

Locke Foundation Newsletter 樂居鎮基金會

Preserving Locke's history and legacy

lockefoundation@frontiernet.net

Fall 2023

www.locke-foundation.org



HISTORY OF LOCKE AND THE LOCKE FOUNDATION

By Stuart Walthall
Chairman, Locke Foundation

The mission of the Locke Foundation is to educate the public about the history and culture of Locke, California. The Locke Foundation is a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation which has operated continuously since November 5, 2003.

Founded in 1915, the town of Locke is a relatively young Chinese American community. It is important to note that Locke is NOT a Chinatown, which traditionally lie within or adjacent to a non-Chinese community. Locke is a stand-alone community built by and for the Chinese.



The land on which Locke was built was leased by the George Locke family estate to a group of Chinese businessmen who wished to relocate after a devastating fire destroyed the Chinatown section of nearby Walnut Grove, located one mile south of Locke. The entire Main Street section of Locke, known as the Historic District, was built in one year.

Locke was not truly intended to be a permanent town. Most Locke buildings were constructed inexpensively and are somewhat flimsy. Chinese residents, fearful of losing their property or of being deported back to China, came to the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta in search of prosperity. The dream of *Gum Saan*, referencing California as "Gold Mountain", had drawn Chinese immigrants to the area where they would make their fortune, then return to China to support or start a family and to buy land. Unfortunately, this dream did not come true for many who came to Gold Mountain.

In 1971 the entire town was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1990 the Historic District became a National Historic Landmark. This rare distinction denotes the national significance of Locke. As stated by the National Park Service: "Locke is the largest, most complete example of a rural agricultural Chinese American community in the United States".

During its heyday from the 1920's to 1940's Locke was an autonomous island of Chinese culture with a permanent population of about 600. At one time it had four restaurants, a half dozen markets, dry goods stores, five brothels, a post office, two slaughter houses, a flour mill, shipping wharves, an opera house, speakeasies during prohibition, numerous gambling establishments and a school.

Following WWII, Locke's population began to slowly decline. Children grew up, went to work or college (particularly University of California Berkeley), and did not return to their hometown.

Starting in the early 1970's Locke's demographics began to shift. Chinese residents of Locke were passing away. Non-Chinese, many of whom were artists and bohemians, began to replace the original residents of Locke.

As Locke's Chinese population declined, so did its structures. Buildings shifted. Floors sagged. Walls and windows fell into disrepair. Sacramento County helped by upgrading many buildings' electrical systems and removing many propane tanks and heaters to reduce fire hazards. Fire suppressant was sprayed on to building exteriors, then upgraded to a water-fed fire suppression system attached to all buildings in the Historic District. But Locke was decomposing.



Clarence Chu and Lien Fan
Chu purchase town of Locke
from George Locke.

In 1976, Clarence Chu, his sister Chu Lien Fan and her husband Ng Tor Tai, were told by friends from San Francisco that the Locke Ranch was for sale. The friends looked at it first and believed that the Chu family's development corporation in Hong Kong would be interested in this unusual site. The Locke estate consisted of 500 acres, about 14 of which comprised the town of Locke.

When the family came to look at the Locke property their first impression about the town of Locke was it did not look Chinese at all, but

more like a Hollywood set for a Wild West movie. There was not much Chinese culture left except for the Chinese. However, the interest to purchase the Locke estate was established immediately by the Chu family. They felt because of their ethnic background, they could definitely help to preserve the town's history and culture.

At the same time Sacramento County Housing and Redevelopment Agency (SHRA) was also interested in purchasing the town alone, but not the remainder of the property as a whole. By 1977 the Locke family estate decided to sell to Locke Property Development Corporation owned by Clarence and his family.

Clarence quickly held a meeting with the resident building owners. There were 60 Chinese and 12 non-Chinese present at the meeting. He could speak their native Chung Shan dialect. He immediately felt close to them and likewise, they to him.

The Chinese residents were concerned about whether his company would honor the land lease which they had with former Locke Ranch owners. Clarence was able to comfort these Chinese residents, many of whom were elderly, and assure them that the basic structure of the town would remain the same. There would be no dramatic changes. He made sure they could continue to use the back open space for their community vegetable gardens also.

Prior to Clarence's arrival, SHRA wanted to restore the structure of the town and do something to maintain culture and community. In the 1990's SHRA initiated a series of meetings and studies to determine what might be done to repair Locke's antiquated sewer system. Clarence consulted with them and explored possibilities. Since a government grant could not benefit a private owner, SHRA offered to buy the land in order to secure a grant which would pay for a new sewer system. After the new sewer system was in place, the property would then be sold to another owner, other than Locke Property Development. Clarence felt this would just perpetuate the land ownership issue. He wanted to resolve the ownership question "once and for all".

