

HISTORY OF CHUNG WAH ASSOCIATION PART ONE: 1909-1985

From the Chung Wah 75th Anniversary Magazine 1910-1985

by Anne ATKINSON and YEE Kee Yong

The Chung Wah Association was officially established in 1909 to meet the social, cultural and political needs of Chinese in Western Australia. As the first ethnic association formed in Perth, it not only provided a substitute family for the community (which consisted almost entirely of single men who were forced to leave their families in China), but was also a means through which individual Chinese could find communal protection and voice their protest against laws aimed at restricting the lives of Chinese in Western Australia.

When the Chung Wah Association was formed there were approximately 840 Chinese living in Perth. Before the Association was established the community had already proved that it was a close knit and well organised one. Newspapers reported that as early as 1889 Chinese collectively celebrated Chinese New Year. In 1898 Chinese formed a Friendly Society, the stated aims of which were to provide welfare services to its members. A few years later a branch of the Emperor Reform Society was formed. Apart from these activities, informal groups of Chinese worked together to voice their opinion on a number of issues. For example, in 1901 they protested against the harshness of immigration laws and the following year initiated moves to have a Chinese Consul-General appointed to Australia to protect Chinese interests.

By 1909, however, the need for an official organisation to represent Chinese living in Western Australia was recognized. No doubt there were several informal meetings held prior to the first recorded official meeting at which the aims of the Association were discussed and a committee elected. Held on the top floor of Wing Sang's business premises at 404 Murray Street in March 1909, Louis Wah Louey was elected president and Tam Ying Man elected secretary and treasurer combined. Two months later members were elected to represent market gardeners in several districts of the Perth metropolitan area - Osborne Park, Guildford, Bayswater and Fremantle - and a member to represent laundry workers. It is assumed that these representatives were responsible for reporting meetings and relaying opinions of members unable to attend meetings. Meetings generally attracted 60-odd members and were held in the evenings.

On 12 July 1910 the constitution of the Association was officially registered in the Supreme Court of Western Australia. The main objective of the Association was:

"To provide a suitable place of resort for Gentlemen of the Chinese nationality residing in Western Australia for the purpose of providing and encouraging literature and education amongst the members of the Association. "

The address of the Association was given as 407 Murray Street, Perth and Louis Wah Louey, James Lee Wood, Kie Hang, Tam Ying Man, Lee Sho Ten, Paul Soon Quong, Ah Chew and Quan A. Sam its first trustees. Members were to pay a subscription fee of 7s 6d and any member leaving the State was required to contribute 1 pound. Meetings were held at 8.00 p.m. on the first Saturday of each month.

A month after registration the Chung Wah Association made preparations to acquire land in James Street and build a two-storey building which could accommodate meetings and social functions on the upper storey, whilst the two shops planned for the ground floor could be rented out to provide revenue for the Association.

On the 12 October 1910 the foundation stone of the building, was laid by Sir Edward Stone. The building was officially declared open by Louis Wah Louey at 11.00 p.m. on Chinese New Year in 1911 followed by a banquet for 260 members in the new hall. The two shops on the ground floor were rented out - that on the east side for 1 pound 10 shillings a week and that on the west side for 1 pound a week.

In its first year the hall was the venue for a number of social functions. To help cater for these the first major purchases of the Association were tables, crockery and banners. As well as social

functions the Association was kept busy with fund raising, not only to pay back the mortgage on the land and building, but also to raise money for the Association's welfare work as well as contributing funds to charities in Western Australia and China.

Aged and ill Chinese were given financial assistance, 4 pounds, to return home to China. Funds were remitted to China to help the victims of floods in Anhui Province and later in Guangdong Province. Donations were also made to local charities like Royal Perth Hospital, the Red Cross Society, European War Fighting Fund, Children's Hospital and orphanage.

Apart from social functions and welfare services, the Chung Wah Association also started a library for the benefit of its members. Books from China and newspapers from Hong Kong were ordered through Kwong Hong Shing's and Kie Hang's businesses.

As well as a centre for literature and education, the Chung Wah Association also showed a great deal of concern over political events in China. In 1911 the Association was very active in organising members to collect money for the Revolutionary Army in China. In September 1911, 500 pounds was raised with a further 700 pounds collected in October 1911. When news of the success of Sun Yat Sen and the 1911 Revolution reached Western Australia, members of the Chung Wah Association celebrated with a boat trip on the Swan River and dinner at a restaurant in Perth.

