



Locke Foundation Newsletter 樂居鎮基金會

Preserving Locke's history and legacy

www.locke-foundation.org

Winter 2015

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Harvest Moon Festival, October 25, 2014: The Day in Pictures



Elated prize winner Toshi.



Spirited Stockton Bukkyo Taiko Drummers ←



Guests enjoy sumptuous lunch in Jean Harvie Center Auditorium.

Willis Tom sings Memories about growing up in Locke. →



Terence Miller submits winning bid for James Motlow print. ↑

Diane Thompson sets a festive holiday table. ↓



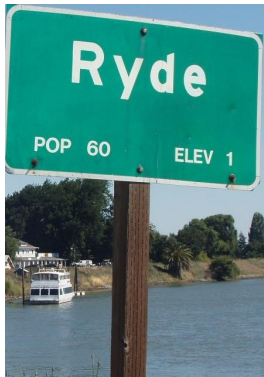
GER Youth Group delights audience as they perform Mongolian nomadic tribal dances. →



Photos courtesy of Eva Chu.

Ryde: Off the Beaten Path

by Eileen Leung



If you drive along Highway 160 near Walnut Grove and blink, you might miss the town of Ryde, a sleepy town located on Grand Island. Ryde is about 3 miles from Locke (or 1.5 miles as the crow flies) downstream from Walnut Grove. Although Ryde is a small community today, its rich legacy continues to enhance the lore of small Delta towns.

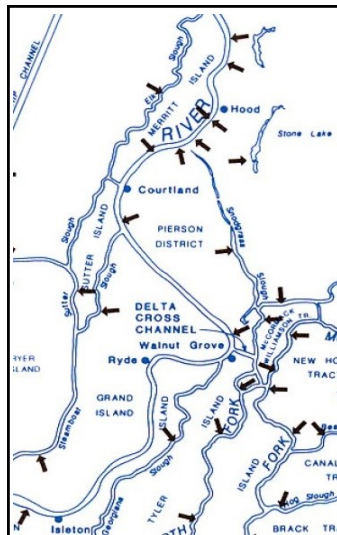
1850 - Congress passes the Federal Swamp and Overflow Act, which provided for the title of wetlands to be

transferred from the Federal Government to 15 states, including California which received over 2 million acres. The Delta includes 500,000 acres of wetlands. The states were supposed to carry out a reclamation program that not only would lessen destruction caused by extensive flooding but also would eliminate mosquito-breeding swamps. The states were then given rights to sell the land to independent parties and speculators who could purchase the land for investment or establishing commerce. The proceeds from the sale of wetlands were meant to be used by the states to establish means for future flood protection in other parts of the state. (This didn't always happen, a subject for future newsletters.)

1855 - California accepts surveys and sells off parcels on islands that are already farmed. California makes money by selling Delta lands to farmers and other investors. Grand Island is one of the largest islands in the Delta, below sea level. Levee building here began in the 1850's, the original work done largely by Chinese laborers who built the levees to a height of 8 feet. Later dredges with clamshell buckets raised Grand Island's levees to their present height.

1861 - California Legislature authorizes the Reclamation District Act, allowing drainage of Delta lands and construction of sturdier levees.

The founder of the town of Ryde was General Thomas Williams, an attorney who came from Kentucky to El Dorado County, California, and served as the county's District Attorney from 1852-53. From 1857-61 he served as California's Attorney General. Upon the expiration of two terms he moved to Sacramento and continued to practice law until he moved to Virginia City, Nevada, in 1863. He and his partner William Bixler established a successful law practice. One of their clients was the owner of a silver mining company. When the client could not pay their legal fees, they gave up a claim worth \$3 million to the attorneys. With



*Grand Island Map courtesy
www.deltarevision.com*

this windfall Williams and Bixler acquired 17,000 acres of Delta land. In 1891 Williams' son sold the 40 acres (where Ryde is located) to William Kesner, who then operated a general store and saloon. Although no one really knows why the town was named Ryde, it is safe to say that the area was founded by both General Williams and William Kesner.

In 1886 four Giusti brothers emigrated from Lucca, Italy, to the Walnut Grove area and built the first Hotel Ryde on the western side of the Sacramento River. The Giusti family operated the hotel and saloon until November 6, 1911, when it burned to the ground. In 1912 Egisto Giusti settled at the location on the eastern side of the River and operated Miller's Ferry Saloon which served as a general store, ferry toll station and restaurant. The current Giusti's Place restaurant is located there.