Clarence is particularly proud of the sequence of events that followed. Clarence and the County returned to the bargaining table. He asked the County Board of Supervisors to support the creation of a subdivision. Without owning the land under their homes, the residents would never feel secure. Their homes would be merely "personal property".

He also urged the County to make right the historic wrong in the Alien Exclusion Act, which prevented Chinese from owning and purchasing land in the first place. All five Sacramento County Supervisors voted to approve the creation of the subdivision so that after the sewer system was in place, the residents could buy the land under their homes. Locke Property Development sold the land to the County for a fraction of the price they could have received in an open

market. By doing so, Locke building owners were able to purchase the land under their buildings for a mere \$3000-\$5000 per lot.

Clarence Chu and Locke Property Development purchased several buildings, including the Joe Shoong Chinese School, the Dai Loy Gambling Hall and the Jan Ying Association building. He currently maintains these buildings and offers them as historic museums to the public. He also owned the Locke Boarding House, one of four original buildings dating back to 1909 when Locke was then known as Lockeport.

Now that Locke was privately owned, how would it be governed?

THE CREATION OF THE LOCKE MANAGEMENT CORPORATION AND THE LOCKE FOUNDATION

In 2000, SHRA bought the underlying land, then began a four year process to return the town back to its residents. The most difficult part of the project was to create an ongoing town governance structure that would balance the needs of building owners and residents, the Chinese cultural and historic groups, governmental entities, and the historic preservation community. All of these groups had intense interest in the outcome, and many had different goals and objectives. SHRA, with the use of outside consultants, architects, historic preservationists and others, developed a plan that would manage these competing interests.

In the end, two non-profit organizations were created: the Locke Management Corporation (LMC) and the Locke Foundation (LF). The membership of each board was balanced between residential and business property owners, representatives of local Chinese cultural groups, governmental entities and the historic preservation community, with no group having a majority.

On December 14, 2004, SHRA turned ownership of the now subdivided land to the building owners in an emotional ceremony that received widespread publicity. After nearly 100 years, the wrong that had been done to these Chinese citizens by the Alien Land Law was finally made right.

It should be noted that the initial board of directors for the Locke Management Corporation and the Locke Foundation were one and the same. However, as responsibilities and interests changed, so did these two organizations. In 2019 the Locke Foundation submitted amended bylaws to the Sacramento County Board of Supervisor which separated the LF from the LMC, and also severed its connection with Sacramento County. This was done to enable the LF to operate as a traditional California non-profit, free to self-govern, and not be subject to the bylaws of the LMC which are mandated by Sacramento County.

The function and responsibilities of the LMC are: to

represent residential and commercial property owners, maintain common areas, collect assessments, promote business and protect Locke's historic structures. To enable the proper governance of Locke, the LMC has bylaws, CC&R's and a Special Planning Area Ordinance (SPA) as mandates and guidelines. In short, the LMC is an HOA for a whole town.

The function of the Locke Foundation is: education, preservation, and promotion. The Locke Foundation is the only organization whose sole function is to advocate for the town of Locke - its history, culture and legacy.

At the inception of the two Locke organizations, the Locke Foundation was considered the little sister organization. The fledgling LMC had pressing issues addressing the many aspects of town governance. Minimal time was spent on the Locke Foundation at board meetings.

Unlike the LMC, which began operating with \$25,000 in seed money from the County, the Locke Foundation started with a budget of zero dollars. If the LF was to be an effective organization, able to accomplish its mission, it needed to raise funds.

Fundraising began with outreach to local organizations, businesses and individuals. The community responded. Donations and sponsorships began to flow in to the LF bank account. The LF also staged a series of festivals and events which increase the profile of the Foundation. The LF was now up and running.

In 2005 California State Parks purchased the Locke Boarding House from Locke Property Development with the intention of creating a visitors center. Significant funds were spent meticulously restoring the Boarding House back to its original condition. From the early 1920's to the advent of WWII, the building functioned as a boarding house operated by the Kuramoto family. WWII led to their internment and the Boarding House ceased operations.



Boarding House Museum owned and restored by California State Parks.

and has become the first-stop destination for most visitors who come to Locke.

