

**Chinatown Historic Resources Survey**  
**City of Fresno, Planning and Development Department**

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**SUMMARY**

In May 2005, the City of Fresno contracted with Architectural Resources Group (ARG) to develop the Chinatown Historic Resources Survey. This project included a reconnaissance level survey, intensive level survey, completion of State of California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) forms for 43 properties, development of contexts, and the identification of a potential historic district. The Chinatown Survey Area encompasses the blocks bounded by Mariposa, Inyo, E, and G Streets. Research and fieldwork were conducted to establish descriptive and historical information for development of DPR Primary Records and Building, Structure & Object forms.

The historic survey for Fresno's Chinatown area was prepared for the City of Fresno's Planning and Development Department under the supervision of Karana Hattersley-Drayton, Historic Preservation Project Manager. The City's historic preservation ordinance was adopted in 1979 and amended in 1999 and includes provisions for an Official Local Register of Historic Resources. Although several buildings within Fresno's Chinatown are on this Local Register, and others were included within the 1994 Ratkovich Plan survey, the area has not benefited from an intensive building-by-building survey. Significant portions of both Chinatown and Germantown (which lies adjacent) are being considered for a mixed-use development. As a consequence, in May 2005 the City of Fresno contracted with Architectural Resources Group to prepare an architectural survey of Chinatown, with separate historic contexts for both Chinatown and Germantown. In order to better understand the social history of the area the City also hired oral historians Suzanne Guerra and Dr. Margo McBane who conducted interviews with numerous individuals representing several of the nine distinct ethnic groups that have lived and worked in Chinatown.

The purpose of the survey is to gain an accurate inventory of the existing historic resources within Fresno's Chinatown and to identify historic resources potentially eligible for listing on Fresno's Local Register of Historic Resources as well as in the California Register of Historic Resources (California Register) and in the National Register of Historic Places (National

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Register). New construction and demolition projects in the neighborhood must be carefully examined in order to maintain what remains of the historic character of the area. A neighborhood survey is one step toward documenting the area, in order to provide a tool for future planning activities in Chinatown.

The area is west of the downtown core and Central Pacific rail lines (see Survey Map). The Chinatown Survey Area is composed primarily of one- and two-story commercial or combination commercial/residential buildings dating from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. In addition, there are two important social or religious association buildings, the Bow On Tong Joss House at 930-934 F Street and the Bing Kong Association Building at 921 China Alley. The bulk of construction in Chinatown occurred between the late 1870s, when the construction of Fresno's West Side commenced, to the 1930s when the number of buildings constructed diminished due to the Great Depression and other economic pressures. Few structures from the nineteenth centuries remain. Over the years the character of Chinatown has been greatly affected by the demolition and alteration of buildings and the construction of freeways. The core of historic Chinatown, G Street, Tulare Street and China Alley, has been particularly impacted by demolition and redevelopment projects.

Of the 51 buildings in the survey area, 43 were over 55 years of age and were surveyed. Four properties appear to be individually eligible for the National Register; eight properties appear to be individually eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources; ten properties appear to be individually eligible for Fresno Register of Historic Resources (in addition to the four already listed); nine appear to be individually eligible to become Fresno Heritage Properties; and eighteen appear to be eligible as part of a local Chinatown Historic District.

**Properties Potentially Eligible for the National Register**

921-927	China Alley (Bing Kong Association)
929-937	China Alley (part of Bow On property)
930-934	F Street (Bow On Association Building)
947-951	F Street (Industrial Bank of Fresno)

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**Properties Potentially Eligible for the California Register**

921-927 China Alley (Bing Kong Association)  
929-937 China Alley (part of Bow On property)  
836-840 F Street (Azteca Theatre)  
930-934 F Street (Bow On Association Building)  
947-951 F Street (Industrial Bank of Fresno)  
1522-1526 Kern Street (Dick's Shoes and Men's Wear)  
1528-1540 Kern Street (Komoto's Department Store)  
942 Fagan Alley

**Properties Potentially Eligible for the Fresno Register**

929-937 China Alley (part of Bow On property)  
956 China Alley  
836-840 F Street (Azteca Theatre)  
914-920 F Street  
922-926 F Street  
1045 F Street  
911-919 Fagan Alley  
942 Fagan Alley  
1522-1526 Kern Street (Dick's Shoes and Men's Wear)  
1528-1548 Tulare Street

**Properties Potentially Eligible as a Fresno Heritage Property**

818-842 E Street  
920 E Street  
804 F Street  
829-833 F Street  
1027-1029 F Street  
1038 F Street  
1042 F Street  
1047 F Street  
1515 Inyo Street

**Properties Potentially Eligible for a Fresno Register Chinatown District**

921-927	China Alley	933-935	F Street
929-937	China Alley	937-945	F Street
956	China Alley	938-954	F Street
836-840	F Street	947-951	F Street
901-911	F Street	942	Fagan Alley
914-920	F Street	1522-1526	Kern Street
922-926	F Street	1528-1540	Kern Street
927-931	F Street	1502-1520	Tulare Street
930-934	F Street	1528-1548	Tulare Street

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**Past Survey Efforts in the Area**

The area included in the Chinatown Historic Resource Survey has never been comprehensively surveyed. However, some buildings have been documented or identified in past surveys such as the 1994 Ratkovich Plan survey. In addition some properties are listed on Fresno's Local Register.

**Currently-Designated Properties**

The following four properties within the survey area are listed on Fresno's Local Register of Historic Resources:

- 921 China Alley, Bing Kong Association Building, HP066;
- 930 F Street, Bow On Association Building, HP065;
- 947 F Street, Industrial Bank of Fresno, Bank of Italy, HP064; and
- 1528 Kern Street, Komoto's Department Store & Hotel, HP072.

All resources listed on the Local Register qualify as historical resources for the purposes of CEQA. According to the California Northwest Information Center Inventory, there are currently no resources listed on the National or California Registers within the survey area.

**Area Surveyed**

The City of Fresno planning staff defined the survey area in the Request for Proposal. The boundaries of the survey area are shown on the map below.



*Figure A: Map showing the Chinatown Historic Resource Survey Area. Mariposa Street is the northwest boundary, G Street is the northeast boundary, Inyo Street is the southeast boundary, and E Street is the southwest boundary.*

## PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Research efforts were significantly aided by contributions of the following individuals and organizations:

- Karana Hattersley-Drayton, Historic Preservation Project Manager (City of Fresno);
- Kathleen Omachi (Chinatown Revitalization Inc.);
- Ray Silvia (Fresno Public Library, California History and Genealogy Room);
- Sharon Hiigel and Maria Ortiz (Fresno City and County Historical Society);
- Suzanne Guerra and Dr. Margo McBane (Guerra and McBane LLC); and
- William B. Secrest, Jr. (Fresno Public Library, California History and Genealogy Room).

The research design and methodology for the project was outlined by the consultant during the course of the project and incorporated guidelines recommended by *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation Planning and Developing Historic Contexts*. The following National Register Bulletins were consulted:

- *National Register Bulletin 24 Guidelines for Local Surveys: a Basis for Preservation Planning;*
- *National Register Bulletin 15 How to Apply the National Register Criteria of Evaluation;*
- *National Register Bulletin 16A How to Complete the National Register Registration Form.*

## Archival Research

For the purposes of this project, especially in relation to developing the context statements, the following collections were consulted:

- Fresno County Public Library (California History & Genealogy Room);
- Fresno City and County Historical Society;
- Department of Planning and Development (department files and building permits);
- Doe and Bancroft Libraries at the University of California, Berkeley; and
- Online Archives of California.

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These collections and contacts provided background information on Fresno's Chinatown and the development of the general area, which informed the context statement.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Fresno's Chinatown were reviewed for each of the 42 buildings, in order to establish estimated construction dates. The Sanborn Map Company produced maps of municipalities for fire insurance purposes from the 1860s through 1950, with mapping continuing to the present in some communities. Sanborn Maps were created for the City of Fresno for the years 1885, 1888, 1898, 1906, 1918, 1948, and 1950. For each year Sanborn Maps were produced for the area, they show every building present, providing: the location, number of stories, footprint of the buildings and use (such as: house, flat, apartment, boarding house, shop, church, social hall, etc).

Polk City Directories were important sources for identifying the residents of the Chinatown buildings. In addition to lists organized alphabetically by name, some years have reverse directories organized by address. Directories also provided the occupation of residents, and often whether or not they owned the property or were a tenant. However, entries for Fresno's Chinatown often refer to the occupants only as "Oriental."

Research was also conducted at the Department of Planning and Development Building Permit Office for information regarding specific properties. According to City staff, the earliest building permits on file date to 1911. Buildings constructed prior to this may have permits for repairs or alterations made after 1911.

It should be noted that no archaeological or pre-historic Native-American resources were surveyed during this project. Additionally, limited pre-historic or Native-American contexts were developed. There is potential for the discovery of archeological resources in the survey area. In the future, when major construction projects are undertaken within the survey area, it is recommended that an archaeologist be consulted to assess the site and potential for resources.

### **Oral History**

Suzanne Guerra and Dr. Margo McBane (Guerra and McBane LLC) conducted a Chinatown oral history project concurrently with ARG's research on Chinatown. This report benefits from and incorporates information from their transcripts.

### **Reconnaissance Survey**

According to *National Register Bulletin 24*, "Reconnaissance may be thought of as a 'once over lightly' inspection of an area, most useful for characterizing its resources in general and for developing a basis for deciding how to organize and orient more detailed survey efforts. . . . Reconnaissance and intensive surveys are often conducted in sequence with reconnaissance being used in planning intensive survey."<sup>1</sup> ARG staff members conducted a driving/ walking field survey of the area in June 2005. Photographs of all buildings within the survey area were taken at that time. Buildings that appeared to be over 45 years old were recommended for intensive level documentation.

Of the approximately 51 buildings surveyed in the reconnaissance phase, 43 were identified as over 45 years old and were recommended for further documentation. Approximately 14 properties within the study area had already been identified as part of the 1994 Ratkovich Plan Survey and other survey efforts as historic resources. The survey team used Sanborn Maps of the neighborhood during field visits to compare with present-day configurations of streetscapes.

### **Intensive Survey**

Based on the Reconnaissance Survey, ARG developed a matrix of properties within the survey area that should be studied at the Intensive Level. In addition, this phase included updating State of California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) forms already completed (to various degrees) as components of past survey efforts. A total of 43 properties were examined at the intensive level and documented on California State DPR forms including Primary Records and



Building, Structure, and Object Records. In addition, historic contexts were formulated based on the findings of both the field and research efforts. The Context Statements follow in the subsequent sections of this document. ARG has undertaken this project in accordance with *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation Planning and Identification, Evaluation and Registration of Historic Resources*.

### **Heritage Sign Permit**

The City of Fresno offers a Heritage Sign Permit. If approved, the signs will be subject to Fresno's Historic Preservation Ordinance (Article 4, Chapter 13). To apply for a heritage sign permit, the sign must:

- Be at least 45 years old at the time of application.
- Maintain appearance and materials as originally designed.
- Meet (or will meet) all safety and health codes.

And

- Contribute to the history and social history of the City, or
- Contribute to a "sense of place" of a City neighborhood, or
- Is associated with a person important in local history, or
- Is an exemplary example of a style, design or type of sign.

The matrix, which follows on pages 15-17, lists potential heritage signs.

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<sup>1</sup> *National Register Bulletin 24*, (Washington, D.C.: US Dept. of the Interior, NPS, 1985), 12.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The survey findings are summarized in a matrix. Documentation of the significance of individual buildings will provide important baseline data for all future development plans in the area. Reconnaissance and intensive level surveys are intended to be the first steps in the documentation process. Further information may be discovered for some of these resources if additional research is conducted as part of a designation process. The matrix, which follows on pages 15-17 lists all of the properties within boundaries of the Chinatown Historic Resources Survey. The matrix is organized by address. Other information provided, when known, includes:

- Parcel number,
- Date of construction,
- Source of construction date,
- Current use,
- Historic use,
- Notes,
- Past survey projects,
- California Historic Resource Inventory System listing,
- National Register eligibility,
- California Register eligibility, and
- Fresno Local Register of Historic Resources eligibility.

There are eight properties in the survey area that appear eligible for the National, California, or Fresno's Local Registers. The tools used to determine the eligibility of properties are the National Register Criteria, the California Register Criteria, and Fresno Historic Preservation Ordinance 13-406 of the municipal code. For information on specific buildings see the matrix on pages 15-17 or DPR forms in the Appendix A.

The detailed matrix follows; however, a further summary includes:

- 51 buildings in the survey area;
- 4 properties appear to be individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places;
- 7 properties appear to be individually eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources; and
- 9 properties appear to be potential candidates for Fresno Register of Historic Resources.

Fresno's Chinatown retains an impressive group of neon signs from the 1950s. The neighborhood experienced a period of growth after World War II, and as a result, many existing buildings were remodeled. Neon signs in unique shapes were frequently part of the alterations. Some were located on the roof of the buildings, others projected from the building's façade like a marquee, and the remainders were mounted flush to the principal elevation. Ten of these signs remain in Chinatown and, although they do not appear to be eligible for National, California, or Fresno's Local Register, the signs are unique historic resources and contribute to the character of Chinatown. The "Dick's" sign mounted on the façade of 1526 Kern Street is an excellent example of postwar neon signage. The presence of neon signs is noted on the matrix.

#### **HISTORIC DISTRICT FINDINGS**

The entire survey area was evaluated as a potential district, but, because of demolition in many locations, as well as a general diminished setting and overall lack of integrity, it was determined that the entire survey area did not retain enough integrity to qualify as a National or California Register historic district. However, there is a concentration of historic properties around F and Kern Streets, which appears to qualify as a Local Historic District as described in Section 13-407.2 of Fresno's Historic Preservation Ordinance 13-400. The buildings in the potential district are the most intact group of structures in the survey area. The potential historic district is

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composed of approximately 1 1/2 blocks. Within the boundaries of the district, 17, or approximately 65 percent, of the 26 properties appear to be contributors to the potential district. The boundaries for the potential district were drawn to include clusters of historic buildings, but exclude areas where infill or demolition compromised the historic character of the street. As a result, the boundaries are somewhat irregular, but generally include properties between Fagan Alley and China Alley between Tulare and Kern Streets (see district map).

