

Newspaper articles on the Chinese presence in Nevada City

From the Nevada City Daily Transcript, retrieved from the Wallace Haganman Chinese Archive in the Nevada County Historical Society Doris Searls Historical Library.

Excerpts from an article, October 1851 (date unclear)

"Chinese in Trouble. A party of fifteen men left this city on Tuesday last, for the Yuba, about five miles above Rose's Bar, to assist some John Chinamen whose claims had been seized by a strong force of envious hombres. The Chinamen had been for a considerable time patiently turning the river, and had just accomplished their claims by one day's successful work, when they were ordered off by a party of forty men, who took unceremonious possession of both claims and improvements, on pretense that a part of them owned the claims before the Chinese took them. On the other hand, the facts are that the Chinese bought the claims of one of the previous owners, and obtained a bill of sale therefor, and the other owners had deserted the claims, so that the Chinese had been in peaceable possession for some four weeks, at the time of this Tartar incursion. The party who left this city made an arrangement with the Chinamen to obtain the claims, to work them, and to pay them one half of the proceeds. They arrived on the ground in dispute during the nights, and assisted the deputy sheriff to arrest eight of the belligerents, who encamped on the spot, and were asleep. The rest of the jumpers were encamped further up the river. A part of the force of fifteen started immediately for Nevada with the captives, two of whom contrived to escape during the passage. The remaining six were brought here, and laid under bonds to appear to answer. It is highly probable the force left at the Bar had a merry time of it, yesterday morning, when the rest of jumpers discovered the arrest of their comrades."

Excerpts from an article, 1852 (date unclear)

"The Chinese still continue to arrive in great numbers, and from all accounts we may reasonably conclude that this is but 'the beginning of the end' of their coming. Nearly all the ships which come from China with passengers have immediately returned, and we have accounts, by the Challenge, of a fleet of twenty ships on their way here, having on board from 200 to 400 passengers each. They generally come here provided with their mining implements, and food and clothing sufficient to do them a long time. The only money our people appear to get from them, is what they pay for boots, and for the means of transportation to the mines. Now, whether it is right to permit a people, who will not allow us to enter the gates of their cities, to come into our country and dig out and carry off our precious metals, on an equality with our own citizens, is a matter I leave for wise legislators and statesmen to settle as best they can. One thing appears pretty certain, that the miners in some regions of our State, do not look upon it as a reciprocity of trade, and are making laws of their own. If the Chinese are permitted to come as heretofore, their numbers in this country, in another year will equal that of American citizens."

Excerpt from an article on March 25 1853

“A Chinese Steam Engine. Lam-tai Sam, an ingenious Chinaman, formerly a fireman on board the East India steamer Pluto, and now a resident of this city, has constructed a complete steam engine, which he has placed on a miniature steamboat about three and a half feet long, with paddle-wheels and everything complete. A crowd of Chinamen assembled yesterday at a store on Sacramento street to witness its operation. Lam-tai-Sam got up steam, and bewildered his countrymen by the brilliant success of his machine. He himself was evidently in high glee, and well he might, as there has been, we believe, but one other Chinaman successful in the construction of a steam engine. The little steamboat the maker has named ‘Mieu-Wah-Fong’ or the ‘wonderful flowery vessel.’ He is engaged in fashioning another engine, of six horse power, which he designs taking over to Canton, with the view of inducing his countrymen to give him orders for large steam machinery.”

Excerpts from an article on August 19, 1853

“The Celestials. It is no rare thing, on the wharves of this city, to encounter one or more representatives of the Celestial Empire, with their comprehensive inexpressibles, eyes turned up edge-wise, and little greasy looking skull-caps. A few of them are employed as sailors, but they are generally cooks or stewards on board vessels in the China trade. They are rather diminutive in stature, with dried-up physiognomies, but are said to be very industrious, patient and good natured. They preserve a uniform indifference to objects with which they are surrounded, working with their eyes directed to the ground, seeming to regard themselves as wanderers in a strange land among barbarians. Reprinted from the NY Journal of Communications.”

Excerpts from an article on December 6, 1881

“Chinamen in the Mines. The Sacramento Bee copies and comments upon an article from the Grass Valley Union in which is spoken of the hiring of Chinamen to work in the gravel mines of Nevada county. The Union asserts that drift mining companies ‘that discharged the Chinamen in their employ some months ago are beginning to hire them again in the place of white labor.’ The Bee makes much of this and assures to say that the hydraulic mines will again hire Chinese help as soon as they resume work and the present feeling against the ‘heathen’ wears off. The Bee asserts that out of the 2,400 miners employed in all the hydraulic mines upon the Yuba, the Bear rivers, some 1600 were said to be Chinamen. So far as we are aware, personally, no such number of Chinese were employed. While the Bee makes such an ado over the hiring of Chinamen in the mines it never once attempts to show up the percentage of Chinamen hired by the farmers and ranchers of the valley. So far as our experience with ordinary California farming goes we would not, we don’t think, be out of the way in saying that at least fifty per cent of the hired help by the farmers of the Sacramento Valley are Chinese. And while we do not approve of the employment of Chinamen at all, either in the mines or upon the farm, we freely admit that the miners do employ them now and so do the farmers – six are employed on the farms where one is employed in the mines. It is not the fault of the company that

