



IMAGES
of America

CHINESE IN SAN JOSE
AND THE
SANTA CLARA VALLEY

*Chinese Historical and Cultural Project,
Lillian Gong-Guy, and Gerrye Wong*

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The Chinese Historical and Cultural Project (CHCP) dedicated the Ng Shing Gung Museum at the History Park in San Jose to the people of San Jose in September 1991.

ON THE COVER: Prominent Chinatown businessman Young Quong Duck stands proudly with his large family in front of their two-story Victorian home at Fourth and Hensley Streets in San Jose. The Young family lived there from 1923 to 1941. (Courtesy Young Quong Duck Family.)

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This book is dedicated to the many community members who have supported the Chinese Historical and Cultural Project in its mission to preserve the proud history of Chinese Americans in the Santa Clara Valley.

CHINESE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PROJECT

EMBRACE OUR CULTURAL
HERITAGE TO ENRICH
GENERATIONS TO COME

五 聖 宮

REPLICA OF "NG SHING GUNG" 1888

DEDICATION : SEPTEMBER 29, 1991
SAN JOSE HISTORICAL MUSEUM
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

承先啟後
繼往開來
李新平 臺

The dedication plaque on the Heritage Brick Donor Wall in the garden adjacent to the Ng Shing Gun Museum is pictured above. (Courtesy CHCP.)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Chinese Historical and Cultural Project (CHCP) is proud this work acknowledges the role of Chinese Americans in the Santa Clara Valley. I wish to thank our community for lending its time, photographs, and stories for this historical publication. I also would like to thank the community for its support of CHCP and its programs over its 20 years. I must first mention coauthors Lillian Gong-Guy and Gerrye Wong for their stewardship of this organization and this project. And although they remain anonymous under the banner of CHCP, the members must also be thanked. In particular, I give enormous gratitude to my coeditors, Anita Wong Kwock and historian extraordinaire Connie Young Yu, for their tireless efforts in bringing forth the clarity, accuracy, and beauty of the stories. The authors also wish to thank Debbie Gong-Guy for her support and Richard Johns for his technical assistance. We are all indebted to Arcadia Publishing and its editor John Poultney, who not only guided us through the process, but also took an interest in our history.

To tell the story of Chinese people over 150 years in a limited space is a daunting task. It is worrisome that stories might be overlooked or individuals neglected. But I am confident that this work gives a fine overview into the lives of these pioneers as they transformed both themselves and the nation their descendants now call home. Most important to me is that we are giving face and providing voice to people who themselves might not be able to. To all of those who have contributed to this proud legacy, I give our most respectful and grateful acknowledgment.

—Dr. Rodney M. Lum
President
Chinese Historical and Cultural Project

INTRODUCTION

This great, rugged expanse of land became the “Valley of the Heart’s Delight” in the late 19th century through labor and skill, and with technology and innovation, this region was known throughout the world as “Silicon Valley” by the end of the 20th century. Here is an extended success story with the Chinese playing a key role throughout.

“The Chinese Question” was the major controversy in 19th-century San Jose. A church was burned to the ground because a minister organized a Sunday school for Chinese children. A German American landowner was reviled and threatened because he made a contract with Chinese merchants. An anti-Chinese convention was held in San Jose touting the popular theme of the time, “The Chinese must go!” Why did they come? Like other immigrants, they came for survival and opportunity. Leaving impoverished villages in southern China in the mid-1800s, the Chinese took to the vast expanses of the Santa Clara Valley, developing the land for the great California industry of agriculture. They plowed fields, planted and harvested abundant crops of fruits and vegetables, and preserved and distributed them. They dug ditches and built walls, roads, and railroads. With gentrification, they were cooks and servants in homes and hotels. Facing racist attacks in one form or another, the Chinese survived by laboring long hours for lower pay and taking jobs whites rejected. During the depression of the 1870s, the Chinese were the scapegoats of a discontented labor movement.

