

Brief History of the St. Paul – Changsha Sister-City Relationship and the St. Paul – Changsha China Friendship Garden at Phalen Regional Park

By MN China Friendship Garden Society
Linda Mealey-Lohmann, Co-Founder ©2016
(revised 5/24/2016)

*Imagine walking through a small moon gate that leads you under an arbor covered with fragrant blossoms on a warm summer day.
To your right, you see people practicing Tai Chi under the weeping willows along a stream and ahead you see people sitting
in a pavilion with slightly sweeping eaves that overlooks a lake with decorative rocks along its bank.
This experience will soon become a reality at Phalen Park,
the sight of the future St. Paul – Changsha Sister City China Friendship Garden.*

Minnesota's Early Connection to China. The first Chinese arrived in Minnesota in the mid-1870s and primarily owned and operated laundries, restaurants, and hotels and worked in mining and railroad building. In the intervening years, Chinese Minnesotans have made significant contributions in the fields of science, medicine, technology, finance, education, and international trade; and have contributed research to many fields, including nanotechnology, bio-fuel, solar energy, Alzheimer disease, etc. The first Chinese scholars arrived at the University of Minnesota in 1914. The University of Minnesota continues to have one of the largest populations of students from China of any university in the U.S.



US China Peoples Friendship Association



US-China Peoples Friendship Association, Minnesota Chapter (USCPFA-MN). The US-China Peoples Friendship Association, Minnesota Chapter (USCPFA-MN) is one of the chapters of the National organization, the US-China Peoples Friendship Association® (USCPFA-National). USCPFA-National was founded in 1974, working on people-to-people diplomacy between Americans and Chinese. Its goal is to develop and strengthen friendship and understanding between the peoples of the United States and China. USCPFA-MN was founded as a subsidiary of USCPFA-National in 1974 and is a non-profit, 501c(3) non-partisan, educational organization. It has over 100 members of all ages and backgrounds who are dedicated to developing and maintaining ties of friendship and mutual understanding between the people of China and the United States. With the realization of full diplomatic relations between the governments of the U.S. and China in 1979, USCPFA and USCPFA-MN initiated and actively participated in a wide variety of cultural, scientific, educational, commercial, medical and technological exchanges. A debt of gratitude goes to those founding USCPFA-MN board members, including **Fred Ptashne**, Founding President of USCPFA-MN from 1974 to 1987. USCPFA-MN initiated the sister-city relationships between the State of Minnesota and Shaanxi Province (1982) and between Minneapolis and Harbin (1992). In 1990, USCPFA-MN became the anchoring organization for the St. Paul – Changsha sister city relationship, Minnesota's first sister relationship with China (1988).

Sister City Historical Context. St. Paul is the sister-city to Changsha (capital of Hunan Province), a relationship that began in 1988. Historical records suggest that the origins of the St. Paul – Changsha sister city relationship can be traced back to April 1985, when Mayor Latimer welcomed the first Chinese Delegation to St. Paul, a delegation lead by the Governor of Hunan Province (Changsha, capital). Critical to the development of this relationship in the early days was the efforts of **Dr. P. Richard Bohr**, then-President and Executive Director of the **Midwest China Center** (until 1987). In October 1985, Bohr led the 8-member Upper Midwest-China Leadership Delegation to several cities in China, including 4 days in Changsha, and presented a letter of greeting from Mayor Latimer to Changsha Mayor Wang Keying. The objective of this trip was to foster the relationship between China and the Upper Midwest. The Delegation also included **Cathy Chen Ron Bryant, Edward Corn, Jon Gutzman, Bart Hazleton, Franklin Jesse, Lee Sandager, and Barbara Tiede**. The Midwest China Center delivered a return letter from Mayor Wang to Mayor Latimer that expressed an interest in developing a closer relationship with St. Paul. There was a belief by both sides that Changsha's development priorities (as reflected in China's Seventh Five-Year Plan) and the fact that both St. Paul and Changsha were regional capitals would open up enormous economic, cultural, and education opportunities for both cities.

