



## **Media Release**

***For immediate release***

### **REVITALISED SINGAPORE RIVER WALK FOCUSES ON ITS HISTORY AS THE LIFELINE OF SINGAPORE**

***Singapore River Walk gets a new lease of life from  
American Express grant of US\$160,000***

*"I will always recall the city, know every street and shore.  
Sail down the river which brings us life, winding through my Singapore."*

*-- Home by Dick Lee*

**SINGAPORE, 7 October 2015** – So loved is the Singapore River by Singaporeans it was "immortalised" in Singapore's 1998 National Day song, "Home". Indeed, the Singapore River holds a special place in the hearts of many Singaporeans, with many fond memories forged along its banks. More than that, it has played a vital role in the growth and development of Singapore over the years, going as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From a bustling port-of-call for early merchants, the lifeline to the different communities who lived and worked along the river, to the popular hang-out spot it is today, the importance and relevance of the Singapore River has not diminished through the years.

#### **The Trail of Choice**

2 And these are the reasons why the American Express Foundation has specifically chosen to adopt the *Singapore River Walk*, contributing US\$160,000 to its first refurbishment in 10 years. Mr Cheng Heng Chew, Country Manager of American Express Singapore, said: "The Singapore River is an important part of the country's history as this is where early commercial activities started for Singapore. At American Express, we feel that you can't know where you are going unless you know where you have come from and that's why we wanted to be part of this project of identifying and locating historic sites and buildings in Singapore. Furthermore, the Singapore River holds special memories for American Express as 90 years ago, we started operations with offices at Collyer Quay and Raffles Place – both along the river. We hope that members of the public and tourists will enjoy this new walk and be immersed in the rich history behind our Singapore River."

3 The generous grant by American Express has facilitated further research on the Singapore River, development of new and updated site markers, as well as trail booklets and an interactive website which will be available in early 2016.



### Updated Trail with a River Focus

4 Mr Tan Boon Hui, Assistant Chief Executive (Museums & Programmes), National Heritage Board, said: "The Singapore River Trail was first launched in 2005 by NHB to offer a broad storyline of the nation's development from Sir Stamford Raffles' landing in Singapore, to the history of the river set amidst our nation building years. A decade later, this new upgrade comes with a new name – Singapore River Walk, with a renewed focus on the river and its evolution over the years. Through new content that has been added to make the narrative richer, we are better able to learn about the river's social history and its key role in Singapore's mercantile development. We hope the enhanced trail will reveal lesser known facts of the river and enable a renewed appreciation of its vital role over the years."

5 The refreshed 2.8km *Singapore River Walk* features 14 heritage markers stretching from Collyer Quay to Robertson Quay. They comprise historic buildings, places of worship and majestic bridges, all set against the scenic backdrop of Marina Bay and the Central Business District. As visitors walk on foot from quay to quay, the refreshed storyline of the *Singapore River Walk* presents a flow which focuses on and ties in with the direction of the river itself – starting with the immigrants and travellers arriving at Collyer Quay, working at the godowns and warehouses built along the river by merchants such as Whampoa himself, to the *tongkang* and *twakow* vessels that ferried goods to and fro quayside.

6 Of the 14 markers, seven are new. These include the markers featuring Collyer Quay, which served as the gateway to Singapore for early maritime travellers; the Former Thong Chai Medical Institution, a National Monument which originally housed a clinic set up in 1867 to provide free medical treatment to the needy; and Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka, which was established in 1820, making it the oldest mosque and place of worship in Singapore. (Refer to **ANNEX A** for more information on the 14 marked sites, and **ANNEX B** for the map of the refreshed *Singapore River Walk*)

### A River that Resonates

7 The Singapore River story has been enhanced with the memories and personal accounts contributed by Singaporeans under the Singapore Memory Project ([www.singaporememory.sg](http://www.singaporememory.sg)). These anecdotes paint a vivid and intimate perspective of the Singapore River and its rich socio-economic history, bringing to life the memories of the community whose lives intertwined with the development of the river and its surroundings over the years.

8 Stories shared touch on the early days of the river as a trading emporium and centre of commerce, and the social activities in the area throughout Singapore's development. These include memories of Raffles Place as a bustling shopping belt in the 1960s, early street peddlers around Clarke Quay, friends and families bidding farewell to those travelling by sea from Clifford Pier, as well as accounts of how goods were delivered to warehouses along the Boat Quay area in big *tongkang* vessels and the industrious coolies who toiled to keep the trade going.