In the winter of 1876–1877, U.S. Senate hearings took place in San Francisco calling for the testimony of “California’s leading citizens” on the issue of Chinese immigration. Robert F. Peckham, owner of the San Jose Woolen Mills, stated that his business “cannot be carried on without Chinese labor.” Railroad magnates Leland Stanford and Charles Crocker, who employed thousands of Chinese building the Transcontinental Railroad, testified to the capabilities and trustworthiness of the Chinese. Declared Crocker, “Without Chinese labor we would be thrown back in all branches of industry, farming, mining, reclaiming lands and everything else.”

In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by Congress, banning Chinese laborers from immigrating and also denying their naturalization to U.S. citizenship. This act caused untold suffering, separated families, and created a society of single Chinese men. Making the Chinese ineligible for citizenship legitimized discrimination toward them in every aspect of American life. San Jose, like many cities, enacted ordinances to harass the Chinese, from restricting laundries to forbidding Chinese employment on public works. Following a series of violent expulsions of the Chinese throughout the West Coast, the Market Street Chinatown was destroyed by an arson fire on May 4, 1887, and San Jose citizens rejoiced. Had it not been for the courage and steadfastness of one John Heinlen, who leased his land to the Chinese, the outcome would have been tragic for the Chinese and a shameful blight on San Jose’s history.

Heinlenville, which lasted for 44 years, was home base for all the Chinese in the valley and was beloved for its colorful festivals and community spirit. The customs and traditions were strong, and the children attended Chinese school after American school. But their aspirations and dreams began in the integrated classrooms of San Jose. When the last Chinatown was torn

down, young Chinese Americans started attending college and wanted to be professionals. They faced discrimination in housing and hiring and often changed vocations. Valley firms did not hire Chinese engineers in the 1930s.

The Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, but the quotas remained. After the 1965 immigration act, families were reunited, and a new influx of immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan and other parts of Asia brought new talent and energy to the valley. The number continues to grow, as newcomers immigrate from Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia.

And here, the story changes: the Chinese, once the backbone of the agricultural industry, are now major players in an enormous technology-centered economy. Chinese engineers, entrepreneurs, and professionals have contributed their talents to what has become one of the most educated areas of the United States. Chinese shopping centers with gourmet restaurants are popular with all. Chinese culture has entered into the mainstream, with non-Chinese joining in Chinese language classes and activities.

Everything is forward-looking in the valley, and even this interest in things Chinese seems new. Twenty years ago, the Chinese Historical and Cultural Project (CHCP) was founded to educate, preserve, and promote Chinese American history and culture in the Santa Clara Valley. "There was a Chinatown in San Jose?" people ask in surprise—there were five. And we have a story to tell. Here we fill a major gap, connecting past and present with this book, our lasting legacy to future generations.

—Connie Young Yu, Historian
Chinese Historical and Cultural Project

One

SAN JOSE'S FIVE CHINATOWNS

1850s–1930s

First Market Street Chinatown	1866–1870
Vine Street Chinatown	1870–1872
Second Market Street Chinatown	1871–1887
Woolen Mills Chinatown	1887–1902
Heinlenville (Sixth Street Chinatown)	1887–1931

The Chinese played a major role in developing and building the Santa Clara Valley, and their settlements have a colorful history. Yet from the very beginning, their presence in *Gum San*, “Gold Mountain,” was threatened with challenges. By 1852, there were 25,000 Chinese in California working in mining or as laborers, servants, and laundrymen. During the 1870s, California suffered an economic depression with resulting labor unrest. The Chinese, willing to work at menial jobs for low wages, faced resentment from unemployed whites. With the economy failing, the Chinese were attacked by angry mobs and persecuted by discriminatory legislation, locally and statewide.

