

THE CHINESE IN CALAVERAS COUNTY



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THE CHINESE OF NORTH BRANCH

By MRS. EVA SORACCO

There never was a Chinatown in North Branch. However, hundreds of Chinese lived in the vicinity. The majority of them were from Hong Kong. Most of them lived in cabins scattered along the banks of the South Fork of the Calaveras River and down the river into the Petersburg District. A few lived northeast of North Branch on Central Hill. There was a small clutter of cabins a short distance from the North Branch School near the south entrance of the town of North Branch on the left-hand side of the road. These cabins, less than a dozen in all, were built of rough boards and shingles and were patched and built over many times. There was also a well and a few apple and pear trees that were twisted and split but continued to produce fruit annually. The trees gave the impression of age and it was very obvious that they had been planted by the earlier pioneers who had lived there and worked the area and left. This proved an inviting spot for the Chinese as they usually worked in the diggings that the earlier miners had abandoned.

They formed large companies and usually had a leader. They did placer mining with rockers, long toms and river dams. They bailed out the deep holes in the rivers with a Chinese pump operated by a Chinese walking from one paddle to another in order to keep the water wheel turning all day. This action was the motive power for the pump. They worked the rivers and gulches over and over many times. They made some very rich clean-ups. When the gold played out some went back to China and some stayed and went into business in stores, restaurants, and laundries. Others just gambled their money away and when they became old and helpless they were given aid by the company.

In the spring of 1878 a group of Chinese from the South Fork area were involved in a crime that cost the life of a young Irishman, Henery Connolly. He owned and operated the toll bridge that spanned the North Fork of the Calaveras River one and one-half miles west of San Andreas. The Chinese were on their way home from San Andreas and as they crossed the bridge they spoke loud and showed signs of anger as they approached the toll keeper. They accused him of charging them a double fee that morning on their way to San Andreas. In the course of the dispute, one Chinese stabbed and killed Mr. Con-



IN QUEST OF GOLD — Ah-Se-One, one of the last of the pioneer Chinese miners in Calaveras County, is shown with his rocker. He lived in a cabin in the North Branch area, where he was a great favorite of the schoolchildren.

nolly. It was said when the case went to court the Chinese would not tell which one did the stabbing so several Chinese were punished for the crime of one. Henery Connolly is buried in the Catholic Cemetery in San Andreas. The inscription on the headstone reads:

HENERY CONNOLLY
NATIVE OF
CO. LYRONE, IRELAND
MAY 6, 1878
40 YEARS, 7 MONTHS

It has always been understood that it was the request of the Chinese who died here that their bodies be shipped back to China for interment. This, however, was not true in all cases as during the construction of the Hogan Dam in the Petersburg District about 30 years ago several Chinese bodies were shipped back to China at that time.

Among a few of the last remaining Chinese that lived in the cabin area near North Branch were Ah-Se-One, Ah-Gee, and Ah-Se-Ak-Son. Ah-Sing was the last to live in the Central Hill area. He did not mingle much with the rest of the Chinese, and, unlike the rest of the Chinese, he worked in the deep mines as well as on the surface. He worked in the "Union Chief" and the Reed Mine, both deep

(Continued on Next Page)

THE CHINESE AT O'BYRNES FERRY

By MRS. LILLIAN GORHAM MURPHY

(From a letter to Miss Elsie Flower from Mrs. Murphy, aged 84 years, whose family home was on Rock Creek in the O'Byrnes Ferry area.)

I was between three and four years of age. Everything that I recall at that early age seems to be in a "small circle," otherwise I can not recall the surroundings.

I recall standing with my father (John Nelson Gorham) on the steps, or porch, of a small store. I believe the store was owned by Mr. Joe Pardee. I was always very afraid of the Chinese or Chinamen.

This store must have been located on a river bank and looking down the stream were Chinese at work. As I recall, it seems that they put the gravel in a wooden box with a "curved" handle and rocked it up and down and there seemed to be water running out of these. I believe these were referred to as "rockers" (size about 3 by 6 feet). In after years my father would say, "Why, you were only three years old and it could hardly be possible that you could have remembered." I think that the fear of the Chinese was cause for me to remember. Chinese peddlers came through our "foothill" ranch with packs on their shoulders. They had long "pig tails" and used to pull my hair braid and say, "All same as Chinyman." This act would frighten me. I remember them being angry when mother cut our hair much shorter. I also recall the "Chiny" town here in Stockton and the men with long black braids hanging down their backs.

I am the last of the John Nelson Gorham family. I believe Jame is the last of the William Gorham family (much older than I).