9 Mr Chia Hearn Kok, who has fond memories of playing in the river as a boy in the late 1940s, shared: "I remember joining many boys to swim in the Singapore River and always having to keep our heads above the polluted waters then. One of our favourite antics was to catch a ride to the Elgin Bridge on the *tongkangs* that plied the river, by climbing onto the rubber tyres on its sides. At the Elgin Bridge, the braver boys would dive while the others would only jump when the all-clear signal was given. We then returned by clinging onto another *tongkang* moving in the opposite direction. Those were the carefree and innocent days!" Mr Chia's memory is reflected in the bronze sculpture of children jumping into the river located on the river bank in front of The Fullerton Hotel Singapore, alluding to the river's significance to the community.

- END -

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### **About American Express**

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### **About the National Heritage Board**


The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit. NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the national collection. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit [www.nhb.gov.sg](http://www.nhb.gov.sg) for more information.



**REFRESHED SINGAPORE RIVER WALK  
– LIST OF THE 14 MARKED SITES**

1. **Collyer Quay (featuring Clifford Pier and Customs House)**
2. Cavenagh Bridge
3. **Raffles Place (featuring Change Alley, Market Street and Masjid Moulana)**
4. Boat Quay
5. Elgin Bridge
6. Coleman Bridge
7. Clarke Quay (featuring River House, The Cannery and Whampoa's Ice House)
8. Read Bridge
9. **Former Thong Chai Medical Institution**
10. **Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka**
11. **Tan Si Chong Su Temple and Clemenceau Bridge**
12. Ord Bridge
13. **Alkaff Bridge**
14. **Robertson Quay**

(Note: The seven sites in **bold text** are newly added to the refreshed Singapore River Walk.)

No.	Information on Marked Site
1.	<p data-bbox="284 349 1005 387"><b>Collyer Quay (featuring Clifford Pier and Customs House)</b></p> <p data-bbox="284 432 1410 548">Once a gateway to Singapore for maritime travellers, Collyer Quay would have been their first glimpse of town as they approached the island. This road and seawall was named after George Chancellor Collyer, who built it between 1861 and 1864.</p> <p data-bbox="284 593 1410 750">Clifford Pier was the main landing point for visitors to Singapore after the original landing point, Johnston's Pier, was torn down in 1933. Here, thousands of travellers set foot in Singapore after transferring from ocean vessels to smaller ferries or sampans. Clifford Pier was also a departure point for boats to the Southern Islands until 2006.</p> <p data-bbox="284 795 1410 873">Red beacons indicated the piers' location at night, so the area was also popularly known to locals as such in their various languages.</p> <p data-bbox="284 918 1410 996">Completed in 1969, Customs House was the base of the Singapore Customs' Harbour Division, whose officers kept a look-out for smugglers from its 23-metre high watchtower.</p>  <p data-bbox="284 1556 598 1590">Collyer Quay in the 1900s.</p> <p data-bbox="284 1594 1045 1628"><i>National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board</i></p>

2. **Cavenagh Bridge**

The oldest bridge across the Singapore River to survive in its original form, Cavenagh Bridge is located between Empress Place and the Fullerton Building, linking the colonial offices to the financial district.

Earlier, the only way to cross the river mouth was via a temporary footbridge or by paying a boatman. Named after Governor Sir William Orfeur Cavenagh, the bridge was completed in 1869.

Cavenagh Bridge was one of the first suspension bridges in the region. Locals called it *Hai ki thih tiau kio* (Hokkien for "Iron suspension bridge by the sea shore").

After 1910, when the nearby Anderson Bridge was opened, Cavenagh Bridge was converted into a footbridge linking Empress Place and the commercial district.



Cavenagh Bridge, with Boat Quay in the background, 1950s.

*National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board*





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3.

### Raffles Place (featuring Change Alley, Market Street and Masjid Moulana)

Established in the 1820s as Commercial Square by Sir Stamford Raffles as Singapore's main mercantile district, this area was renamed Raffles Place in 1858.

It grew to become a regional centre for finance and commerce, and also became a popular shopping district with retailers such as Robinson's and John Little. Bargains were also available at Change Alley, a nearby walkway filled with moneychangers and shops from the 1940s until 1989.

From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century until the late 1970s, many migrants established themselves in this area; nearby Market Street was a South Asian enclave with many Indian traders, sundry shops and eateries. The Chettiar community, who originated from the Sivagangai and Pudukottai districts of Tamil Nadu in South India, established themselves here as merchant bankers who were vital sources of working capital for many small and medium businesses.

Singapore's only underground mosque, Masjid Moulana Mohamed Ali was originally established at Market Street in the 1950s by Indian Muslim leaders as a place of worship for fellow Muslims working in the area. The mosque moved to the basement of UOB Plaza in 1994.



