

China Town

Sunday, December 21, 1952

Old Santa Cruz

• • • By Ernest Otto

The Chinese have undergone the greatest changes of any nationality which has settled in Santa Cruz.

Back in the city's early days, the Chinese occupied five Chinatowns, including one at the Powder Works.

Many of the first Chinese in this area were fishermen and the location of their village retains the name China Beach to this day.

Like the shrimp fishermen around San Francisco and the abalone fishermen on the Monterey side of the bay, the Chinese fishermen as a group kept to themselves.

One of the Chinese villages near Santa Cruz was located in the vicinity of Capitola.

The Chinese lived in rough lumber shelters which were practically nothing but shacks. If those shacks still stood today, they undoubtedly would be an attraction for artists' paintings. The shacks, surrounded by many wild flowers, would make fine settings for paintings. The bluffs in the background would also add to the painting.

The houses were situated several feet above the ground. The beds were usually made of rough boards. There was always the joss for worship.

On the beach were the Chinese fishing boats, quite different from the lateen sails of the Italian fishermen. The Chinese boats were long and flat and curved at each end.

When not in use, the boats were frequently left high on the sands of the beach. Along the beach were windlasses used to pull the boats in to shore and to pull in the seines. Sometimes the pockets of the seines were so full that the seines would break and the fish went in all directions. The catches included smelt, sardines, anchovies, herring, many king fish, and some flat fish such as sole, petrolli sole, rex sole, turbot, flounders, skates, violin fish, sting ray, and once in a while an electric fish.

Most of the fish were peddled about Santa Cruz. Several Chinese fishermen had wagons. Others came to town in wagons and went from house to house calling out, "Fish for sale."

The Chinese often had long bamboo poles over their shoulders. Suspended from each end were the bamboo baskets filled with fish. It was remarkable the way those Chinese could balance the poles and still carry the heavy weight of the fish.

The Chinese never fished in Santa Cruz, but one of their number was employed by Fred Perez at the wharf for years.

This Chinaman employed by Perez was always in Chinatown on Chinese New Year, but was seldom seen there at other times. He was a friend of all those who worked or visited the wharf.

A group of Chinese was employed at the California Powder Works, later the E. I. DuPont Powder Works. They were quite large in number and had set up a Chinatown of their own at the entrance of the village.

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Powder Works. They were quite large in number and had set up a Chinatown of their own at the entrance of the village.

Practically all of the Chinese were assigned to the cooper shop at the powder works. The powder kegs were made of redwood and the Chinese were very adept at this work. Their work was appreciated, but when the anti-Chinese agitation started, they were forced to leave the Powder Works. The fires of anti-Chinese unrest were fanned by the Workingmen's party, which adopted the slogan, "Chinese Must Go!" and Dennis Kearney and Dr. O'Donnell of San Francisco sand lot fame.

Connected with the Chinatown near the Powder Works was a joss house on the second floor. The colorful balcony of these temples of worship was touched with a deep blue and also red. Red was a symbol of good luck.

The three days of the Chinese New Year were holidays and a large delegation would always leave Santa Cruz in a body to celebrate. The large Pacific Ocean House bus would be hired and all the way up the road to the village one could hear the three piece orchestra, consisting of a gong, huge cymbals, and a drum. The orchestra's music was frequently punctuated by firecracker bursts.

Another group of Chinese who did not live in the local Chinatown were on the railroad crew. They worked on both Santa Cruz railroad and the Santa Cruz-Felton line. They always wore broad-brimmed split bamboo hats. Great bowls of rice and much pork were their favorite dish. They worked on the mountain branches of the railroad and once about a dozen were killed in a gas explosion.

The Chinatown within the city was a row of shacks on the west side of Pacific avenue between Walnut avenue and Lincoln street. Later this area was the scene of commercial development when businesses and small hotels located on Front street moved to Pacific avenue.

Chinatown moved to Front street and was wiped out in the big fire in the early 90's. The Chinese then were faced with locating somewhere else and there was some disagreement among themselves as to where they should go. Some went to the old island where the Garibaldi hotel is now located and for a number of years that area was known as Birkenseer Chinatown after the man who owned the property.

Other Chinese went to what was known as Blackburn Chinatown below the street known as West Sycamore. They managed to have the joss house or temple of worship. This settlement was small and finally it merged with the area that became the heart of the city.

Eventually the Chinese broke away from their little settlements and now they are scattered throughout the city. Only one home is occupied by Chinese in what was the city's old Chinatown.

WARREN TO NAME

SENATOR MONDAY

Sacramento. (AP)—Gov. Warren will announce Vice President-elect Richard M. Nixon's successor in the U. S. senate at 9 a. m. Monday.

He set that time at a news conference today without the slightest hint as to who it might be.

In World War II the armed forces acquired more than 18,000 dogs of many breeds.