



Chinatown pre 1885

“The Eureka Plan”: Humboldt County’s Chinese Expulsions

by Katie Buesch

In 2019, the Clarke Museum received a clay jar found in Old Town over 130 years ago.¹ The donor said that a family member a few generations back had found it in an abandoned building, but the current owners felt strange about having it in their possession. That building was located on the strip of land between E and F Streets and 4th and 5th Streets, home to Eureka’s Chinatown. The pot was dug up and carried home following Eureka’s first Chinese expulsion in 1885.

Chinatown no longer exists because of a combination of legally supported racism, fear, and lack of cultural understanding. These sentiments were not unique to Humboldt County and they ideologically connected the isolated county to events happening elsewhere in the United States.

In the 1850s, many Chinese men came to the United States via the “Six Companies”, which were known as both labor recruiters and a support system for Chinese immigrants coming to the U.S.² For those who couldn’t pay their passage to California, the Companies paid up front and received a percentage of the worker’s pay until passage was paid off.³ Many of the people who came to the United States from China through the Six Companies prioritized saving money or sending money home when they could and most had the general goal of returning to China.⁴ Within China, members of the same community who arrived in a new area would stay together as a tong to maintain family and regional bonds.⁵ In California, these settlement patterns, oftentimes facilitated by the Six Companies, helped to protect the Chinese from the



Chinatown pre 1885. Unknown origin of handwriting.

lawlessness of the wild west.⁶ Originally, these tongs were structured as mutual benefit societies to help new Chinese immigrants in California.⁷ Tongs and the close knit nature of Chinese communities were largely misunderstood by non-Chinese communities in the United States and would prove to be a flash point in Eureka.

The Gold Rush period attracted miners from around the world to California. White miners looked for claims yielding \$16–\$20 per day, while the Chinese would settle for steady claims profiting \$5–\$8 per day. However, if a Chinese claim struck it rich, white miners would oftentimes chase the Chinese miners from it.⁸ According to Hubert Howe Bancroft's *History of California, 1860–1890*, the earliest people calling for the removal of the Chinese were white miners who disapproved of the Chinese miner's "frugality, industriousness, opium dens, and the practice of subjecting their women to compulsory prostitution."⁹

Early in California's history it wasn't economically feasible to expel the Chinese as there weren't enough people present in California to do the work that the Chinese did and, according to the *Humboldt Times* in 1855, a movement to expel the Chinese "would benefit only the mining interests of California at the

expense of the agricultural and commercial."¹⁰ In the earliest documented trouble between whites and Chinese Californians in 1856, the Sheriff came out and drove the white miners away from taking over the Chinese claim, but that kind of interference by the local sheriffs in later times was rare.¹¹

As access to surface gold in rivers diminished, the California state government imposed a mining tax on Chinese miners, which, by 1870, made up half of the state's revenue.¹² The tax was required by law and lack of payment could mean serious harm or death at the hands of tax collectors.¹³ Many Chinese workers moved to cities or changed their line of work. Locally, Chinese workers built Wildcat Road near Ferndale and a variety of logging roads connecting Ferndale and southwestern Humboldt County.¹⁴ They were also loggers, railroad builders, and farmers.

In Eureka, the Chinese formed their own community, Chinatown, on land rented from John Vance and C.S. Ricks around 1874.¹⁵ Chinatowns appeared throughout the state as a way for Chinese individuals to maintain community ties, religious and cultural traditions, and group security.¹⁶ Many of those outside of the Chinese community saw this as a refusal to assimilate. The conditions were cramped, sometimes with ten people



Man balancing two buckets on the wooden sidewalk on unpaved street.

to a house built out of refuse lumber from nearby mills.¹⁷ In the February 5, 1885 edition of the *Daily Times-Telephone*, the author states “[Chinatown] is a pestilential quarter where Chinese gambling dens, opium-smoking hell holes, and the lowest brothels abound...Under the present conditions of things there is not only danger from a moral point of view, but continual danger to life and property...”¹⁸

The economy slowed following the Civil War, and whites blamed the Chinese. In 1882, Eurekans passed a resolution to support the national Chinese Exclusion Act: “we have anxiously watched hordes of Mongolian paupers flooding our shores; we have seen our civilization almost subverted and our children driven from all avenues of honorable labor by aliens, foreign to our tongue, religion, customs, and social relations...”¹⁹

Local whites blamed the Chinese for the loss of jobs and declining work conditions, and the capitalists for hiring cheaper Chinese labor, seen as a threat to living wages for workers.²⁰ The Chinese were detested for their willingness to work for lower pay, even though they paid taxes and filled a valuable spot in the

economy by doing jobs that members of the white community wouldn’t.²¹ Labor unions promoted anti-Chinese rhetoric along with eight hour workdays and education promising to protect poorer white workers

