

Colorful Chapter in History Washed Away

By DORIS ROBINSON
Mail Tribune Correspondent
Yreka—One of the most colorful chapters in the history of Siskiyou county, and neighboring Shasta county to the south, unfolded during a period of some 40 years of the 19th Century, when the area had quite a large Chinese population.

The chapter began in the early 1850s, when large numbers of Chinese poured into northern California, lured by reports of vast wealth in the gold mines of the area. It reached a climax in 1890, when Yreka's Chinatown was washed away in a flood. The Chinese who came seeking wealth brought even

larger numbers of their countrymen in to work for them. In fact, it was said that 90 per cent of the Chinese were slaves to the other 10 per cent. The average Chinaman was accustomed to working for a maximum of 10 cents a day in China. His services, therefore, could be obtained for considerable less money than those of the native California, who was used to getting from \$2 to \$5 per day.

As a result, relations between the Chinese and the Californians were not always good. Some of the whites were alarmed at the influx of Chinese and felt the newcomers were getting a stranglehold on the area's commerce.

It was said that every claim sold to the Chinese was forever lost to the community, as no proceeds from that claim ever went in any channel of trade, save the one which went directly to China. It paid for all their fish, rice, clothing, in fact everything commercial.

If there was a delay in a cargo arriving, they would buy as little flour as would sustain life, a few pair of gum boots, and what lumber they needed, but in return they would take every chicken and hog within the range of their acquaintance, the natives claimed. Or while one was buying boots, another would steal two pair.

Numbers Increase
Their numbers steadily increased. Stores began to close, to be succeeded by "Ching," "Chong," "Cha" stores, and the produce was replaced with queer fish, little beans, dried snails and beetle bugs from China, much to the gratification of the San Francisco ship owner.

Many thousands of Chinese worked on the railroads about 1883 in Shasta county. One newspaper clipping reported that some of the Chinese working on the railroad were killing all the fish in the river by means of powder.

The article also reported that about 50 Chinese complained bitterly of the treatment they received from the company. They were compelled to work for low wages and to buy their supplies from Sisson and Crocker, paying in some instances double prices.

They said they were charged 4 cents a pound for rice, 15 cents a pound for pork.

Purchases Straw Hat
One case related about a Chinaman who had purchased a straw hat in town and happened to have it on while in Sisson and Crocker's store. A clerk reached over and grabbed it, exclaiming, "Where you get him?" and put it up on the shelf, compelling the man to purchase it over again of them.

In every race of people one finds both the good and the bad, and this was true of the Chinese. There is a story of a man who came to this country when 21 years of age, by the name of King Sing Wong. He lived to be 90 years old.

He worked for an Englishman named Luke Shaw, and after working for him in Quartz valley for 20 years, teaching hydraulic and other types of mining and serving faithfully, he took the name of Luke Shaw.

He worked for many years for others in the area and then retired in Oakland, Calif. He was married to Louie Len Gew, who died in 1909. They had seven children.

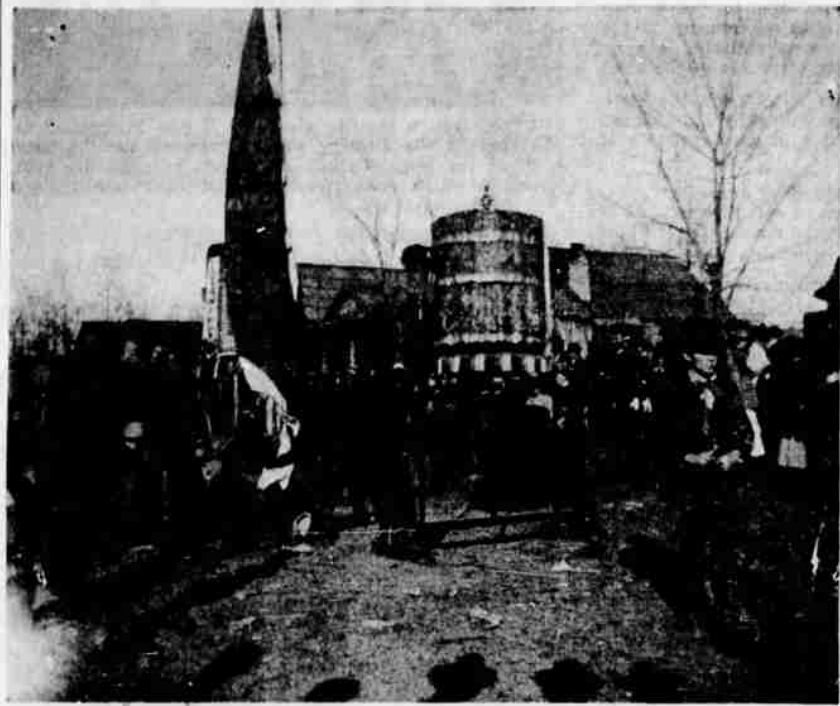
Tribute Is Paid
Frank W. Hooper paid him a great tribute at the time of his death and recalled his act of heroism at the time of a mining accident on Indian creek. He was presented a watch as a token of appreciation by his American friends and he was always proud to exhibit it in later years.

Two Chinese of Yreka, a Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, also were highly thought of by the community as fine people. They were remembered especially by the citizenry at times of Chinese funerals.

They always rode in a horsedrawn buggy, bowing and smiling to the people as the procession wound its way through town to the cemetery. The Chinese burial custom was odd compared to the American way. Everyone was invited, a brass band played and thousands of red papers with tiny holes punched in them were strewn from the home of the deceased to the



THE END OF CHINATOWN—Yreka, Calif., once had its own Chinatown, located near Highway 99 in the block now occupied by the Yreka laundry and other business firms. It burned several times, but was finally wiped out by a flood in 1890. The above photo was taken during the flood, on Feb. 4, 1890. Subsequently, all the buildings were washed down Yreka creek. (Siskiyou County Museum photo).



NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATION—Siskiyou county once had quite a large Chinese population, so large that a Chinese new year's celebration was held annually. This photo, loaned through the courtesy of the Siskiyou County Museum, depicts a celebration at Yreka one year.

cemetery. The belief was that the devil had to pass through the tiny holes in the paper before he could reach the deceased, who thus was safe if he reached the cemetery first. Huge quantities of food were cooked and left at the cemetery on the grave. A whole roast pig and plates of food and liquor were left to assist the deceased on his journey to "Chinese" heaven.

Chinese Cemetery
The Chinese cemetery for Yreka is on the Montague rd. just across the railroad tracks north of the highway. All that is left is a broken down fence and a brick altar on which the Chinese burned incense and hung red paper streamers as part of the ceremony. They buried their dead for a while, then opened the grave and shipped the remains back to China. It has been said that the shipping line shipped back the dead and brought back a cargo of live Chinese to take their place.

The Chinese New Year celebrations lasted about two weeks and were another colorful affair. Six prominent Chinese companies headed the mining operations in Yreka, and each belonged to a different "Tong." Headquarters for the companies and their stores were located in Chinatown. All Chinese working for the companies did their shopping, smoked opium, and gambled on the premises. The games played consisted of

Fan-Tan, Lotto, draw poker played (American style). If a Chinaman had not paid his last year's debts, he was not allowed to gamble.

During the New Year celebration a game played by Chinese boys was called "Fights" and compared somewhat to the American football. There were two teams of about eight boys each. An explosive which was wrapped in padding looking something like a pincushion, was shot into the air and a mad scramble ensued. The object was for a player to carry it to the "Joss House" safely.

First Prize
A round trip to China for the lucky player was first prize and \$500 was divided among his teammates. Fire crackers exploded from tall poles and the Americans joined with the Chinamen in their noisy and colorful celebration.

Yreka's Chinatown burned several times during its existence but was always rebuilt. The area covered was from Highway 99 in the block now covered by the Yreka laundry, Boyd and Franson and east to the railroad tracks. A flood in 1890 carried the shacks down Yreka creek and now none of the original homes remain. At present there is only one family tracing their ancestry from Chinatown still living in Yreka. They own and operate the White Circle Cafe on Miner st.

in the Weaverville district, and the foreign miners tax totaled \$8,000 a month. Although they were thousands of miles from their homeland they built their house of worship and followed ancient customs and religion.

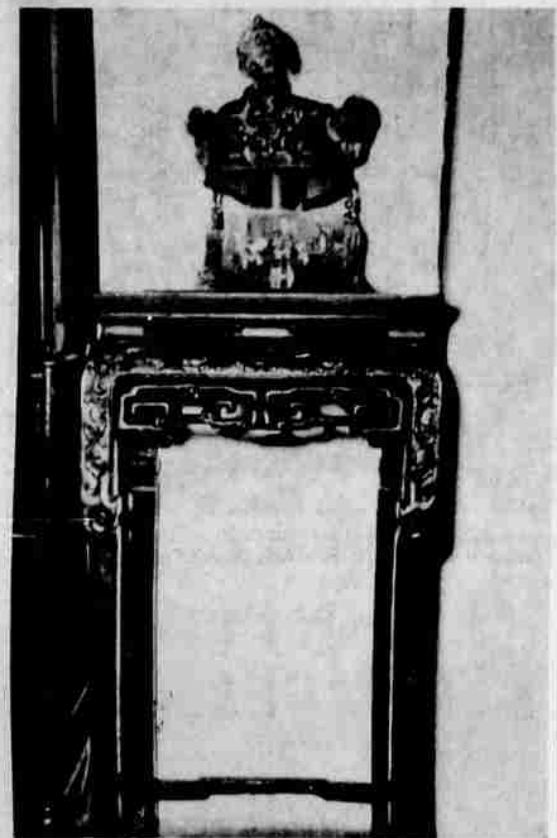
They called their temple "Temple Amongst the Forest Beneath the Clouds." Inside altars, carvings, gongs, panels, lanterns, tables, drum, tapestry and banners were found, as well as images of Chinese deities, including those of Medicine and Wealth. The deities numbered three and were made of clay. There were three elaborately carved altars.

Food and incense and red candles were placed in front of the images; whiskey and tea were kept before them to satisfy their thirst. Lee still keeps up this old custom. As trustee, Lee decided the temple to the state in 1956.

There are so many stories recalled by old timers one cannot write them all, stories about how the wives and mothers of the Chinese were kept at home, their yards fenced with high board fences so they could not see out.

One story tells of a white lady who sat beside a large knothole in the fence and taught the Chinese lady how to knit, and how a little boy took flowers to the lady inside the fence because she did not have any.

PROTESTS EXPECTED
Washington—(AP)—Kennedy administration measures to stop the rise in defense spending are expected to cause anguished protests from the armed forces this fall.



RESCUED—This stand was rescued from Chinatown before it was destroyed, and was later donated to the Siskiyou County museum by the late Clyde Turner. For some time it was used at the museum to hold the register for guests. The little Chinese hat on top of the stand was donated by a Mrs. Balfrey of Etna, Calif.

TAKES FIRST JUMP

O'Brien-Pfe Larry Spedley, son of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Barnes of O'Brien has been stationed in Georgia. He recently took his first jump from a helicopter in exercises

of this paratroop division. His outfit is known as John F. Kennedy's Minute Men and was given the title by the President himself.

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