The next year, October 1986, Mayor Latimer greeted the Hunan Provincial Trade Delegation (aka Hunan Economy and Construction Promoting Committee) in his office in St. Paul and there were further discussions about ways to promote closer relationships between Changsha and St. Paul. Mayor Latimer then began the process to formalize a sister relationship with Changsha. Mayor Latimer, at the request of Mayor Wang, appointed Bohr at the Midwest China Center to be the channel between the two cities in developing a proposal for a sister city relationship. In November 1986, Bohr, in consultation with others, submitted to Mayor Latimer a "Proposal to Develop a Sister City Relationship between St. Paul and Changsha." **Weiming Lu** (Urban Designer and then-Executive Director, Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation) was a member of the Midwest China Center's Board of Directors at that time and was actively involved in and supportive of these efforts. In December 1986, Mayor Latimer established the Changsha Sister City Committee of 16 leaders from various sectors (agriculture, education, business, medicine) and asked Bohr to Chair that Committee. In addition to Mayor Latimer, Bohr, and Lu, these leaders included **Dr. David Bennett** (Superintendent of Schools, St. Paul School District 625), **Dixon Bond** (President, Ordway Music Theatre), **Richard Broeker** (Brokers, St. Paul), **Cathy Chen Ron Bryant** (Proprietor, Jade Wind), **Leann Chin** (Proprietor, Leann Chin Chinese Restaurant), **Dr. Shelley Chou** (Professor and Head of Department of Neurosurgery, University of Minnesota), **Edward Corn** (Independent Arts Producer and Consultant), **Willis Eken** (Chair, MN World Trade Center Board), **Jon Gutzman** (Director, Public Housing, Minneapolis Community Development Agency), **David Lanegran** (Professor of Geography, Macalester College), **Steven Proeschel** (Assistant to Mayor), **Paul Verret** (President, Saint Paul Foundation), and **Dr. Yang Wang** (Professor of Medicine, Cardio-Vascular Division, University of Minnesota). The purpose of the Committee was to determine the goals and scope of the sister relationship and make recommendations on how to develop the sister relationship.



In March 1987, the relationship took a big step forward toward full acceptance when Mayor Wang asked the Changsha Branch of the Chinese Peoples Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries to serve as Changsha's counterpart to St. Paul's Changsha Sister City Committee. At that time, a

number of sister city projects were proposed and those ideas were presented to Mayor Wang when Bryant and Corn traveled to Changsha in April 1987. At Mayor Latimer's invitation, a Changsha Delegation led by Mayor Wang came to Minnesota for the opening of the Minnesota World Trade Center in October 1987. Details for a sister-city relationship were being formalized. In a reciprocal trip in 1988, Mayor Latimer traveled to Changsha, with a delegation including **Weiming Lu** (then-Chair of Midwest China Center since 1987), where the two cities formally signed the sister-city agreement. In mid-1989, the Midwest China Center was renamed Midwest Asia Center, with Lu as Chair. The first official sister-city delegation from Changsha (after the signing) traveled to St. Paul in December 1990. Shortly thereafter, USCPFA-MN became the anchoring organization for this sister-city relationship. Since the founding of the Changsha sister-city relationship in 1988, there have been many official delegations that have traveled between the two cities, as well as many educational, cultural, and business exchanges.

China Garden Project. In 2000, **C.C. Hsiao** (Professor of Aerospace Engineering and Mechanics, University of Minnesota) and **Linda Mealey-Lohmann** (attorney with Masters Degree in Chinese), both board members of USCPFA-MN, realized there were 8 Japanese gardens and no Chinese gardens in Minnesota. They initially formed a China Garden Committee of the USCPFA-MN and conducted extensive research on Chinese garden architecture styles and sister-city China Gardens in the U.S. Based on their research, they determined that there should be a separate organization with a mission to build China Gardens in the Twin Cities. Thus, in 2005 Hsiao and Mealey-Lohmann co-founded the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Shortly thereafter, Lu began working closely with Mealey-Lohmann and became a Principal Advisor to China Garden Society. In that capacity, he has devoted innumerable hours to connect with and educate the Mayor, St. Paul Parks & Rec, and the community about this project and Chinese architecture and garden design. In those early years, the China Garden Society worked tirelessly to make this dream a reality, including trips to Changsha in 2007 by Mealey-Lohmann and in 2008 by Mayor Coleman with **Mary Warpeha**, board member of the China Garden Society, and **Bill Pesek**, St. Paul Park & Rec architect, as well as countless presentations to various groups in St. Paul by Mealey-Lohmann, Lu, Warpeha, and **Joyce Hsiao**, board member and spouse of C.C. Hsiao.