*1st Hotel Ryde 1886,
courtesy Mark Morais,
great-grandson of P.
Giusti.*

Joe Miller rebuilt the second Ryde Hotel around 1918 on the same site and leased it to the Giannetti family. After it ceased to be a hotel, the building housed a grocery store and electric shop.

The third Ryde Hotel was designed by Sacramento architect Jens Petersen and completed in 1927 at the peak of the Prohibition Era; it was a luxurious Art Deco establishment with a barber shop, beauty salon and riverboat way station. In the basement there was a speakeasy that required the use of a "secret password" for entry to bootleg whiskey, gambling, shows, and jazz music. It even had a secret passageway that led underneath the road to the edge of the river for partiers escape if and when the police came. The hotel has had a few different owners including the Lon Chaney, Jr. family.



Current Ryde Hotel

The rich and famous have also stayed at the Ryde Hotel including the mobsters and other notorious characters. In 1928 Herbert Hoover announced his candidacy for President at the hotel, and later on writers from San Francisco hosted parties at the hotel. "It was the perfect hideout for the Hollywood types," current Ryde Hotel manager Viksit Bhardwaj said.

But in the late 1920s the downstairs allegedly cashed in on illegal booze like many area establishments. That era left behind some awesome nefarious hidden things, such as a door masked as a closet

that leads downstairs to the former location of the illicit speak-easy. The door had a peep hole and a small window to pay for a ticket. The "dancing ladies" used to live on the grounds behind the hotel in a building that was torn down about a year ago," Bhardwaj said, "They used that other tunnel to go home.

The downstairs is currently used as a banquet facility for small weddings and receptions. One can see the original black-lacquered bar, art deco motif, columns and some original ornate wooden booths. It's easy to picture an Al Capone look-alike sipping ill-gotten booze in a smoky atmosphere while listening to the sounds of Al Jolson, Duke Ellington or Louis Armstrong.

Off to the side of the bar, tucked away, is the entrance to a tunnel that leads out to the river - the booze allegedly came in from the river. Lookouts supposedly stood out on the rooftop or the water tank to watch for anyone coming, Bhardwaj said. According to Charles A. Bohakel, author of The Historic Delta Country, "Back in the '20s the traffic came by boat, not by road."

The Leary family is another pioneer family in this area. Dennis Leary (NMI), provided some interesting details about his family's legacy. His grandfather Dennis Leary (also NMI), arrived in California in 1865, a dapper young lad, after serving in the US. Navy during the Civil War. He came to the Delta to work as a ranch hand and saved enough money to purchase his first parcel of land in 1879 on Grand Island at the age of 31. Subsequently he acquired more land and planted beans, asparagus and other crops.

His father, Dennis W. Leary, was born in 1897 in the Pierson Reclamation District near Vorden. His mother was Margaret Mahan Jackson. The family had 2 sons and 2 daughters. His father attended Beaver Union School on Road 220. His father's land featured fruit trees, mainly Bartlett pears which thrived in the rich Delta soil and cool nights.



Dennis Leary in the Leary Ranch office November 4, 2014.

The current Dennis Leary was born in 1930, and grew up in Walnut Grove. The second of four children, he had an older sister, and a younger sister and brother. Dennis grew up in the family home on Grand Island, 3 miles north of the current Walnut Grove Bridge. He attended elementary and high school in Courtland; by that time, the schools were integrated. He remembers the camp for workers on his family's land with a Chinese cook. His grandfather also leased farmland to a Japanese family. Today, Dennis and his family members own a partnership, Leary Ranch, and lease their farmland.

Chinese in Ryde

No history of the Delta would be complete without a tribute to the contributions of Chinese farm labor. In 1865, at age 21, Leung Suen Yau emigrated to California from the Nam Long district of Guangdong. An ambitious young man, he worked on the railroads and ventured into gold mining. He made enough money to open a general merchandise store in 1875 in Borden, Madera County located in the Central Valley. He was locally known as Yee Chung. In 1887 he

found a Chinese wife in San Francisco. Yee Chung and his wife Shee Chung had 5 sons (Lee, Jue, Sam, Bing and Look) and 2 daughters (Moy and Lin), all born in Borden. The store closed in 1895 when business declined due to the new town of Madera, located 3 miles away as the crow flies.

