



THE ELECTROLIER

Illuminating St. Helena's History

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FOOTPRINTS IN TIME

Brief History of the Chinese Presence in St. Helena

BY MARIAM HANSEN

By the mid-nineteenth century, China had been ruled by the Manchu Dynasty for 200 years. Canton Province, a densely populated, tropical region bordering on the South China Sea, became the principal region trading with the West, giving the Cantonese exposure to western ideas and products. In the late 1830s, China tried to prevent opium from India from being imported to Britain. The defeat of China



Cantonese men en route to California. Courtesy Chinese Historical Society of America.

in the Opium War of 1840 resulted in the cessation of Hong Kong to Britain. Beginning in 1850, the 13-year rebellion against the Manchu Dynasty cost millions of lives and hard times. News of the Gold Rush caused Cantonese to migrate to California, departing from the port of Hong Kong.

Chinese came to California in three ways: as entrepreneurs paying their own way and setting up lucrative businesses; as indentured servants sent from prison, kidnapped, or ransomed to pay off debt; and as poor peasants whose passage was paid with a "credit-ticket" to be repaid from wages. On arrival, labor contractors were responsible for finding the

men jobs and collecting the debt. Except for prostitutes, they were all single men, who sent most of the money they earned home to their destitute families in China.

From 1850 to 1860, most Chinese worked in the gold fields. By 1860, Chinese comprised about 10 percent of the state's population, increasing to 24 percent by 1870.

Agoston Haraszthy was the first to bring Chinese to work in the wine industry. In January 1857, he brought 100 workers to his Buena Vista farm located near the old Sonoma Mission and the largest vineyard in the North Bay. By May, workers had planted 16,850 vines; in 1862, they planted 332,000. More workers built wine caves and a press house, managed the wine making, quarried rock for a large villa, drained marshland, and built dikes.

By 1861, Haraszthy was furnishing labor to other grape growers, including Charles Krug and Jacob Gundlach. The booming wine industry in 1886 used 75 percent Chinese labor and depended on it until the 1890s.

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Chinese miner during the Gold Rush. Courtesy Chinese Historical Society of America.

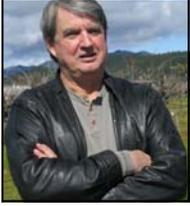


St. Helena Historical Society collection.

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Cornerstone



Skip Lane

Donn Black recently tendered his resignation from our board of directors and will be sorely missed. In recent years, Donn has acted as our PR person, distributing press releases and other information about our programs to the various media. He also oversaw our insurance requirements. Most importantly, we relied on his wise counsel and legal advice at our directors' meetings. Thank you, Donn, for your three-and-a-half years serving SHHS.

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Grandview mansion, Todd White hosted an open house on April 18th. During its long history, the mansion served as hotel, restaurant, and hospital before it evolved into its current function as apartments. It remains one of St. Helena's enduring landmark treasures.



Anil and Sushil Patel, who represent the Presidio Hotel Group, hotel partners in the Grandview Hotel, talk with Mayor Del Britton and Mariam Hansen at the recent open house and SHHS fundraiser hosted by Todd White.

The open house, which Todd White designated an SHHS fundraiser, also included a delightful exhibit of nature prints. We are grateful to all who attended the event and donated to support our work. Thanks to Tudal Wine, Raymond Vineyards, and Napa Valley Farms for providing excellent wines. And thank you, Todd, for this opportunity to introduce SHHS to new contributors and your ongoing generous support.



Forty members had a guided tour of the Sullivan DePins gardens in Rutherford during the first Members-Only Secret Visit. This beautiful estate is owned by Georges de Latour descendants.

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VERA TRINCHERO-TORRES INVESTS \$25,000 IN SHHS EFFORT TO INCREASE CAPACITY

Thanks to a \$25,000 "seed money" contribution from Vera Trinchero-Torres, the St. Helena Historical Society is now able to redesign its website into a "Virtual History Center" for the St. Helena community. When it is completed, the center will include rotating exhibits, a reading room, a collections showcase and virtual resource, and activity rooms for teachers and kids.