Chinamen are employed in the mines so much as that of the foreman and superintendent. It generally comes about this way: a boss Chinaman will go to the superintendent or foreman and try to hire out ten, fifty or a hundred Chinese laborers. If told no Chinamen are wanted the boss will offer him (the superintendent) \$1 a month for each Chinaman so employed, but if that won't secure the employment of his men the offer goes up to two, three, or five dollars each for the men employed, which sum goes into the pocket of the superintendent, and he (the superintendent) will use the means to show the company how they will make a 'saving' by hiring Chinamen instead of white laborers. We do not say this is so in all instances or in all mines where Chinamen have been employed, but such has been the case."

Excerpts from five articles on Wednesday May 3, 1882, three days before the approval of the Chinese Exclusion Act:

"FIRE THEM OUT: That Band of Chinamen at the Blue Tent Mine [...] there will be trouble if the Blue Tent mining company does not cease giving employment to the small army of Chinamen now working in its gold mines. We ask that company, how can it expect sympathy and financial aid from our people when it daily insults them by employing rice eaters in the place of white men? It was understood, fairly and squarely, that no more Chinamen were to be employed in that class of mining, and for that reason our people responded nobly to their call [...]"

"Anti-Chinese Lecture. Tomorrow evening, at the Theatre in this city, Mrs. L.F. Baldy of San Francisco will deliver a lecture on the subject: 'The curse of the Chinese in California.' The lady is well known in literary circles at the Bay, where she is the chief critic writing for 'The Dramatic Brevities' [...] Mrs. Baldy appears to be a lady capable of presenting the Chinese subject in a thorough and interesting manner."

"Chinese Leaving the Mines. A miner writing from French Corral, says of the Chinese there: 'Here there are scarcely any Chinamen left, for about ten months ago they were thrown out of work in the claims and their places have been filled with whites. People are very well satisfied and the work is better done. The Superintendents always predicted we could not do without Chinese help, and now it turns out that we are much better off without the Chinese work. I hope it will be the same all over California.'"

"An Anti-Chinese Organization. The people of Boca are in earnest on the Chinese question. A meeting of the citizens was held in the schoolhouse last week for the purpose of organizing an anti-Chinese society. Major Downie of this city, who happened to be in town at the time, was present, and made a stirring anti-Chinese speech. A permanent organization was effected."

"AH WING: A Fly Celestial Who is Just Too Sweet for Anything. Every Chinese loving man and woman in the East should be provided with one of the bland lepers as a room mate. Some tootsy-ootsy crank in New York City who ought to have a half a dozen just such pets, writes to the Graphic as follows: 'I called the other night on one of the dangerous foreigners resident among us. He is a Chinaman. His name is Ah Wing. He is by trade a printer and

also a painter. He sets type in English, whereby he competes with our American compositors, and he sets and translates from English to Chinese, and vice versa, wherein few of our printers will compete with him for many years to come. Before becoming a compositor he was occupied with the ornamental painting of street cars in a New York factory. He shows capacity in painting, sketching and drawing, is a worker in decorative art, and has studied at the Cooper Institute Art School. He came to this country, landing at San Francisco, when seventeen years of age, and is now about twenty-six. This young fellow 'picked up' all his practical and ornamental accomplishments in America. When he left China he was just 'out of college,' as he terms it. He speaks with a slight Chinese accent, but with much more readiness and correctness than the majority of his countrymen. I experienced no difficulty in making myself understood by him, even when the conversation extended into what might be termed an unusual range and character of topics. For instance, he expressed himself as very desirous of perfecting himself in as many branches of English knowledge and literature. He informed me that he read a good deal at night, but that such occupation had a tendency to keep him awake. I am fond, perhaps overfond of broaching theories on every possible occasion, and in this instance could not resist the temptation of doing so. [...] All this I inflicted on the poor fellow and so added to the long list of prosecutions and injuries received by his race at the hands of my countrymen. He stood it like a martyr and a gentleman. Be my theory what it may, young Wing seemed to understand its gist and drift. He did not say that he agreed with me, nor did he violently combat it and say, 'Pooh, pooh to you.' He is too much of a gentleman for that [...]"

Excerpts from two articles in 1880-82 (dates unclear):

"Nevada in Ashes! Loss over \$200,000!! FULL PARTICULARS! A fire broke out at 4 o'clock and 25 minutes yesterday, in a China house occupied by Win Kee, on Broad street [...] The fire undoubtedly originated from the carelessness of opium smoking Chinamen, who should hereafter by all means be excluded from the fire limits of the city. The same building in which the fire originated has been found on fire five or six times within two or three months past."

