

THE CHINESE IN CALAVERAS COUNTY



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THE CHINESE IN SAN ANDREAS

By OLIVER WYLLIE

San Andreas and vicinity evidently at one time had a sizeable percentage of the Chinese in Calaveras County. Placer mining for gold was what first brought them here. Guessing as to the number working on the South Fork of the Calaveras River range from one to five thousand. Not being citizens, it is said that the Chinese could not locate a claim but were allowed to purchase one.

Those in San Andreas proper may have been not more than a couple of hundred, but it is said by reliable sources that on Sundays or holidays as many as 500 would come into town to celebrate or shop. Gambling has always been associated with the Chinese, and Fan Tan, Chinese Lottery, drinks, restaurants, and what have you were the lure that brought the outsiders into town.

The official map of San Andreas Townsite, dated 1872, shows about fourteen lots of Chinese ownership, and these generally constituted a Chinatown on St. Charles Street (now also State Highway No. 12) where Court Street meets it.

Three stores are indicated at that time and a Chinese church (or joss house) stood there where the present high school is now located. It is reliably said that as many as five stores existed at one time. One store, Wing Chung, owner, next to Cassenelli's Store, was said to be of adobe, and later was gutted by fire. Another store with a restaurant, etc. (the etc. probably covered gaming), with Shing Tong as proprietor, was just east of it. Another of brick construction on St. Charles Street (known presently as the Pinotti Building) also included a blacksmith shop. This was owned by Chong Kee Company.

Mostly the houses in Chinatown were unpainted wooden buildings abutting one another on the street with a wooden porch or sidewalk in front. Invariably they emitted a characteristic odor of smoke, sivent and incense. A bakery and restaurant existed at one time near Cassenelli's store. It may be mentioned in passing that Mr. Cassenelli could talk Chinese about as well as the Chinese themselves. His store was as popular as any of the Chinese establishments, no doubt furnishing certain niceties unobtainable in the oriental markets.

Several fires did considerable damage, and the town volunteer fire department would respond with a hand pumper (it still works!) using water from a cistern on St. Charles Street. Several of these reservoirs were located



CHINA MARY, above, was once queen of the West Point Chinese. She later moved to San Francisco.—Photo courtesy of Judge J. A. Smith.

in strategic places in the business district.

Rather extensive vegetable gardens were planted on the north side of San Andreas Creek.

The Chinese kept pretty well to themselves, and there doesn't seem to be any evidence of any tong war violence here. Many of the older rowdy white boys took particular delight in harassing the chinamen, often by throwing rocks at their houses, taunting them personally, or anything to stir them up. At one time they even launched a heavy wagon wheel down the hill into their homes. It appears the Chinese didn't retaliate with much violence, probably fearing the possible mass reaction of the white populace.

On their New Year's they were generous with gifts of Chinese candies, fire crackers and litchi nuts, especially to those considered as friendly, or at least in an effort to curry a favorable feeling.

A few of the Chinese children went to the public school.

It is very difficult to determine when the Chinese first came to San Andreas. However, the peak of their population may have been in the late 1850's or early '60's since they followed closely on the heels of the white miners, working over many of the claims abandoned by the latter.

Although it doesn't appear as a Chinese ownership in 1872, a Chinese laundry, Chiny Jim, proprietor, flour-

ished in the '90's and probably earlier on Main Street near San Andreas Creek, and, as was the modus operandi, the method of sprinkling the clothes by spraying them with water from the mouth before ironing was identifiable with the trade in those days. Also, certain Chinese ladies were available to do laundry in the homes.

There was one main graveyard on the west side of the present main road to the Calaveras Cement plant, and it also is said that many were buried in the county cemetery on the west end of town and north of the state highway. Most of the remains were said to have been later removed and shipped to China. The custom of placing food on the grave was followed here. It has been said that some of the white boys would slip in after dark and have quite a sumptuous feed.

The custom of marrying a daughter was, at least in earlier times, arranged by the parents. One occasion is well remembered by a certain "old timer" when such an event was celebrated by invitation to the general public to join in the festivities. It was not determined who put on the "whingding," although the bride was generally compensated for. (Poor Yut Ho, the bride, may or may not have been consulted beforehand.)

After the turn of the century, the Chinese population rapidly dwindled, and now not an oriental nor one of their shacks exists to remind one of their one-time presence.

A few items—from the SAN ANDREAS INDEPENDENT, April 10, 1858: "Two Chinamen were severely whipped near the Kentucky House on Thursday last for robbing . . . They were caught in the act of robbing the boxes, were tried by a jury of miners and sentenced to receive 12 lashes on the bare back. Served them right."