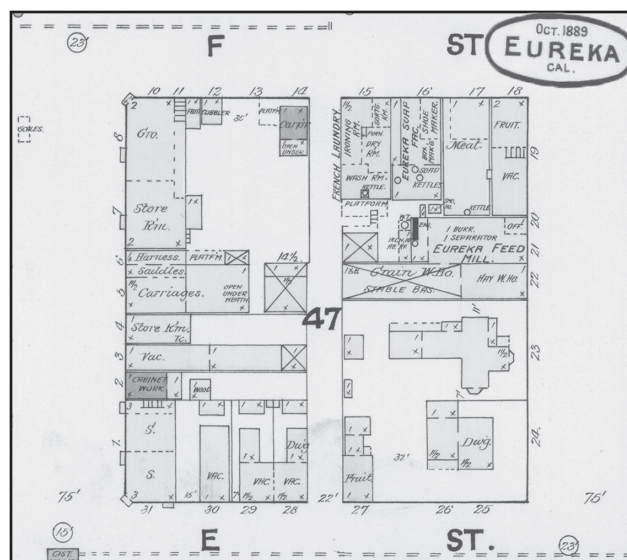
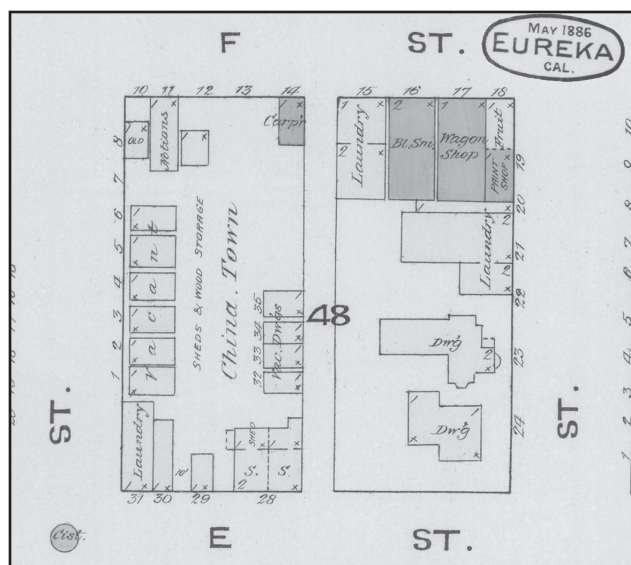
from diminishing wages.²²

Historians unanimously agree that the Chinese were not in competition with the white population because of the division of labor implemented by the whites themselves, that preferred

white laborers for higher paying jobs.²³ However, the rumor of the Chinese immigrant population replacing the resident white population ran wild, and white residents called on their political leaders to intervene.²⁴

Acts passed by the California government placing taxes on the Chinese and legalizing housing discrimination against them paved the way to legalized discrimination.²⁵ The national 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and its many amendments made Chinese immigration to the U.S. virtually impossible.²⁶ Along with laws making it illegal for Chinese individuals to testify in court against white individuals, whites made it known that the Chinese had no protections offered by the government of California. It was a matter of time before these laws would support drastic action against the Chinese.

Acts passed by the California government placing taxes on the Chinese and legalizing housing discrimination against them paved the way to legalized discrimination.



Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of Eureka from 1886 on the left and 1889 on the right. China Town is no longer there.

Violence in and around Chinatown was not unusual—reports of drunken men from nearby Two Street stumbling into Chinatown and picking fights with Chinese residents abound—one of these ended in the death of a white man who broke into a Chinese home on January 24, 1875 and the arrest of the Chinese resident who shot the intruder.²⁷ Children threw rocks at Chinese people passing by on the streets and the abuse, sometimes leading to white riots at the doorstep of Chinatown, appeared in the local newspapers.²⁸

Shootouts between tongs were also published in sensationalized newspaper articles. In some descriptions these tongs were secret societies of “highbinders” who had broken away from the Six Companies to participate in gang warfare.²⁹ Some claimed gang warfare was connected to the taxation and later national outlawing of opium, which moved sale and control of opium into black markets.³⁰ If these claims are true, it could have been a cause that local tongs staged fights over in the months leading up to February 1885, although records of exactly why the tongs were hosting shootouts are not extant.³¹

On February 6, 1885, one of these shootouts ended with the death of passerby and a popular city councilman, David Kendall.³² Within an hour, hundreds had gathered to discuss what to do—

suggestions included massacring all the Chinese or burning Chinatown to the ground.³³ Level-headed leaders moved the mob to nearby Centennial Hall and encouraged the election of a Committee of Fifteen made up of leading businessmen and citizens³⁴ to notify the Chinese that they were no longer welcome and needed to leave Eureka within twenty-four hours.³⁵

