



# LancasterHistory

## For Immediate Release

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## LancasterHistory, Lancaster AAPI Celebrate Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month Proclamation

*Proclamation Serves as Acknowledgement of the Contributions, History of the AAPI*

*Community in Lancaster County*

**LANCASTER, Pa.** – LancasterHistory and **Lancaster Asian American Pacific Islanders** (LAAPI) are proud to announce that the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners have officially proclaimed May 2023 as **Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month**. The Proclamation celebrates the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community in Lancaster County and acknowledges the AAPI community's growth and rich history in our community.

The Lancaster County Board of Commissioners will hold a public meeting on Wednesday, May 3, at 9:15 a.m. at 150 N. Queen Street to read the Proclamation. The public is encouraged to attend and are welcome to support of the AAPI community and stand in solidarity against anti-Asian bias and racism.

According to the U.S. Census, Lancaster County experienced an 84 percent increase in its Asian American population between 2010 and 2020, bringing the AAPI community to comprise 2.4 percent of the county's population.

"The very first county proclamation in 2021 was made in the midst of COVID and the scourge of anti-Asian hate crimes rising throughout the country," said **Paula Koda**, a local AAPI activist and member of Lancaster AAPI. "This year's proclamation comes at a time when Asian Americans in Lancaster County are organizing, representing ourselves more broadly, and sharing our culture with the public. The Lunar New Year Festival, presented in part by Lancaster AAPI, with support from the Lancaster County Community Foundation, is a good example."

Two notable organizations representing the AAPI community in Lancaster County are the **South Asian Association of Lancaster (SAAL)** and **Lancaster Asian American Pacific Islanders (LAAPI)**. SAAL focuses on embracing the community with tenacity and resilience while providing support in various ways, including COVID vaccination clinics, blood donation drives, and resources for older adults. LAAPI, a coalition formed less than a year ago, advocates for the rights and needs of the growing AAPI population in Lancaster County and beyond. Founding members include Ole Hongvanthong, Brian Nguyen, Julie Cao, Heidi Castillo, Catherina Celosse, Paula Koda, Adam Hosey, Sophie Xiong, and Sam and Cindy Guo among others.

In 2021, the **YWCA Lancaster**, **Church World Services**, **Central PA Korean Association**, and **LancasterHistory** were instrumental in supporting the reading of the first AAPI Proclamation. This year, the Proclamation is supported by these same organizations and a host of others, including **St. James Episcopal Church**.

A historic figure mentioned in the 2023 Proclamation is **Hong Neok Woo**, a Chinese immigrant who arrived in Lancaster more than 160 years ago. Woo lived in Lancaster from 1855 through 1864 and, on September 22, 1860, Woo was naturalized as an American citizen in Lancaster County. According to author William Frederic Worner, at that time, Woo became the only Chinese person naturalized in Lancaster County and was one of the first naturalized in the entire country.

Woo attended St. James Episcopal Church, worked at the *Lancaster Examiner and Herald*, and would go on to serve in the Union Army before returning to China where he remained active in the Presbyterian clergy and various humanitarian efforts until his passing in 1919.

“Woo’s story is a remarkable one that shows the intersection of local and global history,” said **Tom Ryan**, President & CEO of LancasterHistory. “Hong Neok Woo is a reminder that Lancaster has always been a diverse city and a diverse county that is home to people of multiple races, ethnicities, religious traditions, and nationalities. We’re proud to support the Lancaster AAPI community in proclaiming May Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month and calling attention to the rich history of the AAPI community in Lancaster.”

Lancaster AAPI encourages the public to support the AAPI community throughout May and beyond by dining at local AAPI-owned restaurants, attending art exhibits featuring Asian artists, viewing films by Asian creators, and exploring the history of AAPI individuals such as Hong Neok Woo.

Additional information about Hong Neok Woo can be found online at [lancasterhistory.org/hong-neok-woo](https://lancasterhistory.org/hong-neok-woo), including resources on how one can research more about AAPI history and genealogy.

### **About LancasterHistory**

*LancasterHistory is a community-based, not-for-profit organization established to educate the public on the history of Lancaster County and its place in the history of Pennsylvania and the United States, to advance the missions of regional historical organizations, and to promote the acquisition, preservation, and interpretation of resources representing the history of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania within the broader context of state and national history, including the life and legacy of America’s 15th president, James Buchanan, and to preserve and maintain Wheatland, his home.*

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