Around 1890, Yee Chung leased land for a fruit orchard southwest of Borden and became so successful that he hired Chinese laborers and he taught white farmers about fruit tree cultivation. Life was good for the family until his sudden death in 1902. When the estate money ran out in 1910, the family had to move to San Francisco, but survival was a struggle. In 1911, the oldest sons, Lee and Jue, moved to the George Beleney ranch on Grand Island in the Delta. During this period they altered their last name to Chong. Since most farm laborers could not speak English, the Chong brothers quickly established themselves as foremen for white farmers to manage immigrant farm workers.

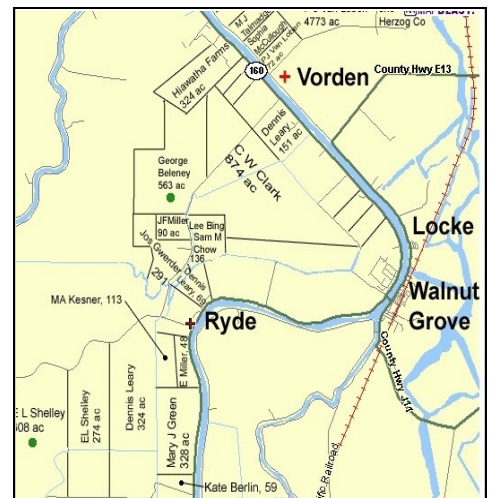
By December, 1912, the Beleney family leased their entire 563-acre ranch to Lee and Jue for \$14,000/year, with rights to five-year extensions upon satisfactory completion of the first year. The Beleney ranch was one of the larger ranches on Grand Island. Lee eventually stayed for three five-year extensions until 1928.

Once established, Lee moved the remaining the family from San Francisco to the ranch house, so that all brothers could farm together: Jue, Sam, Bing, and Look. They farmed asparagus, beets, pears, beans, potato, and other fruits and vegetables. But Lee was very extravagant. He did not know how to save money. He used to drive a Stutz no comma and he also had a Packard truck for hauling produce. These were expensive luxury vehicles. Lee was good to the farm workers and even provided a motel for the field workers, (The motel provided residences for) consisting of Chinese, Portuguese, Filipino, and Hindu

(workers). Connie King said Lee Chong was one of the first Chinese to have an automobile in the area, this was right after World War I.

Ping Lee of Locke and Walnut Grove recalls as a little kid that Lee Chong farmed on Leary Road right across the Sacramento River from Vorden, the Beleney Ranch. The rest of the brothers were farming asparagus and other produce

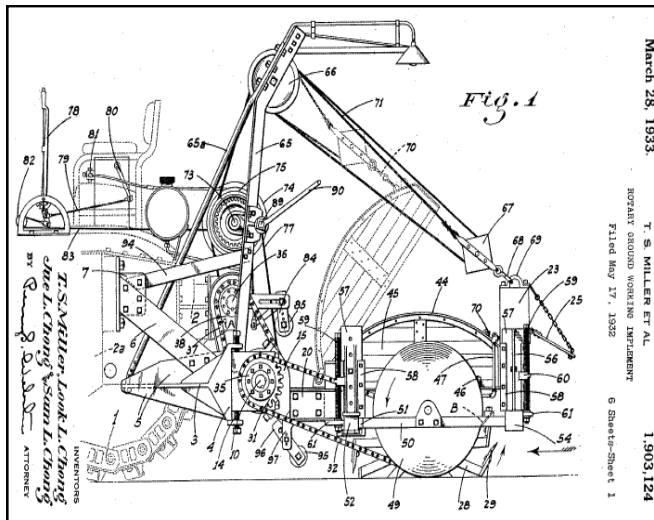
down by the Isleton Bridge at the McCarty Ranch. Ping said the whole family was farmers. They weren't sharecroppers who farmed only pear orchards; they were open land farmers who grew vegetables and fruits. After World War I, prices for farm crops contin-



Parcel owned by Sam Chow and Bing Lee, father of Ping Lee had 136 acres The George Beleney parcel of 563 acres was leased by the Chong brothers. Leary family owned 324 acres to the south.