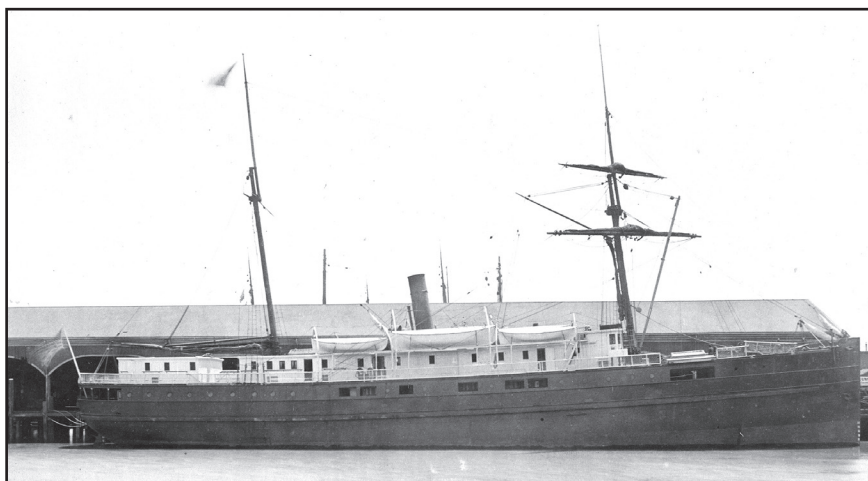
Remarkably, nobody else was killed in the next twenty-four hours, when the Chinese residents of Eureka were put on the ships *City of Chester*³⁶ and *Humboldt*³⁷ for San Francisco.³⁸ Some of these residents had lived in Eureka for ten to fourteen years.

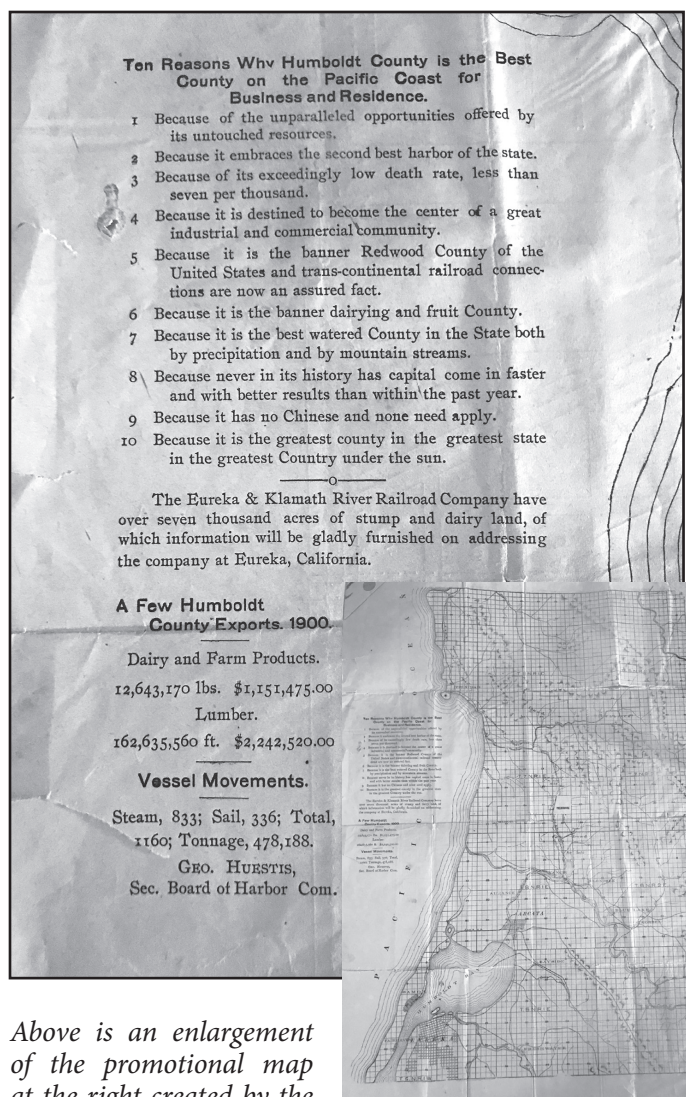
On February 7, 1885, twenty-four hours after the expulsion ruling was laid out, the largest meeting in Humboldt County’s history up to that point,

SS City of Chester The ship sank in 1888 near the Golden Gate.

K01.02571. CITY OF CHESTER.

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, collections





Above is an enlargement of the promotional map at the right created by the Eureka & Klamath River Railroad Company in 1900 to bring businesses to Humboldt County. Take note of reason #9 to come to Humboldt County.

numbering about 600 people, convened and drafted a resolution to ban the sale or lease of land to Chinese people and to boycott anyone dealing with Chinese goods or services.³⁹ After word came that a Chinese man tried to purchase land in Eureka through a white agent, the Committee of Fifteen met again and, led by attorney A.J. Bledsoe, encouraged every town in the county to expel their Chinese populations. With time, each town did and in February of 1886, Humboldt County proudly announced that it was the only county in California without a single Chinese person.⁴⁰

Newspapers conceded that there was one Chinese man named Charlie Moon, who lived and worked in Tom Bair's Ranch on Redwood Creek. Stories abound why Charlie was allowed to stay in the county—oftentimes it was attributed to his “Americanization,”

his marriage to a local native woman, and raising a family. A more pressing reason why Charlie was left alone was that Tom Bair threatened Charlie's expulsion escorts with a gun.⁴¹ In reality, Charlie was not the only Chinese man who remained in the county.

