

Good morning, thank you for participating in this morning's events. I am Sam Wong. I'm curator of Asian Pacific American History, and [unintelligible] of working history.

I'm Peter Leopold, curator in working history as well.

We both co-curated the exhibit "Forgotten Workers" as well as the Transcontinental Railroad exhibit. At this point, we would like to invite one of the descendants of a Chinese railroad worker to make a few comments about their ancestors.

Before we do that, if I can just interject a quick little note. This is an interesting exhibition in that transformation of old history to new history...used to be that we would always concentrate on things like bridges and tunnels and locomotives. And now we're doing an exhibition that looks at the people that made it possible. So it's a real transformation in terms of the museum. But in doing so, I'm here to actually speak for the locomotive. [laughter] Because they need to be heard as well. And you notice we've got the Jupiter locomotive here, and it's a locomotive of the time but it's not the Jupiter from the famous A.J. Russell photograph. This is actually one who was built a few years later, and fascinatingly it's an infrastructure mistake that this locomotive was put out of business by the Transcontinental Railroad. This is a narrow gauge instead of a full gauge, and it actually spent its life after it was put out of business hauling bananas in Guatemala. So it's an interesting backdrop for us, but it's the peoples' story that we're so excited for, and we'd love to have you meet some of the descendants of those people that actually made it possible for the Transcontinental Railroad to work.

Thank you, Peter. So can we have our first descendant come up and introduce yourselves, please.

Good morning, my name is Lisa Shao, and I'm here with my daughter Maya Chen. Maya is a sixth generation American. We have two descendants on my mother's side who, both of her parents were descended from men who worked on the railroads. They came in the 1860s from the Taishan area of Guangdong in China, and they have kind of different stories. My great-great-great grandfather, Lee Ling, came over and was a laborer on the Central Pacific railroad. Some of his cousins and brothers also came, and they, after working on the railroads, exercised the same entrepreneurial vision that allowed them to come across the Pacific to this country, and they started a store in San Francisco selling medicinal herbs on Dupont Street, which is now Grant Avenue in Chinatown. My great-great grandfather, Lee Ahn, was born in San Francisco in 1874. They had the store for a while. After the 1906 earthquake destroyed San Francisco, they decided move across the country and try their fortunes in New York City, and they were one of the founding families of New York's Chinatown, and they had a money exchange business, and they had a letter writing business for Chinese immigrants, and that eventually became an insurance and travel agency, and those businesses are still there today on Pell Street, and my family still runs them. My great-great grandfather on my maternal grandmother's side has a much more colorful story. His name was Lee Ick Gim [?]. He was recruited at age 15 or 16 to come to the United States to work on the railroads, and that was probably because he was over six feet tall, and had the nickname "The Elephant". [laughter] His life reads like an adventure story. The family lore is that while working on the railroads, his crew was attacked by a Native American band, and instead of killing him, for some

reason, they decided to adopt him. Now, the story is that the Chief of this tribe had recently lost a son in a battle, and that this young, strapping, six-foot-tall Chinese guy looked like, probably very tan from working outside, looked like a Native American. And so he lived with the tribe for a few years, and eventually left the tribe, and found his way to Baltimore where he was one of the early settlers in Baltimore's Chinatown, and his daughters were the first Chinese girls born in Baltimore. He apparently, this is also kind of an adventure story, apparently he was killed a few years after that trying to stop a runaway horse. His children, however, eventually also made their way to New York's Chinatown, where they had shops and a tea house, and family lore tells it also a brothel, but they don't like to talk about that. [laughter] But our family has been in the United States for a long time, and the businesses today not only serve the Chinatown community, but also people throughout the United States, as well as in Asia. So they've expanded their footprint but they continue to serve the community they started serving so many years ago. Maya and I are really happy to be here today to represent just two of the thousands of Chinese railroad workers, whose hard work and sacrifice and vision has largely gone unrecognized in the history books, and our ancestors literally helped build this country, and it's wonderful that 150 years later, the United States is recognizing that. Thank you. [applause]

Good morning. My name is Gregory E. Mark, and my great grandfather Wong Sau Soo [?] was one of the railroad workers, and he was born in Hoy Ping [?] in the Guangdong Province in 1844, so he was probably about 20 years old when he came over. And then there's a gap when looking at our family history. About ten years later, he was a China bossman for a timber company in Red Bluff, and then during the intense anti-Chinese movement, my great grandfather, with the 400 workers, was able to help navigate through the intense anti-Chinese movement, and become really a beacon of light in the West Coast so that he was actually brought to San Francisco to help the Chinese six companies to navigate San Francisco Chinatown through this. Wong Sau Soo [?] then brought his family to Oakland, California from San Francisco because of an event in April 1906, and that's the earthquake. The Great San Francisco earthquake. And so my family essentially has roots in San Francisco, and in Oakland, and his wife, my great grandmother, was born in San Francisco Chinatown, and they ended up having seven children, and my grandfather is number five, and number seven, the youngest child, her name was Marian Wong, and in 1915, at the age of 20, Marian had a great idea, and she met some people through our family restaurant in downtown Oakland in the theater district, and it was called Evans Cafe, and she met some people there, and so at age 20 she decided to take on a project. And so Marian was the creator of the first Asian-American film in the United States, that was shot primarily in Oakland, and a little bit in Niles Valley that preceded Hollywood, and so the title of that film was "The Curse of Guangdong", and so we have 35 minutes left of that film. So my family kind of has a long history, and so when people ask me, I live part time Sacramento and Honolulu, and I get asked sometimes like in the Sacramento courthouse when I'm doing some business there, of "where are you from?" And I remember telling this middle-aged attorney, "Well I'm from Oakland." And then he said, "Where are you really from?" And I said, "Well where are you from?" And then they said, "You're getting mad!" And I said, "Yeah, because you're assuming that I'm a foreigner. I'm a long-time Californian."