The buildings of the potential district convey the historic and architectural character of Chinatown. The properties within the historic district represent two major phases of Chinatown development. The first spans the founding of Chinatown in 1872 to 1942 when Japanese-Americans, including those in Chinatown, were sent to internment camps during World War II. During this period residents of Chinatown were predominantly Chinese and Japanese and lived in the neighborhood because of anti-Asian sentiment and exclusion from other areas of town. Most buildings from this period in Chinatown were one- or two-story brick structures with simple ornamentation. The second phase spanned from 1946 to 1956. After World War II the demographics and architectural character of the neighborhood shifted. Second generation Chinese and Japanese had greater economic and social opportunities, and many moved outside of Chinatown. In addition, some Japanese residents did not return to the area after internment. Other ethnicities, particularly Mexican immigrants, moved into the area. During this period new buildings or the remodel of existing buildings often utilized stucco finishes and streamlined trim. All of the district contributors are one or two stories, but vary in style and detail according to their period of construction. Many were two-part commercial blocks with commercial functions on the first floor and lodgings on the second. Two of the structures, the Bow On and Bing Kong Association Buildings, combined commercial uses with religious and social functions.

The district appears eligible for Fresno's Local Register under Criterion i) *It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.* The district is significant for its representation of the development of Fresno's Chinatown and a new phase of growth after World War II. Despite the modifications of some structures and vacant lots resulting from demolition, the district conveys a strong sense of time and place.

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Of the 26 pre-1960 buildings within the potential district, 10 buildings appear to be individually significant, and potentially individually eligible for the National Register, California Register, or Fresno's Local Register. The finding of a local historic district is a preliminary recommendation by the consultant.

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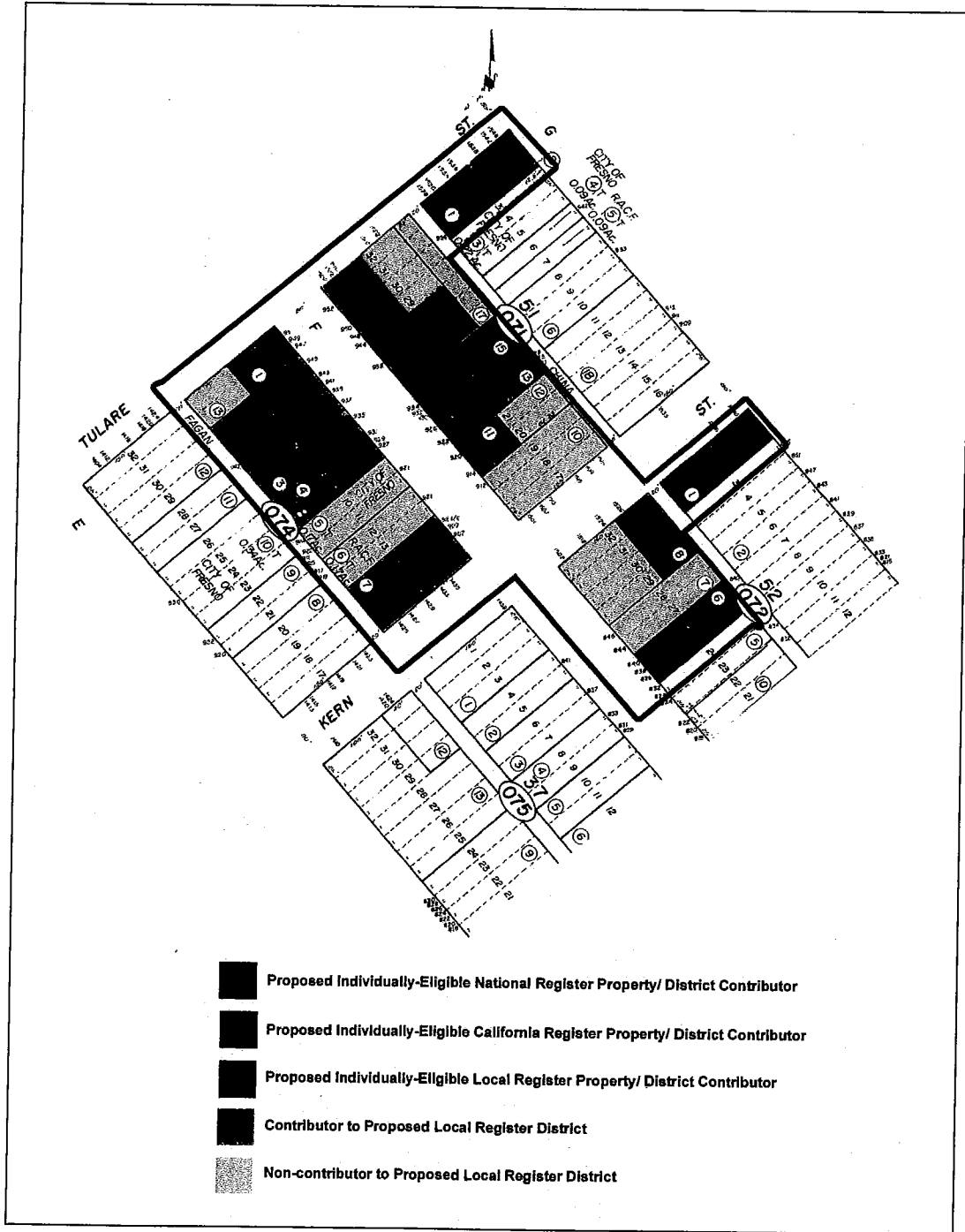


Figure B: Map showing the proposed Fresno Chinatown Historic District and potential contributors.

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Address	(Address Range)	Street	APN	Date of Const.	Source of Construction Date	Current Use	Historic Use	Notes	Past Survey Project	CHRIS	New DPR Forms	NR	CR	FR	Heritage Resource	District Cont/Non	Neon Sign
921	921-927	China Alley		1900	Draft EIR	Bing Kong Association	Religious/Residential		HP066		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Cont	No
931	929-937	China Alley		c. 1900	1898 & 1906 Sanborn	Vacant	Restaurant	back of Bow On Building at 930-934 F			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Cont	No
956		China Alley		c. 1900	1898 & 1906 Sanborn	Unclear	Commercial				Yes	No	No	Yes		Cont	No
818	818,820, 828 & 842	E Street		1941	Building Permit	Multi-Family Residential	Multi-Family Residential				Yes	No	No	No	Yes		No
920	920-922	E Street		1923	Building Permit	Fresno Restaurant Equipment	Commercial				Yes	No	No	No	Yes		No
1010	1010-1018	E Street		1944	Building Permit	Art Planet (1010); NGFX (1012); La Cucaracha Store (1014 vacant?); Pool Tables R Us (1016)	Commercial				Yes	No	No	No			Yes
1048		E Street		1961	Building Permit	Harry's Restaurant Equipment	Bank				Yes	No	No	No			No
1060		E Street		1950	Building Permit	Kurata's Automotive Services	Garage	Sign "Mac's Garage"			Yes	No	No	No			Yes
804		F Street		1949	Building Permit	Gas Station (not in use)	Vacant				Yes	No	No	No	Yes		No
818	818-822	F Street	467-072-10	c. 1910	1906 & 1918 Sanborn	El Patio Club (818); Delicia's Neptali (822)	Commercial/Residential		4 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	No			No
824	824-832	F Street	467-072-05	c. 1920	1948 Sanborn & 1926 Directory	Hotel Azteca (824); El Nuevo Latino (832)	Commercial/Residential		4 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	No			Yes
829	829-833	F Street	467-075-04	1951	Building Permit	Chinatown Family Medicine & Midwifery (829); Phase II Barber Shop (831); Renge Pharmacy (833)	Commercial				Yes	No	No	No	Yes		No
836	836-840	F Street	467-072-06	c. 1950	1948 & 1950 Sanborn	Azteca Theatre	Theater		2a (Rat)		Yes	No	Yes	Yes		Cont	Yes
837		F Street	467-075-03	1952		Steering Column Repair	Commercial				Yes	No	No	No			No
841		F Street	467-075-02	c.1915	1906 & 1918 Sanborn	Salaam Seafood Restaurant	Religious	1965 per owner			Yes	No	No	No			No
844	844-846	F Street	467-072-07	1917	Building Permit	La Fiesta Nightclub (844); Martha's Mini-Mart (846)	Commercial		4 (rat)		Yes	No	No	No		Non Cont	Yes
901	901-911	F Street	467-074-07	1912	Building Permit	Nippon Building No. 1 2	Olympic Hotel	Also 1425-1449 Kern	3 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	No		Cont	No
912		F Street		c.1910	1906 & 1918 Sanborn	Nikkei Service Center (Assisted Living)	Social				Yes	No	No	No		Non Cont	No
914	914-920	F Street		c. 1900	1898 & 1906 Sanborn	Victory Café; Bakery	Commercial		3 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	Yes		Cont	No
922	922-926	F Street	467-071-14	c. 1900	1898 & 1906 Sanborn	Laundry Mat (924); Ho Ho Café (926)	Residential		3 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	Yes		Cont	No
927	927-931	F Street	467-074-04	c. 1910	1906 & 1918 Sanborn	Paris Café (927); Vacant (931)	Commercial/Residential		3 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	No		Cont	Yes
930	930-934	F Street	467-071-15	1920	Building Permit	Bow On Association Bldg.	Religious/Residential	Also 935 China Alley Behind the Bow on Association Building	HP065		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Cont	No
933	933-935	F Street	467-074-03	c.1925	1918 & 1948 Sanborn	Golden Mar Café (935)	Commercial		3 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	No		Cont	No
937	937-945	F Street	467-074-02	c.1910	1906 & 1918 Sanborn	Shoe Repair Store (941?); Alijama Thrift Store (945)	Commercial	Also 942 Fagan Alley	3 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	No		Cont	No
938	938-954	F Street	467-071-16	c. 1925	1948 Sanborn & 1926 Directory	Lincoln Hotel; Barbara Hunt's Alcoholism Center; Rising Sons Motorcycle Club (950); Mama Lo's (952)	Commercial/Residential	Hotel Lincoln at 1520 Tulare	4 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	No		Cont	Yes
947	947-951	F Street	467-074-01	1908	(HP List)	Chinatown Gallery	Industrial Bank of Fresno/Bank of Italy	Also 1448 Tulare	HP064		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Cont	No
1010		F Street		c.1915	1906 & 1918 Sanborn	Happy's Liquor Store (1010 F); Pool Skool (1507 Tulare); El Rancho Restaurant (1515 Tulare)	Commercial	Also 1507-1515 Tulare			Yes	No	No	No			Yes
1027	1027-1029	F Street		1948	1948 Sanborn & Directory	Vacant	Commercial				Yes	No	No	No	Yes		Yes
1038		F Street		c.1940	1918 & 1948 Sanborn	Residential	Commercial				Yes	No	No	No	Yes		No
1042		F Street		1930	Building Permit	Residential	Residential	Narrow Brick Building			Yes	No	No	No	Yes		No
1045		F Street		c.1895	1898 Sanborn Map	Soul Brothers Motorcycle Club	Commercial				Yes	No	No	Yes			No
1047		F Street		c. 1920	1918 Sanborn & 1926 Directory	Vacant Building	Commercial				Yes	No	No	No	Yes		No
1129		F Street		1956	Building Permit	Commercial	Commercial				Yes	No	No	No			No
1143		F Street		1921	Building Permit	Commercial	Commercial				Yes	No	No	No			No
911	911-919	Fagan Alley	467-074-09	c.1920	1948 Sanborn & 1926 Directory	Residential	Residential				Yes	No	No	Yes			No
942		Fagan Alley		c.1925	1918 & 1948 Sanborn Maps	Residential	Vacant				Yes	No	Yes	Yes		Cont	No
1515		Inyo Street	467-072-03	1949	Building Permit	Nissei Automotive Repair	Industrial				Yes	No	No	No	Yes		No

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Address	(Address Range)	Street	APN	Date of Const.	Source of Construction Date	Current Use	Historic Use	Notes	Past Survey Project	CHRIS	New/DPR Forms	NR	CR	FR	Heritage Resource	District Cont/Non	Neon Sign
1501	1501-1521	Kern Street	467-071-10	c. 1910	1906 & 1918 Sanborn	Nippon Building No. 7; Colima Barber Shop (1501); Floreria Rubi (1505?); Ofelia's Barber Shop & Beauty Salon (1513); Fuji Café (1521)	Commercial		4 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	No		Non Cont	No
1526	1522-1526	Kern Street	467-072-08	1923	Building Permit	Dick's Shoes & Men's Wear	Commercial		2a (Rat)	7R	Yes	No	Yes	Yes		Cont	Yes
1528	1528-1540	Kern Street	467-072-01	1901	1901 on bldg	Vacant	Commercial	Also 857-863 G Street	HP072	4S	Yes	No	Yes	Yes		Cont	Yes
1441	1441-1447	Tulare Street		c. 1910	1906 & 1918 Sanborn	Lindo Michoa (1441); Old Folks Home (1447)	Commercial/Residential	Also 1001-1015 F Street			Yes	No	No	No			No
1502	1502-1520	Tulare Street	467-071-16	c. 1905	1898 & 1906 Sanborn	Salinas Tile Company (1502); Carniceria Taqueria Sanchez (1512); Kids Nutrition (1514); ??? II Cassettes & DVDs (1518); ??? (1520)	Commercial	F Street			Yes	No	No	No		Cont	No
1528	1528-1548	Tulare Street	467-071-01	c. 1895	1888 & 1898 Sanborn	NaturaVida (1530); Dick's Menswear & Shoes? (1534); Sonora Barber Shop (1536); Cash Mex LLC (1548)	Commercial/Residential	<a href="http://www.sjvls.org/cgi-bin/dig_b7/frp0076">http://www.sjvls.org/cgi-bin/dig_b7/frp0076</a>	4 (Rat)		Yes	No	No	Yes		Cont	No
814		E Street	467-075-08			Commercial Building					No						
836		E Street				Vacant Lot					No						
842		E Street				Vacant Lot					No						
930		E Street	467-074-10T			Parking Lot					No						
940		E Street				Vacant Lot					No						
946		E Street				Vacant Lot					No						
962		E Street				Vacant Lot					No						
800		F Street				Empty Lot					No						
805	805-823	F Street				Parking Lot					No						
825		F Street				Parking Lot					No						
827		F Street				Parking Lot					No						
915	915-919	F Street				Vacant Lot					No					Non Cont	
921		F Street				Parking Lot					No					Non Cont	
923	923-925	F Street				Vacant Lot?					No						
1016		F Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1017		F Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1018		F Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1019	1019-1025	F Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1022	1022?	F Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1026		F Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1028	1028-1032	F Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1034		F Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1035		F Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1069		F Street				Vacant Lot?		Also 1448 Mariposa			No						
803		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
811		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
815		G Street	467-072-02			Vacant Lot					No						
825		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
833	833-843	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
847	847-855	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
857	857-863	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
901	901-907	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
909	909-911	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
913	913-915	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
917	917-923	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
925	925-931	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
933	933-935	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
937	937-939	G Street			k	Vacant Lot					No						
941		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
945	945-947	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
949	949-953	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						