The ‘clean’ expulsion was praised in local papers as “the Eureka Plan”. This “Plan” was the first time a Chinese expulsion had occurred under the eyes of a city government without adverse legal intervention against the perpetrators.⁴² After the Eureka expulsion, many of Eureka's Chinese residents in San Francisco called a meeting to demand reparations for not only property left behind (and later taken by Eureka's, like the clay tea jar), but as victims of what could have become a massacre.⁴³ Consul Bee, the Chinese consul in San Francisco argued that “all of the Chinese expelled are not criminals. Many of them are peaceable merchants, whose business has been broken up by their expulsion.”⁴⁴ The consul built a case against the city's actions and rightfully claimed that the outcome of his case *Wing Hing v. Eureka*, would set a precedent in future expulsion events—however the results were not in their favor.⁴⁵ The case was dismissed under unclear circumstances, and other communities took note that expulsions could be repeated legally across the country without repercussions.⁴⁶ With the combination of local, state, and national laws against the Chinese and the events in Eureka, expulsions occurred throughout California. Within the same year as Eureka's expulsion, over one hundred towns on the west coast expelled their Chinese residents. Some, like Tacoma, WA, imitated Eureka down to the point of having a Committee of Fifteen delivering the expulsion ruling to their 350 Chinese residents.⁴⁷

In the hundreds of expulsions that happened across the state and the country, reparations were only paid out once in response to a deadly and destructive riot shortly after Eureka's Chinese expulsion. President Grover Cleveland paid the Chinese government \$147,748 for the damages and deaths of Chinese residents, some who were burned alive in their homes, but the money went to the government and not to the people affected. The intention helped protect good trade relations between the two countries rather than actually help the people who were victimized by the mob.⁴⁸

In the void left behind by the expelled Chinese in Eureka, local workers prepared to see their lives improve, per the claims made by the Knights of Labor and Workingmen's Party.⁴⁹ Some individuals jumped at the opportunity to salvage what they could from Chinatown, including personal items left behind by

former residents such as the tea jar donated to the museum. Others took over the laundries and supplies left behind when the Chinese were forced out, forming monopolies on the industry and raising prices.⁵⁰ Ricks and Vance, landlords of Chinatown, “of course... agreed that the absence of the Chinese more [than] compensated for their losses [in rent money from the Chinese].”⁵¹ Newspapers outside of the area claimed that, a year after the expulsion happened “the town has done well, all business has been good, and there has been no mourning for the departed pagans.”⁵²

Homes and businesses on the old Chinatown plot were built, and the memory of Chinatown’s people began to fade.⁵³ But the racist legacy continued proudly, attested to in many documents, such as promotional pamphlets [see *article on Boosterism in this issue of the Historian-Ed.*], tourist guides, and newspaper articles published every few years on the anniversary of the expulsion and stored in our historical archives.

Conclusion

The national Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed in 1943 when China and the U.S. became allies in World War II.⁵⁴ The legacy of exclusion and expulsion still haunts us today. 2020 is the 135th anniversary of Eureka’s Chinese Expulsion. To this day, many residents and visitors to Eureka are unaware that Eureka had a Chinese community. This history has seen a recent revival, however, with the death of Ben Chin in May 2019. In 1954, sixty-eight years after the 1885 expulsion, the Chinese-American Chin family settled and opened a restaurant locally. In the face of continuing racial mistrust and prejudice, Ben Chin, who was a military veteran, persisted and opened the door to welcoming other Asian-Americans back into Humboldt County. The legacy of the February 1885 expulsion affects our community today, and it’s important that we acknowledge it.

HH

SOURCES

- ‘Committee of Vigilance of San Francisco - FoundSF’ <http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Committee_of_Vigilance_of_San_Francisco> [accessed 4 August 2019]
- Donley, Richard, ‘The Expulsion of the Chinese from Humboldt County’ (unpublished Barnum Award, Humboldt State College, 1961)
- ‘Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California (Chinese Americans)’ <https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/5views/5views3.htm> [accessed 12 July 2019]
- Genzoli, Andrew & Wallace E. Martin, *Redwood Bonanza ... a Frontier’s Reward, Lively Incidents In The Life of a New Empire* edition (Schooner Features, 1967)
- Hines, Larry, ‘The Chinese Must Go! An Account of the Expulsion of the Chinese from Humboldt County’ (unpublished Barnum Award, Humboldt State College, 1964)
- Huntington, C., *Memoir of Reverend C.A Huntington*, 1889, Humboldt County Historical Society
- Huntington, Sophia, ‘In Our Midst: The Chinese Expulsion from Eureka, California’ (unpublished History 490 Paper, Humboldt State University, 1999)
- Lanzendorfer, Joy, “I Saw My Countrymen Marched Out of Tacoma”, Longreads, 2019 <<https://longreads.com/2019/02/18/i-saw-my-countrymen-marched-out-of-tacoma/>> [accessed 12 July 2019]
- Perry, Ronald J, “WIPE OUT THE PLAGUE SPOTS”: THE EXPULSION OF CHINESE FROM HUMBOLDT COUNTY’ (Humboldt State University)
- Reynolds, C. N., ‘The Chinese Tongs’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 40.5 (1935), 612–23
- ‘Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Eureka, Humboldt County, California.’ (Sanborn Map & Publishing Co. Limited, 1889), Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4364em.g4364em_g005331889>
- ‘SS City of Chester’ <<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/shipwrecks/city-of-chester/>> [accessed 21 July 2019]
- Tyson, George, ‘Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Eureka, Humboldt County, California’, 1886, Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA <https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn00533_001/>
- Woo, Peggy, ‘The Problem of the Chinese Expulsion from Humboldt County’ (unpublished Barnum Award, Humboldt State College, 1977)