I have many "blessings" to be thankful for—good eyesight and hearing—three fine sons and one daughter (also a widow), a good home and neighbors.

I hope that this gives you some information. The last time I was up at the river everything was changed. I recall father saying that when he came here in 1873 that the bridge was there, but now it's all changed. It seems that the bridge was built in 1861 (not sure). The Chinese mined the river for sure.

The Chinese of North Branch

Continued from First Page

gravel mines. Ah-Sing spoke fluently and was easily understood. He was very neat and usually wore a black shirt and a large black felt hat. He boasted of his home in Canton and had high hopes of returning there a wealthy man as he came to this country with that purpose in mind. He did return to his country but not with the wealth that he had hoped for.

Chinese New Years, held early in February, was always a festive time. The Chinese would come from all points up and down the river and gather at the little cabin area and their low- and high-pitched voices could be heard from a great distance. Ah-Se-One with our teacher's permission would invite all the school children to his cabin. There we would observe with great interest fascinating things in his neat but smoke-scented cabin. There were colorful teapots, cups, bowls of various sizes, and long-stemmed pipes on the shelves. Rows of slippers

CHINESE OF RAIL ROAD FLAT

By MRS. WILLIAM WELLS

(From information obtained from Minerva Houston Reed and Daley Seeman Jones. Both are living at the age of 93.)

About 1500 Chinese were in Rail Road Flat from about 1883 to 1905. They did mining and ditch digging for Warren Clark. They hydraulicked the land all around Taylor's Corral where Bert Del Rey had a hotel. Del Rey sat on the porch of the hotel and said he would shoot if any man attempted to dig anywhere on his ground. They didn't dig!

Many Chinese lived on the Pickering Ranch and the Seeman children used to stop and get candy from them.

Ah Howe was employed by a John Batch and, after John Batch died, Ah Howe took his name. Also, a hill was named after him, John Batch Hill. The original John Batch was a batchelor and Ah Howe cooked and worked for him. Ah Howe was married but left his family in China. After Batch died, Ah Howe went to work for Clark. He was with him until the family all grew up and then Clark built him a cabin at "Two-dollar Gulch." Clark had many Chinese work on his ditch. There were 150 Chinese at one time and two white men—O'Neil and Tompkins. These men boarded with the Houston family.

Continued on Last Page

were beneath the table, coolie hats hung on the wall, and from beneath his high crude-looking bed were straw woven sacks, so full that they bulged at the seams, rag-covered bundles, and large ornamented boxes. We wondered what was in all of this but, of course, we never asked. Of all the years that Ah-Se-One had been in this country, he could not speak English very well. He was very hard to understand. He would ask us our names, then try to repeat them. Then from boxes and cans he gave each one of us firecrackers and punks, Chinese nuts, and candy. One kind of candy was a long flat brown sugar stick. (In recent years I have searched for this same candy in Chinatowns of many cities but I have never been able to find it.)

Whether Ah-Se-One counted, measured, or weighed, the amount that he gave each one of us could not have been more equally divided. It was very obvious that he had no favorites and was careful not to hurt our feelings. He watched us as we ate the candy and nuts, as we laughed when we lit the firecrackers with long punks, and a smile spread across his wrinkled face that seemed like a mask. It was a smile of happiness that he wore for the rest of the day. We were very fond of the kind old man and he knew it.

Like a phantom from the Far East the Chinese appeared along the gold dust trails in the fifties and began disappearing in the mid-seventies, and by the early nineteen hundreds were gone. Only a well remains to mark the spot where the cluttered Chinese cabins once stood near North Branch. Very little else is to be seen in the surrounding area to remind us of the hundreds of Chinese that once lived and worked up and down the rivers and gulches. But to some of us who have known a little of the life of the last remaining few, the scene still impresses on us a never-to-be-forgotten blend of the Orient.

THE CHINESE IN SAN ANDREAS

By MRS. HATTIE HERTZIG

In 1896, Chinatown in San Andreas included one long, low, continuous building made of rough hewn boards and battens, on the lower end of St. Charles Street, and occupied by several families. Across St. Charles, on the lower end of Court Street, adjacent to the Cassinelli Store, where several more buildings, where families resided. Across the creek from the Charles Goodell residence (then the Whitlock home) lived a Chinese man who had a small garden, and across the creek from the Cassinelli Store a couple lived until early Christmas morning, 1896, when their home burned with all their worldly possessions, chief of which was their rice.

