

# Locke Foundation Newsletter 樂居鎮基金會

Preserving Locke's history and legacy

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www.locke-foundation.org

## LF Fundraiser sold out affair

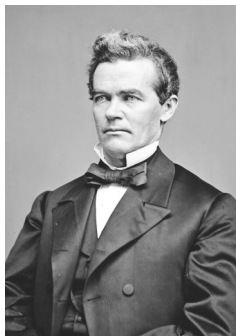
We knew the September 28, 2019, dinner at HK Islander would be a smashing success when tickets were sold out months before. Former residents from Locke, Walnut Grove and Isleton enjoyed the reunion and 9-course dinner with friends and supporters of the Locke Foundation. Photos courtesy of John Cho.



## Civil War Legislator Staunch Supporter of Chinese Labor 1821-1909

By Mark Miller

Before entering politics, John Conness' life story resembled that of many Gold Rush Californians. Born in Abbey, County Galway, Ireland, on September 22, 1821, the youngest of fourteen children, he immigrated to the United States with his family in 1836 and settled in New York City. He was apprenticed to a piano maker and for a time attended public school. He treasured his seven-month school career and his interest in free public education never waned. Late in life he responded to critics of free education by stating that "there are those who do not sufficiently estimate this means of developing good citizenship; but considering the load of ignorance thrown steadily upon the republic from abroad we must estimate the quickening morally and intellectually of our citizen mass by education."



In July 1849, the hope of riches drew him to California. After passing through Panama and San Francisco, Conness mined for gold at Growler's Gulch, Mormon Island, and the middle fork of the American River in El Dorado County. In 1854, he settled in the new community of Georgetown, where he established a profitable merchandising business selling provisions to other miners.

By 1852, he was elected to the State Assembly, where he would serve during four sessions between 1853 and 1861. He later credited slavery with prompting him to enter politics. "It was never my purpose to seek public office or public life and until later when there were such efforts to ally California with proslavery, I never dreamed of, nor had ambition to fill public place," Conness wrote in 1904.

After becoming a United States Senator for California in May 1864, Conness sponsored legislation that did something nobody had ever done before (apparently in human history): It set aside a large tract of unspoiled land, the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias, for future generations. President Abraham Lincoln signed the bill, which ceded the land over to the state of California for the purpose of preservation. California State Parks traces its origin back to this historic event. Unfortunately, for this first effort at pro-

tecting nature, the State of California did a terrible job of protecting Yosemite, and Congress was forced to correct the error by turning Yosemite into a national park a quarter-century later.

White Americans had no reason to fear Chinese immigration, according to Conness. The Chinese should be welcomed because they were essential to the state's economy. "They are a docile, industrious people, and they are now passing into other branches of industry and labor. They are found employed as servants in a great many families and in the kitchens of hotels. They are found as farm hands in the fields; and latterly they are employed by thousands" on the Central Pacific Railroad. (Conness had been an early supporter and advocate of the transcontinental railroad.) Furthermore, the Chinese were sojourners, and the lack of Chinese women and their desire to be buried in their native soil after death would forever limit the number of immigrants.

He acknowledged that the California legislature had enacted numerous discriminatory measures against Chinese immigrants over the years, but noted that the state Supreme Court had struck down most of those measures because they violated international treaties and interfered with the free market. Equating the Supreme Court decisions with the will of the people, Conness believed that Californians would accept the Chinese as they would any other immigrant group and that the state would acknowledge that the children of Asian immigrants were entitled to equal protection, as were all children of immigrants.

Conness would not be alone in his support of the Chinese. Leading California agriculturalist and fellow state politician Wilson Flint in 1855 would argue in the state legislature that Chinese immigrants were critical for developing the natural resources of the state. Flint argued that the foreign miners tax, which was openly acknowledged as an anti-Chinese, threatened the future economic development of the state. Flint, who was also anti-slavery, saw the potential of California becoming an agricultural powerhouse in which Chinese immigrants would play a significant role. Flint's Sacramento nursery provided farmers with the first California-grown hop plants, and his groundbreaking agricultural publications would clear the path for California becoming less dependent on gold mining, laying the foundations for California's agricultural gold rush. Flint's untimely death in 1868 would rob



Conness of the critical support of a popular public speaker and advocate for a more inclusive California.

