

# Locke Foundation Newsletter 樂居鎮基金會

## Preserving Locke's history and legacy

lockefoundation@frontiernet.net

Summer 2018

www.locke-foundation.org

### 2018 Locke Asian Pacific Street Festival



Photos by Catapult Media Production and Eva West.

Clockwise: 1. Boy Scout Troop 8 sets up canopies on Main Street. 2. Eastern Ways lion frolics with crowd. 3. Bayland Dancers pose with emcee Jim Chong. 4. Happy Lady Dancers. 5. Delta Protection Commission is one of festival's major sponsors. 6. I-Wah dancers. 7. Hmong dancers. 8. Wilson Lai Chinese arts and crafts. 9. Betty Louie staffs raffle prize display. 10. Kirby Delaunay and team smashes bricks.







## Locke Foundation Awards 2018 Scholarships

By Stuart Walthall

Four local high school seniors were honored during the Locke Asian Pacific Spring Festival. In addition to receiving a Locke Foundation Scholastic Achievement certificate, each student received a check for \$500. These four outstanding students were also acknowledged with Academic Achievement certificates from the office of State Assemblyman Jim Frazier.

Scholarship recipients were chosen on the basis of grade point average, extracurricular activities, public service and quality of written essays penned on the theme: How would I preserve and promote the town of Locke?

The qualifications of the 2018 LF scholarship applicants were extremely high, making the selection process difficult. The four students chosen for Locke Foundation Academic Awards excelled in each category of achievement.



L -R: Felicity Cordova, Lucero Macias-Torres, Stuart Walthall, Cynthia Osorio and Tillie McTeer .

Recipients of the 2018 Locke Foundation Scholastic Achievement Awards include: **Tillie McTeer** - Rio Vista High School. Tillie will be attending San Diego State University and majoring in Recreation and Event Planning. **Felicity Cordova** - Delta High School, Clarksburg. Felicity shall attend California State University-Sacramento and will pursue a career in Special Education. **Lucero Macias-Torres** - Delta High School, Clarksburg. Lucero will be studying at Cosumnes River College and majoring in Agricultural Business. **Cynthia Osorio** - Delta High School, Clarksburg. Cynthia will also be attending California State University-Sacramento where she will major in Social Work.

The Locke Foundation is extremely proud to honor these four rising stars. Each path is bright .... and each future filled with promise.



## Two Locke Artists Combine Talents in New Book

By Stuart Walthall



**Brock Alexander**

Both of these talented individuals, one a visual artist and the other a poet, have had their work published in book form before. However, by combining their considerable skills they have created a unique and fascinating new work.

Their recently published book entitled Order of Events contains 60 new

drawings by Brock Alexander and 60 poems by D.R. Wagner. Both live in Locke and have been friends for years. The mutual respect they share for each other's work ultimately led to this collaborative effort, and the fruits of their labor are contained in a volume of art and text that truly challenges the eye and the mind.

Artist Brock Alexander owns and operates the Moon Cafe Gallery, located on Main Street Locke, and currently teaches ceramics at Stockton's Lincoln High School. Brock holds a Master of Fine Arts degree and works in a wide range of artistic mediums, including oil and acrylic paint, charcoal, pastel, sculpture, ceramics, mixed-medium and found-art assemblage. His works have been displayed in numerous galleries throughout Northern California and his large commissioned metal sculptures have been installed in multiple states.

Poet D.R. Wagner is the author of over thirty books of poetry. His work is much published and has appeared in many translations and anthologies. He taught Design at the University of California at Davis for over thirty years. He also taught the Honors program at the university conducting classes in Poetry by Design. He is also a visual artist, producing miniature needle-made tapestries that have been exhibited internationally and are included in numerous publications and museum collections.

