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Chinese Camp Science Academy
3rd - 6th Graders

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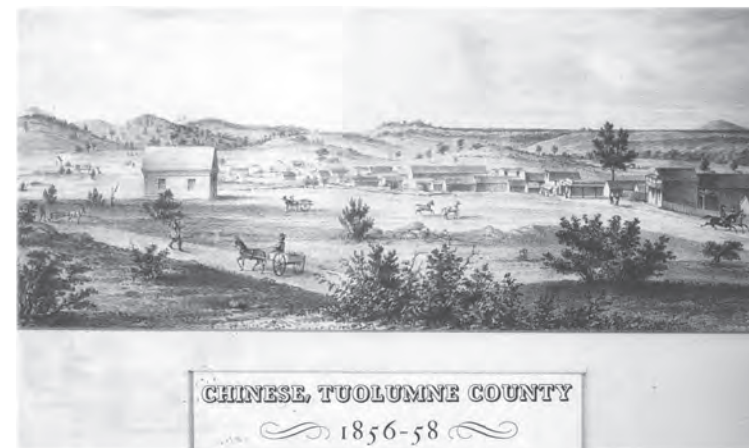
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Sources: Tuolumne County Historical Society, Chinese American Museum of Northern California, www.spi-ind.com, www.calbiomass.org/facilities/ihi-chinese-station, <https://chinesecampstoreandcabin.business.site>, vecteezy.com.

Credits: The Chinese Camp Science Academy 3rd-6th Graders, Sheri Betz, Linda Cazares, Anna Davies.

THE HISTORY OF CHINESE CAMP CALIFORNIA

According to the Chinese Camp Science Academy
3rd - 6th Graders



Garrett House 1870's

EARLY HISTORY

The first people who lived in Chinese Camp were Native Americans, specifically the Me-Wuk tribe. In winter, they would stay at the lower elevations in Chinese Camp and in summer they lived in the higher, cooler elevation near Pinecrest. Archeologists have found proof that Me-Wuk were near our school because nearby they found mortars which were used to grind seeds and acorns and middens, piles of ancient, human rubbish.

Gold was discovered in Tuolumne County on Woods Creek in 1848. Word got out and people from many countries wanted to find gold too. The people were from all over; Mexico, South America, France, and Italy. News about gold in California spread throughout the world, but the only Asians that joined the gold rush were from China. Out of all the regions in China, most of the miners were Cantonese, who came from the Guangdong province. They were adventurous and the gold would help their homeland in many ways. They wanted to make China more modern and thought that the money would also help them revolt against the Qing Dynasty.



In the year 1850 there were about 4,000 Chinese in California, but by 1852 the Chinese population increased to 20,000. In 1849, a Chinese company of miners, under the employ of an English firm, was brought by boat from China to Stockton and taken to a nearby mining camp called Campo Salvado. Later, the Chinese were driven out of the camp by miners who, reportedly, were jealous of their success. According to an 1850 article from a Stockton newspaper, the Chinese miners from Campo Salvado traveled over the hill to a nearby mining camp called Camp Washington, where they felt safe. They were soon joined by other Chinese. So many Chinese miners came that the camp was referred to as "Chinese" and eventually it became "Chinese Camp".

Because of its location on the main road to Stockton, the town soon became a distribution center to move supplies out to all the surrounding mining camps. The supplies came from San Francisco to Stockton and then to Chinese Camp. Stages and wagons carrying people and supplies came into Chinese Camp every 2-3 hours by 1853. The town grew to support all the trade activity. By 1856, it was said by one local historian to be "an emporium of trade". An 1856 "Directory" boasted of 14 merchants, two livery stables, three doctors, five blacksmiths, two hotels, two saloons, two drugstores, two jewelers, three butchers, a grocer, and a number of skilled workers.