In 2008, through contractual agreement with the Locke Foundation, State Parks opened the Locke Visitors Center to the public. The Visitors Center then morphed into the Locke Boarding House Museum. The museum is staffed and operated by LF docents and volunteers. It serves as the headquarters for the Foundation



on-sale items and friendly informed docents to welcome visitors. The Boarding House also functions as Information Center for Locke and surrounding communities.

In addition to operating the Locke Boarding House Museum, LF activities and accomplishments include: staging Locke's signature events- The Locke Chinese

The Museum is free to the public. The Locke Foundation presents rotating exhibits, lectures and film. Also on exhibit are historic photographs, reference materials, ephemera, artifacts,



Locke Town Centennial Celebration

New Year Celebration and The Locke Asian Pacific Spring Festival; the LF Scholarship Program - awarding scholarships to local high schools seniors; docent led historic walking tours; the Locke Oral History Project - capturing the stories of former and current Locke residents; the Locke Artifact Program - collecting, cataloging, preserving and displaying the precious relics from Locke's past; the Locke Foundation Quarterly Newsletter; the Locke Membership Program - over 200 paid members of the Foundation; creation of the Locke Memorial Park and Memorial Tile Project; funding of historic signage and plaques; the Locke Centennial Building Survey - creating a complete color catalog of all historic buildings from all angles. The LF also funds advertising for the town's museums and businesses.



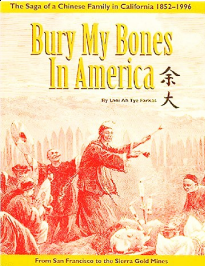
In its twenty years of its existence, the Locke Foundation has grown into a viable and influential organization. Its museum, docents, newsletter and website are valuable sources for historians, scholastic institutions, authors, media, agencies, cultural organizations, and most importantly..... the public.

Sources for this article: Remembering 100 Years - Locke Foundation publication; Sally Ooms; Clarence Chu; Locke Foundation Newsletter; Delta Explorer, Summer 2009, with permission of author Deborah Mendel who updated the article with recent information.

Bury my Bones in America: Saga of a Chinese Family in California 1852-1896 True Story

By Eileen Leung

Most Chinese who came to America to earn their fortune expected to return to China as rich men and die among their people. Their bones must be repatriated in the land of their ancestors so their spirit would not wander forever in a strange land.



Except for Yee Ah Tye. When he died in 1896, he told his family and friends: I have lived in America since I was a young man. Now I want to be buried here and my bones will lie undisturbed in the land where I have lived.

Ah Tye came to America in 1852 from Sze Yup District of Kwangtung Province. He learned English in Hong Kong before coming to America and soon became the leader of his district association in San Francisco. He was a astute and shrewd businessman. In 1854 he moved to Sacramento and led its Sze Yup District Association. His fluency in English allowed him to befriend prominent Caucasian leaders such as judges, politicians and lawyers. District associations were very important social and community institutions for Chinese immigrants to get along with mainstream American society, to redress grievances, negotiate business transactions, help with finances and obviously to ship remains home for burial. They met Chinese newcomers to the gold rush at the docks, gave them a place to stay, found them jobs, and outfitted them to work for the mines. They provided an important service for newcomers who spoke little English

From Sacramento, Ah Tye moved to La Porte in Plumas County (near Marysville) to work on placer mining of gold, to open a store and to help with contract labor.

Yee Ah tye was considered one of the first of a new hybrid: Chinese American. He spoke English fluently so he could communicate with Chinese and Caucasians. Although he dressed in Chinese attire, he was perfectly comfortable with American business practices and the importance of redress through the American judicial system.

He entered into partnerships with White Americans, and developed mutual trust with his friends and colleagues. He was instrumental in helping the Chinese community overcome Anti-Chinese sentiment during the late 1880's. Although he emigrated from a humble Chinese village, he was no country bumpkin when it came to surviving in the frontier as a respected gold mining merchant and labor contractor.

He had 3 wives:

1. Sech Shee, whom he betrothed before he immigrated to America. Before Yee Ah Tye could return to visit her, he received word she died.
2. So Shee whom he met in America. She also died young and had no children.
3. Chan Shee, whom he met in Oroville and married at age 16. She bore 5 daughters and 2 sons.

He was neither a sojourner in life and death. He could have returned to China as a wealthy man who made his fortune in the Gold Mountain, but he decided to live out his days in California for over 50 years. In all that time, he never returned to China.



