

Hmong in America: Refugees from a Secret War

January 12, -- May 30, 1996

A report regarding the exhibition held at the Museum of Anthropology at
California State University Sacramento.

Submitted by Carol Dunstan, Guest Curator, June 6, 1996

Number of visitors

6,000-7,000 visitors (more than 4,000 signed the guest book)

55 groups

adult education 8

college 8

high school 7

junior high 6

elementary 23

church 2

scouts 1

Staff

1 guest curator

12 student assistants and docents

5 registered as interns receiving units

7 paid as student assistants

Faculty support was provided by Professors George Rich and Jay Crain from the Department of Anthropology.

Finances

Complete expenditure of \$20,000 Lottery Fund grant is attached.

\$15,339.52 was spent from the grant directly on the exhibition.

This figure includes staff pay as well as supplies, reception and speaker costs. The remainder of the budget was spent on supplies and equipment for the museum.

The Southeast Asia Community Resource Center of the Folsom-Cordova School District, under the directions of Dr. Lue Vang and Judy Lewis, co-sponsored the exhibition and the related 4-part lecture series. The SEACRC applied for and administered the National Endowment for the Humanities grant provided through the Chippewa Valley Museum

of Eau Claire Wisconsin. The NEH grant was in the amount of \$2000 and provided training for the organization of the lecture series, a set of 20 panels depicting Hmong history and culture in photographs and text, and 50 copies of *Hmong in America: Journey from a Secret War* by Tim Pfaff. The SEACRC spent approximately \$2,000 in addition to the NEH grant for this project, and its report is attached.

Publicity

- The Southeast Asia Community Resource Center designed and printed the 11" by 18" **posters** that announced the exhibition and each of the four lectures. These posters were displayed widely throughout Sacramento, as well as on the CSUS campus.
- The exhibit and lecture series were announced in an article by Steve Magagnini in December in the **Sacramento Bee**: "Exhibit, talks explore Hmong history, future."
- The **CSUS Bulletin** featured a photograph and article about the exhibit and lecture series in the December 11-17, 1995 issue.
- Friday March 1, 1996, the Metro section of the **Sacramento Bee** featured three large photographs and a long article, "Folk art exhibits fabric of Hmong history," by Steve Magagnini.
- Tuesday March 5, 1996 the **State Hornet** displayed three photographs and an article about the exhibit.
- The Calendar section of the **Encore** section of the Sunday Sacramento Bee listed the exhibition in the museum section during March and April.
- The exhibit was featured in the brochure for the **2nd Annual Hmong National Education Conference** that was held at the Red Lion Hotel and at CSUS April 4-6, 1996.
- **Channels 31 and 40** featured the opening of the exhibition on their evening news broadcasts on January 13, 1996.
- **KFBK radio** reviewed the exhibit and announced the opening and the lecture series on Saturday January 13, 1996.

Events

- The **reception** for the opening of the exhibit featured Dr. Yang Dao, the first Hmong to earn a Ph.D. He and the more than 200 guests were officially welcomed by Ann Reed, Vice President of Academic Affairs for CSUS. Five young Hmong boys, the Vang Brothers, played the traditional windpipe (*qeej*) and danced. A Hmong woman batiked cloth and showed samples of hand dyed materials. Hmong food was provided by Asia Gardens of Rancho Cordova. The reception was attended by faculty members from several CSUS departments, many members of the Sacramento Hmong Community, including the President and Board of Lao Family Community, Inc., and people from the broader Sacramento community including many teachers.
- The four-part **lecture series** was held in the lecture hall 1013 in Mendocino Hall, except for the lecture concerning the secret war which was held in the Theatre and was attended by approximately 400 people. The other lectures and discussions were each attended by more than 200 people with a strong showing from the Sacramento Hmong community and from educators in several Sacramento-area school districts. 50 people had requested to be named as “active participants” in the discussions and were each given a copy of *Hmong in America: Journey from a Secret War*, by Tim Pfaff, which was provided as part of the NEH grant. Each “active participant” also received a binder of readings consisting of nearly 200 pages that coincided with the subjects discussed in the lecture series. The content of each lecture is described briefly on a separate page. The museum exhibition was open the entire day that each lecture was held.
- The Southeast Asia Community Resource Center heads a group of Sacramento educators called the Refugee Educators Network which generated interest in the exhibit and lecture series in the school districts in and around Sacramento. Each year they sponsor the **Southeast Asia Education Faire**, which is held at Sacramento City College, and is attended by around 800 educators. On May 1, 1996, the evening before the Faire, the Anthropology Museum sponsored a reception for the members of the Network and the conference presenters at the museum. Some of those attending the reception and conference came from as far away as North Carolina and Minnesota. On the day of the conference, we moved the 20 panels from the exhibition and installed them at the central facility at Sacramento City College. The panels attracted a great deal of interest and served as a catalyst to encourage more teachers to bring their classes to the museum.
- On April 6-8, 1996, the Hmong National Development organization held the **2nd Annual Hmong National Education Conference** at the Red Lion Hotel in Sacramento and at CSUS in Mendocino Hall. The Museum

