

Locke Foundation Newsletter 樂居鎮基金會  
Preserving Locke's history and legacy

lockefoundation@frontiernet.net

Fall 2019

www.locke-foundation.org

**SOLD OUT**

Funds raised will  
benefit the  
Locke Museum  
Renovation Project

\$60 Individual  
\$550/Table of 10

**SOLD OUT**

**Locke Foundation Reunion Dinner  
and Fundraiser**

Saturday, September 28, 2019, 6-8 pm  
Hong Kong Islander Restaurant  
5675 Freeport Blvd.  
Sacramento, California  
95822



## WW2 Flying Tiger Hero: John Lee of Walnut Grove

Photos and Story by Richard Lee

John M. Lee was a resident of Walnut Grove for over 60 years. He worked the Aldrich Pear Ranch just south of Ryde on Highway 160 - raising his family of five daughters and son on the ranch and working the ranch from growing season to harvest season quietly and deliberately - like so many families in the Delta working in agriculture.

John was born in Courtland, California, on October 24, 1914, as part of the Chinese community in and around the Sacramento River Delta. His parents were Chinese immigrants drawn to the Delta where many Chinese from Chung Shan District had also made their home. He and his brothers grew up along the river and graduated from Rio Vista High School.

In 1933, as the Empires of Japan and Germany began their domination of the world, John - moved by the plight of the Chinese people in this fight against Japanese aggression - joined the Republic of China Air Force. As fascist leaders began their plans of world conquest and whole nations blindly followed them, John volunteered to serve China as an aeronautical engineer in China's First Military Defense Aircraft Factory, at his young age of 19.

China was well aware aeronautical technology would determine the outcome of the war. The Japanese were using advanced aircraft to bomb civilian targets in cities throughout China and had air superiority over all of Asia with no real challenge. The Chinese government sought out aeronautical technology for their air force and made air defense and air combat over China a priority to blunt Japan's air advantage. John became a part of that effort by bringing his intelligence and skills in aeronautical mechanics to bear in the air war against Japan.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, America had entered World War II. Chinese Generalissimo Chang Kai-Shek had already requested and received from President Franklin Roosevelt, 100 skilled American pilots, 200 ground staff and 100 fighter aircraft to serve in the First American Volunteer Group - The Flying Tigers to try to bring an end to the merciless bombing of cities by the Japanese forces.

In 1942 the forward airbase for the First American Volunteer Group (AVG) was established in Guilin, China, by American General Claire L. Chennault. While the Allied powers continued to suffer defeat after defeat all around the globe, the Flying Tigers were the only group to score victories in the early years of the war and served a rallying point in a bleak battle against empire in Asia and in Europe. Flying American Curtiss P-40 fighter aircraft. The AVG were responsible for 237 Japanese plane kills and single-handedly kept Japanese dominance of the skies in the China-Burma theater at bay.

Sergeant John Lee transferred to the forward Guilin Base in China and was a part of the Chinese Air Ground staff responsible for keeping the Flying Tigers and the supply aircraft flying. The tireless and hardworking ground staff is credited by military historians for keeping and maintaining the fleet of P-40's and C-47 transport planes in the air by maintaining the incessant fight against Japanese fighters and bombers.

The C-47 fleet was responsible for Flying Supply airlift missions over the "Hump" to bring critical supplies for the soldiers, and fuel for the Curtiss P-40's. At the time, western access to China had been largely shut off, and the only way to bring supplies in was through the treacherous Route over the Himalayas Mountains, known by



many simply as the "Hump". The Supply route carried almost 650,000 tons of supplies into China from bases in India. The "Hump" was a 530-mile stretch of rugged terrain where almost 600 planes were lost and 1000 men killed. It has been historically called the "Skyway to Hell" or the "Aluminum Trail".

By the end of the first half of the Sino-Japanese War, the (RoCAF) Republic of China Air Force suffered major losses, losing all of their most experienced fighter pilots. Ace fighter pilots, such as Lieutenant Liu Tsui-Kang and Colonel Kao Chih-Hang, were both lost in battles against Japanese. By 1942, the RoCAF was practically annihilated. With the introduction of Japan's new single Pilot Fighter planes, the Mitsubishi A6M Zero, the RoCAF posed no match. But, then in 1942, the RoCAF was supplemented with the AVG and the Flying Tigers, and the results were

an astonishing turnaround in favor of the US and China.

