

THE CHINESE IN CALAVERAS COUNTY



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CHINESE AT WEST POINT

By CLAUDE SMITH

The Chinese at one time occupied part of two streets in West Point. They had houses on the south side of Pine Street from about the present fire house easterly, and on the west side of Main Street from the old blacksmith shop. This was the second building north from Cemetery Lane, and the Chinese extended north on Main Street about 500 feet. These Chinese buildings and lots were occupied by the Chinese at the time the townsite was surveyed and patents issued to the Chinese owners. This latter was the Chinatown as we who may still be alive knew it, and it consisted of a row of about a dozen low-built, cheap wooden shacks with steep pitched roofs. There was no appreciable space between them. There was a board sidewalk or porch in front the entire distance.

There was at one time two stores. One was conducted by Lun Kee, who did considerable strumming on a stringed instrument and frequently sang in a loud, high-pitched voice. The larger store was on the north end of the town and was conducted by Ah Cow and here the youngsters of the town purchased Chinese candy, lichi nuts, preserved ginger root, dried shrimps, firecrackers and freshly roasted peanuts. These peanuts were roasted in hot sand, never burned, and were very flavorful.

At the entrance door to Ah Cow's store, and to the right, was a raised platform or bunk probably two feet above the floor on which very often you would see two Chinese lying, a lighted lamp between them, smoking opium pipes. They would lie extended on the bunk with long opium pipes apparently lighted by the lamp.

Other buildings were occupied as gambling houses, which were used only by the Chinese. The white folks did not gamble with them. There was a Joss House, also, where punks were kept burning continuously, and it was always open. It was not uncommon to see a Chinese in the Joss House bowing to the images there.

The living quarters were mostly in the rear. They claimed about 200 feet back from the street and the ground was very fertile with water near the surface, and here they raised chickens, ducks, geese and occasionally kept a pig. Also, they raised gardens and sometimes sold vegetables. A diminutive Chinese woman named Sally peddled these around town.

There were very few women, but one, China Mary, was the queen of Chinatown and later moved to San Francisco where she was quite a prominent woman in Chinatown there. The women of West Point, upon making

THE WAY OF 1964

I know not if the New Year's way
Be hard, or steep or rough—
But knowing God's Son bled and died
For me, that is enough.

The Love of Him has cast a veil
Around the New Year's way
To hide its beauty and its tears
That peace may fill each day,

And though His veil hides from my sight
The way of '64,
I walk with perfect faith in Him—
I ask for nothing more.

'Tis better far, O God, to trust
Your unseen, guiding hand
And know the way of '64
With wisdom, you have planned.

All future fears are swept away—
I'm in God's loving care,
And may I not be spared one thing
My Savior had to bear.

—L. HELEN LEWIS
San Andreas, Calif.

a visit to San Francisco, nearly always went to see China Mary and visited San Francisco Chinatown.

Later, we recall two Chinese women coming to West Point as the wives of Chinese and one family had two boys and a girl. The boys went to school and got along well with the white children and learned well. One boy was in my class at school several years ago. Most of the Chinese mined on the rivers and creeks that had been worked by the whites at an earlier date.

Some Chinese worked in the mines for a day's pay. Some worked in the sawmills and on the ranches. When the Lockwood Mining Company decided to bring the water from Blue Creek for their mining operation, a ditch was dug for about six miles and most of the work was done by Chinese hand labor. Several hundred Chinese were used here for some time.

Quite a few Chinese lived in cabins around the area where they mined or worked on ranches. There were several Chinese at the junction of the Middle Fork River and Forest Creek about four miles east of West Point.

Some worked at mine boarding houses and Ah Sam cooked at the hotel for Mrs. Gallagher for many years.

Ah Yeh was a cross-eyed, undersized Chinese who occupied a small shanty built up against a large log at Bumpersville. He always wore boots several sizes too large for him because he could buy them just as cheaply

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CHINESE IN DOUGLAS FLAT

By CHARLES SCHWOERER

At one time the Chinese must have been quite a problem in Douglas Flat because at a meeting of the citizens of the town held on the evening of December 30, 1857, they considered the Chinese to be such a menace that the following preamble and resolution were adopted unanimously:

"Whereas the inhabitants of the Chinese Empire, a people of almost countless members, and living within a few days sail of our shores, are coming in vast hordes to the mining regions of California, and whereas, the presence of so numerous a class of persons is a great detriment to the State, and if allowed will, when the placer mines become exhausted which will soon be the case, and mining operations shall have passed into the hands of capitalists, cause coolie labor to take the place of the present hardy, intelligent, independent miners and useful citizens to seek homes elsewhere; and whereas, the only way seems to be to cause at least some of those who are now here to return to their own country and prevent others from coming is for the miners throughout the mining region to refuse them permission to work. Therefore, we the miners of Douglas Flat, do assent to and adopt the following resolution:

"Resolved: That no Chinaman shall be permitted to hold or work upon any claim in this district after ten days from this date (Dec. 30, 1857) except such as have bought claims who shall be allowed thirty days to work out their claims or otherwise dispose of their interests." (Taken from the San Andreas Independent, December 30, 1857.)