Fresno Chinatown Survey

Address	(Address Range)	Street	APN	Date of Const.	Source of Construction Date	Current Use	Historic Use	Notes	Past Survey Project	CHRIS	New DPR Forms	NR	CR	FR	Heritage Resource	District Cont/Non	Neon Sign
955		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
957		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1001		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1003		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1007	1007-1009	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1011		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1013	1013-1017	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1019		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1021		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1025	1025-1027	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1029		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1031		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1035		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1037	1037-1039	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1041	1041-1043	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1045	1045-1047	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1049	1049-1051	G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1055		G Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1449		Inyo Street				Vacant Lot?		Also 805-823 F Street			No						
1529		Inyo Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1545		Inyo Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1401	1401-1413	Kern Street	467-074-08?	1966	Building Permit	Auto Repair	Gas Station	Faces "E Street			No						
1410		Kern Street	467-075-13			Harvest of Harmony Community Church					No						
1415	1415-1423	Kern Street	467-074-08			Vilanova Services (1415?); Bancarrota (1417); La Elegante Restaurant (1423); Kiku Floral (1421)					No						
1420	1420-1424	Kern Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1426	1426-1446	Kern Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1450	1450-1454	Kern Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1458		Kern Street	467-075-01			Bank					No					Non Cont	
1502	1502-1518	Kern Street				Hardware Store					No					Non Cont	
1535		Kern Street	467-071-18			Central Fish Co.					No						
1541		Kern Street				Parking Lot					No						
1403	1403-1423	Tulare Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1404		Tulare Street	467-074-12			Parking Lot					No						
1426	1426-1434	Tulare Street				Vacant Lot					No					Non Cont	
1427	1427-1435	Tulare Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1437		Tulare Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1501		Tulare Street				Guadalajara de Noche		Also 1008 F Street			No						
1517	1517-1521	Tulare Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1522		Tulare Street				Vacant Lot					No					Non Cont	
1523		Tulare Street				Vacant Lot		Also 1005 China Alley			No						
1525	1525-1539	Tulare Street				Vacant Lot					No						
1545	1545-1547	Tulare Street				Quick & Save Market (1545); Bill's Place (1547)		Also 1001-1003 G Street			No						

## CONTEXT STATEMENTS

Cultural resource surveys are not complete without linking resources to their associated historic contexts; the establishment of historic contexts is vital to targeting survey work effectively. In addition, contexts are necessary to make future significance evaluations for resources and to evaluate the potential for historic districts. Historic contexts are organizing structures for interpreting history that group information about historic properties that share a common theme, common geographical area, and a common time period. The establishment of these contexts provides the foundation for decision-making concerning the planning, identification, evaluation, restoration, registration, and treatment of historic properties, based upon comparative significance. Contexts can be developed for all types of resources including, but not limited to, buildings, structures, objects, sites, and historic districts. The methodology for developing historic contexts does not vary greatly with different resource types, and they may relate to any of the four National, California, or Fresno's Local Register criteria. The Context Statements for Fresno's Chinatown Survey Area are:

- Exploration and Rancho Era Settlement;
- Millerton and Early Fresno Settlement;
- Patterns of Development;
- Architecture and Shelter;
- Commerce and Industry;
- Education;
- Community Associations and Religious Organizations;
- Celebrations;
- Recreation and Vice;
- Demographics and Ethnic Character; and
- Contributions of Significant Individuals.

**CONTEXT: Exploration and Rancho Era Settlement**

To fully understand the development of Fresno's Chinatown, it is necessary to gain a sense of the earliest settlements within the San Joaquin Valley. Long before the Europeans and Chinese arrived in the area, it was home to several tribes of Native Americans. The Yokuts tribe lived on the valley floor and the foothills, and the Monache settled on the upper reaches of the San Joaquin and Kings Rivers. As a result of years of proximity and contact, the two tribes had similar lifeways, and relations were peaceful. The tribes were non-agrarian hunting gatherers and used tools such as bows and arrows, shafts with stone points, and snares. Acorns were a significant part of their diets, and tule and yucca were also staples. The villages were located near lakes or rivers in order to take advantage of food supplies.<sup>3</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, Spain began colonizing areas of present-day California to protect its holdings from Russian, English, and American encroachment in the vicinity. Military posts, Catholic missions, and pueblos were the tools the Spanish government used to colonize the California frontier. The interior valleys were strategically less important to the Spanish, and little exploration was undertaken in these areas. The first Europeans to enter the region that would become Fresno County were Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga's party in 1805.<sup>4</sup> The exact purpose of Moraga's trip is unknown, but it has been asserted that his exploration was made simply to satisfy his curiosity about the interior. In 1806 Morago was instructed to return to the valley by Spanish Governor José de Arrillaga. Morago's task for this trip was to look for new mission sites, seek stolen livestock, and capture escaped neophytes.<sup>5</sup> Moraga made several subsequent trips to the area but never again explored the lands within Fresno County's borders.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1820s trappers began filtering into California. From 1827 through 1837 as many as four hundred English, French, and American trappers sought pelts in California's rivers. Jedediah

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<sup>3</sup> Edwin M. Clough and William B. Secrest, Jr., "Chinatown Plan Talks Are Slated" (Newspaper clipping, 6 July 1965. Vertical files, Fresno County Public Library California Room) 7,8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

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Smith was one of the best known of this group to reach what is now the Fresno County area. The exploration parties of Ewing Young, and Joseph Reddeford Walker, and John C. Fremont were other famous visitors to the San Joaquin Valley.<sup>7</sup>

In 1810 Mexico declared independence from Spain and, after a military struggle, won autonomy in 1822. Under the Mexican government, the lands formerly held by the missions and pueblos, as well as unclaimed land, were distributed as large private land grants to individuals who had served the government. Three grants comprised what would become Fresno County. Surprisingly, two were given the same name, Laguna de Tache, and the third was the Sanjon de Santa Rita Ranch (the lands that comprised Sanjon de Santa Rita Ranch are primarily within the boundaries of Merced County).<sup>8</sup>

Within Fresno's Chinatown, there are no aboveground or built resources from the Exploration and Rancho Era Settlement period. It is possible that archaeological resources relating to this context could be located within the area. However, extensive development and public works projects, such as street paving and construction of a major highway in the vicinity, have impacted the potential for resources to yield archaeological information within the study area. Information within the realm of historical archaeology at individual residential properties could yield information about specific sites.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 32 and 36.

**CONTEXT: Millerton and Early Fresno Settlement**

The discovery of gold nearly 150 miles away at Sutter's Mill in Coloma had a profound impact on Fresno County and other regions along the Sierra Foothills. Gold fever spread south to the King's River when Mission Indians brought specimens to Monterey in March 1849. In 1850 a ferry crossing was built at Fort Washington on the San Joaquin River to serve the miners of the area.<sup>9</sup> Small mining camps were established throughout the valley including Rootville, later renamed Millerton, which was founded in 1851. The first name for the town reputedly came from the Mexican miners who made their bowls from the tree roots of the buckeye.<sup>10</sup> The mining regions along the Chowchilla, Fresno, and San Joaquin Rivers had a population of approximately 1,500 in 1852.<sup>11</sup>

Soon after the Gold Rush, greed and fear of competition led to anti-immigrant sentiment among the white miners. In 1850 the State Legislature passed a law taxing foreign miners \$20 a month. Although the law did not single out any group, it was primarily enforced against the Chinese and Mexicans.<sup>12</sup> The mid 1850s were a period of growth in Millerton. Fresno County was organized in 1856, and Millerton, the county's largest settlement, became the county seat. As a rough mining camp, the town's Chinese had been tolerated, but after 1856, the Chinese were banned. The expelled Chinese settled halfway between Millerton and Fort Miller and benefitted from the ready market the fort provided.<sup>13</sup>

By the 1850s easily accessible gold deposits were depleted, and the profitability of placer mining declined. Other industries, such as lumbering and stockraising, became more common in the San Joaquin Valley.<sup>14</sup> Although mining was decreasing in popularity with Whites, the number of Chinese miners was growing. Motivated by poor conditions in their homeland, substandard

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>12</sup> National Park Service. "History of Chinese Americans in California: the 1850s," [www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/5views2d.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/5views2d.htm) (1 November 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Clough and Secrest, 78.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

living conditions, famines, overcrowding, civil war, and the Taiping Rebellion, in the 1850s a large number of Chinese, particularly from the provinces of Guandong and Fujian, traveled to California and the gold mines. The 1860 Census Record listed over three hundred Chinese residents in Fresno County; all were employed as miners.<sup>15</sup> The immigration of many Chinese was sponsored by tongs (fraternal organizations), which left many with the burden of paying off tong loans in addition to providing for their daily needs.<sup>16</sup>

The Chinese were forced by law and racial violence to limit their mining to worked-over claims (Whites never allowed the Chinese access to new strikes), which required back-breaking work for little financial gain.<sup>17</sup> In April 1857 a *San Joaquin Republican* newspaper correspondent wrote, "At present there seems to be no mining going on in the immediate vicinity of [Millerton], except by a few Chinamen, who have located along the banks of the [San Joaquin] river, where they are gardening, farming and mining alternately as they imagine their work is the most profitable. I inquired of sundry [Chinese] as to the wages they could make mining, and generally understood that they could make about a dollar a day."<sup>18</sup> Like many White entrepreneurs, some Chinese found opening general merchandise stores to supply miners more profitable than actually searching for precious metals. Despite the poor pay, in 1878, three hundred Chinese were working the banks of the river for the thirty-five miles below Millerton.<sup>19</sup>

In the early and mid 1860s, a school, newspaper, and courthouse were all established in Millerton.<sup>20</sup> Despite the promising growth early in the decade, in the late 1860s Millerton's golden age suddenly came to an end. On December 24, 1867 a massive flood destroyed much of the town. Several years later, a decision was made that would seal the fate of the town. On December 31, 1869, the directors of the Central Pacific Railroad toured the valley. The men were looking for a place to create a new rail stop and build a townsite in the center of the San

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<sup>15</sup> Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, *Fresno County (1860 and 1870) and Fresno City (1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930)*.

<sup>16</sup> Clough and Secrest, 61.

<sup>17</sup> National Park Service. "History of Chinese Americans in California: the 1850s."

<sup>18</sup> Clough and Secrest, 61.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

Joaquin Valley. A visit to the A.Y. Easterby ranch, a lush wheat field in the middle of the bleak prairie, convinced Central Pacific director Leland Stanford that was the site for Fresno Station. The company purchased 4,480 acres for the station and rail route, and by 1873 there was a small thriving town with regular service to Merced, Lathrop, San Francisco, Stockton, Sacramento, Goshem, Tulare, and Tipton.<sup>21</sup>

In May 1872, Edward H. Mix platted the new town of Fresno in a classic grid. Blocks measured 320- by 400-feet with 20-foot alleys, and lots ranged from 25 to 150 feet. By 1873 the town was thriving, and on March 23, 1873 voters determined the county seat would be moved to Fresno. Many Millerton buildings were dismantled and moved to the new town.<sup>22</sup> In 1874 a meeting was held and the result was Whites selected the east side of the railroad tracks and relegated other ethnicities and disreputables to the west side. The new town incorporated in 1885.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

portion of the Fresno Gas Light Company plant was located at the east corner of Mariposa and F Streets (the plant would remain at that site through at least 1918). The northeast side of G Street had a dramatically different pattern and feel. The function and orientation of the buildings there related to the adjacent Southern Pacific tracks and consisted of large warehouses surrounded by ample space and storage yards.

#### 1888

Twelve years later the core of Chinatown remained at Tulare and G Street and little had changed on these densely built-up blocks. The surrounding blocks were markedly less developed: a few detached single-family dwellings and sheds were scattered throughout. Two of the few industrial businesses within the area, the Fresno Soap Works and Fresno Ice Works, were located at the south end of the study area.

#### 1893

Clough and Secrest, in their book *Fresno County: the Pioneer Years*, provided a keyed map to some of the uses of Chinatown's structures. The map confirms what Sanborn Maps indicated: the Fresno Gas Light Company Plant was located on Mariposa and F Streets; prostitutes' dwellings and cribs were focused at Tulare and F Streets; John A. Klee, and Philip Horn's Blacksmith Shop operated at G and Inyo Streets, and the Fresno Infirmary Veterinary Hospital was next door. Between G Street and the tracks there were railroad-related industries such as warehouses, stockyards, and ice companies.<sup>23</sup>

#### 1898

The 1898 Sanborn Map indicates that Chinatown's development had not changed significantly from the previous decade: the blocks between Mariposa, Tulare, F and G Streets and Tulare, Kern, and G Streets and China Alley were extremely congested with small buildings constructed in the preceding decades. By 1898 even the interiors of the blocks were nearly filled and the compact building pattern had spilled to the streets facing these busy blocks. In general the uses

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.



of the buildings remained the same: most were shops, lodging houses, laundries, and gambling halls but by 1898 a theater had been added to the mix.

Outside the core area, the density of development decreased dramatically. Similar to the pattern shown on the 1888 map, the surrounding blocks in the study area contained a few industries and some detached, single-family dwellings. One new trend clearly shown on the 1898 Sanborn Map was an increase in the number of prostitution cribs. The cribs were identifiable by their label; "female boarding house" and their shapes; long, narrow rows of one-story units, divided into very small uniform spaces. Unlike the commercial and residential buildings that dominated the study area, the half block between Kern, Inyo, and G Streets and China Alley was filled with two large feed yards.