Between the Washburn Stable and the Culbertson place on Main Street near the creek was a Chinese laundry, where the clothing was sprinkled in the usual Chinese way, by squirting the water from the mouth. The Chinese Church, or Temple, home of the Chinese priest, stood near the oak tree known as Charter Oak by Calaveras Union High School pupils. It contained many small rooms, corridors, and altar and a prayer mat, and the walls were covered with bright red and gold thin paper. The Chinese priest rode on a white donkey, and cooked chicken dinners for the young men around town who provided the chickens in their special way. These same young men delighted to torment the Chinese by throwing rocks on their houses, stuffing gunny sacks in the stove pipes, to smoke out the Chinese, and poking sticks from beneath the houses, through knot holes in the floors.

Two of the Chinese women were China Mary and Ah Quoy, who wore the traditional loose pantaloons, long one-piece overblouse, and thick, soft-soled shoes. Three children, Ah Moy, Ah Que, and Mooey attended the San Andreas schools. Ah Que was married in her early teens to a wealthy Chinese merchant of San Francisco.

The Chinese wore American clothing, mined along the rivers and creeks in the area. The total Chinese population at that time was approximately twenty five. They were law abiding, friendly when spoken to, kept to themselves, and were generous with gifts of candy and firecrackers at China New Years.

A large Chinese store stood near the Cassinelli Store, but was used as a dwelling in later years instead of a mercantile establishment. There had been a large Chinese cemetery on the hill back of the Chinese Church. All that remained were some shallow excavations and some pieces of broken crocks or jars. It was said the Chinese buried food with the departed ones, to last them until they reached their destination. Another large cemetery was on the Jerome Holland Ranch, now Flintkote-Calaveras Cement Company property. The visible evidence was the shallow excavations and pieces of broken crocks or brown jars.

Elsie Tiscornia remembers when the Chinese Store was selling clothing, groceries, candy, etc. to the Chinese. She thinks Ah Chin was the merchant. Ah Check worked for Louis Salcido in the butcher shop. Ah Sin worked at the mines. He was more educated than the rest. Charlie Ah Ty was a gardener.

Several Chinese lived around North Branch and mined in the creeks. The last one was on Welfare Aid for a long time, and was found dead one day, having refused to move from his place of abode.

(Editors note: apparently the "Ah" ment "Mr.")

CHINESE AT RAIL ROAD FLAT

By MRS. CARRIE BUCHANAN

There were many Chinese in and about Rail Road Flat in 1856. The Clark Reservoir, which was a part of the system supplying water for the local miners, was constructed by Chinese labor with shovels and wheelbarrows. In the article by W. V. Clark, son of the original owner, published in "Las Calaveras," January, 1960, he states that there were 500 white miners who volunteered to work on the ditch and take their pay in water when it was finished, but so many deserted that by the end of the month only 50 were still working.

But the story goes that Clark employed some 1500 Chinese. A big spring on the property now owned by the Taylor family, located behind the Historical Marker, was the site of a large settlement of Chinese.

Close to the China Spring was a three-story hotel owned by a man named Del Rey who found it necessary to guard his property with a shotgun to keep the Chinese from undermining the hotel in their search for gold.

Many of the Chinese were otherwise employed. Jean Fuchs tells the story of China Charlie who hauled freight from Valley Springs to the store at Rail Road Flat for a number of years. He had a badly crippled leg, some eight inches shorter than the other, which apparently did not prevent his loading and unloading heavy freight. It was claimed the injury was caused from a blast from a shotgun while Charlie was robbing a sluice box. His friends carried him to a hide-out where he recovered without medical attention.

Charlie saved his money, carried it with him, and enjoyed showing it. A Mexican named Lopez, who saw the roll of \$300, hid in a clump of brush a mile or two from Mokelumne Hill, shot and robbed him. The horses plodded on to the barn at Mokelumne Hill where they were accustomed to being fed and watered and stood there until a passer-by noticed them and investigated. A hunt for Lopez was started and the Mexican was apprehended, tried and hanged. This was about 1915 or 1916.

Rock Walls at Telegraph City

By ELSIE FLOWER

There is a myth that the rock fences around Copperopolis and Telegraph City were built by Chinese. This is entirely erroneous. Fred Burham, who died in 1951 at the age of 86 years, grew up in the rock fence area of Telegraph City and Copperopolis. He was the last authority on the building of those fences. As a boy he saw them being built by Jimmy Sykes and the two Wirth brothers, uncles of Mable McCarty Manuel (Mrs. Raymond) on her mother's side. Fred said that Jimmy Sykes was the builder of that beautiful stone barn which still stands at Telegraph City in condition as perfect as the day it was built.

A directory of 1884-5 lists James A. Skeys (stonemason) residing in Telegraph City. Jimmie Sykes and James A. Skeyes are evidently one and the same. Whether the "Skeys" was a transposition of letters in the name "Sykes", I do not know, but Fred Burham spelled and pronounced it "Sykes".

