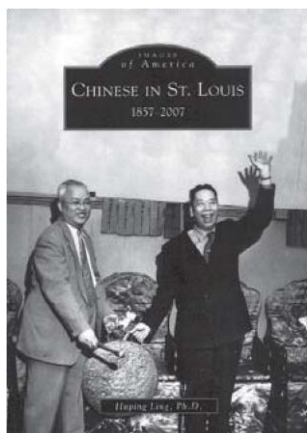


## BOOK REVIEW

# Chinese in St Louis: 1857-2007

By Walter Ko



By Dr. Huping Ling  
Arcadia Publishing, ISBN  
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As the sister book of Professor Ling's 2004 book, *Chinese St Louis – From Enclave to Cultural Community*,

this one is the family album of Chinese-American residents with hundred of pictures in six chapters, each with a page orientation after the introduction. She did a good job in researching the first Chinese settler and Hop Alley in Downtown St Louis till 1966 when Busch Stadium replaced this landscape with the progressive development of laundry and restaurant to highly educated professionals integrated into the main stream society in a cultural community.

Chapter 1 gave a good collection of non-St Louis vintage photos and document starting with a portrait of mother and son in traditional Chinese costume. Of interest is the immigration paper picture on p.16 showing a Chinese woman mug shot with a side profile. Chinese women and children were not commonly visible in those days. The Angel Island Immigration Station triple deck 24-bed dormitory for Chinese on p.18 actually violated the San Francisco Cubic Air City Ordinance of 500 square footage per Chinatown resident. The last page drawings on p.22 are the crib sheets for coaching detained

Chinese to pass the demanding immigration interrogation at Angel Island.

Chapter 2 centered on building Hop Alley, the St Louis Chinatown. Eight life story pictures showed the brothers who ran Sam Wah Laundry (1922 –1986). The shop final days in 1978 closed the chapter on Chinese laundry trade. The picture on p.34 recorded the Chinese Qing Government delegation to the 1904 St Louis World Fair in Forest Park. It would be exciting if Prof. Ling included the 1939 America's first pandas in Forest Park Zoo. The On Leong Chinese Merchants and Laborers Association on P.35 played an important role in organizing and providing different services to its members.

Chapter 3 - Living in Hop Alley, mainly focused on Lillie Hong and her family. It was a personal as well as common history of many Chinese housewives. Her life was family and business. The picture on p.55 showed the Chinese tailor, Lukin Pond in western suits and tie outfit frequently visited Chinese laundries and restaurants. However, his wife, Beulah was not included in this book as she was a bilingual nurse since 1950s working in hospitals for almost two decades despite the duplicate entries on the OCA book with her oral history in bibliography. The last two pictures of Valhalla Cemetery in this chapter signified a change. The Chinese community was once a bachelor sojourner society and the bones of the deceased were shipped back to China for final burial. The bottom picture was the tombstone of a husband and wife. It was a significant culture change from “fallen leaves return to the root” to “fallen leaves grow (new) root”. America is home now.

The following chapter – Community in Transition – started with a vintage picture of enlisted Chinese St Louisians in uniform for WW II. It showed the Chinese professionals as engineers and medical doctors. The central figure, William Tao in eight pictures was a respected Chinese-American Architect who had

been active in the community and Washington University for over two decades as Board of Trustees. The top picture on p.68 showed the group of four Chinese medical doctors.

Chapter 5 highlighted “A New Economy”. It includes other job categories such as professor, lawyer, real estate agent, hair stylist and herbal doctor while restaurants still are the visible establishments. However, none of the carry-out chop suey house mainly in African-American neighborhood was included as their menu items are unique and only available in St Louis area. The picture p.76 showed Chinatown Square in Olive Street Road in that two-mile section with grocery stores, newspapers, insurance and health clinic and it fits the criteria of Chinatown.

The last chapter titled “Constructing Cultural Community”. It includes churches, Buddhist temple, Chinese language schools, Chinese newspapers, Organization of Chinese Americans, Chinese American Forum, magazines, Chinese Christian Community Center and Chinese Cultural Day. Chinese Americans served the State with two Community Services Commissions appointed by Governor Bob Holden not by Joe Maxwell as captioned.

Professor Ling offered nationally this historic album. She did an impressive job in promoting the story of Chinese St Louis of 150 years in less than 150 pages with enthusiasm in a profile of the lives of Chinese St Louis in the heart of America. However, as Board Member of *Chinese American Forum* (CAF), I need to clarify the caption on p.105 “CAF, the OCA’s quarterly cultural magazine . . .”. CAF and OCA are two independent organizations and CAF does not work for OCA.

This book will be more comprehensive if it includes a few more names such as Hong Sit (St Louis native), William Woo (late Editor of St Louis Post Dispatch), Steven Owyong (retired Curator of Asian Arts, St Louis Art Museum), Ben Liang Pa (restaurant owner for hosting thousands of Thanksgiving Dinners for St

Louisians over many years, S.B. Woo (8020 Initiative), T.C. Peng (CAF and many years in Interfaith), Sherwin Liou (St Louis Alliance for Preserving The Truth of Sino-Japanese War) and the visible Chinese-Americans on local network TV.

Dr. Ling personalizes the face and voice to the Chinese St Louis who may not be able to do so especially in the early years of bias and discrimination. This book is a respectful and grateful acknowledgment of this legacy of courage, struggle and success in a meaningful 150 years commemoration of the pioneer Alla Lee, the first Chinese in St Louis and subsequent Chinese American settlers. This is a welcome invitation to the city – Meet me in Chinese St Louis.

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*Walter Ko was a graduate of University of Missouri at Rolla and Central Missouri State University. He has been a St. Louis resident over 30 years, and had been an Associate Editor, coordinator and now Board member of Chinese American Forum (CAF), a cultural quarterly magazine published in the US.*