#### 1906

Despite the eight-year gap between the 1898 and 1906 Sanborn Maps, little had changed on the densely-developed blocks around G Street, China Alley, and Tulare Street. However, some new structures had been built in the vacant lots of the surrounding blocks. The greatest changes had occurred on the half block between Tulare, Kern, and F Streets and China Alley. With the exception of two large lots, the half block had been built out. In comparison with the buildings constructed decades earlier on China Alley north of Tulare Street, the footprints of these structures were much more uniform. Some of these new buildings were commercial blocks divided into shop spaces, while

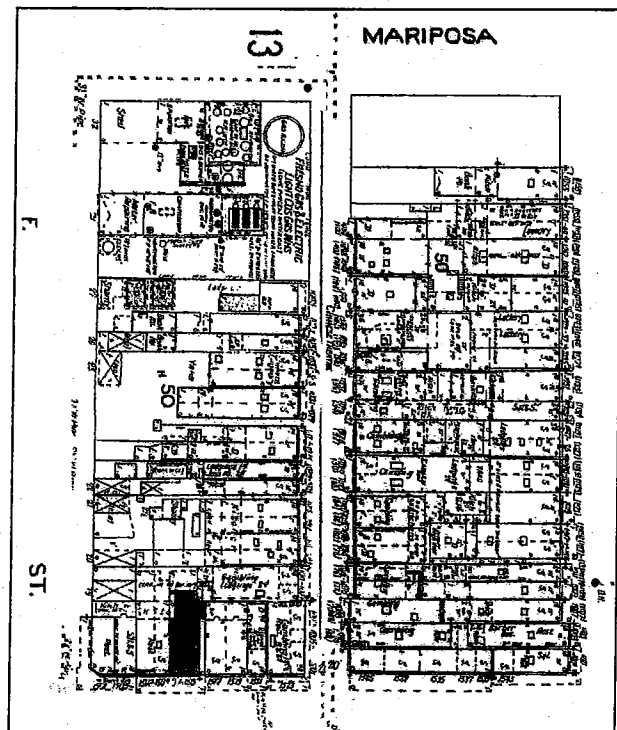


Figure D: 1906 Sanborn Map showing the core of Chinatown at China Alley between Mariposa and Tulare Streets.

others were rows of identical prostitution cribs. Most of the buildings were one story.

**1918**

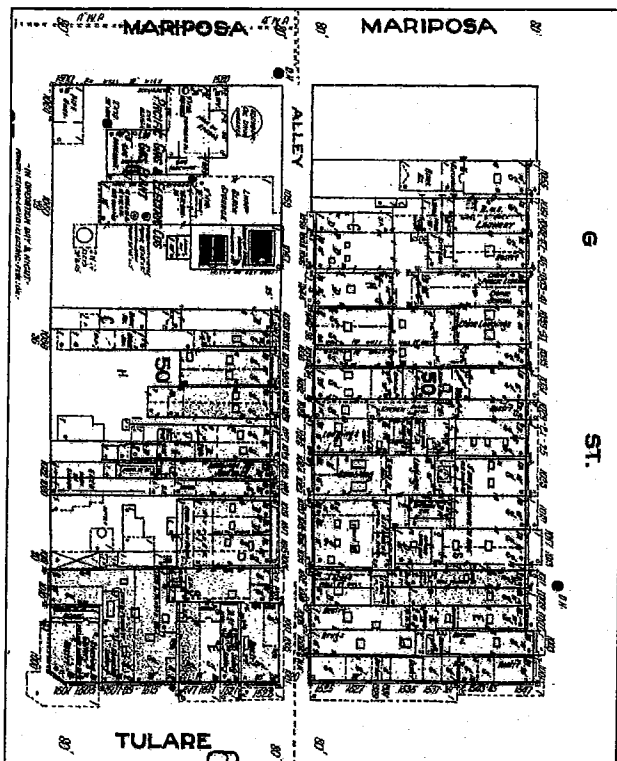


Figure E: 1918 Sanborn Map showing the core of Chinatown at China Alley and Tulare Street.

The 1918 Sanborn Map shows that on a majority of the blocks a few new buildings were added to the existing building stock since 1906. Shops and lodging houses were still the most common use, but by 1918 there was a greater diversity in recreation. In addition to restaurants and gambling houses (which were present in early Chinatown) there were shooting galleries, billiard halls, a nickelodeon, and a Japanese theater. The block southwest of the intersection of F and Tulare Streets was the site of the most substantial new development. Several of the long rows of female boarding houses (most likely prostitution cribs), had been removed and replaced with much larger two-story commercial buildings with uniform shop

spaces on the ground floors and lodging on the second. Fagan Alley, previously unnamed on the maps, is listed as "F St. Alley."

**1948/1950**

The thirty-year gap between the 1918 and 1948/1950 Sanborn Maps leaves many questions about the intervening years unanswered. However, surprisingly, in the most congested portion of the area (Tulare and G Streets), little had changed since the 1898 Sanborn, and the density of these blocks had been established by the time the first map was created in 1885. In the surrounding blocks of the study area, changes were more noticeable. During the decades between 1918 and

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1948 more commercial buildings and single-family residences were built on the vacant lots on both sides of Kern Street between E Street and Fagan Alley. West Side Livery & Feed occupied the majority of the half block between Kern, Inyo, and G Streets since 1898. By 1948 the feedlot was gone, replaced by three lodging houses and rows of two-story commercial buildings with shops on the ground floors and lodging on the second. In keeping with nationwide trends, the study area was impacted by car culture. Gas stations, auto service businesses and garages had been built in the area by 1948. Fittingly, Fresno Gas Light Company, built at Mariposa and F Street sometime prior to 1885, was replaced with a gas station. In 1948 Highway 99 was constructed immediately west of Chinatown. Sometime between 1918 and 1948, F Street Alley was renamed Fagan Alley.

**1960s**

Additional freeway construction occurred in 1963 and 1966, further isolating Chinatown from the surrounding neighborhoods. The result was to split the area and accelerate the area's decline.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the second-generation immigrants were able to get better jobs and move outside the neighborhood further reducing the population.<sup>25</sup> The area was further threatened by economic and material deterioration. Renewal plans for the Chinatown area were developed in the early 1960s. Among other things, the plan called for the creation of a pedestrian mall along China Alley. At the time, many of the wood structures in the area were found unsafe by building inspectors.<sup>26</sup> In 1964 City Councilman Ted Willis called for the razing of several Chinatown buildings on G Street between Tulare and Mariposa Streets because they were "vacant" and "wino hangouts."<sup>27</sup> The result was the loss of a large number of the oldest structures in Chinatown.

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<sup>24</sup> *Transcript, Pete Rokas Oral History Interview, 9 July 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 33.*

<sup>25</sup> *Transcript, Noe Lopez and Alice Lopez Oral History Interview, 9 July 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 61.*

<sup>26</sup> "Fresno's Chinatown Was Busy, Bustling Section." *The Fresno Bee*. 22 May 1962.

<sup>27</sup> "Council Will Get Look at Chinatown's Future." *Newspaper clipping, 17 January 1964. Vertical files, Fresno County Public Library California Room.*

**2005**

Redevelopment plans were revived multiple times in the intervening decades, but the large-scale redevelopment first planned in the 1960s never materialized. The consequence of demolition without reconstruction was a large number of vacant lots throughout Chinatown. In 2004, on the blocks between Fresno and Ventura Streets and Union Pacific Railroad and Freeway 99, thirty-five percent of the land was vacant.<sup>28</sup> G Street, once the most densely-populated street in the area, was particularly effected by demolition. Most of the lots on the southwest side of the street are vacant. In addition to vacant lots, some of the buildings in the neighborhood are unoccupied, or are only occupied on the first floor.

The majority of buildings within the neighborhood were constructed prior to 1950. However, a significant number of these were remodeled in the 1950s, 1960s or 1970s. Many of the buildings are in decay. According to the 1986 Chinatown Expanded Area Community Redevelopment Plan, 75 percent of the residential buildings, 72 percent of the commercial buildings, and 90 percent of the industrial building were in fair to poor condition.<sup>29</sup> Danish Creamery and Central Fish are two of the few vital large businesses still operating in the survey area.

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<sup>28</sup> Jim Davis, "Developers to Pitch Chinatown Plan: Fresno City Council to Hear Partnership Idea Tuesday." *The Fresno Bee*. 5 January 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Donald E. Coleman, "Chinatown Down but Not Out Yet." *The Fresno Bee*. 9 December 1991.

**CONTEXT: Architecture and Shelter**

The bulk of construction in Chinatown occurred between the late 1870s, when the construction of Fresno's West Side commenced, to the 1930s when the number of buildings constructed diminished due to the Great Depression and other economic pressures. The dominant building types in the area were one- and two-part commercial blocks. Many of the buildings from the nineteenth century were wood, deteriorated quickly, and, as a result, were razed. In addition, as a result of redevelopment projects in the 1960s and 1970s, large numbers of buildings in Chinatown were demolished and others were altered. The oldest and most densely developed areas of Chinatown, G Street and China Alley between Mariposa and Kern Streets, were the focus of these projects, and few of the historic buildings on these blocks remain. Very few structures dedicated solely for residential purposes are extant within the study area. An exception is the Spanish Revival style bungalow court at 818-842 E Street.

**Two-Part Commercial Block**

Throughout the nation from the 1850s through the 1950s, the two-part commercial block was the most common type used for small- and moderate-sized commercial buildings. The type is characterized by horizontal architectural features that divide the building into two sections between the first and upper floors. The separation was often highlighted by an intermediate cornice. The distinction between the two often marked a change in use; the street level frequently housed public spaces such as retail stores, hotel lobbies, or restaurants. The second floor was usually more private in nature and commonly included offices, hotel rooms, or meeting halls. By the late nineteenth century, plate glass was more affordable, and the storefront areas were usually glazed.<sup>30</sup> Typical ground floor alterations included everything from additional awnings or signage, to new siding (false stone masonry or stucco over the original fabric), to reconfiguration of windows, which often included covering the mezzanine lites. Although the building type could be multi-storied, in Fresno's Chinatown, most were two-story.

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*. (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1987) 24, 31.

In districts, such as Chinatown, with a high percentage of laborers, one common function of the two-part commercial block building form was a residential hotel. First floor spaces were usually rented as retail or office spaces and hotel accommodations for bachelor workers were housed on the upper floors. As Paul Groth describes in his book *Living Downtown*, this building form, called a cheap lodging house, was common throughout the country as housing for an unskilled workforce.<sup>31</sup> Not surprisingly, given the large number of single, male laborers in Fresno's Chinatown, the combination of commercial ground floor space with upstairs lodging was extremely common. Although the type was popular for workers of any ethnicity, in Chinatown there were additional economic restraints resulting in higher densities. Groth described the living situation in San Francisco's Chinatown lodging houses, "The Chinatown lodging house rooms were crowded with bunk beds. Men commonly slept in shifts, and tenants often did their own cooking in simple communal kitchens."<sup>32</sup> Although less physically constrained than San Francisco's Chinatown, due to economic pressures, conditions in cheap lodging houses in Fresno's Chinatown were undoubtedly crowded.

Whether commercial or residential, the exterior of the building could be ornamented in a variety of styles. Victorian<sup>33</sup> or Classical details were typical of nineteenth century buildings. By the turn of the century, ornament was often simplified and uniform but still contained a few reference to past

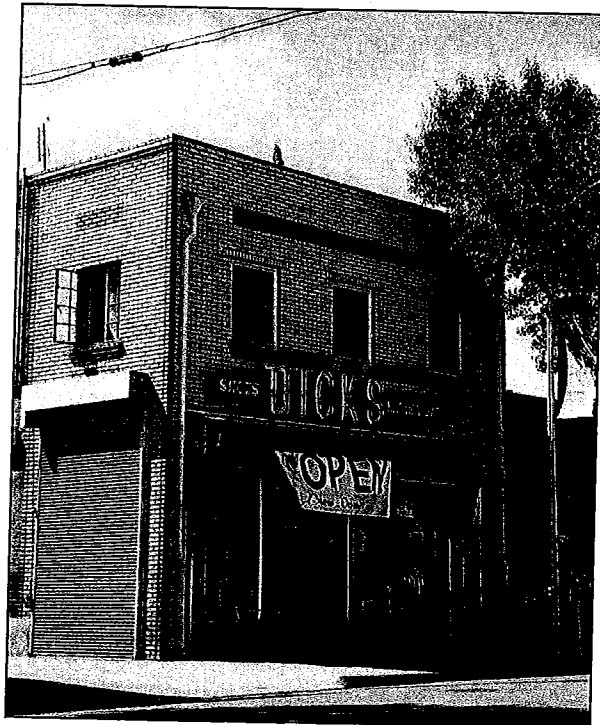


Figure F: Dick's Men's Wear and Shoes at 1524-1526 Kern exemplifies the two-part block.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: the History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>33</sup> As described by Richard Longstreth in his book *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*, 29 and 39.

styles.<sup>34</sup> Komoto's Department Store at 1528-1540 Kern Street is one of the few remaining examples of a Victorian two-part commercial block in Chinatown (although many of the architectural details have been covered with stucco). Most of the area's two-part commercial blocks are relatively plain with little ornamentation other than brickwork such as stepped brick stringcourses or cornices. The building at 1524-1526 Kern Street, which houses Dick's Men's Wear, exemplifies the two-part block with simple ornamentation.



Figure G: Art Deco was a popular style for theaters like the Azteca at 836-840 F Street.

The ornament of the two-part commercial block changed again between the two world wars. Styles such as Art Deco and Art Moderne, which were inspired by European modernism, became popular. Geometric forms, stylized ornamentation, and vertical elements extending past the roofline characterized Art Deco, which was primarily applied to commercial buildings in the 1920s and 1930s. The Art Moderne style was used principally in the 1930s and 1940s and was typified by a horizontal emphasis, streamlined and machine-inspired elements, decorative banding, and rounded corners. Brick remained a popular material, but the use of concrete block and stucco became increasingly widespread.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1910s movie theaters opened throughout the country. The building form copied the legitimate theaters of past decades and often included retail or office space in addition to movie theater functions.<sup>36</sup> As movie theaters became a more established industry, the theater function became more prominent in the ornamentation of the facade, often with elaborate projecting signs

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

and marquees. The theaters could be ornamented in a variety of styles, but by the 1930s, Art Deco and Period Revival styles were popular. Designs were often more elaborate than earlier theaters and incorporated the entire façade.<sup>37</sup> The Azteca Theater at 836-840 F Street is an excellent example of a theater utilizing the two-part commercial block form designed in the Art Deco style.

After World War II movie theater designs were simpler with less ornamentation.<sup>38</sup> Asymmetry was common for theaters of this period and some commercial structures.

