

SELECTED FIRSTS

IN ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HISTORY



Dalip Singh Saund



Calvin Chin



Anna May Wong



Anthony Loo Wong

GOVERNMENT Representing California in 1956, Dalip Singh Saund became the first Asian-American U.S. Representative.

SCIENCE AND MEDICINE In 1957, Tsung-Dao Lee and Chen Ning Yang became the first Asian-Americans to win the Nobel Prize for physics. They were awarded the prize for disproving a quantum-physics law.

LITERATURE AND PUBLISHING In 1974, both Ken Kashiwahara and Connie Chung became the first Asian-American network news reporters. In 1993, Chung also became the first Asian-American news anchor (main reporter) for a major television station.

FILM In 1921, Anna May Wong became the first widely recognized Asian-American film star. In 1951, she also became the first Asian-American to have her own television series, "The Gallery of Madame Liu Tsong."

AIR AND SPACE In 1932, Katherine Sui Fun Cheung became the first licensed Asian-American aviator. As a co-member of the woman-only aviation "99-Club" (headed by Amelia Earhart), Cheung participated in numerous aerial performances and races, eventually retiring from aviation after an accident destroyed her plane.

MILITARY In 1944, Calvin Chin and Anthony Loo Wong became the first Chinese Americans to be commissioned as second lieutenants (officers), after graduating from the Medical Administrative Corps Officer Candidate School at Camp Berkeley, Texas.

SPORTS In 1948, Richard Tom became the first Asian-American to win an Olympic medal. He received the Bronze Medal for weightlifting.

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

M A Y

MUCH LIKE Black History Month and Women’s History Month, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month originated with a **congressional bill**. Two Representatives introduced the bill to the House of Representatives and two senators introduced the bill to the Senate. Both of them passed, and U.S. President Jimmy Carter officially recognized Asian/Pacific Heritage Week on October 5, 1978. Several years later, in May 1990, President George H. W. Bush expanded it to a month, and **designated** it as Asian Pacific Heritage Month. The month of May was chosen in honor of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to the United States on May 7, 1843 and also the completion of the **transcontinental** railroad on May 10, 1869.

May is celebrated with community events that involve historical, educational, and cultural activities, and the recognition of famous Asian Americans in such fields as architecture, entertainment, athletics, education, art, and science. One historical period often discussed in school curricula in May is the building of the first railroad that **spanned** the American continent. This railroad, **largely** built by Chinese immigrants, is considered one of the **crowning** achievements of President Abraham Lincoln, even though it was completed four years after his death. To build the railroad, the Union Pacific Railroad began in Nebraska, and worked westward through Colorado and Wyoming to Utah. At the same time, the Central Pacific Railroad began in California, and moved eastward through Nevada to Utah, carving out places for railroad tracks in high mountain peaks. The two railroad companies met in the town of Promontary, Utah, where they **drove** in the final “golden **spike**” that brought together the east and west

coasts of the American continent. This **feat** revolutionized the economy and population of the U.S. It caused the **wagon trains** to be **obsolete**, and **affected** commerce, trade, and travel across the continent.

Glossary

congressional: *adj.* of an elected group of representatives

bill: *n.* a proposed law in government

designate(d): *v.* to officially choose for a particular reason or purpose

transcontinental: *adj.* extending across a continent

span(ned): *v.* to cross the length between two points

largely: *adv.* mostly; almost completely

crown(ing): *adj.* greatest

drive: *v.* to provide the power to make something happen; to pound in

spike: *n.* a narrow thin shape with a point on one end, usually metal

feat: *n.* an action that involves risk or difficulty

wagon train: *n.* a group or line of vehicles with four wheels, pulled by animals

obsolete: *adj.* not in use anymore because something more modern has replaced it

affect(ed): *v.* to cause to change