

# Current

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**OPENING DOORS** | **150 YEARS**  
OF COMMUNITY SERVICE  
AND EMPOWERING FAMILIES



**Quarterly Newsletter**  
**Winter 2023**

Available online at  
[www.cameronhouse.org/current](http://www.cameronhouse.org/current)

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# Letter from the Board President

For Cameron House, 2024 will be a year like no other. Founded in 1874, it will be the 150th anniversary (sesquicentennial) of our organization.

**A brief history lesson:** Cameron House was originally founded by the Presbyterian Church as the Occidental Mission Home for Girls. The home's initial purpose was to intervene on behalf of vulnerable young Asian immigrants. Forbidden from legally entering the United States by the Chinese Exclusion Act, these girls and women were smuggled into the country and sold as commodities in what came to be known as the "yellow slave trade".



The front of Cameron House still shows its original name as the Occidental Mission Home for Girls.

In 1895, at the tender age of 23, Donaldina Cameron arrived at the Occidental Mission Home for Girls as a sewing teacher. Two years later, without any prior experience, she became the superintendent. For the next 40 years, she dashed through alleys and across rooftops to save thousands of Chinese girls from indentured servitude and human trafficking. She retired in 1934, and in 1942, the building was renamed the Donaldina Cameron House. She died in 1968 and is credited with helping 3,000 girls escape brutal enslavement.

**To honor and celebrate our rich history, a special panel discussion, "Cameron House & Chinatown: Sharing Our Past, Shaping Our Future" will be held on March 9.** Expect an engaging discussion on the historical significance of Cameron House, its present-day needs, and future strategic initiatives to create meaningful change.

Speakers include:

- Rev. Harry Chuck, former Cameron House Executive Director
- Rev. Norman Fong, Chinatown activist and leader
- Aaron Peskin, President, SF Board of Supervisors, representing District 3 including Chinatown
- Liane Wong, President, CH Board of Directors

Registration details will be emailed and available on our website soon.

**The 76th annual Cameron Carnival returns after a pandemic hiatus.** This day of fun for young and old never disappoints. As always, it will be held on the first Saturday in May which means May 4, 2024. And, get ready to look your best for our 150th Anniversary Gala, September 21, to be held at a very special soon-to-be-announced location. It will be a par-tay like never before.

**2024 will provide many opportunities to reconnect with Cameron House, Chinatown and old friends.** I hope to see you at many of these upcoming events.

Wishing you health, joy and blessings in the coming year.



With gratitude.

Liane Wong



# Words

Margaret Culbertson, Donaldina Cameron, Lorna Logan: these women were instrumental in the early days of the Occidental Mission Home for Girls which later became Donaldina Cameron House.

During our historic 150th anniversary, we pay tribute to these legends who spent their lives serving God while fighting against all odds. Their faithfulness, tenacity and perseverance during a time of racism, oppression and sexism continues to inspire Cameron House today.

The day-to-day needs in Chinatown are ongoing. From mental health issues to food insecurity to domestic violence, Cameron House provides services to meet the needs of the community.

During the week, 60 children attend the Bilingual Afterschool Program, where they receive tutoring and can make new friends in a safe, caring environment.

Although the types of services Cameron House provides have evolved since its founding in 1874, our vision for a safe and healthy community where people learn, heal & thrive endures.

# NBC Feature: Past/Present/Future

Cameron House (CH) will be featured in an upcoming special news segment on NBC Bay Area. The report, coordinated by producer Christine Ni, a longtime Chinatown advocate, and reporter Gia Vang, showcases our organization's early history, its evolution over 150 years and a look into CH's future.

The segment features former CH staff and alumni including Rev. Norman Fong, former Program Director of Youth Ministries. He leads Vang to the still visible basement tunnel where Chinese girls escaped during police raids in the early 1900's. These girls were rescued by Donaldina Cameron, the superintendent of what was then called The Occidental Mission Home, now Cameron House. She is credited with rescuing as many as 3000 young women from a doomed life of prostitution or indentured servanthood.

A dark period in the organization's history which included incidents of sexual abuse and inappropriate behavior is also included in the segment. Rev. Greg Chan, former Interim Executive Director, shares how a healing task force was created as part of CH's commitment to the well-being of survivors. The pivotal role of mental health, therapy, resiliency, growth, and community restoration cannot be understated, according to Chan. He emphasizes the importance of following the light, truth and seeking freedom through healing to move forward.

**"Cameron House is resilient." - Rev. Norman Fong**



CH alumnus and board president Liane Wong discusses CH's future and the need to evolve to continually meet the needs of the community. Noteworthy goals include piloting new programs, fostering partnerships with other organizations and a major capital campaign.