### **One-Part Commercial Block**

The one-part commercial block is similar in form and ornamentation to the street level section of the two-story commercial block and is essentially a subset of this type. The type is distinct from the one-story freestanding shop with pitched roof, which was common in towns in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The one-part commercial block buildings had simple box forms with flat roofs, storefronts, and ornament along the cornices. The type developed in the mid-nineteenth century and became common in towns and cities throughout the country. These smaller versions of the two-part block could house the needed functions and generate income but were relatively inexpensive to build. Most of these structures were used as retail stores and were often replaced with more substantial multi-story structures once the area developed.<sup>39</sup> Typically these buildings were long and rectangular in plan with the narrow side facing the street. Glazed storefronts usually dominated the façade, and the wall surface above was used for signage. The configuration limited ornamentation to the cornice or parapet. The styles used for ornamentation were similar to those of the two-part commercial block. Grouped units, or rows of units, were also common.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

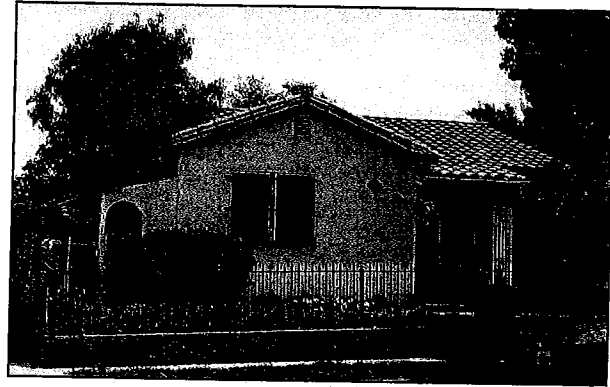
<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 54, 55.



**Residential Architecture: Mission/ Mediterranean/ Spanish Eclectic**

The California Mission, Mediterranean Revival and Spanish Eclectic styles blend the architecture of the Mediterranean, Italian, Spanish, and Moorish traditions with the architecture of early California settlement. In general these revival styles sought to convey the feelings and associations of the era of early California Spanish settlement, specifically Spanish and Mexican forms.



*Figure H: the bungalow court at 818-840 E Street is Spanish Eclectic, a style rare in Chinatown.*

Popularized in Southern California, the style was also frequently used in Northern California. This style suited the warm California climate and became a favorite building idiom in the 1920s. Innumerable houses were built in these eclectic styles in California, and though the designs drew on non-American sources, this revival style is an American creation. Character-defining features include red clay tile roofs, use of balconies, smooth-stucco exterior walls (usually painted white), arched openings, and colorful tile work. Within the study area, there is a Spanish Revival style bungalow court at 818-842 E Street.

**CONTEXT: Commerce and Industry**

The 1885 Sanborn Map showed a variety of small businesses in Chinatown including general merchandise stores, a blacksmith shop, Chinese washhouses, Chinese gambling houses, drugstores, a dance hall, laundries, restaurants, and numerous small shops. Most of the buildings were small one-story structures with rectangular footprints. The majority of buildings directly abutted the neighboring structures. None were commercial blocks with multiple uniform shops.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, there were a few industrial operations in the neighborhood including Fresno Gas and Light Company on Mariposa between F and G Streets. The 1898 Sanborn Map shows a number of industries along the southeast side of G Street: Forsyth Seeded Raisin Company "Drying, Seeding, and Packing House," Phoenix Packing and Seeding, Union Ice Co. Farmers Warehouse Co., and grain warehouse and livery and feed yards.

Despite the number of businesses in the area, the census records did not indicate that many of the residents, primarily Chinese and Japanese at the time, were employed within the neighborhood.

In the 1910s and 1920s, the variety of businesses in the area increased and included: groceries, restaurants, seamstress shops, laundries, and barbershops. Nori Masuda, a *Nisei* (second generation Japanese American), grew up in an apartment directly behind his family's store at 921 China Alley. He remembers that shop sold a variety of goods including Japanese books, combs,

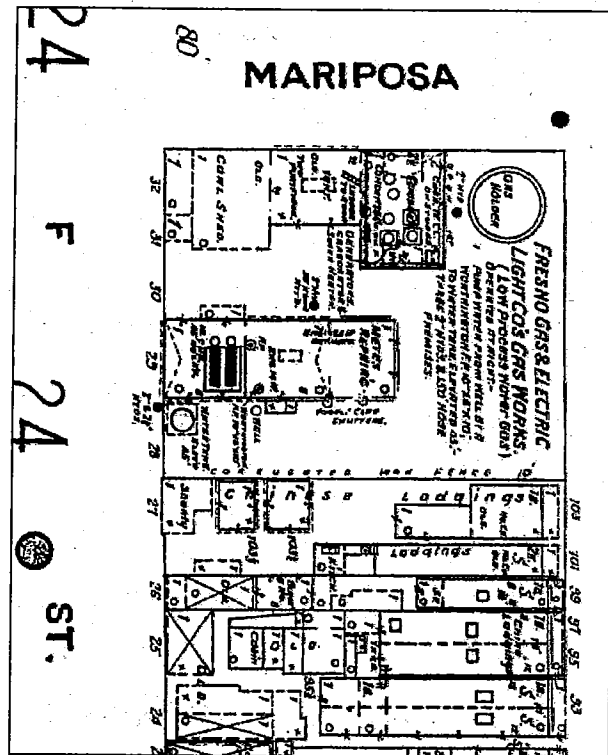


Figure 1: Fresno Gas & Electric was one of a few large industrial businesses within Chinatown shown on the 1895 Sanborn Map. Others were located on the east side of G Street

toothbrushes, and candies.<sup>40</sup> The number of recreational businesses had grown in the previous decades and included bars, cafes, gambling houses, billiards, shooting galleries, nickelodeon, photo shops, a Japanese Theatre, and moving picture houses.<sup>41</sup> The trend continued in the 1930s, and more of the residents were employed in small businesses.<sup>42</sup>

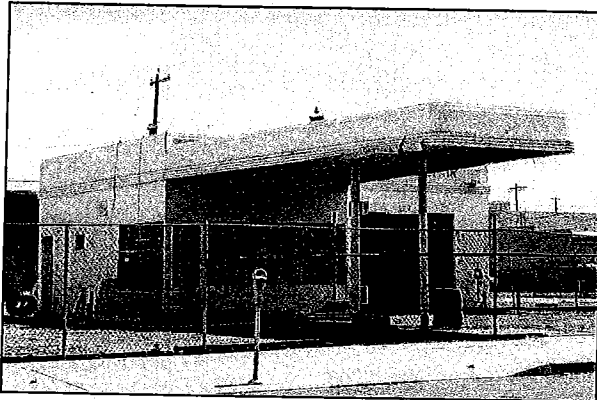


Figure J: Gas stations, like this one at 804 F Street, were built in the neighborhood in the 1940s and 1950s, indicative of the increasing popularity of the automobile.

By 1948 all the businesses mentioned above were present, but there were fewer laundries. Although that industry was declining, others were developing. Like the rest of the nation, the automobile industry was represented in the built environment of Chinatown in the form of gas stations, auto service businesses and garages.<sup>43</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s the neighborhood included: cafes, clothing stores, grocery stores, service stations, hotels, theaters, barber shops, bars, and pool halls.

The greatest change appears to have been an increase in the types of services available. During these decades the number of medical offices in the area increased; Polk City Directories list dentists, doctors, chiropractors, even a physiotherapist. Insurance agencies, banks, travel agencies, and lawyers were also available within the neighborhood. In addition, directory listings suggest Chinatown was increasingly linked with agencies outside the area; offices of the agricultural workers organizing committee and welfare relief agency offices were located within the neighborhood. In the 1970s Chinatown continued to offer residents and visitors a wide range of business and services. Overall, the diversity of businesses persisted through the 1980s and 1990s, however, the total number of

<sup>40</sup> Transcript, Nori Masuda Oral History Interview, 9 June 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Fresno, 1906 and 1918.

<sup>42</sup> Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, Fresno County (1860 and 1870) and Fresno City, 1930.

<sup>43</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Fresno, 1948.

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businesses in the area dwindled dramatically and professional services (such as doctors, lawyers, and accountants) were lacking.

**CONTEXT: Education**

**Chinese Confucian School**

Most of the Chinese immigrants to settle in Fresno in the late nineteenth century were single males and were illiterate. There were few children present, but the community placed a high importance on educating those that were in the Chinese culture and language.<sup>44</sup> In the early twentieth century, Chinese-American children attended public school during the day and Chinese school in the evening and half of Saturday. At the school the children learned to read and write the Chinese language and were taught principles of Confucius.<sup>45</sup>

Confucianism is a set of ethics for Chinese society, which coexisted with and complemented Buddhism and Taoism. Its teachings did not concern man's relationship to God, but defined man's relationship with his fellow man. The core of teachings was respect for parents, elders, and ancestors. A core belief was, "Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you." This teaching has sometimes been called the negative Golden Rule.<sup>46</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the school was housed under the same roof as the Chinese Benevolent Association on G Street between Tulare and Kern Streets. The school remained in this location for many years.<sup>47</sup> The school also served as a meeting space in 1923 when Dr. Sun Yat Sen, founder of the Chinese Republic, visited Fresno.<sup>48</sup> By 1940 the school was located at 1040 D Street.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gloria Wan-Li Huang, "A Historical Study of Chinese Confucius School of Fresno" (Fresno Historical Society Archives) 19.

<sup>45</sup> Mabelle, Selland, "Fresno's Chinatowns," (Fresno County Historical Society brochure, no date. Vertical files, Fresno County Public Library California Room).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> The building is no longer extant. Dr. Sam A. Suhler, "Interview with Mr. Allen Y. Lew." (Vertical files, Fresno County Public Library California Room. 1980-1981) 13.

<sup>48</sup> "Chinese Recall Visit of Dr. Sun to Fresno Area," (Sacramento Bee, 10 November 1941. Fresno Historical Society Archives).

<sup>49</sup> The building is no longer extant. Jerome D. Laval, *As Pop Saw It* (Fresno, CA: Graphic Technology Co., 1976) 223.

### Japanese Schools

By the 1930s Japanese communities in California were well established and most had their own *nihongakko*, a Japanese language school, which was operated by a church or a benevolent association. Students attended the school from 4:30 to 5:30 pm, after their "American School." First generation parents often met resistance from their second generation children who felt learning Japanese unnecessary. According to Nori Masudo, "They were pretty good at teaching us that [the Japanese language], but we just didn't want to learn because we said 'What's the use of learning, we don't, we're not going to go back to Japan.' . . . And we were busy with the English school."<sup>50</sup> Despite their children's reluctance, the first generation parents felt it was important to maintain their culture. In Fresno a school and dormitory were built, allowing some children to reside at the school. In addition, the Buddhist Church ran a kindergarten taught by an American teacher.<sup>51</sup> Many of these schools closed with the incarceration of the Japanese during World War II.<sup>52</sup>

### Public Schools

No public schools were built within the survey area. By the early twentieth century, the children of Chinatown attended the Lincoln School on 'C' Street. At school the Chinese and Japanese learned and played with children from other ethnic groups including the Russian-Germans.<sup>53</sup> Allen Y. Lew, a former Chinatown resident, remembers that despite their different ethnic backgrounds there wasn't conflict, "I was friendly with all of them and I never seemed to feel there was any prejudice."<sup>54</sup> However, the Chinese did not attend the dances or social events at the public high school.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Transcript, Nori Masuda Oral History Interview, 9 June 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Jerome D. Laval, *As Pop Saw It* (Fresno, CA: Graphic Technology Co., 1976) 223.

<sup>52</sup> National Park Service. "History of Japanese Americans in California: Incarceration of Japanese Americans During World War II."

<sup>53</sup> Dr. Sam A. Suhler, "Interview with Mr. Allen Y. Lew," (Vertical files, Fresno County) 8. Public Library California Room. 1980-1981.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

## CONTEXT: Community Associations and Religious Organizations

### District Associations

In the 1850s Chinese immigrants to San Francisco formed associations according to their home districts in China: Ning Yuen, Hop Wo, Kong Chow, Sam Yup, and Yan Wo (later the Sue Hing Association was added). The district associations and the organization that arbitrated between them were called the Six Companies. Soon district organizations were established in other towns, such as Fresno, as their Chinese populations grew. Unless they were Christian, every Chinese belonged to one of the district associations.<sup>56</sup> The associations provided welfare, educational, and social services to their members. They allowed immigrants to locate people from their home district, establish a social circle, and voice political concerns. The Six Companies also registered the birth of all Chinese born in the United States in the village of the child's ancestors.<sup>57</sup> Associations based on surnames were also formed, connecting immigrants to their extended family. Frequently a Chinese man belonged to a district association and a family association.<sup>58</sup> The district associations were controlled primarily by merchants, the most powerful members of Chinese-American society. Through their stores they controlled access to goods, and through the associations they were in charge of jobs, immigration, and arbitration.<sup>59</sup>

The Chinese Benevolent Association (the Six Companies) was created to arbitrate between the district associations and represent and provide services to the Chinese population in general.<sup>60</sup> The Six Companies were the most powerful organizations within the Chinese community between the 1880s and 1906. In the 1880s Fresno's Chinese Benevolent Association was located on G Street next to Kong Chow Society Temple.<sup>61</sup> This association was composed of all Chinese who lived in Fresno and the larger San Joaquin Valley. If local representatives of the companies

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<sup>56</sup> Selland.

<sup>57</sup> Irene Wong, *A Chinatown Community Scrapbook: Memories of the San Joaquin Valley*. (Prosperity Press, 2000), 20.

<sup>58</sup> Bancroft Library, U.C. Berkeley, "San Francisco Chinatown." (<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/chineseinca/sfchinatown.html>, 11 November 2005).

<sup>59</sup> Chacon, 375.

<sup>60</sup> Selland.

<sup>61</sup> Michael S. Opper and Lillie L. Lew, "A History of the Chinese in Fresno, California." (Brochure, no date. Vertical files, Fresno County Public Library California Room) 3.

could not agree, an appeal was made to the Six Companies' supreme council in San Francisco's Chinatown.<sup>62</sup> The San Francisco Six Companies council was authorized to speak for Chinese throughout the United States.<sup>63</sup>

In Fresno's Chinatown at least two district associations were present and constructed Joss Houses, the Sam Yup and Kong Chow Associations. The Sam Yup Joss House was constructed at 1023 China Alley in 1888. The building was a very narrow, long, two-story structure. Lodging was located on the first floor, and the joss house on the second.<sup>64</sup> Many of the Cantonese to first settle in Fresno were from the Sam Yup and Kwantung Province. Lew Yick built a Kong Chow Association Joss House on G Street in the early 1880s, exact address unknown.<sup>65</sup> The building was demolished in the 1960s.