Dave Copello, a native of Douglas Flat, and now in his late eighties, informs the writer that he remembers that there were two communities of Chinese in Douglas Flat when he was a youth. One group lived on the flat southeast of the Frank Grenitta home while the other group lived in the southeastern part of town. This latter group, consisting of some eight or ten persons later moved down with the larger group on the flat. Dave did not know just how many there were altogether.

There was also one lone Chinese who lived near the Ohio Mine in the northeastern part of town.

These Chinese worked the bed of Coyote Creek from near the Milk Ranch to near the Bertatta home.

CHINESE IN CAVE CITY

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH

Cave City, one of the ghost towns of Calaveras County, was one of the principal mining communities of the early 50's. It had a large population but at the present time unless its location is pointed out it would be difficult to even locate the site.

At present there is no one, as far as I know, from whom one can obtain definite information about the old place. However, it offered excellent opportunities for the Chinese to come in and work over the ground that had been worked and abandoned by the white miners.

It must have had a large Chinese population at one time, as the records of the county show numerous trials where the Chinese from Cave City have been charged with murder and lesser offenses.

A short distance from the old town and across O'Neal's Creek is a piece of ground known for many years as the "Chinese Gardens."

It is safe to assume that at these gardens Chinese

Chinese at West Point

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as smaller ones. He worked on the Henry Sterling Ranch for years.

The Chinese had no means of conveyance and carried large bunches or pieces of wood on their backs upon the return from their day's work. Smaller articles were carried in baskets suspended from each end of a pole balanced across their shoulders.

Chinese New Years was a great event at West Point. Chinatown celebrated this event about three weeks after our New Years. At this celebration they exploded long lines of small firecrackers and giant bombs braided together in a chain about 20 feet long. A long pole was placed in the ground and, by means of a rope and pulley, the string of firecrackers was hoisted in the air after being ignited at the lower end. The boys in the community would all scramble to recover the firecrackers that fell unexploded. Of course, some lad always got one too soon and it would explode in his hand; several usually got bad burns.

Also, at this time the Chinese made a network of fuses (such as used in firecrackers) in a frame about two feet long and one foot wide. The frame was hoisted by the rope and the pulley above mentioned to some 16 or 20 feet above the street and the person who could set this frame of fuses on fire by throwing lighted firecrackers at it was given a prize. Many of these were used and many prizes given. The local people as well as the Chinese congregated for these prizes. After one of these celebrations the streets in front of the Chinese quarter was literally covered with exploded firecrackers.

A portion of the local cemetery was allotted to the Chinese where they buried their dead. After a funeral the fresh mound of a new grave was covered with the best Chinese food set out by the Chinese in dishes to appease the devil and that evening many of the local youngsters would have a good feed.

After a certain period of time (about five years) the bones of the departed Chinese were exhumed and placed in an earthenware crock (about 5-gallon size) and taken away for shipment back to the flower kingdom for final resting place. At this time the Chinese would scatter, all along the road leading from the cemetery, small pieces of perforated paper. This seemed to be part of their religious rites.

Strangely enough, there is now a crock in the West Point Cemetery with the bones of one of the departed Chinese. Whether they forgot to ship this one after digging up the bones and placing them in the crock or whether he wasn't worthy of the expense of return to China, we'll never know. Not a Chinese remains in this area now and not a vestige of the old Chinatown can be found. It was completely destroyed by fire about the turn of the century. This fire was always thought to have been incendiary. The Sierra Service Station and the Timberwolf Club now occupy a part of what was old Chinatown.

raised vegetables and sold them at Cave City and adjoining vicinities.

The Chinese carried the vegetables over their shoulders in baskets suspended from either end of a pole.

The Chinese produced much of the early vegetables sold in the mining districts.

CHINESE IN VALLECITO

By CHARLES SCHWOERER

As near as can be determined at this late date of 1963 there were no Chinese in Vallecito.

Mrs. George Carley, who was born in Vallecito of pioneer parents and who spent a good part of her adult life there informs me that as a little girl she remembers seeing Chinese go by her house on their way to John Arata's store to buy their weekly supply of groceries.