Upon opening Order of

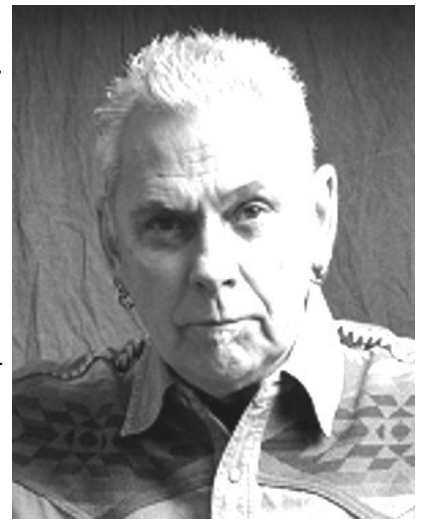
Events one is immediately struck by Alexander's images. They initially appear stark and alarming. But upon closer inspection each work begins to reveal subtle, even hidden images. Each work demands attention ... and time.

Brock Alexander: "Order of Events forced me out of some old habits and helped me find new places to go with my art. Sometimes it just takes the right opportunity or in the case of this project - *the right accident*. The results of spilled ink marked the birth of this book".

"I used ink and paint on paper to create the images. Through pressing and blotting this mixture I create a type of serendipitous print. The results look like Rorschach tests. With a pen and brush I take these tests! I think of it like cloud busting: *What do I see?* Similar to the technique used by Latin American artist Robert Matta, I use marks, stipples, paint, water and ink to create something new ... something discovered. My process was from the gut. I was just responding and reacting to what was on the paper. Sometimes a concept would develop early; a vision which could not be denied. At other times I just allowed myself to be lost in the process".

D.R. Wagner's poetry is meant to complement and enhance the visual images Alexander has created. Wagner has selected poems from his massive catalogue of works. Each poem is associated with a particular visual image and each work of art has its complimentary poem. Their unification leaves the viewer/reader with a lasting impression. Each couplet should be experienced slowly and thoughtfully.

Signed copies of Order of Events may be purchased at the Moon Cafe Gallery in Locke on weekends (916-776-1780), or by visiting: [www.coldriverpress.org](http://www.coldriverpress.org).



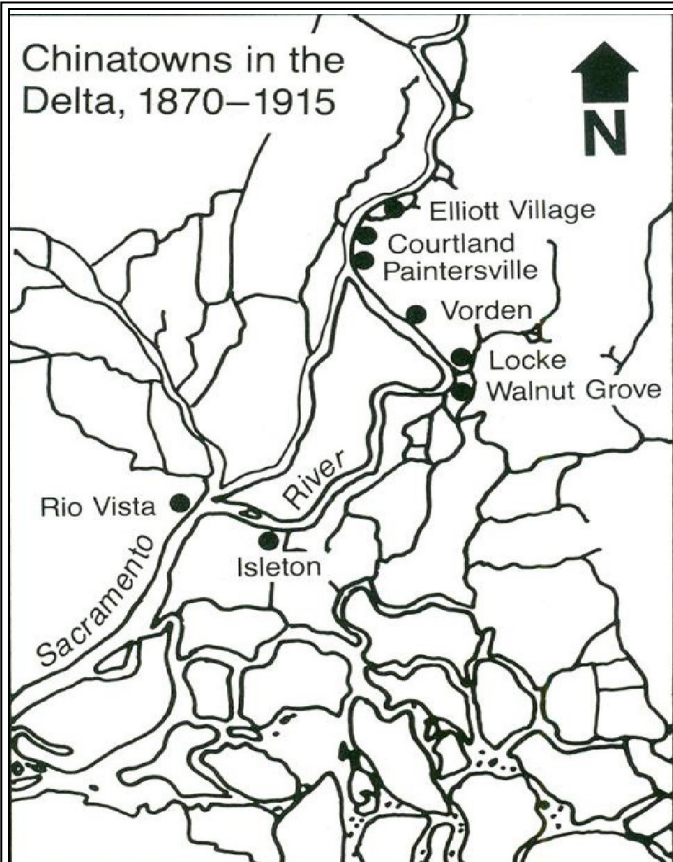
**D.R. Wagner**



**Brock Alexander artwork**

# Where have all the Delta Chinatowns gone?

By Eileen Leung



Chinatowns in the Delta were established in the early 1870's to accommodate laborers and merchants who flocked to make a living along the Sacramento River. Socio-economic and political forces led to their rise as well as their fall.