Grave marker for Yee Ah Tye in Mountain View Cemetery, Oakland, his third wife and

Glimpses of Yee Ah Tye's life can be gleaned from deeds, mining claims, tax assessments, news articles and temple remains. But his legacy lies in the number of descendants that have the unique surname of Ah Tye. There are more than 180 descendants through seven generations which includes doctors, businessmen, educators, lawyers, government officials, homemakers and artists. It also includes a whole generation of veterans who fought valiantly for the land of their ancestors—America.

The saga of Yee Ah Tye's life has been extensively researched and written up by his 2 great-granddaughters in Bury My Bones in America. This book is available for sale at the Locke Boarding House Museum for \$25.

Error Correction:

1. The Winter 2023 newsletter omitted a few sentences from the obituary for Gene Chan:

Gene has deep roots in Locke, and he is proud of Locke's legacy. He and Connie King gave tours to school children who visited Locke. He told them about going to a school for Orientals in Walnut Grove. Gene passed away on November 30, 2022, at age of 90.

2. The Summer 2023 newsletter omitted the following sentences from Nytee Chan Young's biography:

Nytee graduated from Courtland High School (1947) with a Joe Shoong Scholarship to UC Berkeley (Class of 1951). She earned her Teaching Credential from CSU Sacramento and later a Masters Degree in Education. Nytee married Robert Young from Stockton and together they raised two sons. She taught in Stockton and Sacramento, and retiring after a fulfilling 30 years in education. Presently she is actively involved with her sons and their families. Additionally, Nytee is a Mahjong enthusiast, both playing and teaching the game.

LF Oral History Project
& LockePRDA
present

***Voices: Chinese Women
of the Delta***

Fundraiser Luncheon

Proceeds to Support a
New Documentary Film

Sunday, November 5, 2023

12:30 - 4:00 PM

Lucky Jade Restaurant

7007 South Land Park Dr. Sacramento, CA

Table \$650 / Individual Ticket \$70

For Information & Tickets

***Locke Foundation - Oral History Project**

Honey Lum 916-261-2118

lfohplum@gmail.com

***Locke Prior Residents, Descendants**

& Ascendants [LockePRDA]

Carol Lee 916-716-4012

chinasilk88@gmail.com

LockePRDA@gmail.com





LOCKE FOUNDATION



Dear Friends and Community Partners:

The LF Oral History Project in collaboration with LockePRDA (Locke Prior Residents, Descendants and Ascendants), also a nonprofit organization, is hosting a Special Project Fundraiser Luncheon dedicated to the production of our newest project, a documentary film titled, ***“Voices: Chinese Women of the Delta”***.

The documentary will be produced and directed by Min Zhou, an award-winning filmmaker and journalist. We are thrilled to be in collaboration with Min, who has devoted her career to the focus and research of Chinese American immigrant history and to producing short documentary films.

During our luncheon we will be honoring Ruth Jang, Corliss Suen Lee, Gay Lum and Harry Sen for their contribution to the LF Oral History Project. Save the date: November 5, 2023.

Your support will provide the means to produce our *Women’s Voices* project. **Any donation is welcome. ALL donors are invited to the Premier Showing of Voices: Chinese Women of the Delta!!** Please make your tax-deductible donation to: **“LF Oral History Project”**. We look forward to your participation for our fundraiser celebration!!

SPONSORSHIP LEVELS

<u>CO-PRODUCER</u>	<u>\$3000</u>	<u>DIAMOND</u>	<u>\$2000</u>
>> Named as Co-Producer in film credits		>> Logo in program booklet	
>> Logo in program booklet		>> Table 10 Seats at the Luncheon	
>> 15 Seats at the Luncheon			
<u>GOLD</u>	<u>\$1000</u>	<u>SILVER</u>	<u>\$500</u>
>> Logo in program booklet		>> Logo in program booklet	
>> 5 Seats at the Luncheon		>> 2 Seats at Luncheon	
<u>TABLE SPONSOR</u>	<u>\$650</u>	<u>INDIVIDUAL TICKET</u>	<u>\$70</u>
>> 10 Seats		>> 1 Seat	

Organization/Individual: _____. Phone: _____.

Contact Name: _____. Email: _____.

Deadlines: Luncheon Reservation: October 26, 2023. **Logo Submission:** October 10, 2023.

Checks Payable to: **“LF Oral History Project”**. 7302 Rush River Dr. Sacramento, CA 95831

Credit Card: Locke-Foundation.org Donation page: Special Instructions field: put **“Voices”**.

PayPal: *a) Add \$\$ to “Donate”. (b) Go to “Special Instructions to the Seller”: put **“Voices”**.