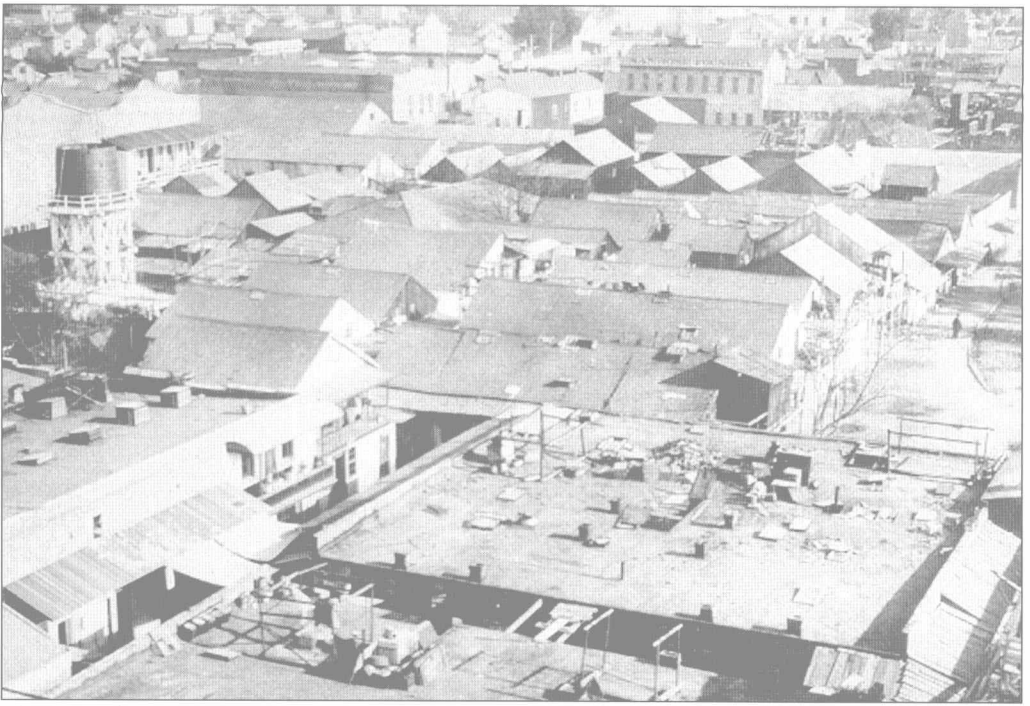
Facing desperate conditions in the villages of southern China, floods, drought, and famine, the Cantonese persisted in coming to California despite the anti-Chinese movement in America. On the eve of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the population of Chinese immigrants peaked in 1882, with over 39,500 entering the state. To withstand the harassment and hostility toward them, the Chinese banded together in communities. These Chinatowns not only offered physical and spiritual sanctuary, they also became havens for celebrating holidays with kinfolk, headquarters for employment, and a place for shopping and recreation.

From 1866 to 1931, there were five Chinatowns that served the needs of immigrant Chinese as they sought their fortunes in the rapidly growing California economy. One followed the other as home base for the Chinese, providing a safe harbor for Chinese laborers, merchants, and ultimately families and making their survival possible in stormy times.