Today, the joint cooperation of American and Chinese governments in the creation and performance of the Flying Tigers is still viewed a historic bright spot in Chinese and American relations - collaborating in the patriotic fight against a common enemy, especially by the Chinese on the mainland where 20 million combatants and civilians lost their lives in World War II.



For his efforts in the war, John received the Golden Sword of Honor for Distinguished Service from Generalissimo Chang Kai-Shek. John transferred from the Chinese Air Force to the rank of Sergeant in the 407<sup>th</sup> Air Service Squadron of the American 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force. During this time, he met and married May Wan Szeto, a teacher in Macau's Yuet Shen High School and principal of the grammar school. May Wan was born in Canton, China and graduated from Ling Nam University with a degree in Education. While John was still in the service, they were married in the beautiful province of Guangxi in 1943.

Honorably discharged from the United States Air Force in 1946, a combined service duration of 13 years, John and May returned to Walnut Grove with their infant daughter Jeanne to begin their life farming and raising a family. John, like so many Chinese American veterans rarely spoke of the extraordinary times of World War II. And like so many of his lucky colleagues, he survived the war in order to make a normal life in the U.S. as part of America's Greatest and Bravest Generation.



John retired from pear farming in 1979 and moved to Berkeley where many of his children graduated at the University there. In retirement, May and John kept busy by working in the home and garden and cooked fresh meals every day. Every weekend John and May would prepare a feast for their children and grandchildren, family and friends in their home in Berkeley. Their home was always filled with fresh grown

flowers and fruits grown in their backyard. Their children: Jeanne, Jennifer, Kathy, Stephanie, Nancy and Richard, would always find time to enjoy a huge family dinner on Saturday and/or Sundays. Whether one, or all of their children would come for dinner, there was always a fresh home-cooked meal and a huge pot of hot Chinese soup cooking in the kitchen.

John passed away in 1993 and his loving wife May in 2015 and are buried together in El Cerrito, California.



*John and Mary Lee with family in El Cerrito*

### Make a Charitable Gift to the Locke Foundation

Here are several ways you can honor Locke's legacy through the Locke Foundation:

1. **IRA Gift:** For those aged 70.5 and older, you can make a gift directly from your IRA to meet your required minimum distribution without paying federal income tax on the withdrawal. This provision may be attractive to retirees who don't need all the current income from their IRA to meet current living expenses.
2. Leave a gift to the Locke Foundation through your will or living trust without reducing your current income. Gifts of retirement plan assets can provide tax advantages and can be given to LF by naming us as a beneficiary.
3. Donate books, photos or artifacts relevant to the Locke experience to Locke Foundation to preserve and share for future generations.

For more information on arranging a planned gift to LF, please send email to [lockefoundation@frontiernet.net](mailto:lockefoundation@frontiernet.net)



## Locke Foundation Lecture Series

It's been a very successful year for the Locke Foundation's continuing lecture series program. The LF has already staged 5 lectures in 2019 and has plans to stage even more in 2020.

Starting in April the Locke Foundation presented a lecture and historic photo exhibition by James Motlow entitled **LOCKE IN THE 70s** - an up-close and intimate look at the people and places of Locke during the 1970s.

In June the LF and CACS (Chinese American Council OF Sacramento) co-hosted author Kim Luke's lecture on her recently released book: **The Lu Family SAGA**.



On July 6, 2019, the LF staged a trio of lectures starting with Ron Chan's informative presentation entitled: **Writing Your Family History With Hearts Not Charts** - a seminar that guides you to create your own multimedia family history



A retired photojournalist for the Santa Rosa Press Democrat, Locke native Jeff Kan Lee presented a fascinating lecture on his legendary grandfather, Lee Bing, founder of the town of Locke.

Master Chef David Soohoo, the celebrity chef of the internationally renowned Chicago East-West and personal chef of Barron Hilton, lectured on the cooking and the diet that fueled the Chinese railroad construction workers. Food included rice, preserved meats; dried fish, shrimp, and other shellfish; dried legumes; dried noodles, preserved vegetables, dried seaweeds, and teas.