Raffles Place, 1910s.

*National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board*

4.

#### Boat Quay

Sir Stamford Raffles reserved the north bank of the Singapore River for government buildings, while the south bank was designated for warehouses and other commercial developments. In the early 1820s, he launched Singapore's first land reclamation project, turning the river's swampy south bank into an embankment on which shophouses and godowns could be built, which became known as Boat Quay.

Boat Quay faces a broad, crescent-shaped part of the river that locals once called the "Belly of the carp" as it resembled a fish associated with good fortune. Traditional cargo boats called *tongkang* or *twakow* ferried goods to and from quayside warehouses until the 1980s, when the Singapore River was thoroughly cleaned up.

In the 1990s, Boat Quay's traditional shophouses were restored as modern shops and riverside eateries.



Boat Quay in the 1950s.

*National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board*





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5. **Elgin Bridge**

Elgin Bridge stands on the site of the first bridge that was built across the Singapore River in 1819.

This footbridge was later replaced by Jackson Bridge in 1823 and Thomson's Bridge in 1844. The bridge had to be continually upgraded to cope with rising traffic levels as the town expanded on both sides of the river. It was finally replaced in 1862 by Elgin Bridge, which was named after Lord Elgin, Viceroy of India.

The original Elgin Bridge was later replaced by a new structure completed in 1929, which survives today. The bridge features cast-iron roundels with a lion, which were crafted by Rodolfo Nolli, an Italian sculptor who also worked on the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station (1932), Raffles Hotel (1887) and the former Supreme Court building (1939).



Elgin Bridge in the 1930s.

*National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board*

6. **Coleman Bridge**

First built in 1840, Coleman Bridge was the second or “new bridge” across the river and named after its designer, Irish architect George Dromgold Coleman. Coleman also designed the Armenian Church (1835), the first Government House on Bukit Larangan (Fort Canning Hill) in 1822, and the former Parliament House (1827).

The original Coleman Bridge was replaced in 1865 and again in 1886 by a cast-iron and steel design with shallow arches. This structure was reconstructed between 1986 and 1991 into a wider dual carriageway equipped with pedestrian sidewalks and underpasses linking Clarke and Boat Quays.

The present Coleman Bridge retains many features of the 1886 structure, such as graceful shallow arches, decorative columns, old gas lamp stands and iron balustrades or railings with Victorian motifs.



Coleman Bridge in the early 1900s.

*National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board*



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7.

### Clarke Quay (featuring River House, The Cannery and Whampoa's Ice House)

Known for its distinctive warehouses, Clarke Quay was developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Singapore was then growing rapidly as a trading port and many merchants, seeking new sites to conduct their business, chose to establish shops and godowns on this formerly swampy stretch of the Singapore River. The quay was named after Governor Sir Andrew Clarke.

Today, Clarke Quay houses the largest surviving cluster of riverside warehouses as well as many traditional buildings. The oldest surviving building here, the River House, is an exquisite Teochew-style mansion from the 1880s. Another landmark is The Cannery, an 1891 warehouse that was later converted into a pineapple cannery. There is also a replica of Whampoa's Ice House, which stood near Hill Street from 1854 until 1981



Bullock Carts at the Singapore River, late 1800s.

*National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board*



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8. **Read Bridge**

This bridge, originally built in 1889, was named after William Henry Macleod Read, a prominent businessman and active figure in Singapore's political and social scene. It replaced an earlier structure from 1863 called Merchant Bridge or Tock Seng's Bridge (after Tan Tock Seng, a pioneering merchant and philanthropist), which was built too low for *tongkangs* (traditional river boats)

Read Bridge was located close to Kampong Melaka (Malay for "Melaka Village"), an area originally settled by Malay traders and fishermen from Melaka in the 1820s. In the past, the bridge was also a gathering site for Teochew labourers who would listen to traditional storytellers in the evening.

Read Bridge was extensively repaired and converted into a pedestrian bridge in 1991 as part of the Urban Redevelopment Authority's masterplan to beautify and upgrade the bridges of the Singapore River.



Read Bridge at Boat Quay, Singapore, early 1908.

*Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*



9. **Former Thong Chai Medical Institution**

This building is a rare surviving example of secular Chinese architecture in Singapore. It originally housed the Thong Chai Medical Institution, a clinic established in 1867 by seven Chinese merchants to provide free medical treatment to the needy, including coolies and boatmen who worked along the Singapore River. The clinic's name reflects the institution's objective of providing free medical care to all, regardless of race, religion or social status.

Apart from dispensing medical advice and treatment, the building served as a venue for public meetings. It also served as a temporary base for the Chinese Chamber of Commerce from its founding in 1906 until the Chamber moved to Hill Street in 1911.