Vera Trinchero-Torres

Additionally, the Trinchero-Torres donation will fund the purchase of computer equipment, software, and network services sufficient to outfit two fully functioning work stations for use by volunteer staff overseeing collections, research, educational programs, and administration.

The donation will also support the production of new fundraising collateral materials and underwrite part of the cost of transitional leadership services.

"The purpose of these investments is to increase the St. Helena society's capacity to serve the community more fully and efficiently from its small office on the second floor of the St. Helena Public Library," said interim executive director Tricia Westbrook. "These resources strengthen the organizational foundation we are building to fulfill our ultimate vision: a dedicated St. Helena History Center facility for St. Helena. We are extremely grateful for Vera's support, both for the funding and for the vote of confidence it signifies in the value and viability of the Historical Society."

Tapping Wisdom from the Past

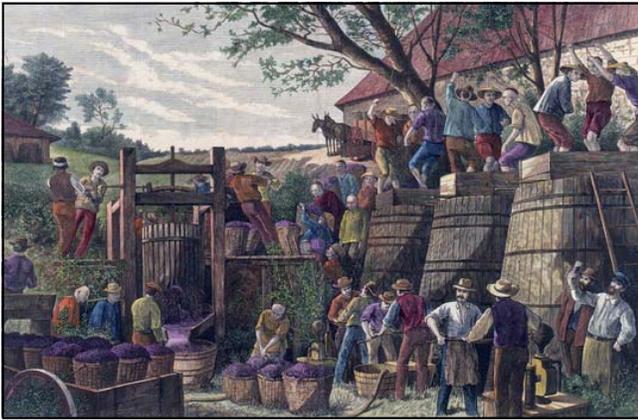


Former St. Helena mayors, left to right, Alston Hayne, Greta Ericson, Lowell Smith, Frank Toller, and Ken Slavens shared their perspectives about governing St. Helena with the audience at this March program celebrating the 135th anniversary of the incorporation of the City of St. Helena. Thank you to the Culinary Institute of America for providing a very tasty birthday cake for the occasion.

Chinese in St. Helena, continued from page 1

Chinese had many other occupations in the valley. They picked hops and gathered wheat; tended orchards; and grew peanuts, strawberries, and vegetables as tenant farmers. They became valued domestic servants and cooks. They built all the railroads in the county and worked in local quicksilver mines.

Attitudes varied from the beginning of the wave of Asians into the new state. While a few laws encouraged this source of cheap labor, from 1850 on various taxes were imposed on many “coolie” occupations. Chinese could not testify in court or become

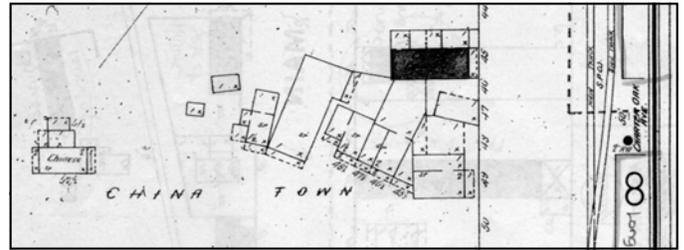


Many workers shown here are Chinese. “The Vintage in California,” by Paul Frenzeny, was published in Harper’s Weekly in 1878. Courtesy Chinese Historical Society of America.

citizens. The federal Chinese Exclusion Acts (1882–1892) disallowed Chinese from landing on US shores (or returning from visits home).

In this climate of discrimination, a group of St. Helenans formed an Anti-Coolie League in 1886, marching on Chinatown to demand that it be vacated within ten days. Three businessmen purchased land outside the city limits, giving Chinese 30 days to move there. In response, leading vineyardists held a citizens’ meeting to quell the eviction. They argued that such an action would have a negative effect on the community and visitors alike, and that the major labor source would be forced out before other vineyard labor could be found. Chinatown occupants refused to move, hired a lawyer—and remained.