"Chinese Wedding at San Andreas

"P. H. Kean, Justice of the Peace, united Ah He and Ah You in the holy bonds of matrimony, a la American on Tuesday last.

"We are indebted to his honor for the present to the editor of this paper of a pair of chop sticks, a bowl of rice and one pint of china gin (20c per gallon) in honor of the occasion.

"May their celestial happiness and the judges \$10 be everlasting."—CALAVERAS CITIZEN, May 17, 1884, C. R. Beal, editor.

TO BE HUNG

Jesus Bealoba, Ah Tung, Ah Ke, Ah Shin, and Yu Skin are sentenced to be hanged at Mokulumne Hill, Friday the 19th of October, 1860.

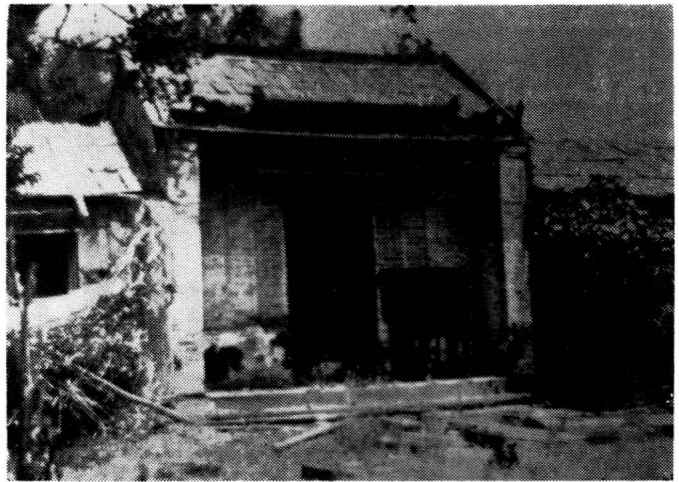
CHINESE THEATRICALS

Troupes of Chinese performers regularly visited the Mother Lode towns during the '50's. At that time, most of the communities had large Chinese quarters and the Chinese entertained the Chinese population.

During the fall of 1857, one of these Chinese troupes visited San Andreas and remained for a month. They thereafter left for Chinese Camp, Tuolumne County, announcing upon their departure that they would soon return with another month of captivating performances.

The SAN ANDREAS INDEPENDENT, commenting on this particular troupe, said upon their departure:

"Chinese theatricals enlivened this place with their eternal humdrum, squealing, squeaking, and cauterwaling



EARLY TEMPLE—This old Joss House was once the temple of worship for Calaveras County Chinese. It stood on the present site of the Calaveras High School.

The "Chinamen" -- My Earliest Memories

By EFFIE E. JOHNSTON

I remember mother buying fish of a Chinese who walked the China Trail and sold fish. He cut slices from a large fish. This could be about 1870. And about that time, in 1870 or '71 Grandma Cottle lived on the N. W. side of San Andreas. One day when mother was there caring for her mother, and we (Martha and I) were with mother, we went out to play and three Chinese children, a little girl and two little boys (the first Chinese children we had ever seen) came along, and with no apparent reason we started a fight. I grabbed the little girl's long braided hair and swung her around. She cried. Then her eldest brother took out his pocket knife and ran us to the house where he and mother had an argument over it. But I needed a spanking. I guess that was "the Call of the Wild" in me. Turn a strange hen loose in a flock of ducks and she has to lick every hen on the place before they leave her in peace. Chinese children were a curiosity.

What was called the Mexican Trail in the 1850's and '60's was called the China Trail in the 1870's and '80's. Numbers of Chinese, carrying their provisions from San Andreas long distances to San Antone Ridge and other places could be seen, and heard talking on the trail at all times of the day in the '70's and '80's. I remember two Chinese women with an umbrella stopping and talking to us children. Women on the trail were very unusual.

In the 1870's and '80's my father sold surface mines to Chinese companies, who built a large shake house about 20 by 15 feet on Paradise Gulch about half way down the gulch. Ah Shin, a very dignified Chinese, the head of a company, while he was negotiating for a mine, was invited home to have dinner with us and we three kids watched his every move at the table. It must have been embarrassing to him.

In the 1870's after the divorce (my parents divorced in 1875), we sometimes went over the hill and spent the

music, and have given notice of their return."