Master Lei Yixin. In 2006, Public Art Saint Paul sponsored the St. Paul “Minnesota Rocks!” Stone Carving Symposium. In cooperation with Public Art Saint Paul, and under the direction of USCPFA-MN President **Mary Warpeha** and the valuable help of Board Member **Jennie Hsiao** (originally from Changsha), USCPFA-MN invited Changsha sculptor, **Master Lei Yixin**, to participate in the Symposium, during which he carved a 9-foot sculpture entitled “Meditation.” This beautiful sculpture was installed at Phalen Park in 2006 and dedicated by Mayor Coleman in 2007. It should be noted that during the Symposium, Master Lei was contacted by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Foundation, and with the translation help of **Weiming Lu**, Master Lei received a

commission and created the 30-foot **Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial “Stone of Hope” Memorial**, installed in Washington, D.C. and dedicated in 2011. Master Lei continues to be a liaison between USCPFPA-MN and the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society and Changsha. Warpeha continued to be involved with sister-city relationship and to work closely with Mealey-Lohmann on all aspects of the China Garden project.

China Garden Site. The China Garden Society considered various sites in St. Paul for the China Garden, including Como Park. With the installation of “Meditation” in Phalen Park, the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society approached St. Paul Parks & Rec about the possibility of building a China Garden in Phalen Park. In 2008, the China Garden Society began working with **Bill Pesek**, St. Paul Park & Rec architect, to select a suitable site for the China Garden in Phalen Park. Ultimately, Pesek determined that the ideal location would be on the north end of the channel at Phalen Park, east of the stone arch bridge. Pesek was instrumental in working to include the China Garden in the Park’s Master Plan. In 2011, St. Paul, Ramsey County, and the Metropolitan Council approved the China Friendship Garden as part of the Phalen-Keller Regional Park Master Plan. Since then, St. Paul Parks & Rec have made significant improvements to the area around the site, including rebuilding the stone arch bridge, restoring the historical waterfall, and making improvements along the channel.



In November 2014, **Bill Zajicek**, Vice President of St. Paul District 5 Planning Council, began working with the China Garden Society and hosted a community meeting to gather valuable input about community needs as related to the China Garden Project. In early 2015, through the tireless efforts of **Representative Tim Mahoney** and **Senator Fong Hawj**, \$50,000 funding was approved from the Minnesota's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund (“Legacy Funds”) for the China Garden design.

October 2015 Changsha Trip. In October 2015, four members of the MN China Friendship Garden Society traveled to Changsha, China, with **St. Paul Mayor Coleman’s** 8-member delegation. During that trip, Co-Founder Mealey-Lohmann and three China Garden Advisors, Zajicek, **Brenda Fong** (Organizer of the Phalen Park Dragon Boat Festival) and **Romi Slowiak** (Community Arts Activist), along with **Alice Messer**, Senior Landscape Architect at St. Paul Parks & Rec, worked to reaffirm the sister-city relationship between St. Paul and Changsha, and to conduct research on Changsha garden architecture and tour several Changsha gardens, including Yuelu Mountain and Academy, home of the famous Ai Wan Pavilion (built in 1792). The China Garden Delegation also traveled to Feng Huang Ancient Miao (Hmong) Village to learn more about Hmong culture in China. According to Senator Fong Hawj, the Minnesota Hmong claim Changsha as their ancestral home. They also met with Changsha architect Jon Youhua WEN, whom Master Lei recommended to work with the City of St. Paul on the China Garden design. During the Changsha visit, there was also a formal signing ceremony to mark the creation of a sister friendship park relationship between Phalen Regional Park and Changsha Yanghu Wetland Park, attended by St. Paul Mayor Coleman and Changsha **Vice Mayor HE Jihua**, and the rest of the Mayoral Delegation and the China Garden Society Delegation.