For now, there is no firm air date for this feature story. As soon as a date is announced, it will be shared in our e-newsletter. As they say, stay tuned!

# Comcast Awards \$25,000 Grant to Cameron House

Comcast has awarded Cameron House with a \$25,000 digital equity grant. The purpose of the funds is to support digital education and equipment in underserved populations in different areas like Chinatown. The grant will be used to provide additional skill-building classes to youths and seniors, such as:

- Resume and cover letter writing workshops
- Graphic design workshops
- How to Create a Simple Funding Proposal
- Basic coding and programming classes
- ESL classes

*"This generous grant from Comcast comes at just the right time for some of our blossoming high school youth. I sometimes joke that they're in a game show called "Writing For Dollars." In real life, it's no joke. These workshops will give them skills they need to do well in the competitive world they're about to step into."*

Corey Chan, Heritage Specialist

- Funds will also be used to upgrade current equipment
- Upgrade office desktop computers/laptops for staff
- Portable video cameras for video conferencing
- Tech support to troubleshoot computer issues
- Upgrade projector

Many thanks to Comcast for their generosity and support of Cameron House!



# Culinary Wisdom in the Hou Meih Dou Program

Having “too many cooks in the kitchen” is usually a recipe for disaster. But this summer, roughly 20 people discovered how to share and learn important life lessons.

Meet the teachers who brought the 8-week Hou Meih Douh (HMD) program to life. Led by instructor Chris Jeong and supported by Sharing & Caring Coordinator Laurene Chan, 10 high school students and 11 “uncles and aunties” discovered not only the joy of cooking but also the power of intergenerational learning and relationships.

Chris and Laurene wanted to train these high school students to pursue health through Chinese medicine and cooking.

Some of the program highlights included learning about mindfulness, creative cuisine, making recipes from scratch with all-natural ingredients and sharing with others.

Students were taught important lessons that are not only essential in the kitchen but also in life. For example, practicing highlighted awareness, focus and creating a safe space where they can all grow.

**What would be a learning experience without challenges?**

There were definitely some bumps in the road. For example, washing dishes can be a very tedious and boring task but at Hou Meih Dou, teachers focused on the importance of noticing the hidden triggers and emphasized taking the time to practice mindful washing while cleaning.

They gained confidence in the kitchen and also themselves. It was a truly successful and rewarding experience for both students and mentors.

Through the “Yes, you can!” attitude and encouragement, apprentices learned to make their own probiotics to boost their immune system. Addressing health and wellness issues was also a big priority in all daily tasks.

Cameron House looks forward to hosting more life changing initiatives like Hou Meih Dou in the future. Thank you Chris and Laurene for your servant leadership!



**"Food is nourishment on many levels"**  
- Chris Jeong



# Meet Legacy Society Member Harry Chuck

In a recent interview, we had the pleasure of conversing with Harry Chuck, an esteemed member of our Legacy Society, who graciously shared insights into his remarkable journey with Cameron House.

Harry's invaluable recollections are rooted in his involvement with a boys club which provided him with a unique opportunity for fellowship.

As he progressed through high school, Harry's leadership journey unfolded, starting as a club leader and culminating in his election as executive director.

"Cameron house introduced me to public speaking and leadership skills."

Over the years, Harry took on increasing responsibilities, assuming the role of a youth program coordinator each summer. In 1962, he officially joined the Cameron House staff, eventually rising to the position of executive director.

In 2004, under Harry's leadership, Cameron House partnered with UPS to host their Community Internship Program, a leadership training program for upper managers from all over the world. It was the organization's first partnership with a large corporation and it continues to thrive today. His role as an activist is inspiring for many since he was an advocate for affordable housing and low income students.

Parallel to his successful career, he nurtured his passion for photography and ventured into filmmaking, resulting in the 2019 award-winning film "Chinatown Rising".. The documentary captures various scenarios, protests, and historical events.

Reflecting on his multitude of experiences, Harry reminisces about his time at Cameron House, expressing a heartfelt desire to give back to an organization that has profoundly influenced his life. This is why he decided to include Cameron House in his trust.

"I see some good things about to happen for Cameron House," shares Harry.



To learn more about including Cameron House in your will or trust, visit [cameronhouse.org/give/plannedgiving](https://cameronhouse.org/give/plannedgiving) or contact Bill Vigna, Director of Finance and Operations at [bill@cameronhouse.org](mailto:bill@cameronhouse.org).



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**Photographer:** Stelman, Louis J.  
(Louis John), 1877-1961.

**150 years of Community Empowerment**