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jar, Richard Fridley Collection, Accession Number: 2019.006.001. Clarke Historical Museum. George Tyson, ‘Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Eureka, Humboldt County, California’, 1886, Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA <https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn00533_001/>.
- 2 Larry Hines, ‘The Chinese Must Go! An Account of the Expulsion of the Chinese from Humboldt County’ (unpublished Barnum Award, Humboldt State College, 1964); Peggy Woo, ‘The Problem of the Chinese Expulsion from Humboldt County’ (unpublished Barnum Award, Humboldt State College, 1977), p. 2.
- 3 Richard Donley, ‘The Expulsion of the Chinese from Humboldt County’ (unpublished Barnum Award, Humboldt State College, 1961).
- 4 Sophia Huntington, ‘In Our Midst: The Chinese Expulsion from Eureka, California’ (unpublished History 490 Paper, Humboldt State University, 1999); Ronald J Perry, “WIPE OUT THE PLAGUE SPOTS”: THE EXPULSION OF CHINESE FROM HUMBOLDT COUNTY’ (Humboldt State University), p. 22; C. N. Reynolds, ‘The Chinese Tongs’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 40.5 (1935), 612–23 (p. 616).
- 5 Reynolds, p. 614.
- 6 Reynolds, pp. 614–15; Andrew & Wallace E. Martin Genzoli, *Redwood Bonanza ... a Frontier’s Reward, Lively Incidents In The Life of a New Empire* edition (Schooner Features, 1967), pp. 35, 37.
- 7 Reynolds, “The Chinese Tongs,” 615–16; Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America*, 50.

- 8 Donley, p. 5; Hines; 'Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California (Chinese Americans)' <https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/5views/5views3.htm> [accessed 12 July 2019]; Woo, p. 3.
- 9 Donley, pp. 4–5.
- 10 Donley, pp. 6–7.
- 11 Hines.
- 12 Hines; Joy Lanzendorfer, "I Saw My Countrymen Marched Out of Tacoma", Longreads, 2019 <<https://longreads.com/2019/02/18/i-saw-my-countrymen-marched-out-of-tacoma/>> [accessed 12 July 2019].
- 13 Sophia Huntington; Perry, n. p. 28 from the diary of a tax collector: "I was sorry to stab the poor creature; but the law makes it necessary to collect the tax; and that's where I get my profit."
- 14 Turner, Place Names of Humboldt County, California, 49, 231.
- 15 Hines.
- 16 Sophia Huntington.
- 17 Lanzendorfer.
- 18 Sophia Huntington.
- 19 Perry, "'WIPE OUT THE PLAGUE SPOTS': THE EXPULSION OF CHINESE FROM HUMBOLDT COUNTY," pp. 38–39.
- 20 Donley, pp. 8–9; Perry, p. 29.
- 21 Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California (Chinese Americans); Donley.
- 22 Perry, pp. 29, 31.
- 23 Hines.
- 24 Woo, p. 4; According to "The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America," "the rhetoric of the anti-Chinese movement focused a lot on Chinese immigrants as an economic threat—that 'cheap coolie labor' would undercut the American working man. But behind these economic fears were racial assumptions. At the time, most white Americans believed the Chinese were an innately servile race that could never assimilate and become upstanding American citizens". Donley, p. 26.
- 25 Sophia Huntington; Perry.
- 26 Sophia Huntington.
- 27 Genzoli, p. 35.
- 28 Genzoli, p. 37.
- 29 Sophia Huntington.
- 30 Hoffmann, "The Historical Shift in the Perception of Opiates."
- 31 Reynolds, "The Chinese Tongs," 616; Hoffmann, "The Historical Shift in the Perception of Opiates."
- 32 A boy named Louis Baldschmidt was also shot in this incident—see Donley p. 18
- 33 C. Huntington, Memoir of Reverend C.A Huntington, 1889, p. 225, Humboldt County Historical Society.
- 34 Members included H. H. Buhne Jr (chairman), C. G. Taylor, Frank McGowan, W. S. Riddle, N. A. Libbey, E. B. Murphy, W. L. Mercer, W. J. Sweasey, James Brown, A. J. Bledsoe, Don Murphy, F. P. Thompson, W. J. McNamara and James Simpson. Eureka newspapers published names of the committee members, and, in later expulsions, individuals who helped in the expulsion so that grateful white residents could be sure to support their business endeavors. Hines.
- 35 Vigilante justice was not new in California during the Gold Rush period—San Francisco's Committee of Vigilance functioned as an extra-legal force that foreshadowed the Committee of Fifteen that would form in Eureka in response to Kendall's death. Interestingly, in Redwood Bonanza, Andrew Genzoli quotes C. G. Stafford in a letter to the Times-Telephone where Stafford claimed that the Committee of Fifteen's Eureka expulsion ruling was more justified than the response of San Francisco's Committee of Vigilance to the death of journalist James King of William. See also: 'Committee of Vigilance of San Francisco - FoundSF' <http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Committee_of_Vigilance_of_San_Francisco> [accessed 4 August 2019].
- 36 'SS City of Chester', n. *The City of Chester* sank at the entrance to San Francisco harbor in 1888 after being struck by an ocean liner named Oceanic. Early reports blamed the Chinese crew on the *City of Chester* for letting passengers on the ship drown following the collision, but firsthand accounts detail rescue efforts made by the Chinese crew to save the passengers. <<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/shipwrecks/city-of-chester/>> [accessed 21 July 2019].
- 37 Perry, n. The ships *City of Chester* and *Humboldt* were in the bay prior to the expulsion, which was rather unusual for a sparsely populated area. There are theories put forth by Jean Pfaelzer, author of *Driven Out* that the ships were in port specifically for the expulsion of the Chinese prior to Kendall's shooting but that the shooting gave an even better reason for the townspeople to remove the Chinese. The presence of the two ships made it possible to expel all of Eureka's Chinese in one trip.
- 38 Perry, pp. 12–13.
- 39 Genzoli, p. 48; Perry, n. pg 53. When the city of Eureka updated its city charter in 1943, this stipulation was added, stating that the City could not patronize Chinese contractors, sub contractors, or businesses operated by Chinese, copying a statement in the California Constitution. A few years later, that clause would be found unconstitutional, but it remained in the Eureka city charter until 1959.
- 40 Sophia Huntington; Perry, p. 14.
- 41 Donley, p. 24.
- 42 Perry, p. 16.
- 43 Lanzendorfer; This wasn't without precedent: American residents had gone after the Chinese government following riots in Canton. Genzoli, pp. 51–52.
- 44 Genzoli, p. 50.
- 45 Genzoli, pp. 51–52.
- 46 Perry, p. 15.
- 47 Lanzendorfer.
- 48 Lanzendorfer.
- 49 Perry, pp. 30–31.
- 50 Genzoli, p. 49.
- 51 Donley, p. 26.
- 52 Morning Press, 15 Feb 1885
- 53 'Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Eureka, Humboldt County, California.' (Sanborn Map & Publishing Co. Limited, 1889), Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4364em.g4364em_g005331889>.
- 54 Lanzendorfer.