Occupational invasion and succession: Chinese immigrants were limited to choice of occupation because of discrimination, restrictive legislation and citizenship requirements. They could only make a living in service industries such as laundries, restaurants and small grocery stores. Demographic changes soon made even these occupations obsolete.

Decline of Chinese population; people moved to areas of improved economic viability.

Social change. Wars and depression lead to loss of economic opportunities and employment resulting in moving to other towns or returning to China.

Rio Vista's Chinatown was the first to die off because the potato farmers moved to the San Joaquin Delta. What killed it was its one-clan system with surname Toy or Choy. A one-clan Chinatown must be continually infused with new blood, because its members are forbidden to marry within the clan. Without influx of new families outside the clan, the selection of mates dwindles. Chinese American men were forced to remain single, find mates in other Chinatowns or let parents arrange a suitable marriage. Young Chinese saw little future in farming and even less reason to stick around in Rio

Vista.

Courtland's Chinatown was next. Courtland was founded in 1871 by James V. Sims. At its heyday, Courtland employed large numbers of Chinese from Zhongshan district who were experienced in orchard work. A fire that started in Chinatown destroyed much of the town in 1879 but it was quickly rebuilt. A salmon cannery operated by McDowell and Taylor was started in 1880, but closed by 1890. With a population of 500, Courtland's Chinese community continued to thrive; during the early 1900's it even became a center of political activity aimed at overthrowing China's last monarchy, Qing. Sun Yat Sen and his lieutenants reportedly visited Courtland frequently to raise funds for the Nationalist movement. By 1926, Courtland still had 2 dozen Chinese stores and lodging houses.

When another fire burned down the Chinese section in 1930, the owners of the land refused to renew the leases for Chinese tenants, so the Chinese moved to Locke and Walnut Grove.

Chong Chan, came to the Delta as a refugee of the great San Francisco earthquake in 1906. To support his family, he worked as a farm laborer toiling in the River pear orchards. Chong eventually settled in "Chinatown" near the small town of Courtland where he opened a grocery store and began to grow pears as a tenant farmer. After watching a good number of River pear farmers go out of business, he decided that leasing was the preferred method of obtaining farmland. Chong's son, Lincoln, carried on the pear farming tradition taking it to new heights. Lincoln purchased his first farm in 1942 and, with his three sons, grew the business into a large farming enterprise he called Lincoln Chan Diversified Farming - for good reason. At one point in the 1980s, Lincoln Chan was reportedly the largest pear farmer in the state. Today, his sons Douglas and Wallace Chan continue to farm.

Although Locke, Walnut Grove and Isleton enjoyed prosperity through World War II, the second generation subsequently moved out having served in the military and used GI bill to obtain college degrees. Job opportunities dried up unless they wanted to operate the family farm.

Walnut Grove was established in 1851 as a boat landing by John Wesley Sharpe. By 1870, Sharpe had been joined by other families who came out west by reclamation incentives offered by the federal government. A thriving business district included a brickyard, school, lumber mill, post office and ferry. In 1888, it became the primary supply and shipping center for all of Grand, Andrus and Tyler Islands. Fruits and produce were shipped throughout the state from the Walnut Grove Wharf on flat barges. Four steamers of the California Transportation Company stopped for day passengers and freight. Due to its midway location between San Francisco and Sacramento, Walnut Grove was the largest and most visited town.

Alex Brown was a successful businessman who not only established a local bank but he supported Chinese and Japanese American communities in town. He provided financial backing to several Asian businessmen and rented land to others at reasonable rates. The Chinese community, which





*Bing Kong Tong Building, Walnut Grove*

may have been established as early as 1875, grew during the 1880s. Chinese businessmen developed a commercial and social center for the hundreds of Chinese laborers who worked throughout the region.

By the 1920s, hundreds of Japanese laborers flooded the town every weekend. One Japanese woman who owned a barber shop remembered that on weekends, when the town was teeming with people from nearby farms, she often cut hair from dawn to dusk with no breaks. She estimated that every Sunday 1,000 men would come into *Kawa Shima*, as the local Japanese community called Walnut Grove. By then there were two movie theaters, a Japanese Association, Methodist and Buddhist churches, a variety of commercial services, schools, a dentist, and a surgeon.