My family goes back to the Gold Rush period on my great grandmother's side, so I'm very proud, extremely proud, to be the great grandson of Wong Sau Soo [?], and his son, my grandfather Albert, my grandmother Violet, and on down to my mother Clara Byron Mark. And my last comment in terms of the anti-Chinese movement: my father emigrated from China in 1928, and in 1936, he was sweeping the floor of his laundry in Oakland, California, and he was arrested at one minute after six for a violation of the Oakland Laundry Ordinance that essentially tried to drive Chinese laundries out of business, and he could not work more than ten hours a day. All Chinese laundrymen in Oakland. And so, the state cop arrested him one minute after six. And he won his case in the California State Supreme Court, and that was also an important vehicle, besides the accomplishments on the railroad, and other many many accomplishments, was to fight back through the U.S. court system. So thank you very much for having me here. [applause]

We have some additional descendants, so Sue, and Shen Shiu [?], and Terry will be...Terry will be last. Great, thank you for listening to their amazing stories.

Hi, my name is Susan Yu. My hometown is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The reason I know about my great grandfather, who worked on the Northern Pacific Railroad, was because my dad wrote his autobiography. Otherwise, I might not have known. My dad said that when he was a young boy, he remembers his grandfather coming home from working in the United States and working on the railroad, and after a year died. The story of my family is the story of the Chinese Exclusion Act, so my great grandfather spent most of his life in the United States, and was separated from his family. Also, my grandfather came here, and I only recently found out before my dad died that he came across the Rio Grande. So, apparently he's an illegal immigrant. But he came and went back to China twice, I believe, and died here at the age of 54 in Pittsburgh, never seeing his family, not being able to bring his wife and other children. He did bring my dad. My dad came, and never saw his mother again from the age of ten. But my dad was quite the entrepreneur. He went to Duquesne High School in Pittsburgh. He started at Carnegie Tech. And then he went back in 1939 to fight the Japanese as a civilian. So, once he met my mother, they actually came back to the United States in 1944, one year, actually a few months, after rescinded the Chinese Exclusion Act. She was number 34 of 105 people that was able to make it here. So, even though the story is of the railroad workers, the railroad workers, most of them probably never saw their families or couldn't see their families, and that's the story of the segregation of the United States, and we're hoping that history doesn't repeat itself. But one thing that I would like to say, is that I sit in the shade of the trees planted by my ancestors, and I'm very grateful. Thank you. [applause]

Good morning, everyone. My name is Ching Sen Wong [?]. I've been working at the Smithsonian for 30 years. I thank you for the invitation. In September 1868, my great grandfather Hui Kan [?], left his village from Canton, China, and he immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 14 by taking a ride from a cargo ship for 60 days. In 1932, he wrote his autobiography, and we learned a lot from that book. In those days, people were free to come and go because there was no immigration law yet, and even though he was too young to work directly in the railroad, he did work among the Chinese laborers, and he helped whatever he can to those folks [sic]. He worked in an American Christian family for the general

help, earning about \$1.50 per week. And the wife of the family taught him English, and he was a fast learner. Later he realized that he could pass on and teach those Chinese laborers for English, and raise their awareness and understanding of the culture, and he did this every night. Around 20 years old, he entered a seminary school. After he graduated from there, he went on to help join and created the first Chinese church in Oakland, and later on he established the first church in New York City, and that church is still there standing on 5th Avenue and 11th Street in New York. The discrimination against Chinese people was common at that time, but Hui worked very hard to provide the support to those who were sick, poor, had legal barriers, or had legal troubles with the authorities. Together, while he was there, he met my great grandmother, who was a Holland immigrant descendant. Together, they created a preschool, adult education classes, and they cared for the sick Chinese laborers, and much much more. Earlier someone mentioned about those Chinese men working in the laundry industry, and they specifically helped a lot with those folks. Together, they had nine children, three sons and six daughters. My grandmother is number five. And those six daughters all married famous Chinese scholars who graduated from Yale University and Columbia University, and went back to China to do mass education, rural education, reconstruction, medicine, etc. And those sons stayed in America and married other Caucasian women, and became famous engineers for New York construction work, and made major contributions. And that's my story. [applause]