### Tongs

Although every Chinese belonged to one of the district associations (except Christian Chinese), not every Chinese was a member of a tong. Tongs were fraternal organizations frequently confused with the district associations, which were often held responsible for actions members took on behalf of tongs.<sup>66</sup> The tongs were secret societies, which, like the district associations, began in San Francisco in the 1860s and spread to Chinatowns throughout the state. Some were initially organized to provide burial in China if their members died in America.

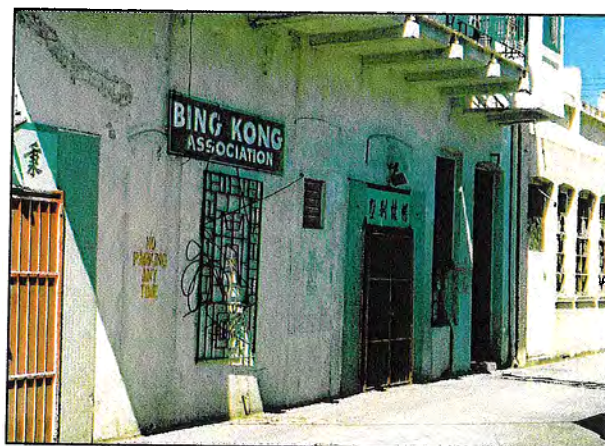


Figure K: View of the Bing Kong Association building at 921 China Alley.

<sup>62</sup> Wong, 20.

<sup>63</sup> Bancroft Library.

<sup>64</sup> Seland.

<sup>65</sup> Opper 3, and Huang, 16.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



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The tongs in Fresno's Chinatown included Hop Sings, Bing Kongs, Suey On, Kwong Fook and Bow On (historically also spelled Bo On)<sup>67</sup> The organizations soon grew to include criminal elements that controlled gambling, prostitution, opium dens, and labor racketeering. Once men took a vow and were initiated into the tongs, they were members for life. Chinese tong gangsters were commonly called highbinders or hatchetmen.<sup>68</sup> Reports of extortion from Chinese businesses were also made. "Merchants are forced to give money to the highbinders at the point of the revolver in broad day, and are told that if they make any complaint, they will be killed."<sup>69</sup>

Reports of tong clashes were often exaggerated in the press. However, in the 1890s the conflict escalated, and the bloodshed was real. Newspaper accounts of tong wars or apprehension of tong violence were frequent topics for the city's newspapers, which called for intervention by city officials and police. "There is a bitter war going on between two Chinese societies known as the Sam Yup and the See Yup, and matters have assumed a nature of such grave importance that bloodshed will inevitably result unless the local authorities take immediate steps to quell the disturbance."<sup>70\*</sup> In 1899 accounts claimed the Bing Kong Tong and Suey On Tongs were at war<sup>71</sup> That year tension between the tongs throughout the state escalated. Two Chinese were killed in Fresno's Chinatown on Tulare Street between F and G Street and China Alley The attack appeared to be highly orchestrated, "from the fact that the firing began in different parts of Chinatown almost simultaneously it is evident that a preconcerted signal had been agreed upon and the hatchetmen only awaited the firing of the first shot before they began their deadly work."<sup>72</sup> The violence aroused anti-tong sentiment within the community

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<sup>67</sup> Ward W Grimes, "Chinese Contributed to Color, Progress of Early Period." (*The Fresno Bee*. 18 April 1956).

<sup>68</sup> Seland.

<sup>69</sup> Wong, 529.

<sup>70</sup> Wong, 529

\* *The Sam Yup Association was a district association not a tong. District associations were often blamed for the actions their members took on behalf of the tong. It is not clear if this is the case in this conflict.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 553.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

After the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, the Chinese community there realized they needed to end control by the tongs and their criminal activities. Fresno's Chinese community followed and by the 1920s "tong wars" were over.<sup>73</sup> According to a 1926 newspaper account, Chinese businessmen's clubs were increasingly filling the social role tongs had formerly played. That year the Oriental Business Men's Club, the Oriental Progressive Association and an Oriental Farmers' Improvement Association were all established. The replacement of the tongs was seen as the Americanization of Fresno's Chinese.<sup>74</sup>

Although the tong violence received the press coverage, the tongs also contributed to the religious and social life of Chinatown by constructing joss houses. Joss houses were small temples, which could be found in Chinatowns throughout California. Most were modest in size but highly-ornamented one- or two-story structures housing altars. In Fresno's Chinatown some joss houses were combined with other functions such as schools, meeting rooms, and lodging. Although few remain today, at the turn of the century, many tongs and district associations had their own joss houses.

- **Chee Kung Tong Joss House (Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Society)**

The joss house at 939 G Street was built in the early 1880s with contributions from Chee Kung Tong members. The temple housed a wood altar carved in 1869 in China.<sup>75</sup> The building was a brick two-story structure with meeting hall on the first floor. Joss house lodging was located next door.<sup>76</sup> The joss house was closed to the public in 1936.<sup>77</sup> The building was later used by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Society.<sup>78</sup> Neither the joss house nor lodging house are extant.

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<sup>73</sup> Selland.

<sup>74</sup> Frederic H. Weigel, "Chinese Become Clubmen As Old Tongs Die Out. Joss Houses Go." *Fresno Republican* (Newspaper clipping, 29 March 1926. *Fresno Historical Society Archives—Ben R. Walker History Files*).

<sup>75</sup> Wong, 19.

<sup>76</sup> 1898 Sanborn Map.

<sup>77</sup> Wong, 19.

<sup>78</sup> Selland.

- **Bing Kong Tong Building**

Constructed in 1900 at 921 China Alley, the Bing Kong Tong Building was a center of Chinese culture for 85 years.<sup>79</sup> The Bing Kong Tong Association has held ownership of this building since the time of its construction. The Bing Kong Tong Building was a significant addition to the densely built-up area of Fresno's Chinatown. When constructed the building was comprised of commercial space on the first floor, with Tong House meeting rooms on the second floor. The 1906 Sanborn map showed the footprint of the current building, but it was labeled as dwellings and a shop. According to Nori Masuda, a resident of Chinatown, in the 1920s his family were proprietors of a shop at 921 China Alley, and the family lived in an apartment behind the store. The Masuda family's store sold books as well as other Japanese goods and candies.

The building appears as "Oriental" in the city directories of 1920 and 1926. In 1931 the city directory recorded that a Mrs. L.M. Choy, proprietor of the Tong Hing Jan Co. grocery was tenant of 925 China Alley. Six years later, in 1936, M. Murikami was proprietor of a restaurant in the commercial space. In the 1950s and 1960s social clubs that operated in the building included: Bing Kong Association and the Ching Wai Club. The Bing Kong Association and Fong Wai Club occupied the building during the late 1970s and 1980s.

- **Bow On Tong Joss House**

The Bow On Tong Joss House at 935 China Alley (930-934 F Street) was constructed in 1920 and replaced an earlier Bow On Joss House at 945 G Street. The association represented a large number of Fresno's Chinese, and according to newspaper articles, the opening of the building was a cause for great celebration. "Practically half of the inhabitants of the local Chinese quarter are members of the company, which represent those of the celestials who have not yet given up their old

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<sup>79</sup> "Draft Environmental Impact Report, No. 10089, SCH No. 8408121212: Regarding the Chinatown Expanded Community Redevelopment Plan" (City of Fresno, Development Department, October, 1985) 23.

country customs for those of the new world.” The article continues by describing the interior of the new building: “The new joss house has been fitted out at a cost of about \$2,000. Eight rooms in all comprise the part of the building devoted to the use of the order. Of these seven are for transient guests of the society, the other being a lounging place as well as one of worship.”<sup>80</sup> The two historic uses, residential and religious, are still clearly communicated in the building’s second floor layout and finishes.

Currently, there are two buildings on the property. The building facing F Street is a two-story structure with two commercial spaces on the ground floor and joss house and lodging on the second floor. A

separate one-story structure faces China Alley, labeled as three dwellings on the 1950 Sanborn map. The Bow On Tong Joss House is one of only two known remaining Tong Association buildings in Fresno’s Chinatown.



Figure L. Altar at the Bow On Tong Joss House at 930-934 F Street.

### Taoism

The majority of the early Chinese immigrants to California practiced Taoism. Their most popular deity was Kuan Yu (also called Kuan Kung), an actual person who lived in China during the third century A.D. In contrast to the predominant religions in the White sections of town,

<sup>80</sup> “Ten Years Ago.” (Fresno Republican. Newspaper clipping. Fresno Historical Society Archives).

worship in the Taoist temples, or joss houses, was usually a solitary rather than group activity. Prayers or questions for the deities were written on a paper and burned on the altar. Burning was seen as a method of transmitting objects to the invisible world. Answers came via prayer sticks, which were read by the temple's priest or deacon. Deities and ancestors were honored by burning incense and combustible offerings made of paper or cloth. On special occasions food and drink were offered to the deities. Although the act of worship was an individual act, the temples also functioned as social centers, and community festivities often focused on the temples.<sup>81</sup>

### **Congregational Chinese Mission**

In 1890 the Congregational Chinese Mission of San Francisco opened a branch in West Fresno in a house on G Street near Kern. The object of the mission was the education and Christianizing of the heathen Chinese. The mission is shown on the 1898 Sanborn Map, but by 1906 the structure it occupied housed shops, offices and lodging. It is not known if the mission was moved or disbanded.

### **Chinese Baptist Mission**

The Chinese Baptist Mission was founded in 1884 by Mrs. Frances M. Potter, wife of the first pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fresno.<sup>82</sup> A building to house the mission was constructed at E and Inyo Streets in September 1885.<sup>83</sup> The 1898 Sanborn Map indicates the building was a freestanding, two-story structure with a simple rectangular footprint. Miss S.E. Stein, a missionary, and her mother ran the mission in the 1890s.<sup>84</sup> Sanborn Maps show the mission was present on E Street through 1906 but by 1918 the building had been converted to a single-family dwelling. That same year "West Side Baptist Community House" was shown at the corner of Mariposa and E Streets.

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<sup>81</sup> Wong, 513.

<sup>82</sup> *Portrait of Fresno 1885-1985 A Publication of the Centennial History Committee (1985)* 36.

<sup>83</sup> Selland.

<sup>84</sup> *Portrait of Fresno 1885-1985*, 36.

### St. Genevieve's Catholic Church

Mrs. Allen Mar, Sr., a social worker from the Associated Catholic Charities of Fresno, established catechism classes in Chinatown in 1934. The Catholic sisters held catechism classes for children ages six to fourteen every Saturday afternoon. The mission was first housed in storefronts at 1333 Kern Street and later 839 G Street. The Tulare Street church on the outskirts of Chinatown was built in 1938. In 1941 the mission's status was elevated to parish and was renamed St. Genevieve's.<sup>85</sup>

### Betsuin Buddhist Temple

The first Japanese Buddhist service in the San Joaquin Valley was conducted in 1899. By 1900 a local branch of the San Francisco Young Men's Buddhist Association had been established. The organization first met at a residence at 825 F Street.<sup>86</sup> In 1901 the congregation purchased the present site of the temple at E and Kern Streets, and a three-story wooden temple was constructed. The building burned in 1919. The congregation quickly raised funds for a new building, which opened November 1920. The pulpit and decorations were brought from Japan.<sup>87</sup> In addition to services, the church offered activities for its members such as the Young Men of the Buddhist Church club and sports teams.<sup>88</sup> In California, immediately prior to World War II, eighty-five percent of Japanese were Buddhist.<sup>89</sup> During World War II the temple was temporarily closed when members of the Japanese community were



Figure M: Members of the Buddhist Young Women's Association in front of the Buddhist Temple at the corner of E and Kern Streets (photograph courtesy of Nori Masuda).

<sup>85</sup> Wong, iii, 3, 7

<sup>86</sup> Rehart, 295.

<sup>87</sup> Newell W Strother, "In Fresno's Chinatown." (*The Fresno Morning Republican*. 5 January 1930).

<sup>88</sup> Transcript, Nori Masuda Oral History Interview, 9 June 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 7,13.

<sup>89</sup> National Park Service. "History of Japanese Americans in California. Incarceration of Japanese Americans During World War II."



interned in relocation centers. After the war, membership increased, and the church became one of the largest Buddhist congregations in the United States.<sup>90</sup> In addition to the Buddhist Temple, in the 1920s there were two other Japanese churches at the intersection of Kern and E Streets, a First Congregational Church and a Methodist Church.<sup>91</sup>

### **Mexican Baptist Church**

Reflective of the growing number of Mexicans in the neighborhood, the first church constructed specifically for Fresno's Mexican Community was built in 1924 at 1061 E Street. The site was the former location of the West Side Baptist Community House. The church served the burgeoning Mexican population. In the 1910s and 1920s, the number of Mexican immigrants in the U.S., specifically California, increased dramatically. The migration was spurred by political chaos in Mexico, and farm labor shortages in the U.S.<sup>92</sup> The Mexican Baptist Church remains at its original location.

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<sup>90</sup> Rehart, 296.

<sup>91</sup> Transcript, Nori Masuda Oral History Interview, 15.