"The very thought of their returning makes our nerves tingle, our blood chill, our brain to rack with pain, our bones to ache, and our flesh to quiver."

evening at Hedricks. One time I remember how angry and shocked Mr. Hedrick was at the Chinese living across the gulch. Hedrick had a female dog that he didn't want. He gave her to these Chinese. Later he was horrified at what they did to this poor dog. They hung her up to a live oak limb and poured boiling hot water in her mouth. I wonder if a like fate befell the stray goat and duck and chickens that we sold them in the 1870's—'80's. I believe this cruel manner of killing their intended meat was common among the early Chinese.

But what a relief to find a Chinese like Ah Joy of the 1880's. After father built a cabin on the mine, Ah Joy was living in the cabin and working for father and a Chinese company was working on shares. Ah Joy told father they were robbing h'im. Ah Joy was a good Chinese, I think a Buddhist. He wouldn't kill anything. He was a friend to one of our dogs that father did not care for. Ah Joy fed Fido and when he died of strychnine poison, Ah Joy dragged his dead body over a half mile around the hill to the mine and buried him and put on his grave little sticks of something that burns and the Chinese think it keeps the devil away.

There were lots of Chinese mining around here in the 1870's and '80's but not in the '90's when most Chinese had gone except Chinese cooks that cooked in hotels, resorts, etc. Mining was dead after the Debris Law caused hydraulic mining to stop.

Willow Creek school children knew old Au Groin who had a little cabin at the head of a ravine on Yaqui Gulch. Beside his cabin he made a little garden about 8 by 10 feet square. I don't know what he did for a living. He raised plenty in his little garden. He must have carried water to it.

In pioneer days Chinese domestics were not unusual. My grandparents had a Chinese do the cooking and house work in the 1850's at Fourth Crossing when they lived in a log house.

My uncle, Frank Cottle (now dead), of Traver, California, told me some of the old pioneers bought Chinese wives, but they didn't have any children. One old fellow with a Chinese wife lived up on Willow Creek. In 1919 while I waited on tables at Highlands Inn they had a Chinese Cook, Sam Dun, whose wife was the daughter of an American Missionary. They had three sons and one daughter that I knew of. His wife did the pantry work for a while. She seemed shy and kept to herself. Being the wife of a Chinese was embarrassing for her. It was so unusual that people wondered and stared. Henry Dun, their eldest son, about 18, did not want to chum with the Chinese dish washer. So to save his wife and children embarrassment Sam Dun tried to palm himself off as "half French." I think they were good people. Their daughter never came to Highland Inn. She stayed in San Francisco. Sam Dun was proud of his family and the two little boys went to school there.

Big Sam and Little Sing cooked in Angels and San Andreas in 1890-92. They cooked for William and Ida Smith in the Golden Eagle Hotel in Angels and Mrs. Anna Edda in the Commercial since she bought Mrs. Cosgrove's Hotel (Golden Eagle), which had three names in about five years. When Buffalo Bill's medicine (true Indian medicine) show was in Angels, Big Sam went to the Free Show in Dollings Hall. When he sat down, the people complained. They would not sit near a Chinese. They caused Buffalo Bill to march down there, put Sam out of

the hall and restore order. Big Sam was silent the next day but burning up inside. If Big Sam had hopes of marrying an American girl this insult jolted the notion out of his head. He said, "When I a boy, I was more white than anybody." "Yes," I said, "but all Chinese have dark eyes and hair." He said, "Some Chinese got blue eyes on." I said, "No full blood Chinese has blue eyes." He said, "Chinese and European make puta chilén."

In 1892 I waited on table at the Metropolitan Hotel in San Andreas. Big Sam was cook. He said, "I go back to China. I mala nice young girl 19 year old. I make my wife puta little baby." And he was happy earning money to send them.

A beautiful friendship and partnership existed between Little John Bennett and Si Kee. They lived where the Rattos lived later on at what was called "Scratch Gulch." I think this was Sam I. Scott's Gulch. This gravel hill was "S. I. Scott's Hill" in the 1850's. Little Che was always called "Little Bennett." John Bennett was from Pennsylvania and a tailor by trade. He was a broad-minded man living in a narrow minded time. With him and his Chinese mining partner, Si Kee, there was no "Big Me and Little You." Si Kee was treated just like he was another good American. Si Kee did the cooking. When they worked for my father, I think in the 1870's, they used to bring nice little biscuits for their lunch and sometimes gave us three kids a biscuit that always tasted extra good. Kids do think eats away from home are tops. But Little Bennett had to tell Si Kee to sprinkle the biscuits with his hands instead of filling his mouth with water and squirting it on the raw biscuits.

