



Name in English: Thomas W. Chinn
Name in Chinese: 陳參盛 Simplified [Traditional]
Name in Pinyin:
Gender: Male
Birth Year: 1909 - 1997
Birth Place: North Bend, Oregon

Founder of the Chinese Historical Society of America

Profession(s): Historian, Journalist, Business Leader

Education: Business administration, journalism, and advertising classes at Heald College and the University of San Francisco

Awards:

1970, Award of Merit, California Historical Society; 1976, Award of Merit, Conference of California Historical Societies; 1976, Award of Merit, American Association for State and Local History; 1980, Scroll of Honor, Chinese Historical Society of America and the Chinese Culture Foundation; 1982, Award of Merit, Conference of California Historical Societies; 1987, Laura Bride Powers Award, City of San Francisco

Contributions: When Thomas W. Chinn was 17 years old, his father died and Chinn could no longer continue his formal education. He later took some courses at Heald College and the University of San Francisco, and with the knowledge gleaned from these few classes, Chinn created his own typesetting business. Although he had little formal schooling, Chinn became an important figure in the development of historical societies in California as well as a respected historian.

With a typesetting business, Chinn furthered his interest in the printed word when he founded the Chinese Digest, the first English-language weekly newspaper for Chinese Americans in 1937. Later, in 1940, he founded, edited, and published the Chinese News. Chinn's articles have appeared in various publications.

Chinn was active in numerous historical societies. In 1963, Chinn was the primary founder of the Chinese Historical Society of America (CHSA), the first such Chinese American organization in North America, and served as its president from 1963 to 1966 and in again in 1975. He played an important role in the early development of the organization, creating the CHSA museum in 1966, and editing the organization's research papers and monthly "Bulletin" publication. He edited CHSA's first publication, "A History of the Chinese in California: A Syllabus," now considered to be a classic resource book about the Chinese in America. To make CHSA research papers and materials accessible to the public, Chinn collaborated with the San Francisco Public Library in 1971 to take on long-term loans of these items. Today, the collection can be

found at the Asian American Studies Library at the University of California, Berkeley where they were transferred in 1983.

To honor the contributions of Chinese Americans to the construction of the transcontinental railroad, Chinn took charge of the efforts to put bronze memorial plaques in 1969 to commemorate the centennial of the first transcontinental railroad in the U.S. Widely respected for his expertise, Chinn was appointed by President Ford in 1975 to serve on a committee to plan and develop the program commemorating the bicentennial of the 1776 American Revolution.

Publications/Patents:

1969 "Genealogical Methods and Sources for the Chinese Immigrants to the U.S."

1989 "Bridging the Pacific: San Francisco Chinatown and Its People"

1993 "A Historian's Reflections of Chinese-American Life in San Francisco, 1919-1991"

Kim, Hyung-chan. (1999). Distinguished Asian Americans. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group.