Ryde continued.....

ued to plummet through the 1920's, and the dominance of large canneries in the Delta controlled prices. Making a good living by farming asparagus, pears, and other crops was difficult. But they used their collective knowledge of farming to realize that many old asparagus farms were in dire need of a new essential service. Near the end of 1923 the four younger Chong brothers decided to start



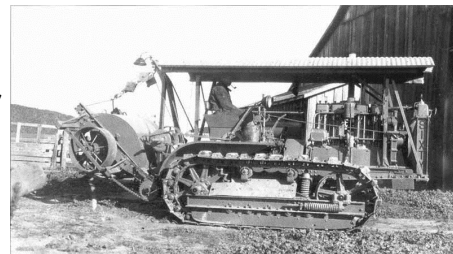
Patented in 1926 by Jue Chong, this asparagus plow revolutionized the asparagus industry. He and his brothers eventually were awarded 10 patents for design of blades and plow machinery. Photo courtesy of Ron Chong, great-grandson of Jue

their own farm, and leave their oldest brother Lee to manage the farm workers on the Beleney ranch. In December 1923 Jue and Bing Chong signed a 10-year lease for \$9,000/year for the J. D. McCarty ranch on Grand Island, just north of the Isleton bridge. Just 30 days prior, the U.S. Supreme Court had affirmed California's Asian Land Laws, which restricted Japanese from renting or leasing farm land. The McCarty family was cautious and decided against renewal of their prior lease to a Japanese farmer, to avoid breaking the law. Instead, they leased their farm to the Chong brothers because they were US-born citizens.

Asparagus was a major crop in the Delta but the old asparagus roots needed machinery to restore the soil. The Chong brothers used their collective creativity to develop a mechanized plow to uproot and grind up old roots. They partnered with Tony Miller and approached the Bank of Isleton for a loan, but they were turned down. Subsequent attempts for loans were successful; the first Miller-Chong plow was invented and patented in 1926. Their design was the first to withstand the rigors of churning up the spent asparagus fields. The brothers provided a plowing service to asparagus farmers in the area.

Other patents were also obtained, but Tony Miller had to be the applicant because the US patent office was reluctant to grant patents even to US-born Chinese citizens. This partnership prospered, and they manufactured more than 90 asparagus plows, each unit numbered and improving upon the prior design. Miller and Chong maintained their shop at the McCarty ranch, where they constantly crafted and sharpened the blades for the plows and manufactured

the machinery. In 1928, the eldest brother Lee moved onto the huge 880-acre E. L. Shelley ranch on Grand Island near Howard Landing Ferry, later being rejoined by youngest brother Look. Lee and Look become known as the largest open-land farmers in the area.



Caterpillar Sixty fitted with Miller - Chong Asparagus Plow, January 1927

Portuguese and Swedish families

Families from Portugal started farms including Joe Miller from the Azores. Many Portuguese descendants farm in the area today with surnames like Cunha, Bettencourt and Souza. Ken Scheidegger, founder of Discover the Delta Foundation in Isleton, said his (had a grandfather who came) grandfather came to the Delta from Sweden in the 1890's.

The Filipino Connection

Labor was different, too. Today most of the crews farmer Daniel Wilson hires to pick and pack pears are Latino. "When I was a kid in the 1930's every pear crew was from the Philippines." Filipinos were essential to Delta agriculture because they provided most of the skilled labor during the Delta's heyday of asparagus. In 1930 more than 350 asparagus camps—with about seven thousand Filipino workers—dotted the Delta.

RYDE TODAY

Dennis Leary explained that Ryde was a vibrant commercial center for Walnut Grove families, where they could buy household staples, get services and meet their neighbors. It had a Catholic church, grammar school, blacksmith shop and saloons. At one time, the east levee was home to businesses and processing plants associated with agriculture. Canneries like Libby McNeil, Pratt-Low and CPC are all gone.

The prison camp is gone as are most of Ryde's commercial establishments. Today a grocery store, auto repair garage, and marinas operate on the east side of the island at the town of Walnut Grove, which is split by the Sacramento River. The community still has a post office, but it's threatened with closure. While Ryde may be a blip on the satellite, there is no doubt that its intriguing past deserves to be remembered.

Sources for Ryde article:

1. Sacramento River Delta Historical Society newsletters, www.srdhs.org
2. Rubio, J'aime, professional writer <http://dreamingcasuallypoetry.blogspot.com/>
3. Dennis Leary, personal interview
4. KALW, public radio, San Francisco
5. Chong family web site: <https://sites.google.com/site/dgcadm/ancestry>
6. Winslow, Susan, Daily Republic, August 27, 2014

When Asparagus was King



Asparagus is a hardy perennial vegetable native to both Greek and Roman Empires. Commercial production began in US in mid-1800's. The earliest recorded growing of asparagus in California was in the northern Delta in 1852. It thrived so well in Delta soil that at one time, 90% of world's asparagus was grown in the Delta. The peat soil is ideal for the formation and nurturing of tender stalks. Two years are required for the first crop, but plantings endure for 10-20 years; average yield in California and Washington is between 2500-3000 pounds per acre.