She stated that there was quite a number of them and that they came from toward Douglas Flat every Sunday, walking in single file and talking at the top of their voices.

However, one Chinese known as Ah Kee and his wife, Mary, lived at Wade's Flat, opposite the Henry Eltringham Ranch, where he raised vegetables which he carried on his back to Angels to sell. One other Chinese was hired by Mr. Mull to mine for him on Coyote Creek below town.

There were several Chinese who came to Vallecito to buy fruit, particularly apples, and they would remain there while the fruit was drying. Mrs. Lupie Scanlon and Mrs. Mamie Keilbar, sisters, who were also born in Vallecito, gave substantially the same information as Mrs. Carley.

Mrs. Carley told me an amusing story about Ah Kee and his wife, Mary.

It appears that they lived in an old cabin beneath a large oak tree. The roof of the cabin was in a rather dilapidated condition. One evening some of the boys from Vallecito decided that they would have some fun with Ah Kee by fixing a tic-tac to the roof of the house. Some of the boys, however, got cold feet and backed out when they got near the cabin, but George Mull said he would climb the tree and fix the tic-tac to the roof, which he proceeded to do.

Everything went fine until he stepped down on the roof. Instead of stopping on the roof as he lowered himself from the tree he went right on through, landing right between the sleeping Chinese. Ah Kee yelled and yelled and out the door went George while the rest of the gang on the side hill laughed until Ah Kee came out and fired a gun into the night.

The next morning Ah Kee came to Luke Sanguinetti's store and, after greeting Luke, said, "Last night debil he come my house; debil he come my house."

Luke knew who the "debil" was.

DROWNED BY CHINESE

From the S. A. Independent, May 1, 1958

Three white men who robbed Chinese for a living were captured by the "Johns" last week while in the act of committing another outrage at Clay's Bar on the Mokelumne, near Campo Seco, and, tied hand and foot, were thrown into the river.

The Chinese had been advised by some Americans that in case white men should make a robbing foray upon them, they should feign humble submission to their demands, pretend to fork over their packages with fear and trembling, but as soon as they had thrown the robbers off their guard, by apparent cowardice, to surround and overpower them by numbers, then tie them to a pole and carry them to Campo Seco.

It is believed these instructions were observed toward the three missing robbers up to the carrying process, but they then adopted the more efficient manner above described.

CHINESE ON THE MOKELUMNE RIVER

From Oakland Tribune Knave Section, September, 1956

In early days Chinese mined for gold along the Mokelumne. They formed stock companies of 25 to 40 Chinese and they would then buy a piece of land from a settler along the river. This was one reason why land along the river was "taken up" by white men. The claims varied in size according to the number of men in a company. The purchase price generally was a few hundred dollars. Some claims were 75x100 feet; others larger and smaller. One company consisting of 16 Chinese bought a bench claim of Dan Child. This bench claim was located where the River Road now passes the entrance of tunnels at the east end of the Child Ranch. Here Chinese took \$80,000 in gold. They bought water from the old Palmer Ditch which started at Lancha Plana and ran down through Van Sandt bottom land, some five miles west of Lancha. Tom Van Sandt tended this ditch for years when living above Comanche Bridge. Wheelbarrows and sluice boxes were used in mining. When claims touched the river, the miners built dams, deepened the water and used undershot wheels to operate Chinese pumps installed in holes the Chinese dug. Thus the holes were kept dry. In case no water power was available, treadmills were built to operate the pumps. Three or four Chinese could operate a tread mill.

In 1864 a man named Sam Marshall and a Spaniard robbed the Chinese miners at the Child Ranch on the Mokelumne River. They hid in grease-wood on the hillside and saw the Chinese "clean up." At night while the Chinese were having supper, the robbers came and covered them with guns, and tied their queues together across the table. The Chinese told Dan Child their troubles. Child and a one-armed man named Murphy went up on the hill and found Marshall and the Spaniard asleep in the grease-wood. Child, who was unarmed, awoke them and ordered them to leave. The robbers went east and Child followed, stopping at a neighbor's to borrow a gun from Charles Blyther. He followed the robbers to a point in the Borden Ranch (later called Gooding Ranch) just across the creek from Grover Graupner's present home. Here Marshall shot Child twice, in the knee and abdomen. Child, who shot Marshall in the face, was brought home in a wagon by Ben Borden (Mrs. Hattie Pardoe's brother) and Charles Blyther. Dan Child died four days later, Oct. 11, 1864, at his home, age 39. He was buried in Ione, where years later Ben Borden was to lay beside him. The Amador sheriff was out of the county hunting other criminals, as the Rancheria Massacre had just taken place in Amador.