The history of the rock fence as given by Fred Burham was used on a KGDM radio broadcast; also in B. C. Wallace's "Home Town Comments" and in "Las Calaveras."

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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

All members of the Society have been made sad by the loss of one of our most dedicated and capable members, Louis Domenghini. For years Louis has been presiding over those fine macaroni dinners prepared by Mrs. Mudd at Mt. Ranch and assisting in the meetings that we have all enjoyed so much. On several occasions he dug out valuable historical material on the area around Mt. Ranch, San Antone Creek and Esmeralda. His final contribution to the history of the county was to act as chairman of the committee that placed the plaque where the holdup occurred that resulted in the shooting of the Rodesina girl by a lone bandit. We will miss Louis and his friendly greetings, wise counsel, and loyal support.

The Ninth Annual Meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies was held at the Bellevue Hotel in San Francisco on June 20-22. The Calaveras Society was represented by Mrs. Marion Brandt and Mrs. Jesse Hanson and they will undoubtedly give a report on the meeting at the June meeting of the society. However, here are the highlights of the Annual Meeting. The Mother Lode Region will have a new Regional Vice-president, Mrs. Dorothy Firebaugh of Sonora. She is Past President of the Tuolumne Society and largely responsible for the production of the long-playing record on the "Lore of the Mi-wok," a cooperative project of the Tuolumne and Calaveras societies. Mrs. Firebaugh is replacing Mrs. Frances Weir of Coulterville and the Mariposa Society. As Mrs. Weir has held the office for two years, she felt it should be passed on to another county. Amador County is the only county that has never had the vice-presidency, but with their reactivation under the leadership of Mrs. Pauline Ringer of Ione they may be in line for the position next.

The new president of the Conference is Miss Irene Simpson, director of the History Room of the Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco. Vice-president will be Richard Bailey, director of the Kern County Museum at Bakers-

Chinese of Rail Road Flat

(Continued from Second Page)

The Chinese had a camp which was later Les Howard's place or Abraham Howard's.

The Chinese were cheap labor and worked for one dollar a day. Ah Howe bored little holes in his cabin so he could peek out when anyone came. Ah Howe was deathly afraid of tong wars and "Nine Long Chinamen" and highbinders. He carried a gun, pistol, hatchet, and knife and his other belongings in a sack. Ah Howe was committed to the State Hospital in Stockton where he cooked for the hospital for years. He was pronounced well but wouldn't leave so he died there. Ah Howe used to help the Howard family with dance suppers. Ah Howe had a fiddle and used to play and sing for the Houston and Howard families. Warren Clark used Chinese in his saw-mill as did Dave McCarty. Ah Howe wore his hair neck length. There is a story about Ah Howe leaving a trunk with the Howard family which was supposed to have many valuable things in it. It was wired and tied, etc., so Mr. Howard stored it in the barn and after Ah Howe died they opened it. All they found was a Chinese fiddle.

Henry Seeman employed six single Chinese to do gravel mining. These Chinese lived on the Seeman property. They smoked opium pipes. Ah Sing lived alone and wore a queue. He lived on the South Fork of the Mokelumne River.

Daley Jones as a child "pulled the gates of the reservoir" and let all the water out. A Chinese came along and put a shovel on her head and pushed her to the ground. Ah Sing used to bring candied ginger and coconut to the children.

Ah Howe put roasted pork on the graves of his fellow men who were buried in the Independence Cemetery but the Indians would steal it.

CHINESE AT MOUNTAIN RANCH

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH

Inasmuch as there was much mining in the vicinity of Mountain Ranch, it offered a fertile field for Chinese to mine by operating their rockers and long toms.

From Louis Domenghini, Mountain Ranch, I am informed that there is no one now residing in the vicinity who has a personal recollection of where the Chinese resided.

However, from old residents, he was told that they had a colony north of the town on Murray Creek, a short distance above the old Ritter Mine.

In addition to mining on Murray Creek and the numerous gulches, they grew quantities of vegetables and peddled them to the miners in the vicinity. They have not resided at this place for many years.

field. Your editor will continue as the Executive Secretary of the Conference for the tenth year. Miss Ivy Loeber, President of the Napa County Society, will continue as treasurer.

The Annual Meeting of the Conference will be held in San Diego in June, 1964.

Members of the Society will be grateful to Mrs. Paul Lewis for her generosity in offering to cut stencils and run off the essays in this year's contest. As the finances of the treasury are very low, this contribution of time and effort will be a big assistance.