leading historian's Chen Diqu accompany them throughout their tour of the district. Chen Diqu is a prominent historian of Sun Yat-sen in particular and has written many works of great value and interest.

That Sun Yat-sen, after the original Xiangshan County was renamed Zhongshan, was a prominent person of this district is of course well known. Also well known is that all the founders of the famous 'Big Four' Department Stores of early twentieth century China originated in Zhongshan County and learned their modern business skills in Australia. Or at least these things are well known to Chinese people, but perhaps they are less well known to many Australians?

It is at this point that the work of Paul Macgregor (former curator) and Dr Sophie Couchman (curator) of the Chinese Museum in Melbourne step in. Both these leading historians have written much about the history of Chinese people in Australia. Being from Victoria they have naturally learned more about Taishan and Siyi people in general. They were therefore very excited to visit Zhongshan County and to learn how different in many

ways Zhongshan County was and is from other Guangdong districts.

Much was also learned by visiting villages such as Chu Shu Yuen from where the Kwok family of the famous Wing On department stores and also Hom Mei village where the Ma's of Sincere Company originated. Homes, schools and ancestor halls all helped inform and impress the visitors as to the significance of these and other families in Overseas Chinese history and in the history of Chinese Australia in particular. Of great interest was an inscription found on a community hall in the village of Sheng Shi listing donors of 1913 who at the time were living in various parts of Australia that included not only Sydney and Brisbane but also Darwin, Cairns, and even Atherton.

The fourth member of this historical quartet was Dr Sophie Loy-Wilson, who is developing the first course in Chinese-Australian history to be taught at a university level. From the University of Sydney, Dr Loy-Wilson was greatly interested in the many historical resources relating to Chinese Australian history that are to be found in Zhongshan County and is pleased to be able to use much found on this trip in teaching her ground breaking and long over due course in this significant field of Australian history.

The success of this historical research trip was by no means accidental and began in fact in Sydney with the generous support of King Fong, President of the Chinese Australian Historical Society and Henry Yang, President of the Chungshan Society of Australia in providing introductions that allowed our four Australian historians, despite their lack of Cantonese language skills, and limited Mandarin, to meet and enjoy the hospitality of the wonderful people of Zhongshan.

Drs Sophie Loy-Wilson & Michael Williams will be discussing more about the implications of this trip for Chinese-Australian history at the CAHS AGM – June 6th, 2015.

Don't forget our upcoming

AGM

Saturday June 6th, 2015 –

2pm

**Sydney Mechanics School
of Arts
280 Pitt Street
Sydney**

The AGM will be preceded by a presentation by two of Australia's leading historians of Chinese Australian history on the researching & teaching Chinese Australian History.

Dr Michael Williams & Dr Sophie Loy-Wilson will talk about their research in China (Zhongshan) and new discoveries related to the history of Chinese Australia.

Dr Loy-Wilson, of the University of Sydney, will also discuss her new course on Chinese Australian history.



This is the first time such a course has been offered at university level in Australia.

**Members and non-members of the
CAHS are welcome**

Of interest

CHINESE AUSTRALIAN HOMETOWN HERITAGE TOUR

Would you like to know more about the homelands of Australia's early Chinese? Join us on a tour to explore the history, culture and everyday life of the overseas hometown districts of the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong, China. Starting in Hong Kong, we will visit museums, heritage sites and ancestral villages over 10 days. The tour is planned for March 2016. It will be led by historian Dr Kate Bagnall in conjunction with heritage expert Dr Selia Tan from Wuyi University in Jiangmen. For more information and to register your interest, visit: www.chineseaustralia.org/hometown-heritage-tour.

To the North:

Dragon Tails Conference –
Cairns July 2-5th

<http://www.dragontails2015.org.au/Home.html>

To the South:

Museum of Chinese Australian
History, Melbourne -
Chinese Anzacs: Chinese
Australians and World War One

<http://chinesemuseum.com.au/chinese-anzacs-chinese-australians-and-the-great-war/>

New website for CAHS coming soon

In 2014 the CAHS received a grant from the Royal Australian Historical Society to create a new website.

A major feature of the new CAHS website – to be unveiled later in the year – is that it will be in English and both traditional and simplified Chinese.

This is a very exciting new development that we hope will pave the way for greater sharing of research and news by those with a preference for either language.

Additionally the website is being designed as a major resource for historical content. It is hope the CAHS website will become the go to site for all those interested in learning more about the history of Chinese Australia.

For more information about this project or if you would care to contribute in any way please contact

Dr Michael Williams –
michaelstor@yahoo.com

今年年底即將嶄新改版的澳洲華人歷史協會新網站，將會以英語、繁體和簡體中文來呈現。

這是一個非常令人興奮的新發展，希望藉此建立一個雙語的交流平台，讓大家分享研究，信息共享。

Researcher's call for information & help

Peter Gibson
(University of Wollongong)
Histories of
Chinese-Australian Furniture

I've just begun writing a doctoral thesis on Australia's old Chinese cabinetmakers.

If you are descended from a Chinese-Australian cabinetmaker and would like to share your family story, or if you own any items of Chinese-Australian furniture, I'd love to hear from you.

I can be reached at:
pcg33@uowmail.edu.au
or
0401 495 240.

Juanita Kwok
(Charles Sturt University)
Chinese in Bathurst

Researching the Bathurst Chinese community between the 1850s and 1950s. Her research is examining the extent to which the Chinese community were engaged in the local economy and civic life of Bathurst and their interconnectedness with regional, national and transnational Chinese Australian business and social networks.

If you have any information on the Bathurst Chinese that you are willing to share with Juanita, please email her –

kwokjuanita@gmail.com.au
or
0410034916