Asian American History with Resources from the Austin History Center

Pre-1900s

Relevant Legislation & History

1790 – United States Naturalization Law of March 26, 1790: Limited naturalization to only free white people of “good character,” excluding Asian populations, Native Americans, indentured servants and slaves, free blacks, and other immigrants of color.

1837—Texas Miscegenation Law: Until 1970 Texas prohibited the marriage between people of different races. However, it appears that this was not as strictly enforced in the case of Asian men marrying Mexican American or black women compared to white women marrying a man of a different race.

1875 Page Act: A federal immigration law which prohibited the entry of “undesirable” immigrants. This included any person from Asia coming to the U.S. as a forced laborer, Asians engaging in prostitution, and anyone considered a convict in their own country. U.S. Representative Horace F. Page introduced the law to “end the danger of cheap Chinese labor and immoral Chinese women.”

1882 Chinese Exclusion Act: A law prohibiting all immigration of Chinese laborers, with the exception of those falling into the “merchants” class of immigrants. The Chinese Exclusion Act was not repealed until 1943.

Early 1900s

Relevant Legislation & History

1907 Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907: An informal agreement between Japan and the United States restricting further emigration to the U.S. from Japan while also summoning the San Francisco school board to stop segregating Asian children into separate schools.

1917 Immigration Act of 1917 aka “Asiatic Barred Zone” Established: Prohibited immigration from the Asia-Pacific Zone, imposed literacy tests as a prerequisite for immigration, and continued to ban contracted labor. The law also prohibited immigrants deemed “mentally defective” or “persons with constitutional psychopathic inferiority,” which included homosexual immigrants who admitted their orientation. Japan and the Philippines were excluded from the barred zone.

1917 Pershing’s Chinese in Texas: General John J. Pershing brought 427 Chinese refugees from Mexico to Fort Sam Houston in Texas, granting them asylum in exchange for their service in Pershing’s fight against Pancho Villa. Fred Wong, an early Chinese Austinite (resources listed below), was a grandson of a “Pershing Chinese” railroad worker.


1924 Cable Act: A law stating that if an American woman were to marry an “alien ineligible to citizenship” (i.e. most Asian men), she would lose her U.S. citizenship. For example, Francis Moreno, a Mexican
American living in Austin, lost her U.S. citizenship when she chose to marry Joe Sing, a Chinese immigrant who moved to Austin in 1890. The Cable Act was repealed in 1936, which eventually re-instated her citizenship.

**Early Chinese Pioneers in Austin: Overview**

Pioneers from the East: First Chinese Families in Austin, Austin History Center Online Exhibit:

http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/pioneers-east-first-chinese-families-austin-352175

**1890 – Joe Sing Family in Austin**

Sing Family Papers: An Inventory of the Collection:

https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/aushc/00025/ahc-00025.html

Sing Family Online Exhibit Page:

http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/sing-family-352533

KLRU Austin Revealed: Pioneers from the East Video (Sing Family):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8ERkBx138w

**1907 – Joe Lung and Family**

Inez Lung Lee Photograph Album: An Inventory of the Collection:

https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/aushc/00484/ahc-00484.html

Lung Family Online Exhibit Page:

http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/lung-family-352534

KLRU Austin Revealed: Pioneers from the East video (Lung Family):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_kJD5oLc2o

Alexander, Frances. “Miss Chou” The Biography of Inez Lung Lee:

https://austin.bibliocommons.com/item/show/110241067

**1938: Fred and Rose Chin Wong Move to Austin**

Wong Family Papers: An Inventory of the Collection:

https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/aushc/00053/ahc-00053.html

Wong Family Online Exhibit Page:

http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/wong-family-352535

KLRU Austin Revealed: Pioneers from the East video (Wong Family):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdOY93EiYxA

**Ng Family Moves to Austin**

Ng Family Online Exhibit Page:
Early to Mid 1900s

1940s to 1950s

Relevant Legislation & History

Japanese Internment: There were three camps that were located in Texas established by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to hold Japanese, German, and Italian descent people during World War II. They were located at Seagovile, Kenedy, and Crystal City. While Japanese internment was not as prominent for Asian Texans compared to the west coast residents, Japanese families in Austin were investigated, detained and regulated. These three camps were in operation until 1947.

Texas Archive of the Moving Image: Alien Enemy Detention Facility, Crystal City, Texas:

YouTube video of National Archives Video Collection: https://youtu.be/6bjH03_GAPs


1943 Chinese Exclusion Act Ends: Chinese Exclusion Act is abolished when the United States allies with China during World War II. This relationship between Chinese and American soldiers greatly improved the reputation of Chinese Texans amongst their white peers.

