

# Live Free

IN THE SPIRIT OF SERVING

**AUTHOR**

Tan Chung Lee

**PUBLISHER**

The Old Frees' Association, Singapore

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The Old Frees' Association, Singapore  
3 Mount Elizabeth #11-07, Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre  
Singapore 228510

**AUTHOR**

Tan Chung Lee

**OFAS COFFEE-TABLE BOOK ADJUDICATION PANEL**

John Lim Kok Min (co-chairman)  
Tan Yew Oo (co-chairman)  
Kok Weng On  
Lee Eng Hin  
Lee Seng Teik  
Malcolm Tan Ban Hoe

**OFAS COFFEE-TABLE BOOK WORKGROUP**

Alex KH Ooi  
Cheah Hock Leong  
Gabriel Teh Choo Thok

Editorial Consultant: Tan Chung Lee  
Graphic Design: ST Leng  
Production: Inkworks Media & Communications  
Printer: The Phoenix Press Sdn Bhd  
6, Lebuhraya, 10200 Penang, Malaysia

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Penang Free School Archives  
Lee Huat Hin aka Haha Lee, Chapter 8  
Supreme Court of Singapore (Judiciary)  
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Tan Chung Lee

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National Library Board (Singapore)  
Cataloguing in Publication Data  
Tan, Chung Lee  
*Live Free: In the Spirit of Serving*  
ISBN: 978-981-09-4251-9

E-book  
ISBN: 978-981-09-4252-6

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Leonard Selvam, Penang Free School Historian  
Alison Chong for pictures of Dr Wu Lien-Teh  
Nicholas Thio for pictures of Chan U Seek  
Michael Chiu and Veronica Ashcroft for pictures  
of Bishop Chiu Ban It

*The OFAS Management Committee would like to thank  
the family of the late Chan U Seek and OFA Life Members  
for their donations towards the publication of this book.*

*The committee would also like to acknowledge all others who  
have contributed to and assisted in the production of this  
book; it apologises if it has inadvertently omitted anyone.*

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# Foreword

By **Alex KH Ooi**

*President, The Old Frees' Association, Singapore*



With limited resources, fading memories and chasm in time where many are gone, we have surmised that comprehensiveness will be somewhat wanting. However, with a good editor, we dug into our resources and put in our best efforts. I thank all parties, Gabriel CT Teh, Cheah Hock Leong and the Adjudication Panel in particular, for making this coffee-table book a reality.

The Penang Free School is the oldest English medium school in this part of the world. Founded in 1816, she celebrates her bicentenary in 2016. Hence this book, mooted by some seniors in 2007, to document what would otherwise become even far too late to ever do.

Most Old Frees in Singapore, if not all, consider themselves blessed alongside the miraculous transformation of Singapore. We have become part of its fabric and call the Republic our home. As the school that educated us turns 200, it is befitting that

we look at our roots and celebrate with the Grand Old Dame. Individually, and as part of The Old Frees' Association, Singapore (OFAS), we have sponsored students here for academia and sports and extended fellowship to those seeking a life here.

Fellowship is the mainstay of our activities when we indulge in some nostalgia and promote educational excellence for our alma mater. At the very least, we definitely meet annually on 21 October (School Founder's Day).

OFAS has come a long way going by the following reports in *The Straits Times*:

**28 Oct 1929:** *A group of the Old Boys of the Penang Free School, gathered at Raffles College during the weekend at a tea party to celebrate the anniversary of their Alma Mater. A proposal was carried to form a Singapore branch of the OFA and a committee was elected consisting of Messrs AA Sandosham (chairman), Khoo*

*Kim Cheng, Hooi Yip Seng and Abbas (hon sec).*

**22 Oct 1952:** *"Old Frees" in Singapore: Mr. A W Frisby, chairman of the Public Services Commission, Singapore, was elected the first patron of the Old Frees Association at an inaugural dinner of old boys of the Penang Free School held in Singapore last night. Others elected were: Mr Tan Ah Tah, president; Prof AA Sandosham, vice-president; Mr Chan Kok Chin, secretary; Mr Khoo Sian Wah, treasurer, Messrs Ibrahim Basha, Chee Swee Leng, Lim Ewe Hin, Leong Yin Choo and Dr Yeoh Bock Choon, committee; Messrs Lim Keng Hor and Chin Bok, auditors.*

**28 Oct 1966:** *Judges head Old Frees: Two high court judges here, Mr Justice Tan Ah Tah and Mr Justice A V Winslow, have been elected President*

*and Vice-President of the Singapore Old Frees Association. They are old boys of the Penang Free School, which recently celebrated its sesquicentenary. Other officials of the association were: Secretary Mr T Q Lim; treasurer Mr E A Clarke and committee members: Messrs Tan Boon Teik, Dr G K Lim, Heah Hock Meng, Chan U Seek and Yong Yoon Fook.*

Among the highlights of this book is the story of one of the earliest Old Frees linked with Singapore. His legacy, inadvertently forgotten, struck me when I attended the inauguration of a museum dedicated to him - the Dr Wu Lien-Teh Memorial Museum in Harbin, Heilongjiang on 8 September 2008.

