



Cupertino Historical Society & Museum  
presents

# the Cornerstone

Winter 2017

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## CYNTHIA LEE AND CHINA HOUSE

By Gail Fretwell-Hugger, Historian

In conjunction with the current Chinese exhibit “An Introduction to Elements of Chinese Culture” at the Cupertino museum, the following *Roots* article chronicles the history of Cynthia Lee and China House restaurant in Cupertino.

First, a little background. The following are excerpts from the book, “Toward the Golden Mountain”, published in conjunction with the exhibit of the same name held at the Cupertino Museum in 1997. “Toward the Golden Mountain” chronicles some of the history of the Chinese in Santa Clara Valley.

Cynthia was born in Macow about 70 years ago and came to this country in 1949 before the communists took over China. She moved to Cupertino in 1967 and guesses that there were no more than 10 Chinese families living here at that time. She came here as a student and attended Skidmore College and Columbia Teacher’s College, where she received her master’s degree. Cynthia recalls that at that time her husband had been an engineer for quite some time. He wanted to change and become either a stockbroker or open a restaurant. The decision was made to open a restaurant. In Cynthia’s words... “When I first opened, we were really welcomed. People say I was really courageous - I think I was very naive. I single-handedly opened a Chinese restaurant and I had never worked in a Chinese restaurant before! I didn’t even know what chop suey was because that is an American dish! But once we opened, right away it was a rage. At that time there were only three or five other Chinese restaurants in the area. Ming’s Restaurant was the big thing, over in Palo Alto.”

Cynthia’s father named the new restaurant in Cupertino, China House because he had a restaurant in Tokyo called China House. Cynthia recalls... “at that time, all I could consider was that I put myself in the position of one of my customers. If they come to my restaurant, what will make them happy? So I thought, I will decommercialize the whole restaurant - make them feel like they are a guest of my family! I think we had the best decorations because we placed a lot of nice Chinese artifacts in the restaurant in order to educate customers and let them know that this was a Chinese restaurant...when we opened the first day, my husband still worked down in Burbank with



Lockheed. I opened the restaurant...the man from National Cash Register Company came to teach me how to operate the cash register. He said, “Mrs. Lee, how come you don’t have any cash in the register?” I just figured that I’d get the money from the customers. I didn’t even realize that I’d have to make change. None of my friends had opened a restaurant - they were all engineers. So in the early morning I had to run to the bank to get change. About a month later I got a big write-up in the San Jose Mercury News raving about the restaurant. There was a special writer for restaurants at that time - and he didn’t write anything about Ming’s Restaurant! I didn’t even realize - when somebody came in and said, “We’re going to do a special write-up on your restaurant”, I said, “Fine!” I didn’t even realize what a write-up was! So when the Sunday paper came out, people were lined up all over and I didn’t even know why!

But our restaurant was really welcomed and I made a lot of friends there. They were really nice to me and treated me like family. And we always treated our guests like a guest of the family. It was like having a party every night in my house!”

The rest of Cynthia’s wonderful story and the stories of many others can be found in the book, “Toward the Golden Mountain” at the Cupertino Museum. □

### SAVE THE DATE

The CHS&M is holding its  
**Annual Summer Fundraiser**

To help support efforts to serve the community with educational programs and the preservation of the historical collections.

**Saturday, June 24, 2017; 5 pm - 8 pm**  
**Cooper Garrod Winery**

22645 Garrod Rd, Saratoga, CA 95070

# PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Donna Austin, President



Dear Members,

During our Strategic planning sessions in 2016 - 2017, The Cupertino Historical Board formed some important long and short term goals:

- Get “kids” involved
- Keep alive our mission with both current members and new folks as well
- Accentuate our exciting Historical Society stories
- Publicize CHS community involvement
- Realize the importance of Living History vs just static Display
- Engage with other local city historical societies
- Look for other building sites for a new museum, like the barn at McClellan, or the Stockmeir house. A corridor committee was formed to study all the possibilities

After much discussion, committee meetings and study, we decided that our museum displays should correlate with the city and community events. So the collections committee created a wonderful “Christmas in Cupertino” exhibit using part of our collection and part of members own treasures. We had a train set and a Christmas Village and a Christmas manger and Hanukkah candles. We opened during the City tree lighting ceremony and had over 300 visitors and 200 the next morning during Santa’s Visit.

Now the collections committee with Jeanie Ting, has gotten together another wonderful exhibit called “An Introduction to Elements of Chinese Culture”. Come visit us and see the art work, tea sets, jewelry and so much more. All visitors can listen to music and get a fortune cookie. Did you know the fortune cookie’s history? Also save the date for “*A Sip of History*” at Cooper Garrod Winery on Saturday, June 24, 2017. There is so much happening and we’d love your help. Can you volunteer a few hours a week? Stop by and get signed up.