Conness' support for the Chinese may have come from his nomadic background. In an 1868 speech he asked his fellow Irishmen to remember their own origins, "for that but sharpens the mental appetite for liberty as we find it here." Regardless of Conness' motivations, his stance on Chinese immigration accurately reflected the feelings of most Americans outside of California on the matter. Across the nation many white Americans objected to the importation of Chinese laborers under contract, but they did not object to the legal immigration of individual Chinese. Many Americans appreciated the desire to come to the United States but "coolie" labor contracts uncomfortably reminded many Americans of slavery. Conness had distinguished between importation and legal immigration during his Assembly sessions in the 1850s, and he continued to make this distinction in the United States Senate. Unfortunately, whites in California and some other areas in the West failed to acknowledge the difference.

Most important, in view of Conness' stated reasons for entering politics, we must consider his career a success. In his brief 1904 autobiography, Conness wrote that he originally sought power in order to defeat slavery, and he accomplished this by opposing Chinese "coolie" labor contracts, endorsing the Thirteenth Amendment and advocating equal rights for all through the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments and various other Reconstruction policies. At the end of his political career he acknowledged: "Before its

close it was my good fortune to vote in the Senate for the expurgation of slavery from the constitution of the United States, when it had long been a stumbling block to the lovers of liberty."

Conness continued to support Congress's Reconstruction efforts until the end of his Senate term, despite his constituents' well-known views and the disintegration of his political base. When his term ended in 1869 he retired from politics and moved to Boston where, his colleague and rival Senator Cole hoped, "he is enjoying in his declining years his well deserved otium cure dignitate." He died in an asylum in Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts, on January 10, 1909, (87) and has been memorialized by Mount Conness and Conness Creek in the Sierra Nevada mountains, named in honor of his support for the 1864 Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove land grants.

He was widely acclaimed for voting for the amendments to abolish slavery and for supporting immigration and civil rights for Chinese in California. He worked closely with President Abraham Lincoln, on whose death in 1865, John Conness was invited to be one of the pallbearers at Lincoln's funeral.

It is highly unusual to come across a white Civil War legislator who supported Chinese immigration, but Senator Conness' service to the California and federal government is a testament to his vision that supporting Chinese labor would be positive for the economic growth of the nation.

## Come Celebrate Chinese New Year in Locke Saturday, February 15, 2020, noon - 4 pm

The 1st animal in the Chinese zodiac cycle is represented by the Rat.

The Locke Foundation will offer the following activities in celebration of the Lunar New Year:

- Eastern Ways will perform the lion dance at 12 noon sharp, followed by martial arts demonstration.
- tea ceremony,
- calligraphy and cooking demonstrations,
- painting contest with cash prizes,
- traditional Chinese music,
- lucky money will be distributed to the first 100 visitors.
- light refreshments

Free admission and free parking.



## Uneasy Co-existence between Japanese and Asian residents in Walnut Grove 1908-1941

This article includes excerpts from "Interethnic Conflict under Racial Subordination: Japanese Immigrants and Their Asian Neighbors in Walnut Grove, California, 1908-1941," *Amerasia Journal* 20:2 (1994), pp. 27-56. It was written by Eiichiro Asuma, Associate Professor of History and Asian American Studies, University of Pennsylvania, for his Master's Degree thesis at UCLA. He has graciously granted permission to LF to use this article. Due to its length, the article will be printed in installments over several issues.