Hi, good morning. My name is Terry Yuan, and I am originally from Boston, Massachusetts, and I currently live in Chicago, for some odd years. Full disclosure, in 2011, I was appointed by President Obama to the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation as a landscape architect as a member and expert, which was completely out of the blue. I got a call from the White House and I think it's a prank call, so it's only with grand coincidence and great appreciation that I stand here, and also thank you so much for the stories of my co-speakers, because, as you can tell, each story is so uniquely different that it's really hard to track what happened, and there's no single thread. I'm here today to speak on behalf of my mother, which she is also here, and brought her daughter. But on behalf of my great grandfather, who I actually have a photo of, and his name is Ming Mao Chin. So Ming Mao was recruited out of probably Huang Hai [?] out of Toisan, China as an herbalist, meaning he was a Chinese doctor, and merchant. So he received a domicile merchant status, and therefore had a little bit of a different situation with the other railway workers who also recruited out of China, in that he was to walk up and down the railroads and provide them with Chinese underwear and herbal medicine, things that the importers would bring in so they would remain healthy during their treacherous work. So he didn't break stone with his hands like the others, but he did carry a couple baskets, as the story goes in my family, on a pole, and he would walk up and down the railroad, and my family was very honored that when he arrived in San Francisco it was said that they gave him the baskets and the pole and the goods, and he didn't have to pay them. That they would wait for him to return a month later, having taken the railroad to extents and, y'know, where the active face was being mined, and sell all the goods and then ride back, fill it up again. So he arrived in the United States thanks to the Exclusion Act, he actually arrived in 1875, and so we not only have photographs but all these documents. So as a merchant, I believe he actually came in and out of the United

States over four times, and during the railroad period he worked for four years and then returned to China, so didn't have the amount of racism applied, which we all know was definitely true, but as a result I can say that I come from a very optimistic family. I'm very fortunate both my parents are very educated, and because of their knowledge of how they had an advantage, because they were both American-born citizens, the 50 or 60 years they've spent as activists starting on profits, helping other underserved community members, they just feel grateful. And so my mother last year was, or the year before, was presented an honorary doctorate from Boston College, where she got her master's in social work, but this year is the first time I've ever heard her say, "I'm a descendant of a rail worker." So I really want to thank you for this opportunity because of opening the door for all of this history being told, and it was inside history that everyone here, y'know, whether their family was able to write the story or to remember the story, and we've all wanted to share this with America, and now we're able to do it. And sorry for the tears, but I'm a little emotional so thank you so much. [applause]

Thank you for those stories, which were so moving and powerful, and add to our collective American story. Thank you for sharing those with us. And now, please welcome Kate Cannon, a native of Utah, who brings us greetings from Senator Lee, who is at Promontory Summit today, the center of the 150th Anniversary. Kate?

Thank you for that introduction. I'm very happy to be able to represent Senator Lee here today. As you mentioned, he is in Utah celebrating this momentous occasion, and growing up in Utah we celebrated the Golden Spike every year, and I never would have thought that I'd be here at the Smithsonian talking about this amazing historical event, while also remembering these very impactful stories that have really touched me today. So I really appreciate hearing those from you. And now I have a message from Senator Lee that he's asked me to share with you today. It says, "The Golden Spike that was driven into the last link, joining the rails of the first continental railroad at Promontory Summit, Utah, bore this inscription: 'May God continue the unity of our country as this railroad unites the two great oceans of the world.' And indeed it did. With the joining of the Union Pacific Railroad, stretching from the Missouri River near the Iowa-Nebraska border, and the Central Pacific Railroad, stretching from Sacramento, California, east met west. The United States truly became united. As the spike was struck, a telegraph was sent around the nation, and bells rang out from coast to coast, and it is only right that we celebrate this pivotal moment because this was a moment that changed the course of history in Utah, our nation, and ultimately the world. With the driving of the Golden Spike, the arduous six month journey required to cross the country costing \$1,000, had become a mere ten day trip costing only \$150. Thousands of miles of tracks were laid across the country, allowing people to emigrate West and establish new settlements far more quickly and easily, and it transformed the economy in Utah and across the nation. Goods became efficiently transported across farther distances, sellers found new markets, and buyers on the frontier or in rural areas were able to purchase goods that were previously unavailable to them. It spurred a boon in communications, commerce, agriculture, construction, and mining. It started a significant new chapter in our relationship with Asia and the Pacific region, and it served as a model of innovation and prosperity for the rest of the world. And it's essential to note that all of this came

through the perseverance and efforts of many different people working together. It required a clear-eyed vision from President Lincoln and the federal government, and a fruitful private and public partnership which allowed the engineers, railroad companies, and local communities the freedom to do their jobs well. And it would not have been possible without the work, as has been mentioned, the work of many Chinese workers, Irish, Mormon, Civil War veterans, Native Americans, and other laborers who toiled to build these railroads. It is because of the work of these ordinary Americans, these hidden heroes, these immigrants, that we were able to achieve one of the most transformative events in our nation thus far. It is my hope that we will continue in their footsteps, and take up the banner that they carried, the banner of innovation, perseverance, and unity. If we do, there's no telling what our great nation can achieve. Thank you. [applause]