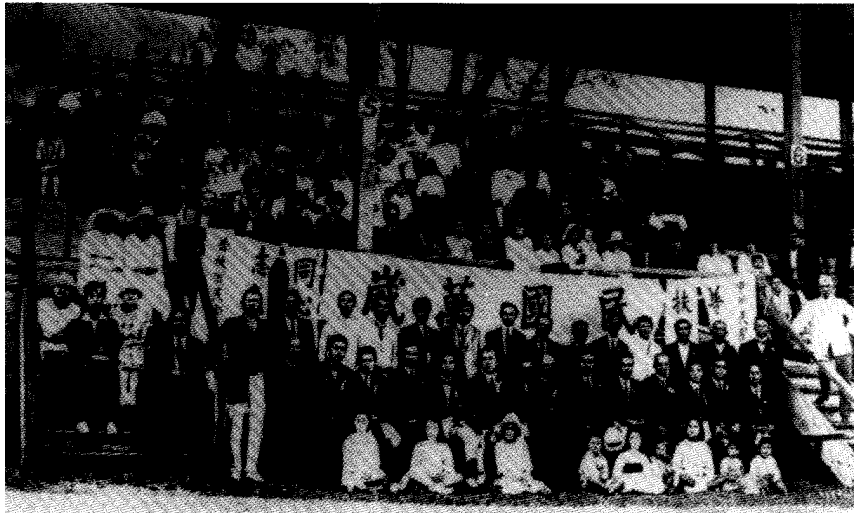
Interest in Chinese politics was continued in branches of the Kuornintang (KMT). On 12 June 1921 the Perth branch held its opening in the Chung Wah Hall for a hire fee of one pound.

In 1922 the Association was finding it difficult to meet repayments of the mortgage. It was decided to let the hall on condition that the tenant agreed to hire back the hall to the Association whenever it wanted it for use by its members. It was further decided that the hall would only be let out either to the KMT or the Chinese Christian Society. The KMT eventually obtained the lease and paid rent of 1 pound 8 shillings per week. Presumably the KMT was operating from the Chung Wah Hall into the 1940s.

The effectiveness of the Chung Wah Association to continue as an organisation, for fulfilling the social and cultural needs of the Chinese community in Western Australia was reduced by the rapid depletion of the Chinese population in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this period not only had the Great Depression made it almost impossible for many of the small Chinese businesses to continue, but also most Chinese, who had arrived in the 1890s, were of retirement age and wished to return to China for their remaining years. By 1933 there were 363 Chinese living in Perth with a total of 705 recorded throughout the whole of Western Australia. The 1947 census recorded a further drop in numbers to 385 Chinese living in the whole State.

The Chinese community at this time was kept alive by a small number of families and it was members of these families who, in 1951, revived the Chung Wah Association. A new constitution, drafted on similar lines to the first, was written and the Association re-registered on 10 July 1951. The objectives were:

"To provide a suitable place for persons substantially of Chinese descent residing in Western Australia to congregate for the purpose of encouraging literature and education, and conducting social activities. "



Sports Day held at the Claremont Showgrounds 1921

Initially no subscription dues were required. The trustees of the Association were William Fan, Alexander Shem and James Lee Wood.

The size of the Association in 1951 was reflected in the requirements for a quorum for meetings. General meetings required ten members whilst executive committee meetings needed the presence of only three members.

The early 1960s, like the '50s, continued to see the decline in the number of Chinese in Perth. The Chung Wah Association was barely managed by a skeleton committee. However in June 1969 a move started to rejuvenate the Association. This move was further strengthened by the timely visit of the Ambassador of the Republic of China, Sampson C. Shen, and later a National Day reception organised by the Chinese Consul in Perth, William C. P. Chen for "all the members of the Chinese Community".

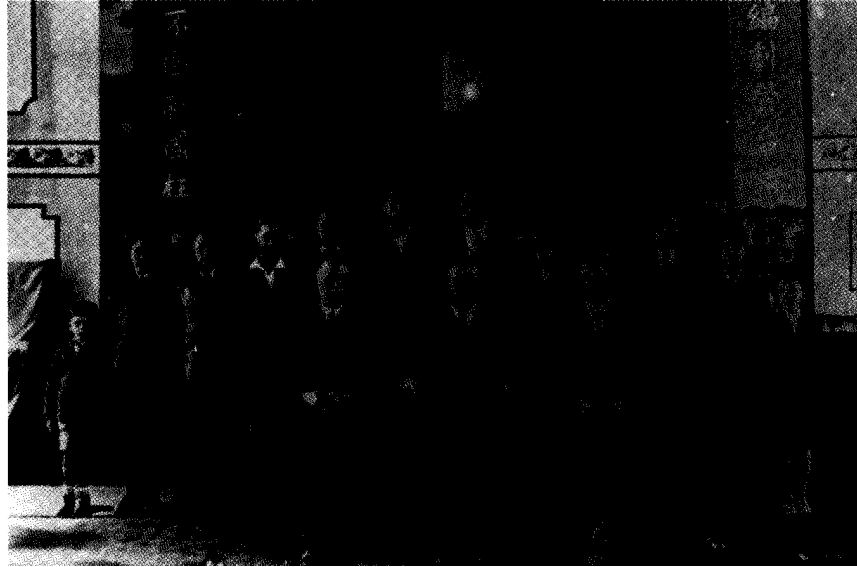
The White Australia Policy continued to dominate the Australian immigration policies in the 1960s and early 70s. However, in 1965 the Australian Government relaxed its immigration laws and began to allow non-European migrants into Australia. In the late 1960s a few former students applied to settle here and their requests were granted. Meanwhile Chinese, predominantly from Burma and Malaysia, arrived to settle in Perth.