Designed in a Cantonese style known as *zhu tong wu* (Chinese for "bamboo house"), the building is long and segmented, with four halls separated by three courtyards. The building was declared a National Monument in 1973.



Outside Thong Chai Medical Centre, 1960s.  
*Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*



10. **Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka**

This is the oldest mosque and place of worship in Singapore. It was established in 1820 in an area known as Kampong Melaka (Malay for "Melaka Village"), as many traders and fishermen from Melaka had settled here soon after Singapore became a British port.

Masjid Omar was a gathering point for the Malay community as well as Muslims originating from India, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The mosque was built by and named after Syed Sharif Omar bin Ali Aljunied, a Yemeni-Arab merchant and landowner whose family contributed greatly to the community by building mosques, wells and bridges.

The original timber mosque was rebuilt in 1855 as a brick hall with a pyramidal tiled roof. This structure remained until the 1980s, when a new worship hall for a thousand people was built.



Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka mosque compound. The main building was built in 1855.  
*Courtesy of Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka*





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11.

### Tan Si Chong Su Temple and Clemenceau Bridge

Located at the northern end of an area once known as Kampong Melaka, Tan Si Chong Su Temple is a National Monument built in 1883 by prominent Hokkien merchants belonging to the Tan clan.

The temple is also known as *Po Chiak Keng* (Hokkien for "protection of the innocent"). Formerly located by the bank of the Singapore River, it now stands further inland as a result of land reclamation over the years.

Clemenceau Bridge was first built in 1940 and named after French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, who visited Singapore in 1920. It replaced an older structure called Pulau Saigon Bridge, which linked the riverbank to a former island on the river. Clemenceau Bridge was rebuilt in the early 1990s.



Tan Si Chong Su Temple at Magazine Road, 1950s.

*National Museum of Singapore Collection, Courtesy of National Heritage Board*



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12.

### Ord Bridge

A simple, elegant steel structure with ornamental balustrades and girders, Ord Bridge was opened in 1886 and named after Sir Harry St George Ord, Singapore's first Governor after the island became a Crown Colony.

Ord was known as an efficient but hard-nosed Governor as he sought to stamp out inefficiency and corruption in the colonial bureaucracy. To tackle abuses in the coolie trade that had led to inhumane treatment and kidnapping of newly arrived coolies, he introduced a Chinese Coolie Immigration Bill in 1873.

The bridge linked River Valley Road to Magazine Road, where ammunition was once stored. Due to its original paintwork, Ord Bridge was also known as Green Bridge in the various local languages, as was Toddy Bridge, as many shops selling toddy (palm liquor) operated in the area until the 1970s.



Scene of Singapore River with Ord Bridge, 1970s.

*Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*



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13.

### Alkaff Bridge

Shaped like a *tongkang* (a traditional river boat), the 55-metre long Alkaff Bridge was built in 1997.

The bridge was named after Alkaff Quay, a cluster of godowns that once occupied the south bank of the river, which was named in 1907 after Syed Shaik Alkaff. The Alkaffs were a family of Yemeni-Arabs who arrived in Singapore in 1852 to become prominent landowners and philanthropists. Their legacy includes the Alkaff Kampong Melayu Mosque, built in 1932 at Jalan Abdul Manan, and the Alkaff Upper Serangoon Mosque, which was built in 1932 and declared a National Monument in 2014.



Scene of Singapore River with Alkaff Bridge, 1990s.

*Courtesy of Urban Redevelopment Authority*



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14.

### Robertson Quay

In the past, boatyards and warehouse complexes, rather than traditional shophouses, dominated Robertson Quay, which was probably named after Dr Thomas Murray Robertson, a medical doctor and Municipal Commissioner.

Commercial facilities such as Alkaff Quay and Earle Quay were established here in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Meanwhile, the area north of Pulau Saigon Bridge was where boatbuilders and fishermen dwelt in settlements such as Kampong Martin, which was destroyed by a fire in 1916, and Kampong Pukat, which survived until the early 1980s.

In the 1990s, Robertson Quay was redeveloped into a modern neighbourhood with housing, recreational and arts facilities.



Robertson Quay in the 1955

*Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*





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ANNEX B

REFRESHED SINGAPORE RIVER WALK – MAP





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- The public can find more information online from: [www.nhb.gov.sg/places/trails](http://www.nhb.gov.sg/places/trails)
- They can also obtain the trail map from the National Museum of Singapore, the Asian Civilisations Museum, the Peranakan Museum or the National Heritage Board office (61 Stamford Road, #03-08, Stamford Court, Singapore 178892)