Thus, unlike many other California cities, where Asians worked in buildings constructed by European Americans, Walnut Grove developed a Japanese commercial district whose buildings were designed and built by Asians.

Although many changes have occurred over the years, the majority of Walnut Grove's original buildings are still standing. The Chinese Masonic Lodge or Bing Kong Tong established a branch in Walnut Grove before World War I to manage labor relationships, regulate gambling, provide mail and bank services, and help laborers find work. It also sent bones of the deceased back to China for burial and helped Chinese immigrants return to their native land. At its height, the BKT in Walnut Grove was the most important social organization in the region's Chinese community with over 400 active members from throughout the Delta. Today it is a privately owned art gallery,

Once owned by the Lee family, Alex Brown General Store (now "The Big Store") is still operating. The town's convenient location and emphasis on tourism attracts summer boaters on the Delta waterways. The surviving late-1930s Chinese buildings, and the Japanese district that looks much as it did in the 1920s, remain as a testimonial to the memory of a once-thriving community.

Isleton was founded in 1874 by Josiah Pool; it included a hotel, drug store, harness shop and blacksmith shop. California Transportation steamers stopped at the wharf daily. In 1878 a flood destroyed the sugar beet crop. The original Chinatown was built along Jackson Slough; the land was rented from J. Gardner and consisted of contract labor and businesses designed to serve the Chinese farm laborers. By 1880 there were 880

Chinese residents in a town of 1680. By the early 1900's Japanese workers moved in due to asparagus boom in the Delta. In 1907 the Libby Cannery was built. Chinatown burned in 1915 and was rebuilt in a new location. Rail transportation connected Isleton and Walnut Grove, just 8 miles apart. In 1910 there were 6 asparagus canneries; Chinese and Japanese workers supplied 90% of the labor. They planted, maintained and harvested the majority of asparagus and other crops. Gambling halls, a joss house and the Bing Kong Tong building were present. Fire continued to plague the ramshackle wooden buildings, but Chinatown was always rebuilt using Dutch and German carpenters.

When asparagus production moved to San Joaquin, Isleton's Chinatown too died. The Bing Kong Tong building on Main Street began as a branch of the San Francisco Bing Kong Tong association to support the 1,500 Chinese residents living in Isleton in the early 1900s. It was later rebuilt after a fire ravaged the original structure — and the entire downtown — in 1926.

Empty for years, the Tong building was once a gathering spot for immigrants who worked the farms surrounding the community. It housed a Chinese language school, and was used for banquets, community festivals and local Tong Association meetings. It was donated to the Isleton Brannan-Andrus Historical Society in 1994.

For the past several decades, the IBAHS has worked tirelessly to bring the dilapidated structure back to life. The group almost raised enough money in 2011, but then lost a good portion of it when the state dissolved redevelopment agencies that year. After securing nearly \$600,000 in funds from Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency and



*Bing Kong Tong Building, Isleton*

California Cultural Historical Endowment, the BKT building and Chinese Pavilion are being restored to their former glory. They are awaiting the release of additional funds. The partial renovation of the Bing Kong Tong building has been a jewel in Isleton's crown, a testament to the efforts of the IBAHS leadership.

When asparagus production moved to San Joaquin, Isleton's Chinatown too died. Moreover, Isleton was less quaint and picturesque as Locke.

Locke is not considered a "Chinatown", but an autonomous Chinese town, established by the Chinese for the Chinese.

When a fire in Walnut Grove burned down Chinatown, members of the Zhongshan community asked George Locke of Lockeport if they could rebuild their homes. Established in 1915, Locke was home to about 600 Chinese residents including merchants and laborers who toiled in the orchards and levees. It is technically the newest Chinese town in the Delta.