**Elaine Corn distributes samples of Rice Soup (Jook) prepared by David SooHoo to audience.**

Each of these diverse lectures was enlightening, personal, well attended ... and FREE. Stay informed of upcoming Locke Foundation lectures, activities and events by visiting the LF website at: [www.locke-foundation.org](http://www.locke-foundation.org) and by checking out and "liking" the LF FaceBook page: [www.facebook.com/Locke1915/](https://www.facebook.com/Locke1915/).

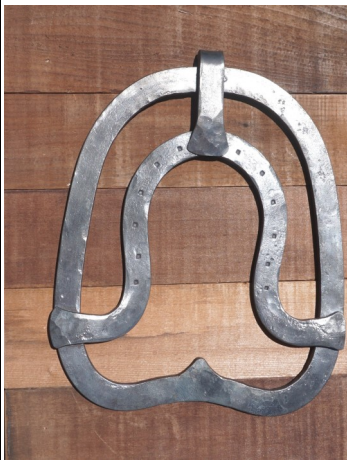


## Tule Horse Shoe on Display at New York City Museum

By Douglas Hsia

The Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) in New York City is staging a special exhibition "Gathering: Collecting and Documenting Chinese American History." October this year. The exhibition showcases artifacts from Chinese American communities in the country. The show will focus founding of historical societies, museums, and organized projects that document the history of Chinese throughout the Americas. The exhibit runs from Oct 17, 2019 - Mar 22, 2020 .

Locke Foundation was invited to participate and has decided to offer the Tule Horse Shoe. Unique to the Sacramento River Delta, this device was developed by the Chinese laborers during the period of swamp reclamation and river levee building. The horseshoe was attached to an extra ring on the original horseshoe, helping the horses to maneuver on the soft peat soil. As the levees rose and canals drained the water, the Sacramento River Delta became a vast agricultural region that has generated enormous wealth for the state. Some have called the rise of agriculture in California the second Gold Rush.



In the absence of actual artifacts from the period, Daniel Patrick of Walnut Grove Iron Works has crafted two artifacts based on the photograph on hand and generously donated them to the Locke Foundation. Patrick Daniel started his artisan work in Folsom. He then moved to the Walnut Grove in 2005, recreated the Imperial Theater remarkably that became the base

of his artistic pursuit and the pride of the Delta.

Douglas Hsia with Daniel Patrick who fabricated replicas of Tule Horse Shoe.



## Filmmakers Come to Locke

During the second weekend of July 2019 Locke residents and business owners opened their doors to welcome and assist the cast and crew of Circle B Productions, a Sacramento-based film company on location in Locke to shoot a short film highlighting the U.S. anti-Asian immigration policy of the late 1800s.

The film has been shot and now goes into the post-production process. It is scheduled to debut at a Sacramento film festival this fall.



Cable public access TV station Access Sacramento selected "Flight of the Heron" as one of 10 films to premier on October 5, 2019, during the 20th-annual "A Place Called Sacramento" film festival at the Crest Theater in Sacramento. More than 300 scripts were submitted as part of the selection process.

"Flight of the Heron" centers on the 1875 Page Act, which effectively banned the entry of Chinese women into the U.S. (In 1882, Chinese men were banned through legislation as well).

Offering assistance to the film crew were: Mark Miller, owner of the River Road Art Gallery - logistics, make-up, canteen services and rest area; Clarence Chu - orchard scenes & Jan Ying building scenes; Russell Ooms, Deborah Mendel and Stuart Walthall - interior and exterior scenes; Tony Ragona - accommodations.





## The Old "Barn" in the Back of Locke

By Stuart Walthall

Many visitors who come to Locke take the time to step away from busy Main Street to venture down the wooden walkways that lead to the back of town and find themselves in the quietude of residential Key Street.

It's another world to explore - away from conversations, cars and motorcycles. Guests stroll down Key Street gazing at the many fruit trees, flowers and picturesque landscaping that surround quirky homes. Cats, strange garden sculptures, gravel dust .... and more cats.

One sees the face of Locke from Main Street. One feels the heart of Locke from the back streets. This is where so many of the Chinese residents lived and flourished. Growing food and growing families. Working the land, fishing the sloughs and existing in a world created through practicality and custom.