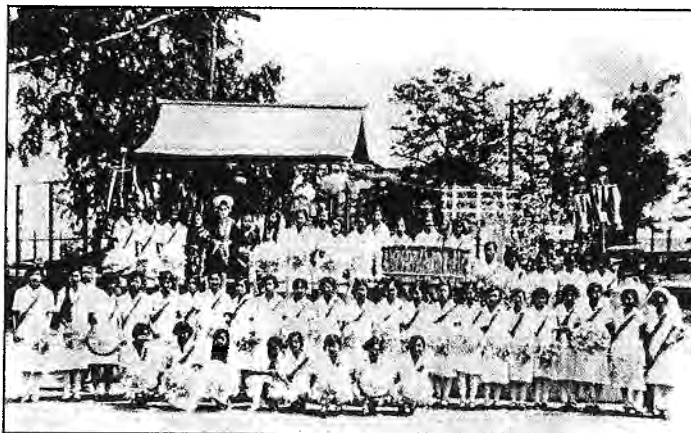
<sup>92</sup> National Park Service, *A History of Mexican Americans in California. Revolution to Depression 1900-1940.*

**CONTEXT: Celebrations**

**Parades**

Chinese parades were popular with the Chinese community and with the larger population of Fresno. The parades threaded through the city's downtown before reaching Mariposa Street in Chinatown. Although predominantly composed of Chinese floats and characters, Fresno city officials and White bands were incorporated, and both the American and Chinese flags were carried.<sup>92</sup>

The Chinese Parade on October 26, 1901, was, at the time, one of the largest in Fresno's history and provides a glimpse into the tradition. Police Chief J.D. Morgan led the parade, and the



*Figure N: Japanese participants in the Raisin Day Parade, c. 1925 (photograph courtesy of Nori Masuda).*

Raisin City Band, a White musical group, performed. The parade also consisted of elaborately costumed Chinese in flowing silk robes, children dressed as deities on horseback, and Chinese musicians. Many of the Chinese district associations were represented by members carrying large silk banners.<sup>93</sup> The festivities ended with an evening celebration in the city's fair pavilion.<sup>94</sup> Quong Mow Lung,

parade organizer, explained the purpose of the celebrations: "Our fair is about the same as your Thanksgiving. The Chinese have not one god, but many, and everything is done to please all of these gods, and to drive away all the devils."<sup>95</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Rehart, 3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> "Oriental Splendor" *The Fresno Morning Republican*. (27 October 1901).

<sup>95</sup> "Today Ends It." *The Fresno Morning Republican* (26 October 1901).



The parade was hailed a great success in the *Fresno Republic*, a paper representing the entire city; "In everyway it was the most beautiful parade that has ever appeared on the streets of the city. It was from the beginning to the end one dazzling array of magnificent banners, immense flags, gorgeous floats, shimmering silks in every color, shields, weapons of war—and was on the most elaborate and expensive scale."<sup>96</sup> In addition to serving as cultural and social events for the Chinese, their parades helped bridge the gap from Chinatown to White Fresno, if only temporarily

### **Chinese New Year**

The Chinese New Year was a cause for great celebration in Fresno's Chinatown. Stores held open houses and were elaborately decorated. On that day and several days after, regular business was suspended in the neighborhood, and merchants held open houses for the Chinese population and visitors of other ethnicities. In addition to colorful banners and decorations, the celebrations featured impressive firework displays. Tens of thousands of dollars were spent on firecrackers, which were suspended from the porches. One by one, the merchants would set off their fireworks. Rows of incense-studded watermelons lined G Street.<sup>97</sup>

The festivities were exotic to Fresno's White community and were covered in the city's papers. In 1883 the *Fresno Republican* reported: "Chinatown is in the midst of the Chinese New Year's festivities. they all keep open house and get full, and have lots of fun in their own peculiar Oriental style. The wild, weird melody of the Chinese violin, the tam tam and yangtees—huldabaloo float in on the evening air till about 4 o'clock in the morning, when the last musician falls under the table in a state of helpless intoxication and the meeting adjourns."<sup>98</sup>

With the fall of the Manchu dynasty in 1911, the celebrations of Chinese New Year became more staid. By that time most of Fresno's Chinese were no longer loyal to the Manchu dynasty and

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<sup>96</sup> "Oriental Splendor "

<sup>97</sup> "Fresno's Chinatown Was Busy, Bustling Section" *The Fresno Bee* (22 May 1962).

<sup>98</sup> "Chinatown is in the midst " (*The Fresno Weekly Republican*. No date. *Fresno Historical Society Archives*).

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followed Dr Sun Yat Sen, China's first president. Residents held dinners in their homes, but the banners, elaborate decoration, and loud public celebrations were absent.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Neill M. Toohy, "Fresno Chinaman Reads News of Former Home; Was Mayor in Canton." *Fresno Evening Herald* (6 June 1923).

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female boarders of these buildings, but others were bolder and clearly label the residents “prostitutes ”

In the Fresno County 1880 census records, prostitutes were clearly identified. Although there were a few small groups, most did not appear to live in brothels or cribs but were intermixed with Chinese male laborers. On the 1885 Sanborn Map, a group of small buildings on G Street between Mariposa and Tulare Streets was labeled “Chinese Women.” The buildings were indistinct from the surrounding shops. By 1888 a row of small uniform buildings had been constructed on southeast side of Tulare Street between F and G Streets. The buildings were labeled “Female Boarding” with no indication of ethnicity. The form of the building was typical of prostitution cribs--long, narrow, one-story structures divided into identical small spaces. Each crib was approximately ten feet wide and twenty-five feet deep. A description of cribs in Salt Lake City provides some insight into the possible interior configurations of these spaces: “The stockade consisted of nearly 100 small brick ‘cribs’ which were ten feet square with a door and window, built in rows. A curtain divided the crib in two, with a washstand and chair in the front part and a white enameled bed in the back.”<sup>109</sup>

By 1898 the number of Chinatown’s houses of prostitution had grown. A row of cribs labeled “Japanese Female Boarding” was located on China Alley between Tulare and Kern Streets. Another longer row on F Street on the two blocks between Mariposa and Kern Streets was listed only as “Female Boarding” houses, which alternated with saloons. Another row was located on Tulare between E and F Streets, and yet a third row on E Street between Tulare and Kern.<sup>110</sup> Sanborn Maps show that by 1906 houses of prostitution had proliferated. Most buildings on the block bordered by Mariposa, Tulare, E, and F Streets were “Female Boarding.” The buildings on the three blocks between Tulare, Kern, D, and G Streets were predominantly female boarding houses. The 1910 census records the tenants as single, unrelated women living as “lodgers” with

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<sup>109</sup> Jami Balls, “History of the Stockade and Salt Lake’s Red Light District.” <http://historytogo.utah.gov/redlight.html>, 29 August 2005.

<sup>110</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Fresno, 1898.

no occupation. On the 1918, 1948, and 1950 Sanborn Maps, no female boarding houses were labeled.

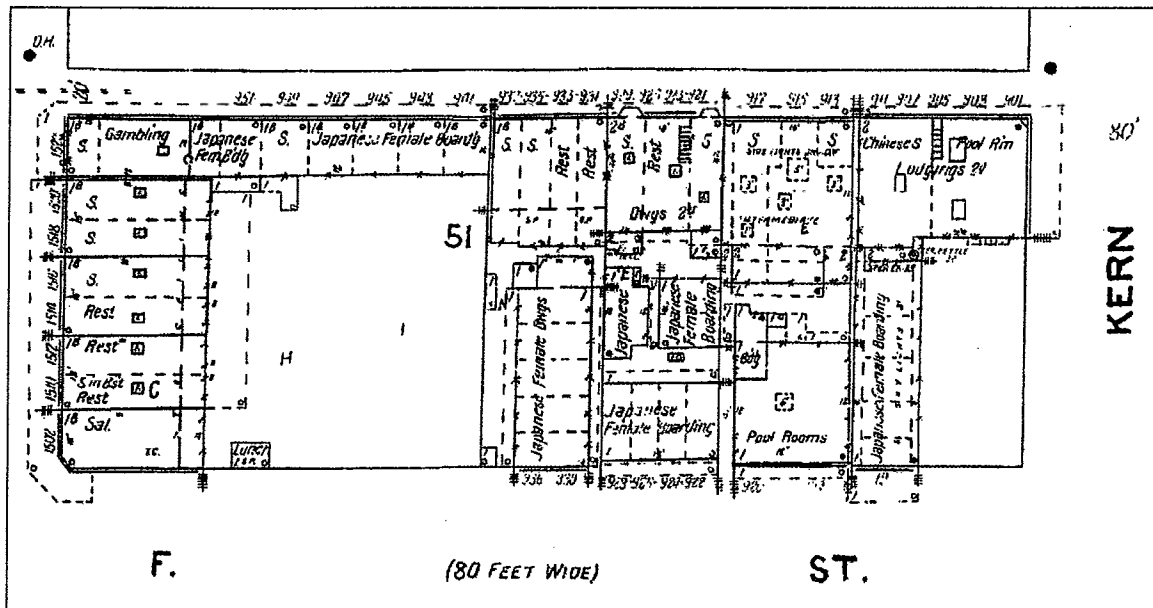


Figure O: 1906 Sanborn Map showing the proliferation of Japanese Female Boarding Houses, which were most likely brothels and prostitution cribs.

The Chinese population of West Fresno declined from 1104 in 1900 to 617 in 1920. Chinatown increasingly became multicultural in the 1930s. Over the years the numbers of African Americans and Mexicans increased. Although the demographics of the area changed and the number of prostitutes was reduced, from the 1930s to the 1970s the area continued to serve as a red-light district. Prostitutes, largely Mexican and African Americans operated out of brothels, pool halls, dance halls, and hotels.<sup>111</sup>

### Gambling

Gambling and Chinatown went hand in hand for several reasons. Similar to the unofficial policies on prostitution, Whites were more militant about keeping gambling establishments out of

<sup>111</sup> Chacon, 394.

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the east side but were more tolerant of gambling on the west side. In addition gambling held a special place in Chinese society. To Chinese luck and fate were two of the most powerful forces.

West Fresno's gambling establishments were numerous and lucrative. Reporter Schyler Rehart stated, "In the early 1890s, Fresno already had the second largest Chinatown in the state. The Chinese gambling dens of West Fresno were considered the most notorious and profitable of any in the nation."<sup>112</sup> Gambling provided Chinese and gamblers of many ethnicities with recreation, social interaction, and hope.<sup>113</sup>

Three of the most popular games of chance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Fresno's Chinatown were the lottery, fan tan, and stud poker.<sup>114</sup> The lottery was unique because players were not required to visit Chinatown and, as a result, this game drew from a broader cross section of the population. Chinese laundrymen and vegetable peddlers carried the tickets to the White neighborhoods, where participants, mostly women, purchased them. The tickets contained eighty Chinese characters, and the purchaser of a ten-cent ticket marked ten of the eighty characters. The seller marked a duplicate ticket and brought it back to the gambling hall where the winners were determined under careful security. "The drawing is effected in an apartment at the rear of the lottery den, usually with a side exit to an alley, guarded with an iron door. The moment the parties to the drawing are assembled, every door and window in the place is closed as tight as wax." Characters, matching those on the tickets were drawn. Selected marks on each ticket were returned to purchaser along with any winnings.<sup>115</sup>

For Fresno's Chinese, gambling, especially the lottery, was a popular form of recreation as well as an industry and employer. The gambling houses reportedly employed as many as 700 and added millions of dollars to Fresno's economy in the late nineteenth century. Some of the profits were sent back to the tong organizations in San Francisco.<sup>116</sup> Only one building was labeled

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Chacon, 383 and Clough and Secret, 246.

<sup>115</sup> Clough and Secret, 244.

<sup>116</sup> Chacon, 384.

“Chinese Gambling” on the 1885 Sanborn Map but newspaper accounts suggest the activity was more prevalent and that lotteries were held under the protection of one of the sheriff’s deputies.<sup>117</sup> In early 1895 City Marshall Martin Luther Woy led a series of Chinatown gambling raids. However, little change was effected, and some pointed to bribes. “The word was that a man, claiming to represent city officials, had told the Chinese their games could be safely reopened if his palm was greased—up to \$400 per month per establishment.”<sup>118</sup>

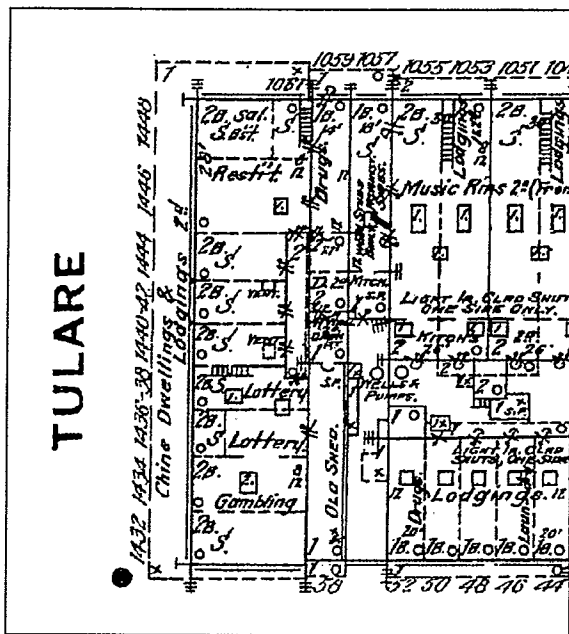


Figure P: 1898 Sanborn Map showing lottery dens at 1432-1448 Tulare Street.

The profusion of gambling houses on the 1898 Sanborn Map confirms that the raids were ineffective. Along China Alley between Mariposa and Tulare Streets the majority of buildings were labeled “gambling.” The gambling houses were one-story and, in footprint, were very similar in size and shape to the surrounding shops. Although an underground industry, the structures were sometimes substantial. According to an 1894 newspaper article, “It is perhaps scarcely fair to style them all dens, for one is a substantial building, a regular exchange, constructed expressly for the purpose at a cost of not less than \$2000.”<sup>119</sup>

Accounts indicate that one of the telltale signs of a gambling house was an iron door with a peephole next to a cord extending to the street. An outer guard watched and pulled the cord to alert gamblers to possible raids. The iron doors significantly stalled the police who had to batter them down, giving patrons a chance to flee through hidden exits and operators a chance to hide

<sup>117</sup> Clough and Secret, 244.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 244.

**CONTEXT: Demographics and Ethnic Character**

**1860s\***

Motivated by poor conditions in their homeland--substandard living conditions, famines, overcrowding, and political unrest--in the 1850s a growing number of Chinese fled their homeland and immigrated to California and the gold mines known as *Gum Saan* "Gold Mountain." In the 1860 census record of Fresno County, over three hundred Chinese were listed as residents. Whether an accurate reflection or bias on the part of the census takers, *all* Chinese were male and *all* were listed as miners.<sup>122</sup> No mention was made of Chinese merchants; although it is likely a few existed to serve the needs of their community. Fresno County was organized in 1856, and Millerton, the county's largest settlement, became the county seat. Initially Chinese were tolerated but within a few years, the Chinese were banned. The expelled Chinese settled halfway between Millerton and Fort Miller.<sup>123</sup> In December 1869 the directors of the Central Pacific Railroad selected a site on the A.Y. Easterby ranch for the Fresno railroad station.

