Rising from the Ashes:
Where Do We Go From Here?

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CAMOC Mission

The mission of the Chinatown Museum Foundation is to maintain a museum in Chicago for the purpose of promoting exhibitions, education, and research relating to Chinese-American culture and history in the Midwestern United States.
Our Brief History

• 2002: the Chinatown Museum Foundation (CMF) established
• Chinese-American Museum of Chicago (CAMOC), located in the heart of Chicago’s Chinatown, is the result
• 2005: CAMOC grand opening with the *Paper Sons* exhibition
• 8 exhibitions held since then
• CAMOC is managed by a board of directors consisting of business people, museum specialists, educators, other professionals & community members from throughout the Chicago area, all of whom are volunteers
• 2008: CAMOC suffered a devastating fire. Since that time, we have concentrated much of our energies in re-building the Museum and assuring that we incorporated appropriate building safety measures and conservation standards and best practices
• 2010: The renovated building re-opened on September 25
CAMOC Staffing

• Dedicated volunteers who serve on the Board of Directors, Advisory Board, or on one of our seven committees

• Paid staff include an Executive Director, and 4 part-time employees
Volunteers Reach a Variety of Audiences

• CAMOC volunteers have spoken at national conferences and at local institutions including:
  – American Association for the Advancement of Science
  – Association for Asian American Studies
  – Chicago Public Library, Chinatown Branch
  – Hyde Park Historical Society
  – Northwestern University
  – Pui Tak (Chinatown)
• 2 books published on Chicago’s Chinatown
• Interviews in local media
• Museum visitors (in-house and virtual)
Technical Skills of Volunteers Vary

- PastPerfect software (museum accessioning software)
- Website creation and maintenance
- Digitization of important 2-dimensional artifacts
- Photography of important 3-dimensional objects as exhibitions close, or when donation made
- Translation of exhibition panels into Chinese & Spanish

Worth noting: the language issue
  - Some volunteers do not speak English, so we pair them with those who can translate the tasks for them
  - This is a sustainable model thus far, and we hope to continue along these lines in the future
Achievements: Exhibitions
9 engaging exhibitions, ranging from historic topics to Chinese culture and food

2012: My Chinatown
2011: Chinatown Centennial
2008: Chinese@Play
2007: Chicago’s Two World Fairs
2007: Chinatown History and Archeology
2007: Great Wall to the Great Lakes
2006: Silk & Wood
2006: Tofu, the Wonder Food
2005: Paper Sons
Achievements: Digitization

- eChicago grant digitized several hundred documents that survived the fire
- CAMOC volunteers continue as time permits
- Wealth of previously hidden information revealed in our:
  - Photo albums, loose photos
  - Documents & personal letters
  - Immigration documents
  - Archival papers
  - Newspaper clippings
  - Restaurant menus
  - Business licenses & other local business documents
  - Materials from other Chicago Chinese-American organizations
  - CAMOC deeds of gift (legal record of objects donated)
Achievements: Website

• Website visitors grown steadily
  – 12,000 visitors in 2007
    • 51% from the U.S.
  – Over 35,000 visitors in 2010

• Revamped the website in mid-2011
  – Museum volunteers worked with new webmaster and moved to new web host
  – 12,765 visitors/month for past 10 months
  – 14,672 visitors for March 2012
Achievements: Grants

• Creation of promotional materials
• Exhibitions
• Website development and digitization of collections
• Museum re-building
• Grant funding exploration
• Creation of Museum Executive Director position
• Lecture series
• General operating expenses
What has happened since our 2008 grant?

Fire at the Museum!
Effects of the 2008 Fire

• Negative:
  – Loss of many Museum collections
  – Loss of trust within the community

• Positive:
  – Started fresh with building renovation
  – Strong bonds developed & remain today with area cultural institutions
  – TV, newspaper, & radio publicity increased
  – Resulted in greatly improved facilities and laid groundwork for improving technology
Our Visitors are Diverse

- School children
- Chinese-Americans from Chicago and surrounding areas, other parts of U.S.
- Overseas Chinese
- Tourists visiting Chinatown
- Researchers
- University students
- Museum professionals
- Educators and other professionals
The Language Issue

• With visitors, we communicate in English and Chinese. This is vital to our community. Many visitors are not comfortable speaking English

• Spoken Chinese means 3 languages in Chicago’s Chinatown: Cantonese, Mandarin, and Taishanese

• Written Chinese is also complicated:
  – Traditional characters are used in Taiwan and Hong Kong
  – Simplified characters are used in PRC
  – Choice of Chinese script can become a political issue!

• Because of our proximity to the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago, we also translate our exhibition panels into Spanish
What’s Working in Reaching Visitors?

• Mainstream media (TV, newspapers, radio)
  Articles in Tribune and Sun Times, cover article of Streetwise, Time Out reviews

• Chinese media: our presence even more successful

• Press conferences for important events

• Press releases

• Paid advertising on sides of buildings, in parking lots, in newspapers

• Website: currently in second incarnation. Still work in progress.
  – E-mail blasts of events & exhibitions, Evites to our fundraisers
    – Broad sweep to our members, donors, and tourist-oriented organizations

• Lecture series: 2012 Chicago Chinatown Centennial monthly lecture series

• Concerts of Chinese music

• Social media: Facebook, You Tube, & Flickr (unreached potential thus far)
Community Outreach/Engagement

• Major events we participate in
  – Chinatown Summer Fair
  – Chinese New Year parade
  – Millennium Park Chinese Family Tent
  – Dragon Boat Race for Literacy (Museum-sponsored team)
  – Chinatown 5K Run
  – Chicago Children’s Museum

• Organizations
  – Chicago Public Library, Chinatown Branch
  – Chinese American Service League
  – St. Therese Church and School
  – Pui Tak Center (church-based literacy program)
  – Chinatown Chamber of Commerce
  – Chicago History Museum and Field Museum

• Family associations
• Area hotels via their concierges
• Elementary school classes
• Local universities
• Special exhibits, e.g., School of the Art Institute Centennial Project
Challenges: We Remain Optimistic!

- **Technology:**
  - More training needed
  - Chicago Cultural Alliance is invaluable resource for small museums
  - Technology training just beginning
  - Keep up-to-date with technology
    - Website enhancement: add blog feature; create a true digital collection website
    - Digital asset stewardship
    - Social media: increase Facebook, YouTube, & Flickr presence
    - Create a phone app?

- **Resources:**
  - Staffing & volunteers
    - Need help with exhibitions, accessioning the collections, outreach, etc.
  - Development
    - Fundraising assistance
  - Financial expertise

- **Marketing/Promotion:**
  - Assessment: how do we measure success?
  - Increase visibility locally, nationally, internationally (especially overseas Chinese)

- **Sustainability:** our ultimate goal!
Please Visit!

- 238 W. 23rd St.
- Phone: (312) 949-1000
- [http://ccamuseum.org/](http://ccamuseum.org/)

Now open 6 days a week