Chinese eat dogs and cats in China and Si Kee killed and cooked a cat. Little Bennett said the meat was white and as good as chicken. Si Kee had a family in China. He went back to China and he used to write to Little Bennett who would tell us that he got a letter from Si Kee. I don't know whether Si Kee could write or not.

Little Sing, who cooked for Mrs. Eddy at the Commercial Hotel when I waited on table there, said to me, "O, I got common education, I go to school two or three days." And he could write a little. He later had a chop house in Angels and still later in the 1890's or 1900's in San Andreas. (It may have been much later.)

China Ack of Upper Calaveritas

When we went to Calaveritas School 1879-80-81, China Ack was a cook and when L. Costa gave a Grand Ball, Ack, I think, made the cakes. I know he decorated them with colored sugar and would top them with a gay rooster on them. He, as I remember him, did not wear the regular Chinese blue clothing. He wore American every day clothing. Sometimes we would see a woman at his house dressed American style. I think she was a Chinese sex slave, but we children thought she was his wife.

China Ack was a butcher, too. The Chinese company mining on Paradise Gulch had Ack come down there and butcher a pig with a knife. I can hear that poor pig squealing yet! I think they dried the small strips of pork in the sun, instead of smoking it. We kids watched the Chinese smoke opium and eat their Chinese New Years dinner with chop sticks. In the center of the table would be a large bowl of chicken cut up in small bites and each Chinese would have a bowl full of rice. With chop sticks he would fill his mouth with rice, then with chop sticks take a bite of meat. They drank tea and I think took a pot

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The Calaveras County Historical Society meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Courthouse in San Andreas. Dinner meetings are held each quarter at different places in the county.

EDITORIAL

Congratulations to our beloved president, Judge Smith, on his 81st birthday. May he have many more useful ones and continue to be as alert, interested in the Society, and needed by us as much as he is at present. I'm sure I speak for everyone who has worked with the Judge during the eleven-year history of the Calaveras County Historical Society when I say we cherish our wonderful association with him and are grateful to him for his inspiring leadership.

Although we are sorry to report that our lifetime honorary member, Dr. Rockwell D. Hunt, "Mr. California," is seriously ill from severe surgery, we are happy to report that his 95th birthday dinner at the University of the Pacific on February 3 was one of the most inspiring events in our lives. Several members of the Calaveras Society attended the dinner as guests of the University in honoring Dr. Hunt. One of these was our amazing little lady from Calaveras County, Miss Effie Johnston of Willow Creek, who also observed her 95th birthday on February 1. Although she had never met personally Dr. Hunt before, she had known his writings and his books and wanted to greet him on his birthday. Dr. Hunt was very happy to have her attend and grateful to Paul and Helen Lewis for bringing her down. The picture of these two grand old pioneers which we took at the reception is being printed for the pleasure of all our members in this issue of LAS CALAVERAS.

We all have been made sad by our recent loss of one of our most cherished and admired honorary life members of the Society, Mr. Amon Tanner. He had served for several years as vice-president of the Society and was a charter member, contributing a great deal to the success of the Calaveras County Historical Society. Although sad at our loss, we cherish the memories of our association



CELEBRATE BIRTHDAYS—Dr. Rockwell D. Hunt, "Mr. California," and lifetime honorary member of the Calaveras County Historical Society, and Miss Effie Johnston of Willow Creek, Calaveras County, are shown above in a picture taken at a birthday reception for Dr. Hunt at the University of the Pacific on his 95th birthday, February 3. Miss Johnston, who celebrated her own 95th birthday February 1, was one of several who came from Calaveras County to greet Dr. Hunt.—L. Covello photo.

with him and are proud of his triumphant life. The praise and high tribute paid him by the newspapers must have been a source of much satisfaction to his family because it was so richly deserved. It would be difficult to estimate the value of his contributions to Calaveras County through his years of service on the Fair Board, the Calaveras County Water Board, in the Grange and the historical society, as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Murphys Elementary School, in his church and as a successful rancher. Calaveras County is a better place in which to live because of his life. He had the spirit of the pioneer to look ever onward and upward. He stood straight and tall among his fellow men. As we carry on where he left off, we can truly say, "We're standing on the shoulders of giants and because of him we can reach a little higher and see a little farther over the horizon."

(Continued From Page Three)

of tea to work to drink. I never saw anything to drink on their table. On Chinese New Years the Chinese would give us kids some nice mixed Chinese candy.

Answers to Questions

Yes, the Chinese dressed in loose pantaloons and overblouse except the miners. None of the Chinese attended the schools that I did.

Chinese tickets were being sold in the 1890's in Angels Camp.