was advertised widely at the conference, including an announcement in the brochure which was distributed nationally by the Regional and Continuing Education Division of CSUS. The Museum exhibition was opened to coincide with the conference. At the end of the conference, the museum was presented with a framed certificate signifying the contribution made to the conference. The conference was attended by over 600 people who came from all over the world, including Thailand and France.

- April 11-13, four museum staff members, Carol Dunstan, Thomas Bongiorno, Lee Lo, and Steve Watters, presented a panel on the exhibition at the 67th Annual Meeting of the **Southwest Anthropological Association** in Pasadena Calif. Steve Watters also mounted a display of his photographs documenting the construction of the Hmong house and other structures for the exhibit. These meetings were attended by several hundred people from California and the Southwest, and there was a very favorable response to the museum display and presentation. Carol Dunstan's paper, *If We Build a Hmong House, We Must Also Build a Chicken Coop: a Community Determined Cultural Exhibition*, provides an ethnographic account of the construction of the exhibition and is attached.
- The Museum sponsored **Dr. Amy Catlin**, Ethnomusicologist from UCLA, who presented her in-process film, *Hmong Musicians in America*, on May 11, 1996, in Mendocino Hall 1013. Dr. Catlin solicited reactions to her film from the nearly 100 people in attendance. She also filmed a segment in the museum making use of the traditional Hmong house to document the playing of the mouth harp (*ncaj*). The instruments were played by Lee Lo, a museum employee and graduate student in the Department of Anthropology, and a friend of his, both of whom are Hmong.
- I was asked to present a paper on Hmong Women to the CSU Chico-School of Nursing's Community Health Nursing Conference on April 18, 1996. The invitation was the result of a referral by a local Sutter Health Nursing team who visited the museum. My paper was very well received.

Related Developments

- This exhibition provided excellent opportunities for interaction between the university and the people of Sacramento. It also facilitated communication within the university between people from a wide variety of departments.

- The exhibition brought a large number of people from the Hmong communities of Sacramento and other parts of the Central Valley onto the CSUS campus, many of them for the first time. Approximately thirty Hmong people volunteered time and energy in the construction of the Hmong house and other structures. Many also brought cultural artifacts to display in the exhibit. While the exhibition was designed and hung by the curator and staff, the Hmong community determined what was displayed by what they decided to loan to the museum.