Less than a decade after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 put a stop to most Chinese immigration, Japanese immigrants entered the Sacramento River Delta as the alternative cheap labor. During the first decade of this century the Japanese became the dominant immigrant group in Walnut Grove. According to the United States Census manuscript schedule, during the 1900s the Japanese population almost doubled from 295 to 530, while the Chinese population dropped drastically from 1,142 to 416 in Walnut Grove and the neighboring Isleton. Japanese immigrant laborers were preferred by local white landowners and farmers since they accepted lower wages than white and Chinese laborers. In 1891, the Japanese reportedly received only eighty cents to ninety cents a day, and the whites and the Chinese \$1.25 and \$1.00 respectively.

During the first decade of this century many Japanese immigrant farmers appeared in Walnut Grove. Most were former laborers who had successfully accumulated capital and learned farming methods. In 1904 the Sacramento River Delta, including Courtland, Walnut Grove, and Isleton, already had 356 Japanese farmers. Within a year, the figure grew by 56.7 percent to a total of 558 farmers. At the same time, the acreage under Japanese cultivation shows a rapid expansion from 2,010 acres to 7,124 acres. After 1905, the majority of the farmers raised asparagus, making Walnut Grove well known as the heart of California's asparagus industry.

Nevertheless, all Japanese farmers in Walnut Grove were sharecroppers and cash tenants, for the white elite monopolized the ownership of land in the area. Under stringent leasing contracts, white landowners gave Japanese tenants virtually no autonomy in cultivation and harvesting and no rights in the shipping and mar-

keting of crops. Thus, despite their dominance in the process of actual crop production, Japanese farmers were at mercy of their landowners.

The white residents never attempted to expel the Japanese from Walnut Grove, not because they regarded the immigrants as equal members of the community, but because the use of Japanese tenants was economically beneficial for them. A Japanese farmer told a reporter of the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

When Japanese farmers took (sic) this river land it was worth \$25 to \$50 an acre. Because of the development we have done the land is now worth from \$200 to \$300 an acre. It brings a cash rent of \$20 to \$30 an acre (to landowners annually). Under the share system landowners are realizing from \$60 to \$70 an acre.

Other than economic relations, whites sought no association with Japanese residents. From their perspective the Japanese were socially and culturally inferior and unacceptable to their community. Given the dispersal of Japanese farming population in rural agricultural fields, the Issei (first generation) farmers posed no problem. On the other hand, the merchants who lived in the central commercial district were potential threats. In order to maintain social distance, the whites forced them to reside with the Chinese in a segregated residential quarter located across the Sacramento River and assigned their children to the segregated "Oriental School" from 1908. In this fashion, white racism relegated the Japanese to a subordinate position with the Chinese and created the background to the conflict between the two groups.

### Striving with Chinese "Evils"

The Sino-Japanese conflict essentially occurred over the support of the white elite, which held sway over the survival and welfare of ethnic minorities in the delta. The Walnut Grove Issei considered their Chinese neighbors responsible for tarnishing the good reputation of Japanese people and destroying their harmonious relationship with the local whites. Residing in the crowded Chinatown, the Japanese had always feared being identified with the Chinese whom they saw as "inferior." After the 1906 San Francisco school incident in which the city's board

of education ordered Japanese students to attend a segregated Chinese school, that fear increased. Both the Japanese government officials and community leaders believed that the ultimate consequence of such an incident would be Japanese exclusion from the United States. Therefore, they endeavored to nip further anti-Japanese movements in the bud by bettering the living conditions of Japanese immigrants, so that white Americans would accept them as equally civilized people.

Japanese government officials were the first to make Walnut Grove an issue. Hanihara Masanao, second secretary of the Japanese Embassy, who traveled throughout the western states in 1908 to inspect the Japanese immigrant lives, depicted the Walnut Grove Japanese community in disgust: "The Japanese and the Chinese lived together in filthy, winding alleys crisscrossing each other ... and lewd women and lazy men were loitering around day and night disgracing the reputation of Japanese people and the nation."