Final Call Donations



Julie Abrahamsen
Esther Allen
Chestine Anderson
Hank Appleton
Cam & Lisa Appleton
Jim Armstrong
Jerry M. Avila
Phyllis M. Bailey
Scott Baker
Ron Barkley
Patricia Barnum
Mr & Mrs C Robert Barnum
James & Heather Bartlett
Gerald Beck
Joan Berman
Tom Bertain
Elio & Janice Bertolini
Mary Biehn
Joseph Biondini
Gary Blickenstaff
Larry & Cheryl Bowermaster
Diane Bowers
Richard Brown
Roxanne Burgess
Sandra J. Armentrout
Laura Mahan Bush
Leroy Bush
Charles Bussman
Shirley Butler
Sally Call
James Michael Carter
Pamela Cavanagh
Mike
Richard Cave
Barbara Cerny
James R. Chapple
Carlin Christensen
Edmund Clausen
Donald Cloney
Donald Cloney
Stanley & Barbara Cochran
Lorraine I. Colby
Gloria Cottrell
Sterling Cousins
Cousins Family
Katy Cunningham
Mary Dawn Cunningham
Tanya Currier
Janet Day
Maria Delaney
Stacey DeShazo
Chuck Dewitt
Mary Dias
Elaine Dillon

John & Sue Dimmick
Rose Marie Dinsmore
Shannon Dixon
Gregory Dodge
James Dunbar
Charles & Judith Dvorak
Norma Papke Dye
Mike & Katharine Eagan
Steven Littlefield & Sharon Edmondson
Robert Fallis
Evo & Catherine Fanucchi
Michele Fell-Casale
Bob & Ginny Felter
Mickey Foster
Jane Fraser
Duane & Karen Fredrickson
Maxine Anderson Freson
Titia Fulton
Darrell Furtado
Catherine Garrison
Mervin & Gail Giacomini
Willis & Patricia Gipson
Patsy Givins
Lesley Graham
Melinda Groom
Viola Hague
Peter Hall
Robert & Carol Hallmark
Charles & Judith Hampton
Marian Hancock
Tom Hannah
Arlene Hartin
Martin & Susan Hauan
Dan & Donna Hauser
Diane Hawk
Jean Hawkins
Karen Hendricks
John E. Hill, Sr.
Norman Hinman
Glenn Hoffman
Cheryl Holt
Bill Honsal
Bob & Charleen Hoopes
Lee & Chris House
Dennis B. Howard
Lois Hunt
Paul Ivancich
Lincoln Jackson
Barry Jacobsen
Erla Jadro
Richard Johnson
James P Johnson
Kay Johnson