Marshall had killed five white men in California. He later was shot by the sheriff in Carson City, Nevada.

CHINESE IN MURPHYS

By CHARLES SCHWOERER

"Charley, were there any Chinamen in Murphys in the early days of the town?"

"I am sure there were not because I cannot remember my grandmother ever mentioning them when I was a youngster and she told me many things about other nationalities in Murphys."

The above question and answer is the gist of a conversation between Judge Smith and myself. The Judge completed the conversation by saying, "I am appointing

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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

One of the first things your editor wants to say in assuming his duties again is to extend his thanks to all the dear friends in the Society who sent messages of cheer and good wishes while he was in the hospital. Especial thanks are due to Sadie Hunt and Helen Lewis for editing the October issue of LAS CALAVERAS. As we start on the twelfth volume of LAS CALAVERAS the editor would like to brag that the issue in October is the only one that he has not personally edited and never has an issue been late. However, the last issue was so well done that we think Sadie or Helen should take over this task of editing the quarterly at the end of the year.

It's wonderful to be back in circulation again and enjoying the fellowship of the Society.

The Christmas party in 1963 was one of the best we have had in the seven years they have been held. The emphasis was on Christmas music but there was also the historical element when Helen Lewis very effectively read several excerpts from Dr. Baur's book on Christmas in the United States. The beautiful poem written and read by Helen Lewis, the harmonica duets by Paul and Helen Lewis, and the exchange of gifts, topped off by delicious refreshments added up to a lovely evening. Again, as in the past seven years, we must express our appreciation to Alice Eldridge and her committee consisting of Charles Schwoerer, Sadie and Percy Hunt, Marian Brandt and Hattie Hertzig for decorating the tree and tables and making all the plans and arrangements for the party. We are also grateful to Mr. Carl of Mokelumne Hill for providing the tree. A special orchid should go to Mrs. Eldridge for arranging the lovely program and for presiding in her efficient and gracious manner as master of ceremonies. It is always a thrill to have our beloved president, Judge Smith, with us and it is always a pleasure to listen to his stories from his rich historical background.

Chinese In Murphys

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you a committee of one to find all you can about Chinamen in Murphys, Douglas Flat, and Vallecito." Some assignment!

At this late date the sources of information are very few because all of the early pioneers are gone and few of their children are left. However, Ed True and Antone Malaspino, both now in their eighties and sons of pioneers, still live in Murphys and it was from them that I was able to gather the information here presented.

According to both of these gentlemen, there was quite a settlement of Chinese in Murphys at one time. They resided on both sides of Main Street west of where the Odd Fellows Hall Now Stands. Most of them lived on the south side of the street on what is known as the Denslow property.

Ed True remembers that when he was seven or eight years old he and his twin brother, Tom, used to go to see their friend, China Mary, who lived in one of the stone buildings that stood on the north side of the street. They frequently ate with China Mary and her family and learned to eat with chopsticks as well as the Chinese did. He also told how he, his brother Tom, and his cousin, Joe Baratini killed a couple of China Mary's geese. They gave one to Joe's mother. He couldn't remember what they did with the other. However, they could not make China Mary believe that he and Tom did it because they were good boys.

The Chinese were not allowed to mine in the Murphys flat during the time that the white man was working there. However, according to official records, some of them owned claims in what is known as the Owlsburg district, which was the area back of the Masonic Hall. Whether they mined here during the time the white men were working here or after, I do not know. They did do some removal of rock piles in the flat to get at the gravel after the white men had quit working there.

Ed True also stated that Mr. Kimbel, who had a sawmill at Hunter's Dam, employed all Chinese in the mill, but he thought these came from Angels Camp and elsewhere.

Here are some historical events which you may want to get on your calendar. The Symposium of Southern California Historical Societies will meet at the Hacienda Motel in Bakersfield on February 7-8. The event is sponsored by the Conference of California Historical Societies.

The California History Foundation Institute will be held on the University of the Pacific campus on April 3-4. The Jediah Smith Society breakfast will be held on April 4.

The Annual Meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies will be held at the U. S. Grant Hotel in San Diego, June 18-20.

The Sixteenth Annual California Missions Tour will be conducted by the University of the Pacific during Easter week, April 20-27.

We're a couple of months late but certainly all members of the Society would want us to publicly congratulate our "Mr. Mother Lode," Archie Stevenot, on the wonderful party given him on his 81st birthday in Sonora on September 25th. We hope he will have many more happy and useful years of service to his beloved Mother Lode.