The volunteers ranged in age from 10 to 60, with the elders teaching the young people how to use traditional Hmong tools to build the house and other structures. This interaction proved very valuable as the young people commented that they had not realized their parents and grandparents were so skilled and held so much knowledge. Many of the volunteers both young and old, had not been on a university campus before, and enjoyed the interaction with students, faculty and staff from the university.
- Representing CSUS, the museum developed a good working relationship with Sacramento Lao Family Community, Inc., and the Southeast Asia Community Resource Center. Relationships were also established with other educational institutions including the following: Sacramento City Unified School District, Grant Unified School District, Folsom-Cordova Unified School District, Stockton Unified School District, Washington Unified School District, Del Paso School District, Natomas Unified School District, Cosumnes Community College, Sacramento City College, University of California at Berkeley, University of California at Los Angeles, University of California at San Francisco, University of California at Davis, California State University Chico, California State University Stanislaus, California State University San Bernadino, California State University Hayward, Fremont Adult School, and Headstart of Sacramento. All of these academic institutions had classes and or representatives visit the museum.
- The Museum also served as a site for interaction among faculty and students from several diverse departments on the CSUS campus. Faculty from many departments, and classes from Communication Studies, Asian Studies, Education, Design, and Anthropology visited.
- While non-Hmong docents learned about the Hmong culture from the display and readings, they also learned from the Hmong students and visitors who were drawn to the museum because of the exhibit. Many Hmong students from a wide variety of departments dropped by the museum and spent time talking with docents and visitors, and just “hanging out” in a way that suggested that they had become comfortable there. Many expressed their pleasure with the exhibit stating that they had not felt before that anyone was interested in their culture.

The three Hmong docents learned more about their own culture through the readings and lecture series. They were extremely valuable in working with the many multi-ethnic school groups who visited the museum. Not only were they able to speak to the Hmong children and adult visitors in their own language, but they provided an invaluable model of successful integration into the wider American society through education. They developed a strong sense of pride in their cultural heritage and in their own accomplishments as they learned to address large groups of people who visited the exhibit.

Because they were passionate and knowledgeable about Hmong culture, and because they developed presentation skills by docenting in the museum, these Hmong students became involved in significant academic events that they might not have participated in otherwise. Houa Lor and Moua Her participated as discussants at the 2nd Hmong National Education Conference. At this conference they met people from across the United States who were also interested in issues concerning Hmong people.

Lee Lo, Thomas Bongiorno, and Steve Watters, graduate students in the Department of Anthropology, as well as museum staff, presented papers at the 2nd Hmong National Education Conference and at the Southwest Anthropology Association Meetings. They made potentially valuable contacts in academia and presented ideas that engendered stimulating discussions at both conferences.

Future Plans

- Each year we would like to mount two exhibitions, a smaller one in the fall semester, to be followed by a major show in the spring that would focus on one particular ethnic group. In the fall of 1996, we plan to show a collection of Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime Paintings that will be loaned by Dr. Daniel Crowley of U.C. Davis. Dr. Crowley will lecture on the subject during the semester.
- For the spring of 1997, we are planning an exhibition titled: *20th Century Pilgrims: Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union*. We have already received verbal support from various groups that work within that community including, Sacramento Lao Family, Inc., Sacramento City College, and the Southeast Asia Resource Center. The Southeast Asia Resource Center has applied for a grant "to host in collaboration with CSU Sacramento Department of Anthropology a 'leadership roundtable' meeting for college and high school youth leaders within immigrant and refugee groups, held in conjunction with the opening of a new museum exhibit on the peoples of the former Soviet Union."
- We would also like to host an ethnographic film series that would facilitate the showing of recent works by California anthropologists. The

ethnographer would host the showing, and a question and response session would follow. I have already had tentative commitments from two film makers, Dr. Amy Catlin who has made a film about India in conjunction with her husband, Dr. Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy, and Bruce Pierini who has documented Eastern Religions in Sacramento. I have also been in contact with Wayne Anderson about a presentation of his recent work on non-Western astronomical sites.

- The Museum of Anthropology should serve as a resource for students of all ages in a variety of fields. It should provide a forum for intellectual discussion and exchange of knowledge and ideas between staff, students, and community members. With these goals, the staff plans to present anthropological exhibitions, lecture series, and film festivals of interest to a wide variety of people in Sacramento.
- It is our hope that CSUS will fund the Museum of Anthropology so that it can take its place as a full member of the campus community. We believe that we have demonstrated the value of the museum to the university and the wider Sacramento community. The CSUS Museum of Anthropology is the only anthropology museum in the Central Valley, the nearest other one being the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum at UC Berkeley.