In 1912, Southern Pacific built a river warehouse on the water frontage terminating at Walnut Grove with a short spur returning north to Locke. This became an active hub for shipping fruits and vegetables. Three Zhongshan businessmen, Chan Tin San, Wing Chong Owyang and Yuen Lai Sing, built a store and saloon, boarding house and gambling hall across from the warehouse.

When a fire in 1915 destroyed a part of Walnut Grove's Chinese section, the Zhongshan residents decided to move to Walnut Grove and lease land from the Locke farm owners. American carpenters constructed the wooden homes with galvanized metal roofs. The Chinese could not own the land; they merely paid ground rent annually. This settlement included some merchants as well as orchard and packing house workers. Libby, McNeil & Libby built a cannery in Locke in the winter of 1917 for packing asparagus.

During Prohibition, Locke attracted clientele of all ethnicities with saloons, brothels and gambling halls. The Jan Ying Association was established in 1915 as gathering place and clan association for Zhongshan dialect residents. There are still chapters in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Fresno.



Jan Ying Association Building, Locke

Locke's population declined when its American-born Chinese young people moved away for better jobs. It has the smallest current population of 75 with only a handful of descendants from original families. It is a tourist mecca as the only surviving rural Chinese town in the nation.

Founded in 2003, the Locke Foundation promotes the town's historic legacy to visitors with exhibits in the Boarding House Museum, tours of the town and public events.

Floods and fires have decimated these small communities, but the resilient people always came back and rebuilt. Determined to overcome natural and manmade adversities, Chinese and other Asian residents demonstrated a true pioneer spirit. The conditions that fostered the establishment of Chinatowns in the Delta will never happen again. Most of these towns will languish in obscurity but their historic legacy is a reminder of people who survived social isolation, racial discrimination, and poverty. Tourists who travel along the meandering Sacramento River will find the ramshackle buildings and occasional gift shops cute and quaint, but can only imagine the bittersweet memories of its residents eking out subsistence.

### Where have all the old Chinese men gone?

Long time passing. Most never made the fortunes they came to seek in Gold Mountain. While planning only to be sojourners, many became stranded in Locke because of poverty or Communist takeover in China. Most old-timers passed away in loneliness and despair. "We only made 75 cents a day then; where was I going to make the money to go back to China?"

### Where have all the young Chinese men gone?

Long time passing. They went to college; they left the Delta to seek better lives with jobs in urban areas. Some of them return occasionally to visit friends, but as more leave, there is less reason to return. One former resident said he had bad memories of poverty, chilling winters and gawking stares of tourists. Although he currently lives 20 minutes away, he has never returned to Locke.

### Where have all the railroads gone?

Long time passing. Between 1909 and 1912 the Sacramento Southern Railroad extended a line south from Sacramento to Freeport, and along Snodgrass Slough to Walnut Grove and Locke. Southern Pacific extended this track to Isleton in 1929, and to southern Andrus Island in 1931. The purpose of all these lines was to capture farm produce shipments previously sent to the Bay Area by boat. They were inspired by the growth of specialty crops such as asparagus and celery and boosted the growth of packing and shipping centers as Isleton, Walnut Grove, Locke, Thornton and Terminous. The railroads, however, were frequently in competition with each other and in conflict with growers and packers over freight rates. With the improvement of highway networks and the development of refrigerated trucks, they declined in importance.

"There used to be a train right in back [of Locke] and it would take you to Sacramento or wherever you wanted to go in that direction. If you wanted to go to San Francisco you could pick up the freight ship."

The railroad, then, was essential to the towns along the line, providing the only reliable overland passenger and freight connection between the Delta and Sacramento. As part of the initial construction, Southern Pacific built spur lines to various packing houses and canneries in the Delta. At several locations, such as Locke, the Company also constructed packing houses to encourage use of the rails for shipping.

### Where have the packing houses gone?

Long time passing. Once the home of 6 major packing houses and canneries such as Isleton Canning Company, California Co-op, and Bayside Canning, business conditions during the 1930's led to their closure and relocation, forcing loss of jobs.

California Department of Parks and Recreation, "Class I archeological Survey, North Delta Program," May 1994.

Chu, George, "Chinatowns in the Delta, 1870-1960," California Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 21-27.