"Particularly have this class of Chinese emigrants become obnoxious to a wholesome state of society. We are being overrun by them, too many of whom either from necessity or choice, make this their only business on arriving among us. They are arriving at San Francisco almost every week by ship loads, from whence they are driven off to the interior, here to be fastened upon the mining towns to their utter horror and annoyance. The only way to escape the threatened danger is to wage a similar warfare against them here also. We do not want them. Society does not call for them. They are not of our people and why should we tolerate them? A scourge—a pestilence which falls upon a well regulated society, can be bourn only because it cannot be averted; but when brought among us by a worthless foreign population, it is our own fault if it is allowed. It is to be hoped the labors of the grand jury may be successful in the accomplishment of the object; but where they fail, let the town organization finish the work."

All of the above are quotes from the Nevada City Daily Transcript. Finally, I will include a reminiscence by an unnamed member of the Nevada County Historical Society for the notes of the "Officers for the Centennial Year of 1949." This paints a different picture, though flawed, of life in the local Chinatown.

The Old Chinese of Placer Mining Days - A Memory

*I like to "reminisce." The boyhood happenings at the old time placer mining Chinese camps will not be recalled by very many this day. Either the majority have passed on or at the time of the events they were of no particular interest to many. A Chinaman was a "Ch*nk", that was all. Many of these old characters I knew, snowballed, rocked, teased. I now realize for them I had a genuine affection.*

I recall the funeral of Jim Yet Wah. Jim was a sort of tycoon amongst the Chinese at the settlement known as the China Garden. He ran the garden and had a store in a walled up dug-out of a cellar. The most interesting place for a store one could imagine. Today nothing remains but a mound of earth and relic of the stone walls. To gain entrance to this store with its peculiar tasting brown sugar bars of candy, the melon or citron candied to perfection, the strips of cocoanut candy or candied plums, the litchi nuts, and the eternal salted watermelon seeds, certainly was an event. Anything could happen, anything could emerge from the dark corners and from the crevices made by goods piled on the shelves. The whole affair was mysterious. The only light coming through the cellar door merely increased the illusions. Jim was a sort of Solomon as well. The trouble and controversies arising at times amongst the Chinese would be settled without the recourse to cleavers, hatchets and knives.

When the time came for old Jim to die, occasioned an event long in my memory. He was placed in a coffin resting on two saw horses out in front of the China gate. A canopy was placed over the bier. There he rested in state until the funeral. But all was not to be serene. For some reason or other a handful of nickels and dimes was showered over the remains. That nearly wrecked the works. We white urchins viewing the proceedings made one wild dive and scramble. For a few moments it was nip and tuck as to whether Old Jim was to remain in state on the saw-horses or was to be cast upon the ground. Precariously the coffin tilted on one saw-horse and then upon the other, the coffin jiggling meantime. After much "ki yi ing" and uproar the young ruffians were scattered and order restored. The town "hearse", a light two horse rig larger than a buckboard but much smaller than a "deadax" wagon bore the remains to the China cemetery.

Sing was the son of Jim Yet Wah and the chief mourner. He headed the cortege. He was supported on either side by another Chinaman and then started one of the most peculiar and tortuous, apparently, walks I have ever witnessed. All the kids vowed that Sing had needles in his slippers which caused the spectacular locomotion. He swayed from side to side in agony seemingly and meandered from one side of the road to the other diligently held upright by the two aides at his sides. Another aide followed dispersing "devil papers" - sheets of small size punctured with openings. Presumably the devil was to pass through all these openings before catching up with the corpse. The holes being many and the number of small sheets being plentiful or the devil was slow, anyway he never caught up. However, the devil was working under a decided handicap. The din of the firecrackers and the racket of the China band, noise used to

frighten the devil - and it could have the devil badly befuddled and it was hardly conceivable that he could sneak through and manipulate every hole in the "devil paper".

Now the racket, uproar and din occasioned by the firecrackers and cymbals and gong of the band may have been alright in so far as scaring the devil but it was certainly as tough on the nerves of the horses drawing the "hearse". And Old Jim Wah's last ride came very close to being a wild one in so far as the horses were concerned. Then the grave. A whole roast pork - not small either - several roast ducks, Chinese pastry, candies, nuts, bowls full of rice. Yes, Old Jim was sent on well provided. Either he was supposed to have a long journey ahead or else was created with a prodigious appetite, I wouldn't know. But I do know that the town dogs increased in weight. Sing, the son, took over the China Garden and ran it for years. When he retired and returned to the land of his ancestors finally to repose through eternity in the sacred soil, word had it that he had been killed by bandits in this land of turmoil, sadness and political corruption. [...]