

Stockton Cambodian Oral History Project

The Cambodian Oral History Project, a collaborative team with representatives from University of the Pacific, San Joaquin Delta College, The Record, the San Joaquin County Historical Society, Stagg High School and the Asian Pacific Self-development and Residential Association, came together with the goal of educating our community on the richly diverse and unique roles Cambodians have played in Stockton's recent history, as well as the phenomenal contributions Cambodian-Americans have made to the city's artistic, religious and cultural landscape.

The City of Stockton is home to the fifth-largest population of Cambodians in the nation and the second largest in California. Beginning in 1975, when Cambodia fell to communist Khmer Rouge forces – and as many as 2 million of the country's people perished in a brutal campaign of torture, starvation and forced labor – Cambodian refugees began relocating here in large numbers.

With the bulk of the Cambodian influx more than three decades behind us, many who lived firsthand through the killing fields, who braved the perilous flight to refugee camps in neighboring Thailand and who confronted the daunting task of adapting to new communities in America are reaching middle or old age. Your dedicated work in collecting these stories now will be imperative to their preservation. Our mission with this project is not just to highlight the sufferings of their past but to show their remarkable strength, will and resilience – the affirmative, empowering, redemptive story of their history and their presence here.

A public-domain oral history project to include a short video documentary, an exhibit of artifacts and photos, presentations at schools and community events and a multimedia website – in conjunction with the institutional archives of University of the Pacific and the Historical Society – will preserve the personal narratives of Cambodian Americans and allow those stories to be used for further education and research. The interviews and audio and video footage will be housed in these archives and made publicly available in an online digital archive. Eventually, those records will be used to create a more comprehensive film that places current Cambodian issues within a largely undocumented historical context.

One specific project we plan is a video documentary that focuses on the Cambodian New Year celebration to paint a broader picture of Stockton's Cambodian community as a whole – to affirm and show the positive impact the Cambodian community has had on Stockton, despite its wrenching past. Through the exploration of Cambodian arts that this video enables, a human face will be put on the Cambodian story, and the oral histories and archival records we collect will come alive.

Thank you for commitment to work on this project. If you have questions or need further information, please contact either Jennifer Torres-Siders, University of the Pacific, jtorressiders@pacific.edu; or Elizabeth Roberts, (209) 546-8268 or eroberts@recordnet.com; or visit www.stocktoncambodianoralhistoryproject.com