In his opinion, almost all Chinese establishments were gambling houses where "the Chinese fattened themselves by squeezing dumb Japanese laborers." A year later the Japanese Consul from San Francisco also visited Walnut Grove. Stunned by the spectacle of the town, he harshly accused the residents of leading a life as low as the Chinese, thereby allowing anti-Japanese exclusionists to contend that "the Japanese are as unassimilable as the Chinese to American society." The Walnut Grove Japanese leaders immediately joined in the criticism. Only three days after the consul's visit, a newspaper correspondent published an article castigating a "shameful life" that his fellow residents had lived. He continues:

"White people now think that we are as filthy, as disorderly, and as immoral as the Chinese, since we have lived just like them. It will take a great deal of determination to vindicate us. [Without doing that,] it is absurd to demand we be treated better than the Chinese."

In order to clean up their community, the Japanese of Walnut Grove had to combat what they considered as a "menace": the prevalence of Chinese gambling. In their opinion it was a pernicious evil which corrupted the moral fiber of the residents and seasonal laborers. Hoping to eradicate such a vice, the community launched a series of awakening campaigns. First, some farmers and merchants jointly held a "moral reform speech contest" in June, 1908 during which a San Francisco leader and three immigrant journalists made anti-Chinese speeches. A *Nichibei Shimbun* reporter, for example, warned hundreds of audiences not to patronize

Chinese gambling houses because "the Chinese plot to drive the Japanese out of Walnut Grove after squeezing the last penny out of you." In addition, the Japanese Producers Association of Walnut Grove (JPA) tried to stop Japanese laborers from losing money. Receiving the support of fifty-eight whites, the JPA first petitioned police authorities to prohibit the operation of such businesses in Walnut Grove. It then hired a special watch to keep an eye on the movements of Japanese laborers. This measure forced Chinese gambling houses to close down for a while, and caused the arrest of several Japanese gamblers. From 1910, the local Japanese association, a successor of the JPA, also launched anti-Chinese gambling campaigns every summer after asparagus field hands completed their work. Yet it never attained a tangible success.

Concurrent with the anti-Chinese gambling movement, the Issei leaders considered the possibility of segregating their community from Chinatown in order to escape from the adverse influence of Chinese immigrants. Judging from the existing documents, the idea was first introduced by the Japanese Consul in 1909. Before the community leaders, he declared that the establishment of a new Japanese quarter would prevent Japanese immigrants from being corrupted by Chinese "evils" such as gambling. The leaders discussed the idea in passing, but it never became a real possibility until 1915.

A devastating fire on October 7, 1915, gave the Issei of Walnut Grove an opportunity to focus on the establishment of a genuine "Japantown" or *nihonmachi*. Starting from a kitchen of a Japanese boardinghouse, the fire burned down the entire Chinatown within a matter of two hours. It reduced thirty Japanese houses to ashes and made approximately one hundred and fifty Japanese homeless. To provide shelter for the victims, the Japanese association set up tents on the Japanese language school playground. Despite initial confusion, the residents began planning the reconstruction of their town quickly. On the day following the fire, they convoked a mass meeting and resolved: "We shall segregate ourselves from the Chinese at this occasion... Anyone who defies this decision shall be punished."

To be continued....



# Chinese Celebrate Winter Solstice on December 21, 2019

By Eileen Leung

For many ancient agrarian civilizations that struggled to subsist through harsh winter months, the winter solstice marked a time of spiritual rejoice and celebration. Modern heating technology and the globalization of food markets make the seasonal transition remarkably easier for modern humans to survive, but people still do celebrate the day with festivities and rituals. This is traditionally the time when workers gathered food to sustain their families through the cold season. *Yang* begins right after Winter Solstice and *Yin* begins right after Summer Solstice in the northern hemisphere.

Dong Zhi, like other Winter Solstice festivals, is marked by hope and optimism and well as joy. It can be regarded as a Chinese Thanksgiving where food, wine and feasting are integral parts of the celebration. The festive food is also a reminder that everyone now is a year older and should behave better in the coming year. Even today, many Chinese around the world, especially the elderly, still insist that one is "a year older" right after the Dongzhi celebration instead of waiting for the lunar new year.