Kenneth & Pamm Johnson
Harry N. Johnson, DDS
Mary Kay
Sam Kelly
Robert Kirkpatrick
Thomas & Barbara Kugler
Larry & Gayle Lampi
John & Mary Lou Lange
Hughlette Ledbetter
Russ & Joan Lee
David Lichtenstern
Glen & Marie Liscom
Linda Lorvig
Gary Lozensky
Catherine Mace
Donald J MacMillen
Tim Mason
Joyce Mather
James Matthias
Bill & Laura Matthias
Charlie Mattila
Richard Maxwell
Aida McBride
Delores McBroome
Don McCann
Daniel & Lynne McLaughlin
Thomas & Gretha McMurray
Everene D. McPherson
Pam Mendelsohn
Hugh & Shirley Metcalf
Candace Miller
Henry Moore
Lynda Moore
Judith Moranda
Michael R & Linda Moreland
David W Morris
Greg & Betsy Mullins
Anita J Murchie
Mr. & Mrs. John Murray
Jack & Wynona Nash
Linda Nellist
Linda Nicholson & Thomas Adam
Gordon Nitsch
Patrick & Victoria Noonan
Ralph Norling
Albert & Helen Norton
Frank Onstine
Patrick O'Shea
Grant & Georgina Pace
Robert Palmrose
Gary Paoli
LaRue Parsons
Thane & Karen Parton

Remo & Easter Pecolatto
David Perry
Doug & Karla Peterson
Shirley Lake Petterson
Frances Rapin
Charmayne Replogle
Stan Reynolds
Michael A Ring
Johanna Rodoni
Al Sanders
Frances Schatz
Jeremiah & Mary Scott
Lawrence & Leona Seidell
Russell Shaddix
Beth Anderson Smith
Slater Smith
Jackie A. Sousa
Jerry & Barbara Spellenberg
Ken Starkey
Timothy Stewart
Janice Stokes
Brian & Lisa Stone
Debby & Dick Storre
Joyce Preston Stroeher
Ross Stromberg
Terry Strong
Betty Sweaney
John Tallman
Eugene Thomas
Dennis W. & Gloria Turner
Don Tuttle
Peggy Van Doorn
Pamela Patten Wagner
Joe Walund
Leon & Elaine Warmuth
John Warren
Kevin & Candy Watts
Edward & Judith Webb
Elizabeth Webster
Val Webster
Kathleen Weed
Myrna Weingartner
Paul Werblow
Janet C. West
Del & Elsie Westman
Virginia I Whisler
Oral Whitlow
Lura Ann Winzler
Sharalee & Thomas Wrigley
John A Wynands
Betty & Lloyd Yandell
Don Yarger

THE EDITOR'S RABBIT HOLE

January 1, 2020

Dear Fred,

Who knew? You have been one of my best friends since we were joined at the hip as undergraduate students at U.C. Berkeley. Turns out you had secrets. But, I suppose, they weren't really secrets. Almost a thousand newspapers across the nation in February 1952 knew your "secret". But your best buds from the U.C. Berkeley dorms did not.

I guess you did. Several years ago, you tried to share your family history with me when you pulled out a yellowed and well-worn, front page article from the *San Francisco Chronicle* printed 67 years ago showing me your "claim to fame". At that time, I was suitably horrified at what your family had faced, in liberal California, but the significance of it didn't really register until, as editor, I began work on this issue of the *Historian*. Then I chased your story down a rabbit hole. Your rabbit hole.

The clarity of your family's issue layered into the 1885 historical expulsion of the Chinese not only from Humboldt County but across our young nation in a racist tidal wave. In 2020, I'm not sure if that tidal wave has calmed, given the current views towards immigration and race.

As it was years ago that you showed me, I have only a vague recollection of the newspaper article. More than anything, I remembered being impressed that there was a photo of your mom and dad and Richard, your older brother, on the front page article. It had something to do with housing discrimination.

With my new favorite editor's tool, newspapers.com, I was able to do a quick search to see if I could find that article from 1952 and if it would be relevant to the *Expulsion* article. The search result threw me deeper into the rabbit hole as I found more than 950 articles with your father's name and I became obsessed with seeing whether all of those articles actually referred to your family. They did.

I spent a few days glued to my computer screen trying to understand how your family became known nationally in a few short weeks in February 1952 and why there were articles from 46 of the 48 states plus both of the soon-to-be states of Hawaii and Alaska.