Changsha Architects Travel to MN. In November 2015, the Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society, through Mealey-Lohmann, Zajicek, and Slowiak, hosted two Changsha architects, a husband and wife team, **Jon Youhua WEN** and **Jennifer Junfang FAN** from Hunan Jian Ke Landscape Company. The architects spent several days and many hours examining the Phalen Park site with members of the China Garden Society, St. Paul Parks & Rec, and international Feng Shui expert **Carole Hyder**, to determine the placement for a pavilion, a moon gate, a small bridge, and other garden features. They also toured the Como Park Japanese Garden, Bonsai collection and Conservatory, Mears Park, Rice Park, and Raspberry Island Park to learn more about the local parks and the types of local plant and rock materials that may be available for their use. They also toured the extensive world-class China collection at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. They also attended the “Dream of the Red Chamber” Event sponsored by the Chinese Heritage Foundation, as well as several other dinners hosted in their honor to introduce them to those connected with the China Garden project.



Garden Plans Unveiled. In January 2016, the Changsha architects and St. Paul Parks & Rec finished their work on the conceptual designs for the China Friendship Garden and those plans were made public. The plans include a the conceptual designs of the various components of the garden, including a replica of Changsha’s famous Aiwan Pavilion and stone garden, an arched bridge, a lakeside pavilion with an enclosed studio for classes, an entrance arch, and a Hmong Cultural Plaza; as well as a “walk-through video” of the garden grounds. These are posted on the China Garden Society website. These structures and elements will reflect Chinese culture and the long-history of Chinese garden aesthetics. The Hmong Cultural Plaza is an important element in the China Garden because Minnesota Hmong claim Changsha as their ancestral home, and a large Hmong community live in the Phalen Park area. Hmong cultural symbols and historical information will be included in the Plaza.



Ancestral Connection between MN Hmong and Changsha, Hunan, Miao Zu Communities. The first Hmong refugees arrived in Minnesota in 1977 and Minnesota has the largest Hmong population in the United States; approximately 80,000 Hmong. A majority of that population live in St. Paul and are frequent users of Phalen Park. There is a strong connection between the Minnesota Hmong community and the Miao Zu Community in Changsha and Hunan Province (湖南长沙苗族人). These two geographically-separated communities share a common ancestor, Chi You, one of the three Grand Ancestors in ancient China (along with the Yellow Emperor and Yan Di). Chi You died and is buried in the Da Xiong Mountain in Xin Hua City, about 2.5 hours southwest of Changsha. A temple to Chi You, the “China Chiyou Culture Park,” was designed by Changsha architect Jennifer Junfang FAN, the designer of the St. Paul-Changsha China Friendship Garden. The hope is to place an art sculpture in the China Garden to reflect this ancestral connection between the Minnesota Hmong and Chi You.

Community Input Meetings and Workshops. A series of community input workshops and meetings were held by the St. Paul Parks & Rec, the MN China Friendship Garden Society, and District 5. As the project continues, further community input meetings will be held.

July 9 Site Dedication Ceremony. A Site Dedication Ceremony was held during the opening ceremony for the Dragon Festival, complete with a parade of lion dancers to the China Garden site where a Feng Shui Site Dedication ritual was performed by International Feng Shui expert Carole Hyder and a Hmong blessing was given by Hmong Elder Uncle Charles Vu. Speeches featured former Mayor Latimer, who signed the 1988 Sister-City Agreement, China Garden Society President Linda Mealey-Lohmann, MN Senator Fong Hawj, MN Representative Tim Mahoney, St. Paul City Councilmember Dai Thao, Hmong 18 Council President Wa Houa Vue. Other Dignitaries included: Director of St. Paul Parks & Rec Mike Hahm, China Garden Society Board Members & Advisors: Joyce Hsiao, Mary Warpeha, Carole Hyder, Weiming Lu, Bill Zajicek, Romi Slowiak, Brenda Fong, Bill Pesek, Robert Jacobson, Jeff Wang; Liaison Noah Vang, Architects Alice Messer and Bryan Murphy.



Next Steps. Preparations and fundraising for a sister-city gift of 5 Peanuts statues from the St. Paul community to Changsha are in progress. There are hopes for a ground-breaking ceremony in Spring 2017 and a grand opening ceremony for Phase 1A in fall 2017.

Those interested in getting involved with or making a donation to this exciting project can contact Mealey-Lohmann at MN.China.Garden@comcast.net and view the website at www.MNChinaGarden.org