From 1852-1900, asparagus was sold only in California. By 1900. When the people back east learned to enjoy asparagus, it was shipped by rail and steamships. In 1919, Thomas Foon Chew built the Bayside Cannery in Isleton. Barges and riverboats brought asparagus from the field to the cannery. He devised and built asparagus sorting and processing equipment. Foon built warehouses, cabins, homes, apartments and boarding houses to accommodate about 500 workers each season. It wasn't long before Tom Foon earned the title of **Asparagus King**. At the peak of operation, Bayside's canning volume was over 6,000 cases per year. The work was back-breaking, but the Chinese were pleased to have jobs.

The Sacramento River Delta has been an innovative center for agricultural equipment invention. The confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers created rich peat to nurture 89 distinct crops. The original Caterpillar tractor was invented in the Delta, which has tracks instead of wheels to navigate in reclaimed swamp land. Other equipment patented by Delta farmers include
bean har-
paragus
beet harvester,
vester and as-
plow.



Locke 1915-2015 The legacy lives on



Join us on
May 9, 2015
Centennial Celebration
Noon-4 pm
Main Street, Locke

www.locke-foundation.org

This newsletter will feature articles on various towns along the Sacramento River Delta in future issues with emphasis on the historical context of Chinese presence. The Chinese in Delta towns knew each other as co-workers, clansmen, merchants, herbalists and neighbors. These communities were an integral part of Delta life in the first part of the 20th century. Once centers for bustling agriculture enterprises, many of these towns have disappeared, and others have evolved into bucolic villages, echoing whispers of the past.

New LF members

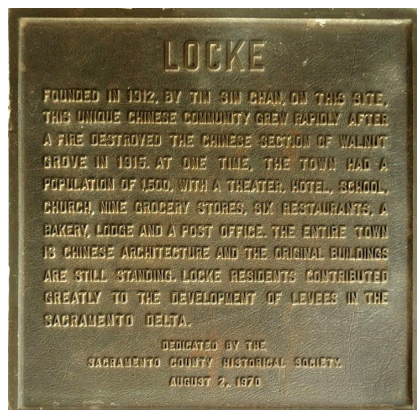
Robert and Priscilla Jung, Life
Robert Quan, Life
Kathleen Dadey, annual
Phil Scurich, annual

DID YOU KNOW....

Article and photos by Stuart Walthall

As 2015 ushers in the centennial of the founding of Locke, we thought it might be interesting to ask the readers of the Locke Foundation Newsletter: "Did you know?"

- Locke is the last remaining Chinatown in North America. All other Chinatowns are connected to or lie adjacent to an existing town or city.
- Although the current population of Locke is just 70, during the 1920s to 1940s Locke had a permanent population of 600, which swelled an additional 1000 during the harvest season. Add to that the folks who traveled to Locke in order to drink, gamble, and carouse and you have a bigger crowd than the total attendance of Locke's Asian Pacific Spring Festival!
- At one time or another nearly every building on Main Street offered gambling.
- The Main Street structures of Locke are made entirely of wood. Plus, Locke used to have wooden sidewalks. Because of the constant risk of fire, a town resident was hired to walk the street at night and strike a slatted wooden box at an appointed hour in order to inform residents and business owners that everything was OK. The little wooden box was known as a Bok Bok, due to the sound it made when struck. The man with the box was known as the Bok Bok Man.
- After the 1920s the Star Theater on Main Street operated as an opium den.
- The founding of Locke was the result of a fire which occurred in Walnut Grove's Chinatown on Oct. 6, 1915. At that time two rival Chinese immigrant groups - the Sze Yap and the Zhongshan (named after the counties in Canton, China from where they originated) - lived in less than peaceful coexistence.
- After the fire a group of Zhongshan merchants leased the land where Locke now stands (1/2 mile north of Walnut Grove). They leased the land from the Locke family, who had substantial land interests in the Delta. The merchants immediately began building residential and commercial structures, renting them out to other Chinese residents and businessmen.
- Nearly all of Locke's Main Street structures were constructed by Caucasians.