Your story went out over the Associated Press and was picked up in such diverse spots as Florida, Oklahoma, South Dakota, New York City and Eureka, CA. Yes, even the *Humboldt Times Standard* on February 23, 1952 ran the article with the photo of your family on the front page, "above the fold." As it turns out, follow up articles on your family's case made

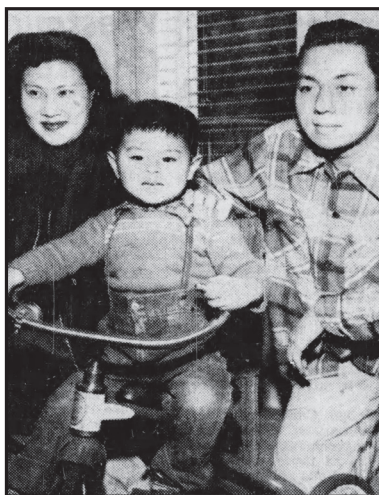
it into the *Humboldt Times Standard* several times in the following month. One of the headlines was "Furore Renewed — Racial Issue." Was the "furore renewed" referring to the multiple expulsions of Chinese from Humboldt county? That is a rabbit hole for another day.

So, what was your story that caught the eye of the nation in 1952? To set the stage, it was 1952 on the eve of "National Brotherhood Week".[see page 23 for more information]

It started with you, or at least the anticipation of you. Your parents had graduated from Earlham College in Indiana and had made it to the west coast with your then three-year-old brother, Richard. Your dad, Sing, had chosen to become a U.S. citizen after college when the Chinese Revolution placed him at odds with his native country of China. Your mom, Grace, had been born in the U.S.A.

You were less than a month away from being born. It was time to start the 1950s American dream...your parents decided to buy a house in the Southwood tract of South San Francisco. They made a deposit and were ready with their down payment when democracy took a detour through racism.

The all Caucasian Southwood residents objected to your parents being allowed to purchase and move in. Their fear was that if your dad and mom with their growing family (which included the anticipated you) were to move into their neighborhood, the property values would go down. Racism colluded with greed.



Grace (mom), Richard (older brother) and Sing (dad) Associated Press photo that ran in hundreds of papers across the U.S. during the latter part of Feb. 1952

Although the Supreme Court in 1917 had already ruled that your mom and dad had a legal right to purchase the house, when faced with some of the hostile Southwood residents, your parents decided let democracy rule. They asked the Southwood residents to vote on whether they should be allowed to buy their home. Grace and Sing agreed to abide by the majority vote, betting that democracy and the American dream would work to their advantage. Ballots were sent to all who lived in the Southwood tract. To their dismay, and it turns out the dismay of most of the nation, the Southwood residents resoundingly objected: 174 to 24 with four having no opinion.

There were editorials; there were letters to the editor; there was shame. The City of San Francisco debated demanding that the separate City of South San Francisco could not use the words “San Francisco” in their

city’s name. Some columnists pointed to the already growing fear of Communist propaganda which would use this case as proof that the United States did not support the truth of equality. Your family’s case had a global impact as editorials around the world were written about you and your family.

As I fell deeper into your rabbit hole, I remembered why I had even considered telling your story in this *Historian*. In 1885, the Caucasian citizens of Eureka gave the Chinese citizens 24 hours to get out of Humboldt county or face the gallows that had been erected at City Hall. With 135 years between that event and today, the horror has not diminished. But 67 years after the Eureka Plan to rid the county of Chinese, the Southwood residents in South San Francisco had found a far less dramatic, but just as effective way of keeping “different folks” out of their community. And here we are 67 years after the Southwood event, and we are still entangled in racism, discrimination, and greed.

Fred, how could this have happened? Or more importantly how could this still be happening? How can we still be looking at immigrants as anything but our future? Go back almost 400 years and some of my ancestors were trying to make a go of this new and radical country. What about my German ancestors who in the mid 1800s came blindly to find a new life, finding the American dream?

Then I remembered that this is YOUR rabbit hole I have fallen into. And here is where I can’t help but

“I was sure everybody believed in democracy.”

~Your dad responding to reporters after the negative result of the vote.

smile. About two weeks after the devastating news that Southwood had turned down your family, the media was filled with new information from the Sing and Grace Sheng family. First there was an outpouring of communities across the nation offering you a home. But more importantly, there was a new baby boy... you were born in the beginning of March, a couple of weeks after myself. Your birth was covered in almost 700 newspapers and, again, 46 of the 48 states plus Hawaii and Alaska (two different holdouts this time). Your photo made it across the country!

Your baby sister Michelle who was born many years later never made it into the L.A. Times. Your nieces and nephews will, hopefully, find their own paths that don’t require revisiting the systemic racism your mom and dad unexpectedly discovered.

What I don’t get, is that you were just Fred to me. You didn’t represent racism, discrimination, democracy, inequality, or fodder for Communist propaganda. You were and are, just Fred. My best friend. The one who will always tell me the truth. The one I grew up with during our youthful college years. The one who sat with me late into the night, long enough to actually force me to understand Calculus well enough to receive an A from U.C. Berkeley. That is no small feat.

In retrospect, conversations with your parents and brother at family dinners, might have been different had I known your story. But as it was, we always found plenty of rabbit holes to disappear into.

Much love,
~Wendy

Wendy Platt Hill
Editor

HH

From page 3 of the front section of L.A. Times on March 13, 1952. The caption reads “His name’s Fred” shown here with your parents on your way home from the hospital.