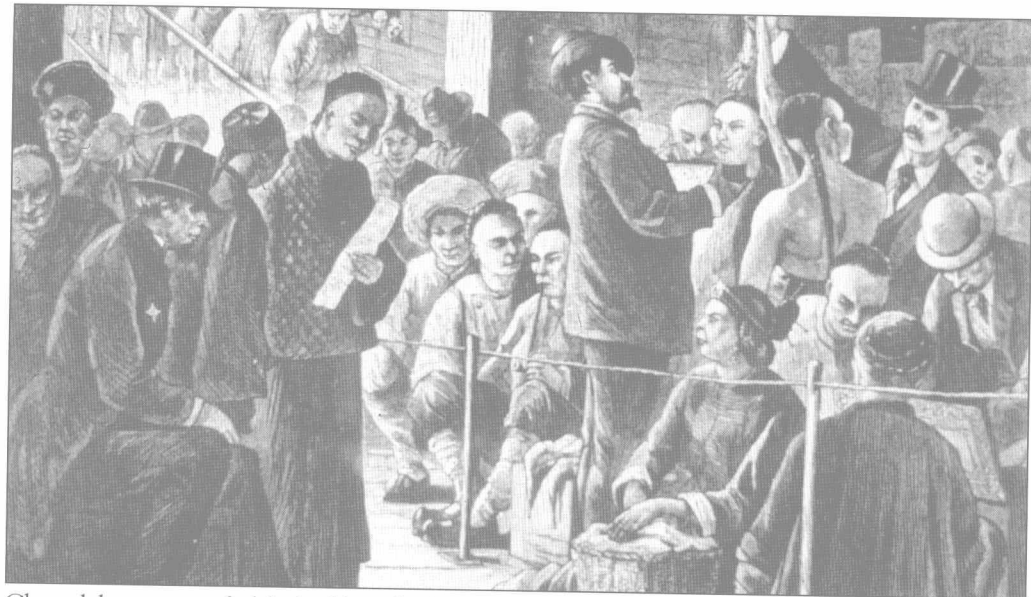
The five historic Chinatowns were located in various parts of the city of San Jose.

- (A) Vine Street Chinatown (1870–1872), was where residents moved when the Market Street Chinatown burned. Five hundred people lived on this street of restaurants, lodging houses, brothels, gambling houses, and merchandise stores. When the Guadalupe River flooded, the community had to evacuate again.
- (B) The first Market Street Chinatown (1866–1870) burned in a mysterious fire. The Second Market Street Chinatown, also called the “Plaza Chinatown” (1872–1887), expanded beyond the original site, with many more stores, three restaurants, a large temple, and a theater. By 1876, over 1,400 people lived in this home base for the all the Chinese working in the valley.
- (C) The Woolen Mills Chinatown (1887–1902) was one of the two Chinatowns that emerged after the 1887 arson fire of the Market Street Chinatown. On Taylor Street along the Guadalupe River, it was the site of San Jose Woolen Mills, one of the earliest manufacturing firms in the city, which employed Chinese workers since 1869. Buildings of wood frame and brick were constructed for stores and lodging, and a temple and theater were also built under the direction of Ng Fook, who died a year later. When Chin Shin (“Big Jim”), who ran a large cannery, left for China, the town declined, and a fire in 1902 finished it off. The site was excavated by archeologists in 1999 during the upgrade of Route 87.
- (D) Heinlerville (1887–1931), on Cleveland Avenue, was the longest-lived Chinatown of San Jose, built by John Heinlen on his land near a residential neighborhood despite vehement protests from the city. Designed by San Jose’s famous architect, Theodore Lenzen, Heinlerville was surrounded by a fence to protect it from harm. Heinlerville’s colorful history ended during the Depression in 1931. The site became San Jose’s corporation yard, destined in the 21st century for redevelopment.



The second Market Street Chinatown was bustling with activity from shops and cottage industries manufacturing cigars, shoes, clothing, furniture, and brooms. By the 1880s, Chinatown was expanding southward along First Street. Downtown merchants and residents pushing plans for the beautification of San Jose abhorred this growing Chinese presence in such a central location of the city. A hundred years later, this would be the site of one of San Jose's finest and largest hotels, the Fairmont San Jose. (Courtesy History San Jose.)