- In 1909 the Southern Pacific Railroad established a packing shed adjacent to where Locke now stands. The packing shed is now known as The Boathouse.
- To service the Southern Pacific workers, businessman Tin Sin Chan, along with two other merchants, built three buildings adjacent to the SP wharf.
- This tiny three-building burg was known as Lockeport (later shortened to Locke). The year was 1912.
- The oldest of these three original buildings was the residence of Tin Sin Chan, where he also operated a restaurant. The Locke Garden Restaurant is currently in operation in Tin Sin Chan's original home. The late Ruby King, daughter of Tin Sin Chan, was born in this structure. She passed away in 2013.
- There were at least five brothels operating in Locke. It is claimed that all of the prostitutes who worked in the Locke brothels were Caucasian.
- On the day of the 1915 Walnut Grove fire \$1,200 was stolen from a large Chinese business establishment.



Connie King Memorial Service in October, 2009. At left is Ruby King, daughter of Lockeport founder Tin Sin Chan. At left is Ping Lee, son of Lockeport founder Bing Lee; assisting is Eva Chu.

- The late Ping Lee, son of Locke founder Lee Bing, claimed that the amount of stolen money was considerable higher. Practically the whole available force from the Sacramento County Sheriff's Dept. was called to Walnut Grove. The deputies, besides endeavoring to catch the thieves, were there to prevent any public disorder.
- In April of 2010 the residents of Locke, along with many others, gathered in the Locke Memorial Park to celebrate the life

of Locke "Mom" Connie King- who had passed away 6 months earlier. Among those who attended and spoke were Ruby King (daughter of Lockport founder Tin Sin Chan) and Ping Lee, son of Locke founder Lee Bing. This memorable event marked the last time these two historic figures would cross paths.

- 'Erle Stanley Gardner, creator of the Perry Mason books and television series, discovered the Delta in his later years. He spent a great deal of time in Locke and developed personal relationships with the Connie King and Yuen Chong Market proprietors George Marr and Stanford King. Gardner's 1967 book entitled *Gypsy Days on the Delta* referenced "Godfather King" and George Marr.
- Locke founder Lee Bing was a cook for Alex Brown, founder of the Bank of Alex Brown. The two men became good friends and Lee Bing benefited greatly from their relationship.



- Alex Brown's two fireboats were called into commission to battle the flames of the 1915 Walnut Grove fire. At first the fierce north wind forced back the fire-fighters. But then the wind shifted and turned the fire back upon itself. As a result, streams of water from the fireboats were sufficient to down the flames. But not before Chinatown was consumed.

- Locke is frequently visited by groups of individuals who investi-

gate paranormal activity.

- In 1935, Sacramento County Sheriffs raided an establishment in the "notorious Chinatown" of Locke. A cub reporter from the Sacramento Union Newspaper, invited by the sheriffs to cover the bust, helped himself to a couple of souvenirs: a beautiful gong and a large handheld brass symbol. In 2013, nearly 8 decades after the two items were stolen, both artifacts were returned to the Locke Foundation by surviving family members of

the scofflaw reporter.

- In the early 1900s Dr. Sun Yat Sen, founder of the Republic of China, made a number of trips to the Sacramento Delta, including Locke, to raise funds for the overthrow of the Qing dynasty.
- All the Wop's history goes back a long way. In 1915 Lee Bing and partners built it for a Chinese restaurant. In 1934 Al Adami bought the building, opened a bar and restaurant and called it Al's Place, which became affectionately known as Al the Wop's. Tons of memorabilia are affixed to the walls including dollar bills tacked to the ceiling.
- In the not too distant past, when the Locke septic tank became filled to capacity, the untreated waste was pumped directly into the slough behind the town.

- The most frequently asked question by visitors to Locke? "Where is the toilet garden?"



Connie King's famous toilet planters are located in front of the Chinese demonstration garden.



Locke Foundation Membership Application/Renewal

Last Name _____ First Name _____

Mailing address _____

Email address _____ Tel () _____ Fax () _____

I would like to volunteer for the following activities:

Event planning _____ Publicity _____ Membership recruitment _____

Write articles _____ Grant writing _____ Historical restoration _____

Membership Dues: circle one

_____ \$25 Individual Annual/\$200 Lifetime _____ \$50 Family or Non-Profit Organization Annual/\$300 Lifetime

_____ \$100 Business Annual/\$500 Lifetime

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