The drive to bring his legacy to light was a rocky but rewarding journey. His bust, unveiled by Penang's Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, now stands at the Penang Medical College and his autobiography has been re-printed. In Singapore, the Nanyang

University Institute of Advanced Studies held a memorial public seminar and exhibition in his honour in April 2014 (graced by Health Minister Gan Kim Yong) and the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine has named a house after him. His verve in fighting pneumonic plague and instilling hygiene as a lifestyle epitomises the quintessence of life.

*Fortis Atque Fidelis* (strong and faithful)  
as you go to serve in the community.

# Introduction

By **Tan Chung Lee**

When I first started my research on Penang Free School and doing interviews with several distinguished Old Frees living and working in Singapore, it seemed as if Old Frees stood out mostly in the fields of law, medicine and the public service.

In the 1940s to 1960s, the Chief Justice, the Attorney-General and seven out of eight High Court judges were Old Frees. The Justices who served as president of The Old Frees' Association, Singapore were luminaries such as Tan Ah Tah and AV Winslow.

Among the judicial/Legal Service officers who were Old Frees were JWD Ambrose, Attorney-General Tan Boon Teik, Judicial Commissioner TQ Lim and Registrar Eu Cheow Chye.

In medicine, outstanding Old Frees include Professor Lee Seng Teik, dubbed the father of plastic surgery in Singapore, Professor Lee Eng Hin, who helped develop Singapore as the regional centre for paediatric orthopaedics and Dr Wu

Lien-Teh who although he did not practise in Singapore was one of the best known Old Frees internationally who helped to eradicate the plague in China in the 1930s and went on to modernise its medical services.

Then there was the Speaker of Parliament, Dr Yeoh Ghim Seng, an Old Free who was also the professor of surgery in the University of Malaya in Singapore.

Among the Old Frees who served in Singapore's public service with distinction and at the highest level as Cabinet ministers were Dr Wong Lin Ken as Minister for Home Affairs and Ahmad Ibrahim as Minister for Health and also for Labour.

I would find out in the course of my research and interviews that Old Frees are actually a very diversified lot thanks to their all-round education system and strong background of pastoral care invested by their teachers.

Many of them stood out in other professions as well. Among them were P Ramlee who was perhaps the most

popular Malay actor on both sides of the Causeway. He starred in many films produced by the Shaw-owned MFP (Malay Film Productions), was a producer of movies himself as well as a singer and composer.

Chan Soo Khian, who runs the SCDA architectural firm, is known for his unique designs which he likes to call neo-tropical architecture. He won an international award for Lincoln Modern in 2003 and is now much sought after globally.

Heah Hock Heng also excelled in architecture. He had a hand in designing some of Singapore's earliest iconic structures such as the Shangri-La Hotel, the Futura and Draycott Towers and today is concentrating on redeveloping the historic Crag Hotel on Penang Hill into an Aman resort.

Then there is Lim Chong Keat who has two buildings designed by him – Singapore Conference Hall and Jurong Town Hall – recognised as national monuments in Singapore.

Catherine Lim needs no introduction

having made a name for herself as a novelist. One of her novels was used as a Literature textbook for the Cambridge 'O' Levels in the West Indies.

Lim Thean Soo who served as Comptroller of Customs and Excise was also a writer.

Then there is Dennis Lee – the world renowned pianist living in London.

Old Frees have also made a name for themselves in the field of religion. There is Reverend Chiu Ban It – who was a Hutchings' scholar of Penang Free School in the 1930s and served as an Anglican bishop from 1966 to 1982, the first Malayan-born bishop to serve in the diocese of Malaya and Singapore.

Antiques collector and Chinese scholar, CM Wong, stood out as a recognised authority on Chinese culture.

There is also Tan Poh Seng, a national tennis coach and Malaysia's number 2 Davis Cup player, who played a big role in grooming young Singapore tennis talents.

The Old Frees also showed that they

were not all a boring bunch. Professor Lee Eng Hin for instance, was known to have rocked in school as he was part of a six-piece band called the Fenders. He has a cool picture of himself playing on the bass guitar with fellow schoolmates.

Then there is Steve Foong, a young Old Free who is so passionate about his alma mater that he went on a two-month expedition that ultimately led him to the home of the school's founder, Robert Sparke Hutchings. What inspired him was why would a young man like Hutchings sail to Penang to set up a school?

Apart from successfully finding Hutchings' birthplace of Dittisham, Steve discovered the 1000 year old St George's Church there where Hutchings served as rector. He also discovered that the Penang Free school badge was actually the family crest of the Hutchings!

With nuggets of history such as these, it is little wonder that Penang was able to earn a World Heritage Site status for its capital

George Town from UNESCO in 2008.

This commemorative book, *Live Free, In the Spirit of Serving*, celebrates the bicentenary of the Penang Free School. It also honours the Old Frees – past students – who have gone through its hallowed portals as well as the dedicated headmasters and teachers who have shaped and moulded them to become leaders, men – and women – of integrity as well as people of compassion.

It is no mean feat for an institution to reach the milestone of 200 years. An even greater achievement is how Penang Free School has churned out distinguished Old Frees who have made a mark in their chosen professions in both Malaysia and Singapore.

Whether in the judiciary, medicine, the public service, education, sports, architecture or the arts, Old Frees have contributed greatly to the communities in which they live.

This book highlights the achievements of Old Frees in Singapore and their influence. These are their stories...