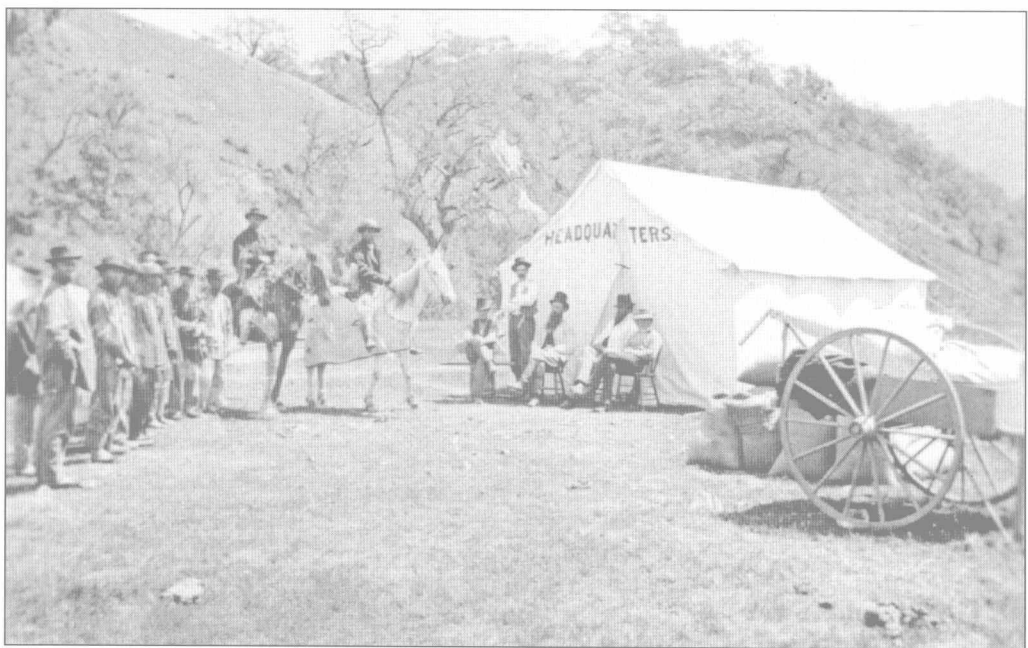
Cheap labor was needed for building the West, and young Chinese were imported from the seaport city of Canton. They were crowded into holds of ships, and when they arrived in San Francisco they were sized up and taken to job sites. Chinese merchants were partners with American companies in labor contracting. (Courtesy Chinese Historical Society of America.)



Two Chinese workers are seen on the Heron Ranch on Hostetter Road in San Jose. The older worker on the left was affectionately called "Ah Bok" by the family, meaning respectfully "old uncle." According to Edith Heron, who as a young child knew Ah Bok, he worked loyally for decades on the ranch, doing everything from tending the orchard to babysitting the children. Immigrating as a laborer, he never had his own family and returned to China as an old man, dying the day he arrived. (Courtesy Connie Young Yu.)



A farmer or rancher needing hands would go to a store in Chinatown that did labor contracting and pick up Chinese by the wagonload. Banned from American political and social life, the growing numbers of Chinese in the valley needed a home base. Chinatown provided all their material needs, serving as a social, cultural, and employment center as well. (Courtesy History San Jose.)



Chinese workers largely driven out of mining counties by the 1860s found ready employment as laborers on construction projects. This Chinese crew was contracted to work on Mount Hamilton Road for the Lick Observatory, c. 1876. (Courtesy History San Jose.)