Celebrated on the longest night of the year, Dong Zhi (冬至) is the day when sunshine is weakest and daylight shortest. The latter falls on the 15th day of the 11th moon; in 2019 the date is December 21. The coming of winter is celebrated by Chinese families and is traditionally the time when farmers and fishermen gather food in preparation for the coming cold season. It is also a time for family reunions. The last festival of the year, Dong Zhi coincides with the winter solstice, and it is a time for the entire family to get together to celebrate the past good year. Some Chinese "traditionalists" even believe that everyone turns a year older after Dong Zhi.

The Winter Solstice officially became a festival during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). This celebration can be traced to the Chinese belief in *Yin* and *Yang*, which represent balance and harmony in life. *Yang* symbolizes masculine and positive, *Yin* has the opposite meaning. At winter solstice, the *Yin* is at its peak and will disappear gradually. While the *Yang* or positive things will become stronger and stronger from the day. So winter solstice is regarded as an auspicious day to celebrate. It is believed that the *Yin* qualities of darkness and cold are at their apogee at this time, but it is also the turning point, giving way to the light and warmth of *Yang*.

Dong Zhi means the "arrival of winter". The army was sequestered, frontier fortresses closed, business and traveling stopped. Relatives and friends presented delicious food to each other. It was a day to offer sacrifices to Heaven and ancestors. Emperors would go the suburbs to worship Heaven; commoners would offer sacrifices to deceased parents or other relatives. The importance of family and community are paramount, as is honoring ancestors. It is believed that ancestors return to the family this day. People carried out rituals for the gods not only to thank them for the harvest but to pay homage to ensure future prosperity.

One activity that occurs during these get-togethers, especially in the southern parts of China and

in Chinese communities overseas, is the making and eating of *tangyuan* (湯圓), balls of glutinous rice. The round shape symbolizes wholeness and unity, and the tradition is an important celebration of family unity and family prosperity. Each family member receives at least one large *tangyuan* in addition to several small ones. The flour balls may be plain or stuffed. Sweet fillings may include sugar, walnuts, sesame seeds, rose petals, peanuts, tangerine peel or bean paste. They can be cooked in a sweet soup or savory broth with both the ball and the soup/broth served in one bowl. A savory broth would include minced meat, vegetables, cilantro and toppings. Early Chinese immigrants from Guangdong call Dong Zhi: Guo Dong (過冬). Frozen ready-to-boil *tangyuan* are now sold in Asian grocery stores.



In parts of Northern China, people eat dumplings with hot soup on this day; believing that doing so will keep them from frost in the upcoming winter. Zhang Zhongjing (150-219), was a famous physician in Eastern Han Dynasty. He was once an official in Changsha. When he returned home for private life, he saw people lived a very hard life, and their ears were red with cold in winter. He was very sad and let his disciple cook to drive out the chill with mutton, hot pepper and some herbs. Zhang let him boil them first, mince them, then wrap them with flour. After boiling, he gave the food to the people there. By eating this kind of ear-like food, people's ears were all cured. Later, every winter solstice, people cooked this kind of food which was called dumplings to avoid ears from being frozen. This tradition was hence passed down one generation after another. The dumplings contained meat and high-level *Yang* warming herbs such as ginger and garlic. This helped the people stave off illness and disease and stay warm. It helped them adapt to the onset of winter and buoyed their mood during the darkest days of the year.

Dumplings or *jiaozi* (餃子) consist of semi-circular or half-moon shaped pasta with different fillings inside. Making the dumplings is a family affair. Dumplings are given different names because of their various fillings. There are different ways to cook dumplings, such as fried, boiled or steamed.



Dong Zhi remains a festive holiday that many overseas Chinese celebrate with family and friends.

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### Save these Dates for 2020 LF events All Saturdays

January 25: Chinese New Year of the Rat  
February 1: Museum Day at Boarding House Museum  
February 15: Chinese New Year Celebration in Locke  
May 9: 10th annual Locke Asian Pacific Spring Festival  
September 26, LF fundraiser banquet

### Make a Charitable Gift to the Locke Foundation

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)

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