Visitors continue down Key Street making the southward curve that leads to Mother Connie King's toilets - filled with succulents and cacti. Always a photo op. Connie's display stands in front of the Chinese demonstration garden. Walk in. Vegetables typically grown by Chinese residents up to the 1980s are labeled along the pathways within the demo garden: Dow Gok (long beans), Cee Gwa (luffa), Hulu Gwa (gourd), Fu Gwa (bitter melon), and a Hong Jo (jujube - Chinese date) tree. Lots of grapes.

Keep walking and you can see the many community gardens to your left. You see honey bees swarming around their hive boxes. And you can hear the chickens clucking from their coop behind the big steel barn.

Simple country community living: gardens, homes, bees, chickens, chores and sharing. No mystery. Except that big barn. You see, despite what everyone calls it .... *it was never a barn*. It was a mill - a flour mill. And despite Locke being a Chinese community, the mill was operated during the 1920's and 30's by Sikhs. (Locke was founded in 1915). Milling has long been an important ancestral enterprise within the Sikh culture.

Punjabi Sikh immigrants arrived in the Delta in the early 1900s. The region resembled their Punjabi homeland in northern India, and they found work in the Delta's orchards and field crops and eventually expanded into leasing their own farm land. Many Sikhs settled in Stockton, where they built the first Sikh temple in the United States.

The names of those who operated the mill are still a mystery. However, the old mill is now of historical interest within the Sikh community.

On June 11, 2019 writer Gurjatinder Randhawa and photographer Kaveer Kang came to Locke to learn more about the now-iconic mill. Their mission was to write an article for Punjabi language press, shoot video for TV news coverage and to capture



**Current image of the Flour Mill. Chicken coop to the left. Photo courtesy Tony Ragona.**

footage for a documentary on the old mill and their visit to Locke. Randhawa and Kang were in luck; current mill building owner Russell Ooms was in town and graciously opened the mill, upstairs and down, for their inspection and cameras.



**Gurjatinder Randhawa, old milling machine, Russell Ooms, James Motlow, Stuart Walthall. Photo by Kaveer Kang.**

Ooms was interviewed extensively. He also offered a thorough explanation of the workings of the old milling machine he had saved during the process of converting the structure into a workshop.

(The circa 1883 milling machine stands right outside the rear of the Chinese demo garden).

This visit was warm and rewarding. James Motlow, author of the definitive biography of Locke: *Bitter Melon*, gifted each gentleman with a signed copy of his book. Locke Foundation Chairman Stuart Walthall provided materials pertaining to the legacy of Locke and the mission of the Foundation.

Our new friends, along with the entire Sikh community, were welcomed back to Locke. There are still more people to meet and things to be seen.

The Locke Foundation and Sikh historians will continue to research the history of the iconic old mill.

## LF in Courtland Pear Fair

Sacramento Delta's Bartlett pear district is a swampy anomaly in the arid, rapidly suburbanizing landscape of north-central California. Winding levee roads run level with the upper branches of a sea of lush green trees, dotted by modest farmhouses and occasional Victorian mansions. The pear growers, many of whose families arrived with the Gold Rush, like to boast of their century-old groves.

Pear trees tolerate wet roots better than other fruits, and flourish in the rich, moist soil near the banks of the Sacramento River and adjoining sloughs. This district, protected from development because it is a flood plain, has 6,600 acres of pear orchards stretching from 15 to 30 miles south of Sacramento. It provides half the state's Bartlett harvest, which typically starts in early July, though this year it was delayed 10 days by cool spring weather.

A Delta tradition since 1972, the Pear Fair is the largest, continuously running agricultural fair of its kind in Northern California. The Pear Fair was held on Sunday, July 28, 2019. Hot days are common for the 47th annual Courtland Pear Fair and this year's event was no exception.

In fact, it was exceptionally hot! But the event was fun for all who attended and the Locke Foundation took advantage of a great opportunity to promote the Foundation by informing the public of its mission: to educate the public of the history, culture and legacy of Locke. Many visitors stopped by the Locke Foundation booth where they received Locke related materials, cold water and informative conversation. Plus, the Foundation folks had a good time marching in the parade.



Braving the elements were Mark Miller, Corliss Lee, Douglas Hsia and Stuart Walthall.

## 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

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