1944 Texan "Lost Battalion": The Texan “Lost Battalion” (originally the Texas National Guard), was rescued by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. The 442nd was a segregated unit comprised of second-generation Japanese Americans and is the most decorated unit in the history of American warfare. This rescue mission greatly improved the reputation of Japanese Americans living in Texas.

1945 War Brides Act (Public Law 271): A law that allowed foreign-born women who married American servicemen eligible for American citizenship. More than 100,000 women and children immigrated to the United States under this act. A 1947 amendment provided the same rights to women who married Chinese American servicemen.

- Influx of Japanese women from the occupation of Japan after WWII to the present
- Influx of Korean women from the onset of the Korean War
- Influx of Filipino women marrying servicemen residing on the bases in the Philippines from WWII – 1992
- Influx of Vietnamese women from the Vietnam War period
- Influx of Thai women who married servicemen based in Thailand during the Vietnam War period
1946 Luce-Celler Act: Permitted a quota of 100 Filipinos and 100 Indians to immigrate to the United States each year. This Act also provided a path for Filipino Americans and Indian Americans to become United States citizens.

Duke Tu/FAB-100

FAB-100 Records (Donated by the Tu Family): An Inventory of the Collection:
https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/aushc/00431/ahc-00431.html

The Tu Family Online Exhibit Page:
http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/tu-family-352537

1960s to 1990s

Post-1965 Immigration Reform

Relevant Legislation & History

1965 Immigration Act: (Hart-Celler Act): Marked a turn in past immigration policy that discriminated against non-European immigrants, ending the quota system based on national origins. This resulted in a new wave of Asian communities coming to the United States and Texas. UT Austin attracted many Asian immigrants in search for educational and professional opportunity, particularly for communities from China and India.

1975-1978 Refugee Influx to the U.S.: Due to the Communist takeovers in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, there was an increase of refugees from these countries to Texas.

1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act: Granted refuge for more than 130,000 Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian peoples

1980 Refugee Act: Provided a more systematic way of managing refugee resettlement in the United States. By 1980 refugees were most frequently resettled in Texas and California.

Overview of Vietnamese in Austin

Vietnam to Austin: Restoring Community, an Austin History Center Online Exhibit:

http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/vietnam-austin

“Vietnam to Austin: Restoring Community” Exhibit: An Inventory of the Collection, Collection:
https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/aushc/00029/ahc-00029.html

Nguyen Family Papers: An Inventory of the Collection:
https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/aushc/00042/ahc-00042.html

Aggarwal Family

Aggarwal Family Papers: An Inventory of the Collection:
https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/aushc/00355/ahc-00355.html
**1980s and Beyond**

**Relevant Legislation & History**

**1990 Immigration Act:** This act established the H-1B Visas, allowing foreign employees to work in the United States for up to six years. This resulted in a huge influx of professional Asian immigrants from the medical, telecommunications, education, and tech fields resettling in Austin.

**1990s: Asian American Studies at University of Texas at Austin**

Through student activism and protest, the Asian Relations Committee (Later Asian American Relations Group) fought for the creation of an Asian American Studies program at UT Austin. In 1999, there was a sit-in protest that resulted in the arrest of 10 UT students, known as the UT-10.

UT 10 Collection: An Inventory of the Austin History Center Collection:

https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/aushc/00177/ahc-00177.html

**2000 – Austin Asian American Cultural Center Founded:** Founded by activist and mental health advocate Amy Wong Mok, the Austin Asian American Cultural Center was the first independent cultural and resource center dedicated to Austin’s Asian American Community. The center provides childcare, health and immigration resources, cultural activities, senior services, and recreational activities. It also created the Dragon Boat races and festival, a traditional event taking place on Town Lake each year.

http://www.asianamericancc.com/

**2000s: Karen Refugee Community**

Due to political turmoil, there was an influx of Burmese and Karen refugees resettling in Austin in the early 2000s.

Burmese and Karen Communities: An Inventory of the Collection:

https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/aushc/00291/ahc-00291.html
2002: Chutney Bubble Tea Half Hour

A student-run radio show at University of Texas at Austin centered on Asian American issues.

Digitized segments of the show can be found through the South Asian American Digital Archive:

https://www.saada.org/browse/source/the-chutney-bubble-tea-half-hour

2013 – Asian American Resource Center Opens

The first city-funded cultural facility dedicated to the Asian American community in Austin, a part of the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department.


Submitted by Loretta Edelen