Lee, Rose Hum, "Decline of Chinatowns in the US," American Journal of Sociology, LIV, 1949, p. 422-232,



## Chinese NPS Plaque installed

In the Locke Memorial Garden stand two bronze plaques showcasing Locke's National Park Service awards in perfect symmetry. The latest addition includes Chinese translation of the original English text by Locke Foundation board member Anita Lo. We are grateful to Nelson Loo for the professional installation.



(Photos courtesy of Clarence Chu).



## Locke Boarding House First Place Best Museum

Locke Boarding House Museum wins First Place as Best Museum in the Delta again in poll conducted by California Delta Chamber and Visitors Bureau.

<https://visitcadelta.com/best-of/>

## In Memoriam Celestine Marr Fong 1950-2018



A wonderful mother, sister, auntie, and friend, Celestine Marr Fong lived a vibrant 68 years and passed away March 15, 2018, from organ failure after a brief, sudden illness. Celestine was born in Locke, California, the eldest child of George and Serena (Chan) Marr on February 22, 1950, the leading edge of the baby boom in the U.S. a generation that spurred so many changes. Celestine (Celeste) was a graduate of Walnut Grove Elementary School, Courtland High School, Sacramento City College, U.C. Davis and C.S.U. San Jose with a Masters of Library Science. She was an avid reader and loved books and education which brought her to her vocation as librarian.

After graduation she married Austin Fong of Sacramento and had two children, Aaron and Janna. Her family lived in Union City, CA, for a number of years, eventually moving to Upland, CA, where they lived over the past 30 years, and where Celestine worked as the principal librarian of Upland Public Library until she retired. On most days you could find Celeste walking her cocker spaniel Emma around her neighborhood. Celestine will be remembered as a loving family member, kind to all who knew her, happy and giving to friends and family, and as an accomplished librarian. She was always graciously willing to help any person who sought knowledge, enjoyment, information and research through books. Celeste is preceded in death by her husband of 29 years, Austin Fong of Sacramento, CA and her parents, George and Serena Marr of Locke, CA. She is survived by her son Aaron Fong and daughter Janna Fong; her brother Dustin Marr of Locke, CA, sister La Randa Marr Brown (John) of Piedmont, CA and brother Whitney Marr (Doreen) of Orinda, CA, and numerous in-laws, nieces and nephews. Gifts in her memory can be made to the charity of your choice or the organization Celeste regularly supported: Boys Town at [secure.boystown.org](https://secure.boystown.org) or Boys Town 200 Flanagan Blvd. P.O. Box 8000 Boys Town, NE 68010, phone 800.217.3700.

## Locke Foundation Membership Application/Renewal

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ Tel ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Cell ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to volunteer for the following activities:

Volunteer docent \_\_\_\_\_ Donor \_\_\_\_\_ Visitor Center Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_

Contributor to newsletter \_\_\_\_\_ Media contacts \_\_\_\_\_ Landscape maintenance \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership Dues: circle one

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

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 Business Annual/\$500 Lifetime

Make check payable to Locke Foundation. Please return this form with check to Locke Foundation, P. O. Box 1085, Walnut Grove, CA 95690. Contributions are tax deductible to extent allowed by law. Tax ID: 20-0364281.

Office use only:

Date application received \_\_\_\_\_ Membership Year \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

Locke Foundation  
P. O. Box 1085  
Walnut Grove, CA 95690

### 2018 Board

President: Stuart Walthall  
Vice-Pres: Clarence Chu  
Secretary: Anita Lo  
Treasurer: Eileen Leung

Directors: Douglas Hsia  
Honey Lum  
Dustin Marr  
Mark Miller  
Darrel Woo

Newsletter: Eileen Leung  
Stuart Walthall

Cartoonist: Brock Alexander

### Locke Foundation Reunion Dinner and Fundraiser

Sunday, October 28, 2018, 6-8 pm  
HK Islander Restaurant  
5675 Freeport Blvd  
Sacramento, CA 95822

\$50/person  
\$450/table of 10 (single check only)

[www.locke-foundation.org](http://www.locke-foundation.org)