Please direct questions to:

Honey Lum
lfohplum@gmail.com
(916) 261-2118

Carol Lee
chinasilk88@gmail.com
916-716-4012

Chinese Demonstration Garden Undergoes Rejuvenation

Article and photos by Stuart Walthall

It's been over a decade since the first few precious seeds were planted in Locke's infant Chinese demonstration garden. In the passing years the space expanded, more authentic Chinese plants were cultivated and the garden flourished.

The demonstration garden was created by the Locke Foundation in order to display the vegetables, fruits and herbs grown by the original Chinese residents of Locke whose daily lives revolved around tending the gardens which fed their families and neighbors.

The garden has been a popular stop for visitors who venture off busy Main Street and stroll the quiet back streets of Locke. Enter the garden gate and walk along the pathways to view the numerous signs describing the Chinese vegetables being grown - Fu Gwa (Bitter Melon), Dong Gwa (Winter Melon), Dow Gok (Long Beans), Hong Joe (Chinese Red Dates), Cee Gwa (Luffa), and more.



Entrance to Chinese Demo Garden. Sign by Anita Lo.

Visiting the garden can be quite a meaningful and nostalgic experience for those raised on such traditional Chinese vegetables. Unfortunately, the garden's soil has become depleted of vital organics and nutrients. Plus, the scourge of Bermuda grass has invaded the area. Thus, it's time to rejuvenate the soil and rid the area of invading vegetation. In order to initiate the rejuvenation process a game plan had to be formulated. Fortunately, three generous "outside" individuals volunteered their skills and experience to the project.

Spearheading the project is JayLee Tuil, Research and Academic Coordinator Sustainable Living/Learning Community, UC Davis. JayLee holds a Bachelor's in Landscaping Architecture, a Masters and PhD in Geography. She has a background in conservation and restoration planning and is interested in community outreach and ways to leverage University resources to aid community groups.



Li Schmidt, Mayna Concepcion, Jaylee Tuil

Working alongside JayLee is Mayna Concepcion, Graduate Student Researcher studying community development at UC Davis. Mayna was raised in Elk Grove and has a background in landscape architecture. Her interests are in experimental learning and community programming.

Joining JayLee and Mayna is Li Schmidt, a Taiwanese farmer based in Sacra-

mento. Li started Cultural Roots Nursery in 2020 with a mission to heal the connection between the Asian diaspora and ancestral foodways by increasing abundance and availability of culturally important heritage plants. She holds a M.A. in Community Development with a focus on sustainable food systems. She is a member of the California Farmer Justice Collaborative and the Asian American Farmers Alliance. She is also an Associate Storyteller and Researcher for the Cal Ag Roots Podcast at the California Institute for Rural Studies.

To initiate the rejuvenation process the space had to be stripped of all vegetation down to ground level. Locke resident Russell Ooms completed the task. In order to kill the existing Bermuda grass the area had to be covered with one large 5 mil 50' by 40' silage tarp whose edges were secured with cement tiles, pilings and rubber mats. This process is referred to as "occultation" - blocking light and inducing solar heat. This task was accomplished by Locke volunteers Russell Ooms, Deborah Mendel, Mark Miller and Kim Robertson.



Demo garden is covered with black tarp to block light and induce solar heat to destroy weeds.

The occultation process will continue for a period of two months. With luck the invasive vegetation will be killed off, and the garden space will be ready to be tilled and planted. Raised beds with mole-proof galvanized screening will be constructed for winter and summer crops.

The Locke Foundation is grateful to the volunteers who have stepped forward to initiate this worthy task. The rejuvenation project is a prime example of collaborative community involvement and utilization of available resources.

The Locke Foundation invites you to visit our community. And while you are here, take a walk to the back of town and see how the new and improved Chinese demonstration garden is progressing.

The Locke Foundation is interested in facilitating community involvement with the Chinese Demonstration Garden Project. Thus far the LF has been very fortunate to have a dedicated team of volunteers assisting with the planning and execution of the garden renovation. However, the upcoming growing season offers a meaningful opportunity to those interested in heritage vegetables.

The LF welcomes anyone interested in participating—garden clubs, students looking for community service hours, organizations or the general public. If interested, contact stuartwalthall@aol.com

Locke Foundation Membership Application/Renewal

Last Name _____ First Name _____

Mailing address _____

Email address _____ Tel () _____ Cell () _____

I would like to volunteer for the following activities:

Guided tour docent _____ Boarding House Volunteer _____

Contributor to newsletter _____ Media contacts _____ Landscape maintenance _____

Donation: _____ Designated purpose (if any) _____

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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