Census figures show 17 Chinese in Napa County in 1860 (total population 5,521), 263 in 1870 (total 13,235), 905 in 1880, 875 in 1890, and 541 in 1900. In 1880, about 200 workers lived in St. Helena, peaking at about 600 in the 1890s. Calistoga, Rutherford, and Napa also had Chinese neighborhoods. By 1886, 80 percent of farm laborers in California were Chinese, a number that was typical in Napa County.



This 1899 Sanborn fire insurance map shows that St. Helena’s Chinatown was located on the west side of Main Street at what became Charter Oak Avenue. Today the site is occupied by Constellation Wine US. Courtesy St. Helena Public Library.

When a visitor approached St. Helena going north on Main Street in the 1870s and looked to the west at Charter Oak Avenue, Chinatown could be seen set back a distance. Two rows of shabby wooden buildings were built of scrap lumber, with a temple at the western end. Each building had a store in front, such as Quong Loong High & Co. or Hong Yuck & Co. Sam Sing Lung was a store owner and labor contractor. In the rear



St. Helena Star ad in 1901. St. Helena Historical Society collection.

rooms gambling or fan-tan were pastimes. These rooms and the attics overhead provided the sleeping quarters inhabited by young, single men in pigtailed wearing blue robes, loose slippers, and silk hats.



St. Helena’s Chinatown before it was damaged by fire in 1884. It was quickly rebuilt, and in 1898 eight buildings, including four stores and the temple, were destroyed by an untended cooking fire. In 1911, another fire destroyed what remained. Chinatown land and buildings were owned by a succession of Caucasian residents. Courtesy Napa County Historical Society.

SHHS Cooks Up Dessert & Wins Dough!



The "Chocolate Diva" team, left to right, Kim Farmer, Susanne Salvestrin, Nancy Caffo, and Tricia Westbrook serving up the judges' favorite.

The Historical Society, under the leadership of Susanne Salvestrin, made its debut as a contestant in the Hall Winery Cabernet Cookoff on Saturday, April 30th—and came home with the Judges' First Choice medal in the Amateur category!

The idea was to cook something delicious that paired perfectly with Hall Cabernet. Those of you who have enjoyed nibbling on Susanne's desserts at our holiday dinners probably aren't surprised that her entry won. The recipe for chocolate-raspberry-truffle-covered brownies with raspberry reduction sauce drizzle was billed as "historically indulgent and fab with Cab." Susanne's brownies disappeared as quickly as they were plated.

Profits from the event will be divided and awarded to winners. It's still unclear how much money SHHS won, but everyone involved had great fun and made some new friends for the society.

One eager eater asked Susanne for her name so he could put her in his will. Without missing a beat, she said, "If you like them [the brownies] so much, put the Historical Society in your will!" Thank you, Susanne, and thanks to everyone who came and voted for us.

SHHS Future Goings-On

Mark your calendars for **June 14th!** Philip P. Choy, from the Chinese Historical Society of America, and local historian Mariam Hansen will explore Chinese immigration to California and St. Helena.

Message from the Interim Director



Tricia Westbrook

It was with much sadness that the Historical Society learned about the departure of Mary Neilan from the position of St. Helena city manager. Mary and I recently worked closely together to determine what must happen in order for the ancient aboriginal artifacts, unearthed during the St. Helena Flood Protection Project excavation, to be allowed to come back to St. Helena as a part of the SHHS collection.

Six organizations have an official stake in the final disposition of these artifacts: the Mishewal Wappo Tribe, the City of St. Helena, the California State Water Resources Control Board, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Native American Heritage Commission, and the State Office of Historical Preservation. This is a complicated and delicate effort. With Mary's help, we made some progress in forging positive relationships with these groups.

We commend Mary for her work with us related to the artifacts. We hope that whoever follows her in that role on behalf of the City will approach it with as much intelligence, cultural sensitivity, political savvy, and understanding of the value these artifacts hold for our community as Mary did.

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ST. HELENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 87
 ST. HELENA, CA 94574

TELEPHONE: 707-967-5502
 E-MAIL: SHSTORY@SHPL.ORG

Images of the Past: St. Helena may be purchased for \$21.99, including tax. Contact the office for more information.