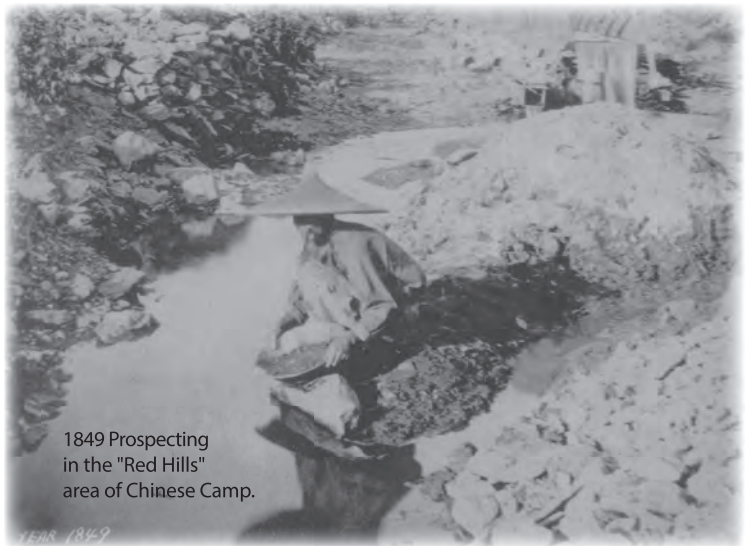


By 1856, a local pastor claimed that there were 600 Chinese in the Chinese Camp. They established their homes and businesses on the western half of Main Street. Non-Chinese business where located on the opposite side. It is worth noting that there were more Chinese than non-Chinese businesses at that time. The 1860 Census lists many Chinese-owned businesses showing ten Chinese boarding houses, six cooks, two barbers, seven doctors, three saloon keepers, four bakers, two tailors, a grocer and a musician. Although there was a physical division between the two business districts, there was an exchange between the ethnic groups as they purchased goods and services on both sides of the street. The peak of Chinese activities in the town happened around the early 1870s with the Chinese population being reported at 650.



CHINESE CULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

A Chinese man named Jim Lee would walk across the Chinese Camp school grounds and the kids would tell him hello and he'd say hello back. He was always wearing cowboy boots and would carry a bunch of bootleg whiskey to the Shawmut Mine when he crossed the school grounds. One day the children asked him how he lost his hand and Jim Lee said that he lost it while he was fishing. Jim Lee forgot to mention that he fished with half sticks of dynamite at Woods Creek. Once, after he lit a stick of dynamite, he didn't throw it fast enough and his hand got blown off.



1849 Prospecting in the "Red Hills" area of Chinese Camp.

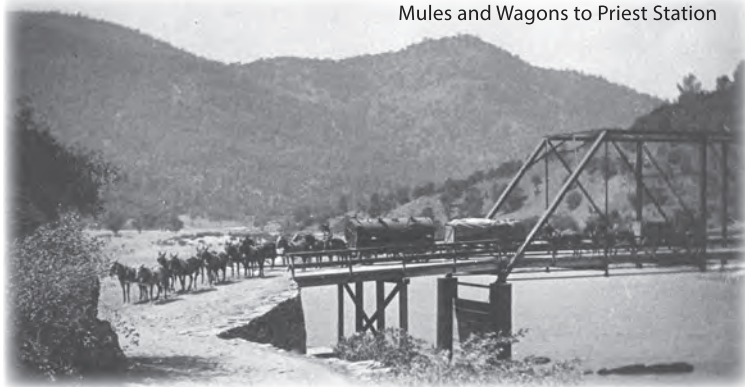
The most famous event of Chinese Camp, the Tong War, happened on October 25th in 1856. It started with a fight between two enemy groups of Chinese when one group rolled a big boulder onto the other's mining claim and wouldn't remove it. This boulder made them set up a duel or battle in a field near J59 and Red Hills Road. The Chinese men came out in full battle armor. A local blacksmith made weapons for them. There are reports of 800 to 2,500 men involved in this battle. Over 5,000 other miners in the area came out to watch. Four men lost their lives and twenty were wounded. It is said that the Chinese Camp blacksmith, Louis Egling, kept the weapons and armor donating them for scrap during World War I.

In Chinese Camp, there were seven herb doctors. The herb doctor would figure out a patient's illness by observing the tongue, eyes, complexion, their breathing, pulse, and the sound of their voice. In their shops, there would be more than 100 tiny drawers of bugs, plants, herbs and insects. The doctor would then go to the drawers to put together a collection of items. A bitter and mud brown drink would be made for the patient. It tasted gross but it worked!