*Donna M. Austin*

Donna Austin  
President of the CHS&M  
*Steve Jobs 1955-2011 Stay hungry! Stay foolish!*

Cupertino Preschool children enjoying Christmas exhibit!



Guests at Chinese exhibit opening night!  
*Front row (L-R):* Steve Ting, Sandra James, Donna Austin, Ragini Sangam, Jeanie Ting, Savita Vaidhyanathan, Janet Riddell, Helene Davis.  
*Back Row (L- R):* Don Sun, Mark McKenna, Orrin Mahoney, Sharon Blaine.

## Cupertino Historical Society & Museum

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### NEWSLETTER STAFF

Donna Austin, Gail Fretwell-Hugger,  
Ragini Sangameswara

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## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

NOV 2017 thru JAN 2017

### RENEWING MEMBERS

Margaret Butcher  
Tom and Joan Dyer  
Robert and Janet Meyers  
Sean Sullivan

### NEW MEMBERS

Jennifer and George Bohrnstedt

## **NEW EXHIBIT**



The Cupertino Historical Society is pleased to present

### *An Introduction to Elements of Chinese Culture*

Items on exhibit illustrate important components of this ancient culture including: CERAMICS, ARCHITECTURE, MUSIC, LITERATURE, MARTIAL ARTS, CUISINE, VISUAL ARTS, PHILOSOPHY and RELIGION.

Many of the items on display have been loaned to the museum by members and friends of the Cupertino Museum from their own collections. We would like to thank Steve and Jeannie Ting, Don Sun, Richard and Sharon Blaine, Ling Ling Kulla, Janet Riddell, Hsing Kung, and Barbara Stockmeir for their generosity.

Selected display items are available for bidding on  
**SILENT AUCTION.**

Proceeds Benefit CHS&M Education Programs.

**EVERYONE WELCOME!**

Bring your family and friends!

## **CHRISTMAS IN CUPERTINO**

By **Gail Fretwell-Hugger**

Chair, CHS Collections Committee

The 2016 "Christmas in Cupertino" exhibit at Quinlan Center opened in conjunction with the city's annual Tree Lighting event and A Visit With Santa. The museum hosted over 300 adults and children who had a wonderful time looking at all the holiday decorations and toys. There was a "coloring corner" for children that was extremely popular with many young artists, also a Lionel train display complete with vintage engine, cars and buildings and a Victorian village among many other items on display. Other visitors to the exhibit included the QCC preschool and residents from Chateau Cupertino. The popular exhibit was on display through mid-January.



A full house!

*Cupertino Historical Society & Museum  
Located in the Quinlan Community Center, the Museum  
is open to the public Wednesday through Saturday from  
10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Admission is free.*

## **IN MEMORIAM**



**Mary Lou (Cochran) Lyon**  
Sept. 18, 1926 - Nov. 8, 2016

She was one of the original teachers recruited to open Homestead High in Sunnyvale. She taught English US History, and her favorite, California History. After retirement she taught California History as part of an Adult Ed program. She is the author of "Early Cupertino" Images in America. The family celebrated her 90th birthday last September for an entire week. She is survived by a brother, two sons, four grand children, and four great grandchildren.



**Patrick Filmore Rogers**  
December 18, 1929 - October 31, 2016

Patrick F. Rogers was born in Oklahoma City in 1929. Pat attended the University of Oklahoma and after receiving a BS in Chemical Engineering, Pat was commissioned as a reserve officer in the US Army and assigned as a Forward Artillery Observer in Korea. He met and married his wife Barbara in San Diego, and they had their first son Roger. They subsequently moved to the San Fernando Valley where their second son Charles was born. Pat moved his family to Cupertino where he was employed at Lockheed, Sunnyvale as an Advanced Missile Systems Engineer. Pat is survived by his wife Barbara, their sons Roger and Charles, and granddaughter Christina, now a post-doctoral scholar at Chapel Hill, NC.



## Cupertino Historical Society & Museum

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### BULLETIN BOARD

#### CHS Board of Directors Meetings

Wednesday, March 15, 2017  
 4:00 p.m., QCC Conference Room  
 Wednesday, April 19, 2017  
 4:00 p.m., Cupertino City Hall, Conference Room A

#### Museum Hours:

Located in the Quinlan Community Center, the museum is open to the public  
**Wednesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Admission is FREE.**

#### Holidays: QCC closed

February 20, 2017  
 President's Day  
 May 29, 2017  
 Memorial Day  
 July 4, 2017  
 Independence Day

Current resident or:

## CUPERTINO HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM EVENT PHOTOS



Chateau Cupertino residents viewing Christmas exhibit



CHS Christmas party at Alotta's Deli Cafe



Donna Austin raising funds at Chinese exhibit Silent Auction & sale



Jeanie Ting Performing Tea Ceremony at the Chinese exhibit opening night