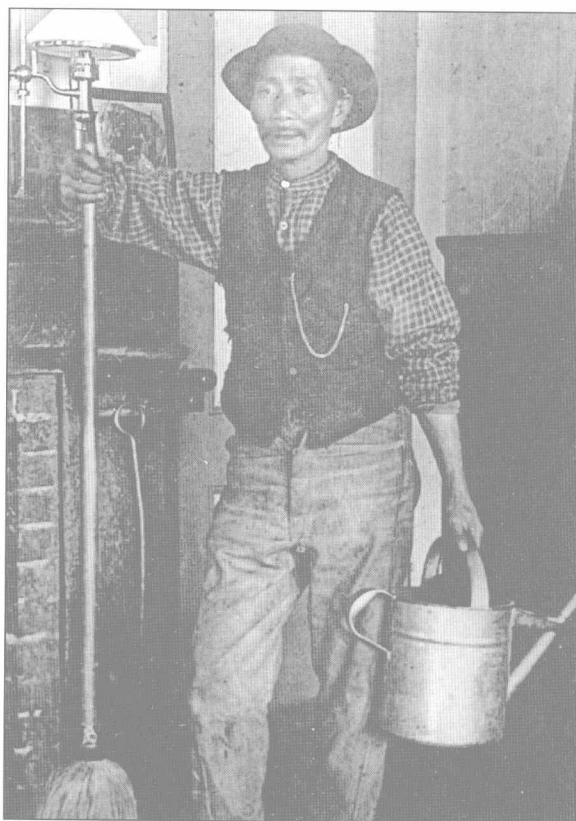
Chinese were hired in building the Transcontinental Railroad (1865–1869), and their industry, ingenuity, and courage were legendary. After the golden spike ceremony, there were thousands of experienced Chinese construction workers ready for employment on other transportation projects. Chinese worked on the San Jose Railroad and, in the 1870s, built the Santa Cruz–Monterey Line for the South Pacific Coast Railroad, suffering heavy casualties in this hazardous work. (Courtesy Southern Pacific.)



Chinese workers were employed in every aspect of agriculture, from clearing land to plowing, planting, and harvesting. Here they are working in the onion fields in bountiful Santa Clara Valley, which largely due to their labors was known as “the Valley of the Heart’s Delight.” (Courtesy California Historical Society.)



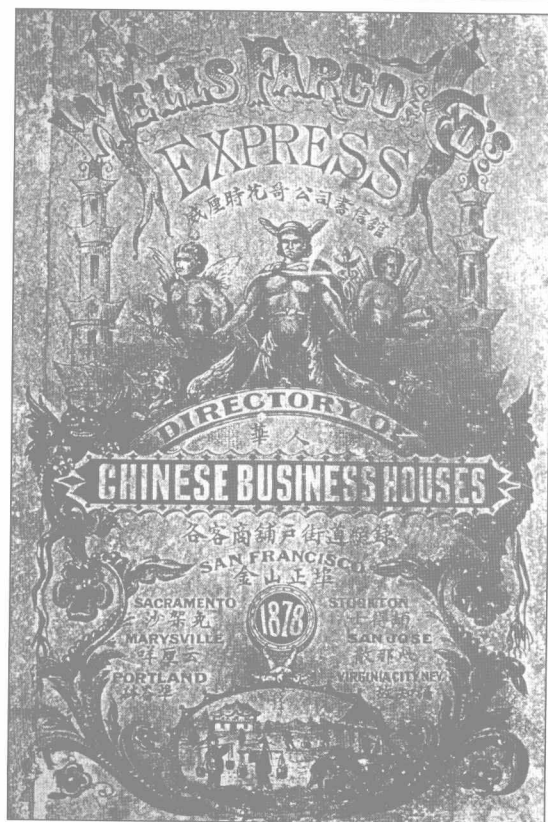
In the New Almaden Quicksilver Mine, the Chinese were hired as manual laborers. Here in 1885, Chinese workers pose in front of the pagoda given as a gift to the mine owners by representatives of the Emperor of China during negotiations for a contract for mercury in the 1850s. (Courtesy New Almaden Quicksilver Mining Museum.)



Ah Sam, who performed the many tasks of a caretaker, was one of the most familiar figures at the New Almaden Mine property. Living and working there for decades, he was popularly known as "China Sam." (Courtesy New Almaden Quicksilver Mining Museum.)



A 1877 painting by Aaron Stein depicting a stagecoach of the Overland Express, later to be Wells Fargo, shows three Chinese riding high and backward. (Courtesy Wells Fargo History Museum.)



The enterprising, hard-working Chinese contributed substantially to the economy of the young state of California. Their role in commerce was important enough for Wells Fargo to publish a directory of Chinese business houses. The 1878 directory lists 77 Chinese businesses in San Jose alone. (Courtesy Wells Fargo History Museum.)