China Mary was a woman who lived with China Sam. A local woman, Mrs. Stephen, said that China Mary would peddle her home grown vegetables using a two wheeled cart. China Mary usually wore her black pajamas with black satin slippers. She often put on beautiful, shiny jade and gold jewelry. China Mary would dress all fancy like that because she wanted people to buy all of her freshly grown vegetables.

The cemetery that the Chinese set up was 150 feet north from Montezuma Road off of Highway 120. The Chinese thought that when you died, your soul would never want to wander around in the strange land. This meant that they would hire a professional exhumer to remove the body. The remains of their bones would be scrubbed, polished and inventoried for completeness and recorded. The final thing that they would do for the ritual is place the remains in a small box or a urn which is a jar like container. They would usually put a queue, the man's ponytail, on top of all the body parts. This package would be sent back to their homeland in China.

Many of the stone walls that you see standing today were built by the Chinese. These walls were often five feet high and were considered cattle proof. The Chinese got paid only 25 cents for every 16 ½ feet. Twenty five cents was more back then but it wasn't much. Imagine building a long, rock wall for only that much.



Transporting Freight by many teams of Mules and Wagons to Priest Station

The Chinese brought freight from their homeland to the Chinese miners. Some of the products were: rice, cabbage, tea, seaweed, dried mushrooms, cuttlefish, bean curd, dried abalone, shrimp, and salted duck eggs. The Chinese in town grew fresh vegetables, raised livestock, and had a pond with fish in it. The children of Chinese Camp would get a dime from the Chinese to go down to Six Bit Gulch and catch turtles so they could make one of their favorite dishes, turtle soup. The Chinese also planted persimmon trees for the fruit, narcissus for good fortune, and "trees of heaven" for medicine.

Chinese Camp, at one point, had three temples where they worshiped their gods. Of course, the Chinese celebrated Chinese New Year. William Fairburn, born in Chinese Camp, said, "We used to peek in the church to see the strange rituals. They had pictures of dragons on the walls and figurines of gods on the altar. They always had firecrackers and they would give us candy and litchi nuts. You could smell the incense a block away."

In Chinese Camp there were mostly men, and it was very rare to have families. Between the years of 1860 and 1900, only four Chinese children were recorded on census documents. The resident Chinese men either got old and died, returned home, or they moved on to other jobs. The Chinese quarters declined in the 1880s. By the end of the 1880s, only six of the stores they built were still standing. With the end of the mining era and the roads/rail lines already built, most of the Chinese left around 1918. A 1920 census states that Milly and Lum Sam Kee, a married couple, were the last to remain, living on Red Hills Road.



The non-Chinese section of town slowly died as well. By 1914, a prominent stage company operating out of Chinese Camp shut down and the nearest train station was located several miles from Chinese Camp. The automobile made travel to the larger settlement of Sonora easy, where there was a greater variety of stores and goods available. Chinese Camp stores lost much of their business. There were many fires recorded in the town of Chinese Camp, but by the time of the 1918 fire, business and activity in the town had slowed so much that business people simply decided it that was not worthwhile to rebuild. By the 1920's the community had become a small ranching community. The business district that can be viewed today are what remains of the non-Chinese section of town. There are no remaining Chinese-owned buildings.

CHINESE CAMP TODAY

The Chinese Camp saw mill is run by Sierra Pacific Industries. It has 1.9 million acres of land in California and Washington. They are one of the largest lumber producers in the United States. They make cedar fences that are used in urban neighborhoods.

The Pacific Ultra Power Plant, a private energy plant, burns wood to make energy. This biomass plant produces 18 megawatts of electricity per hour. In 2016, the Forest Service estimated that there is more than 100 million trees in the forests that are dead or dying. Biomass power plants are considered to be renewable energy generators.

The Chinese Camp Store and Tavern, built in 1934, is a nice place to stop on the way to Yosemite. This family operated store sells camping supplies, snacks, groceries, and drinks. They also have a picnic area and clean bathrooms.

There are a handful of family operated cattle/livestock ranches in the area. These ranches, the biomass plant, and lumber mill make up the bulk of the agriculture production in the local area.



Chinese Camp Store



Chinese Camp Ranch Land