In 1970 the doors of the Chung Wah Association were opened to these new arrivals. Immediately, some of them were invited to join the committee and take an active role in the affairs of the Association. The early 1970s was a period of rebuilding the Association in more than one sense. The then dilapidated Chung Wah building was substantially renovated in 1971. This was possible because the Association had successfully negotiated a contract with N.B.K. Pty Ltd to lease the ground floor as a Chinese restaurant.

A concerted effort to increase membership was carried out in 1973. This resulted in a rise in membership to nearly 200. A new policy introduced in 1972 ensured that only those Chinese residents who registered themselves with the Association could be considered as members of the Chung Wah Association and membership was no longer free as it was in the 1950s and '60s.

In 1975, the 1951 version of the constitution was revamped. The objectives of the Chung Wah Association were substantially enlarged. Up to that point the revived Association was basically socially orientated.

The mining boom in Western Australia in the late 1960s saw a rapid development in Perth and consequently the growth of its population. Chinese restaurateurs from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane started to move into Perth. From the humble beginnings of two Chinese restaurants in the early 1960s, they grew to nearly 200 by the mid-1970s and continued to mushroom. The mid-1970s also saw the arrival of Chinese from Vietnam. The Chinese community no longer all spoke English.



Chung Wah Youth c1932, Back 1 to r 2 unknown, Bruce Hoy Poy, 2 unknown, Clyde Hoy Poy, William Yuen, 2 unknown, Roy Hoy Poy, unknown. Seated 1 to r Mr Tarn Ying Man, Chinese Consul & Mr Alex Shern.

During this period the Association started publishing a regular newsletter in both Chinese and English. A Chinese class for children was formed and the Association was invited to contribute towards an ethnic radio broadcast through the production of a weekly Chinese radio programme. In 1978, more than \$20,000 was raised from members for renovations to the building. The kitchen was substantially upgraded and a new ablution block was erected over part of the existing building. Later, two offices were set up in the hall. As membership continued to grow in the 1970s so did the complexities in which the Association had to face.

The 1980s began another period of rebuilding and consolidation, which allowed the Association's ever increasing activities to expand. Changing attitudes within Western Australian society and the development of government policies aimed towards recognising the diversity of cultures in our multicultural society allowed the Chung Wah Association to openly pursue a wider range of cultural activities.

To meet the needs of young families to maintain our language and cultural heritage, several cultural groups are active. The Saturday morning Chinese school for children was expanded in the 1980s so that now it is one of the largest ethnic schools in Western Australia. Chinese cultural activities are presented to members of the community itself and the wider community through the activities of the singing and dancing group, the Chinese orchestra, the Lion Dance troupe, Dragon Boat group, the Literary and Arts group and Tai Chi classes. Cultural activities are also shared through the continuation of the half hour radio programme on the ethnic radio station, 6NR. Several painting exhibitions have been held to which members of the general public were invited.

Changes in immigration regulations have allowed family members to come to Australia without formal qualifications. This means that many members of the Chinese community were able to bring their parents and other relatives to Perth. Many of these parents speak little or no English. This, coupled with the increased number of non-English speaking refugees from Indo-China has resulted in the Association trying to meet their needs in adjusting to the new environment. In the middle of 1983 the Association applied for, and obtained, in 1984 a grant from the Commonwealth Government to employ a social worker to help these new arrivals. The social worker is now providing a very valuable service to the members of the community.

When the present Chung Wah Hall was built it met the needs of a community of mainly single men. Now, with a community in which young families predominate, the hall is no longer able to cater for the needs of all its members. In 1984 the Association bought from the City of Stirling four hectares

of land in Balcatta. Fundraising for the land, which cost the Association \$95,500, was organised and a total of \$108,368 was collected in three years through private contributions, donations from members and local businessmen and the proceeds from social functions such as auctions, quiz nights, dinners, cooking demonstrations and concerts. The purchase price was paid off on 30 June 1985.

In 1985 the Association's constitution was again revised to keep abreast of changing patterns within the Chinese community and also to allow the Association to honour those who have performed faithful and long service.

The Association today has come a long way from its earliest beginnings when the first meeting was held over Wing Sang's shop in Murray Street. In recognising its long history, the Chung Wah Association is celebrating its 75th anniversary with a number of activities carried out over a period of five months. This extends from the Anniversary of the day on which the foundation stone was laid until the subsequent Chinese New Year Day when the early pioneers celebrated the opening of the building. This year's activities commemorating 75 years of history range from exhibitions through dances, dragon boat races, and concerts to banquets. This surely reflects the greatly expanded diversity of the Association's role and functions.