**1870s**

In May 1872 Edward H. Mix platted the new City of Fresno, and by 1873 there was a small thriving town.<sup>124</sup> On March 23, 1873 voters determined the county seat would be moved to Fresno. Many Millerton buildings were dismantled and relocated to the new town.<sup>125</sup> The Chinese community just outside Millerton also moved to the new city. Initially Chinese settled east of the railroad tracks, however, as a result of racial agitation, all Chinese and other disreputables were soon compelled to move across the tracks to Chinatown.<sup>126</sup>

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\* *The 1860, 1870, and 1880 Census Records were arranged by "Dwelling houses--numbered in the order of visitation," and addresses were not given.*

<sup>122</sup> *Department of Commerce and Labor--Bureau of the Census, Fresno County (1860 and 1870) and Fresno City (1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930).*

<sup>123</sup> *Clough and Secrest, 78.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid., 121.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid., 121-122.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ernestine Winchell, "Fresno Memories: Across the Tracks" (The Fresno Morning Republican. c. 1920).*

Act, which extended the Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882 for an additional ten years. On August 14, 1893, 500 unemployed men attempted to run the Chinese out of Fresno's Chinatown. When the Earl Fruit Company fired its White female workers in order to hire Chinese, an Anti-Chinese

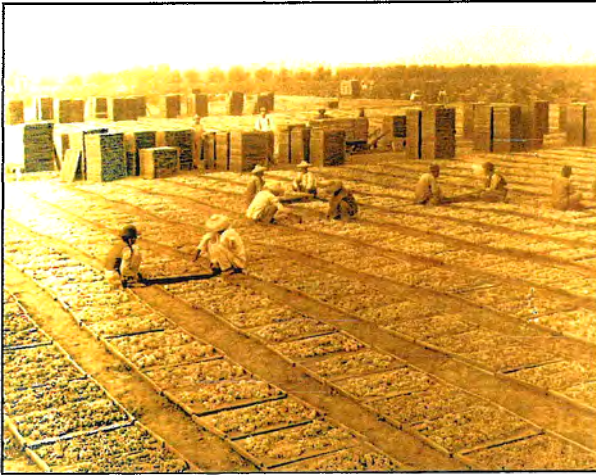


Figure R: Chinese workers drying grapes (Online Archive of California <http://ark.cdlib.org>).

League was formed. A riot on September 1, 1893, almost drove Selma's Chinese population out of town. Later that month, a bunkhouse of Chinese at the Metzler Vineyard was attacked.<sup>136</sup>

In the 1890s the face of Fresno's Chinatown changed. In previous decades few ethnic group other than Chinese resided in the neighborhood. Although limited in number, Japanese immigration had begun, and these new residents were forced to settle in Chinatown.

### 1900s

Census records for 1900 indicate that West Fresno's Chinese community was typical of Chinese settlement patterns throughout California, although there were a few families, the majority of the populations were single males living in boarding, lodging or rooming houses. Most were farm laborers, but other occupations included cooks, physicians, merchants, bookkeepers, butchers, a boarding house keeper, bartenders, fish peddlers, and a teacher. In addition, there were a large number of laundrymen. Laundries were popular with the Chinese, because, unlike other professions, Chinese did not face opposition from white businesses because washing was considered women's work unsuitable for White men.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Clough and Secret, 333.

<sup>137</sup> National Park Service, "History of Chinese Americans in California: the 1900s."



The Asiatic Exclusion League was formed in May 1905, and the group campaigned to exclude Japanese and Chinese from immigration.<sup>138</sup> At the turn of the century, the U.S. economy began expanding after an economic depression in the late nineteenth century. In California the need for agricultural workers was greater than the workforce could supply. The Chinese Exclusion Act had contributed to a labor shortage on the West Coast. For this reason some farmers wanted the act to be changed. Japanese immigrants (both men and women) helped fill the shortage and were looked at favorably as potential farm laborers.<sup>139</sup> Unlike the mining and railroad industries, which required only male laborers, farming required quick hands rather than brute strength, and women and children were capable of the task. By 1900 Northern California had the largest number of Japanese in the U.S., and of those, 598 lived in Fresno County.<sup>140</sup>

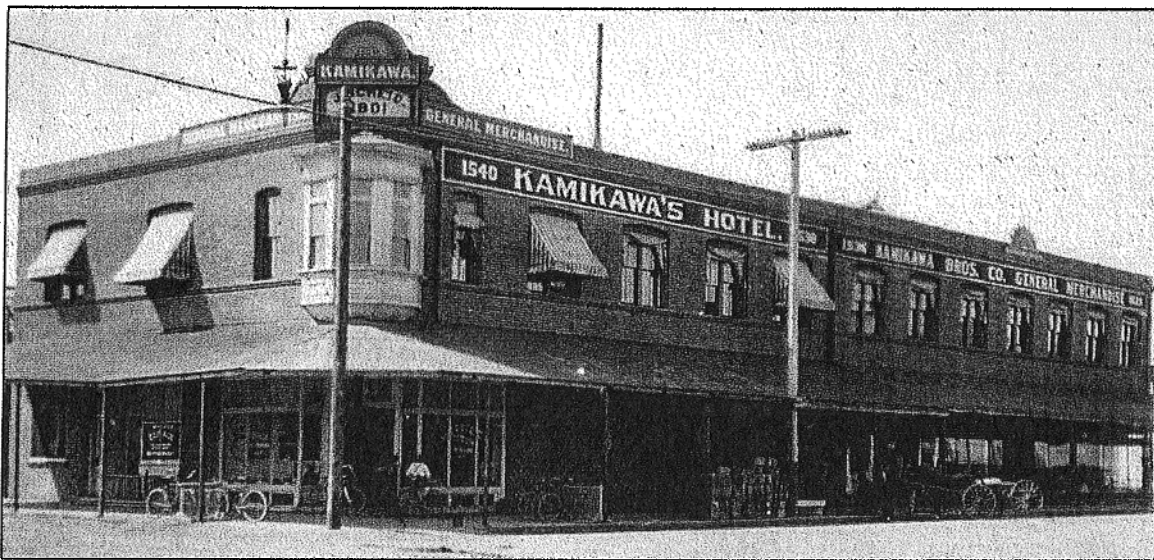


Figure S: Kamikawa's General Merchandise and Hotel was a prominent Japanese business in Chinatown, c. 1910 (Online Archive of California <http://ark.cdlib.org>).

Despite their common Asian heritage, the experience of Japanese immigrants to California was distinctly different from that of the Chinese. Many Japanese men saved money in order to bring their families over. In addition, unlike Chinese immigrants who were escaping poverty and an

<sup>138</sup> National Park Service, "A History of Japanese Americans in California: Discriminatory Practices."

<sup>139</sup> Lee, 3.

<sup>140</sup> National Park Service, "A History of Japanese Americans in California: Patterns of Settlement and Occupational Characteristics."

unstable political climate, many Japanese came from farming families and arrived in the U.S. with entrepreneurial plans.<sup>141</sup> Japanese began buying property in the names of their children who were American citizen and able to own property. They established farms, orchards, and vineyards.<sup>142</sup>

The 1900 census records for Fresno's Chinatown indicated that although there were some families, at that time Japanese residents were still mostly single males. The Japanese mixed with the Chinese within the neighborhood and lived throughout Chinatown. Japanese even lived on China Alley. However, there didn't appear to be mixing within lodging houses.

As the number of Japanese in the U.S. increased, there was an anti-Japanese backlash. Labor unions and opportunistic politicians pressured President Roosevelt to restrict Japanese immigration. However, unlike the Chinese, the Japanese had a strong home government to defend their interests. After Japan defeated China in 1895 and Russia in 1905, U.S. officials saw Japan as a potential enemy and were wary of creating a tense relationship.<sup>143</sup> As a result, rather than a more comprehensive ban like the Chinese Exclusion Act, President Roosevelt and Japanese officials reached a "Gentlemen's Agreement," an understanding that the Japanese government would not issue passports for Japanese laborers or prostitutes. Japanese already in the U.S. were allowed to have their wives, children, and parents join them. Japanese women were allowed to marry Japanese men already in the U.S. by proxy, leading to the practice of "picture brides" or "photograph brides." As a result, a large number of Japanese women came to the country.<sup>144</sup> Some immigration inspectors believed picture brides were schemes to get prostitutes into the country. Beginning in 1909 through the end of World War II, anti-Japanese bills were introduced to the California State Legislature each year. Despite hostility from some sectors, the U.S. policy on Japanese immigration still allowed the Japanese-American population

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<sup>141</sup> Lee, 24.

<sup>142</sup> National Park Service, "A History of Japanese Americans in California: Patterns of Settlement and Occupational Characteristics."

<sup>143</sup> Lee, 26.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 26 and 27.

to grow. Over the next two decades, the Japanese population in the U.S. doubled in size through immigration and natural reproduction.<sup>145</sup>

### 1910s

The revolutionary uprising of October 10, 1911 and the establishment of a republic in China combined with anti-Chinese sentiment in the U.S. spurred many Chinese Americans to return to their homeland.<sup>146</sup> In 1910 the Chinese

population of Fresno's Chinatown was still dominantly composed of single males laborers with only a few families. Although the Chinese population was frozen as a result of the Page Law and Chinese Exclusion Act, the occupations of the

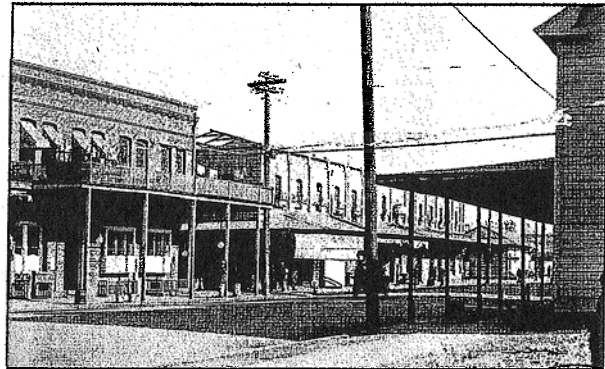


Figure T: View of Chinatown streetscape, c. 1915  
(photograph courtesy of Nori Masuda).

Chinese who remained in Chinatown were becoming increasingly diverse. In addition to the expected farm laborers, laundrymen, farm contractors, and general merchandise store proprietors, the 1910 census records show there were also cooks, waiters, lodging proprietors, canning workers, vegetable peddlers, tailors, druggists, and bakers. Similarly, there was a greater variety and specialization of stores including: groceries, clothing, tobacco, and hats.

Despite the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement that allowed Japanese women to join their husbands in the U.S., in Fresno's Chinatown there were only a few Japanese families. Most residents were still male farm hands living in boarding houses. The Japanese were located throughout the neighborhood on G Street, China Alley, Tulare Street, and Kern Street. In addition to laborers the Japanese community had a large number of restaurant proprietors, waiters, and cooks. There

<sup>145</sup> Lee, 27 and 29.

<sup>146</sup> National Park Service, "History of Chinese Americans in California: the 1900s,"

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were also coffee house clerks, billiard hall proprietors, railroad workers, fish market proprietors, gardeners, and liquor merchants.

In 1910 a group of single Japanese women resided at the 900 block of F Street. No occupation was given in the census records, but a group of single women living alone suggests they were prostitutes. In the late 1910s anti-Japanese sentiment was growing and the Japanese association with prostitution was one of the main issues. In the U.S. press, Japanese women were increasingly depicted as hypersexual.<sup>147</sup> In 1919 California Senator James D. Phelan attacked the policy of allowing picture brides to immigrate. He called the practice "Asiatic" and a "throwback as it were to barbarism."<sup>148</sup>

Although not yet represented in Chinatown's population, in the 1910s events occurred in Mexico that would later significantly influence the demographics of the neighborhood. President Porfirio Diaz overthrew the Mexican government and revolution spread throughout the country causing political, social, and economic upheaval. Chaos drove thousands of Mexicans north. In the U.S. World War I enlistment created labor shortages attracting immigrant labor.<sup>149</sup>

### **1920s**

Anti-immigration sentiment reached a climax with the Immigration Act of 1924, which placed quotas on the numbers of immigrants allowed into the United States. The law was intended to limit immigrants from southern and eastern European countries but it had a great impact on other groups as well.<sup>150</sup> The Act excluded all classes of Chinese immigrants and extended restrictions to other Asian groups. These restrictions were not relaxed until the middle of the twentieth century

In Fresno's Chinatown in the 1920s, far fewer Chinese worked as farm laborers than in the previous decades. Census records list general merchandise store proprietors, fish store

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<sup>147</sup> Lee, 31.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>149</sup> National Park Service, "A History of Mexican Americans in California: Revolution to Depression. 1900-1940."

<sup>150</sup> Lee, 1

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proprietors, pool hall operators, laundrymen, restaurant and retail store bookkeepers, grocery salespersons, waiters, a cigar store proprietor, restaurant workers, cooks, waiters, an auto mechanic, and a librarian.

The Immigration Act of 1924 limited the number of new Japanese immigrants, however, the Japanese-American community was already well established by this time. Nisei, second generation Japanese Americans, numbered 30,000 in 1920.<sup>151</sup> By 1920 Fresno County's Japanese population reached 5,732.<sup>152</sup> Population increases were due primarily to the immigration of women and the birth of children in the United States. According to Nori Masuda, a resident of Chinatown, the Japanese population of the area was growing, "Of course there was a lot of Japanese in the twenties, you know, a lot of immigrants. They come through from labor camps, they come through to Fresno to work for grapes, this and that, then they keep going."<sup>153</sup> In Fresno's Chinatown the number of Japanese families (in relation to single males or female prostitutes) was increasing. Reflective of the change, Nori Masuda, a Chinatown resident who grew up in an apartment on Fresno's Chinatown, called the area "J Town."<sup>154</sup> Occupations of Japanese listed in the 1920 census records included, hotel proprietors, bakers, auto mechanics, shooting gallery proprietors, barbers, laborers, rooming house keepers, restaurant proprietors, ranch contractors, fruit stand proprietors, and vineyard laborers.

In the 1920s the number of Chinatown's non-Asian residents was growing. Census records show five families from Mexico lived at 1051-1055 F Street. The heads of households were all laborers but worked in a variety of industries including: the street department, a vineyard, general contracting, a cannery, and a farm. Next door at 1045 F Street, a man from Greece was proprietor of a rooming house. An Italian couple lived at 1029 G Street; the head of household worked as a restaurant keeper. The 1926 city directory shows an even more diverse neighborhood than the census records convey. Although the majority of residents and business

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>152</sup> National Park Service, "A History of Japanese Americans in California. Discriminatory Practices."

<sup>153</sup> Transcript, Nori Masuda Oral History Interview, 9 June 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 9.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

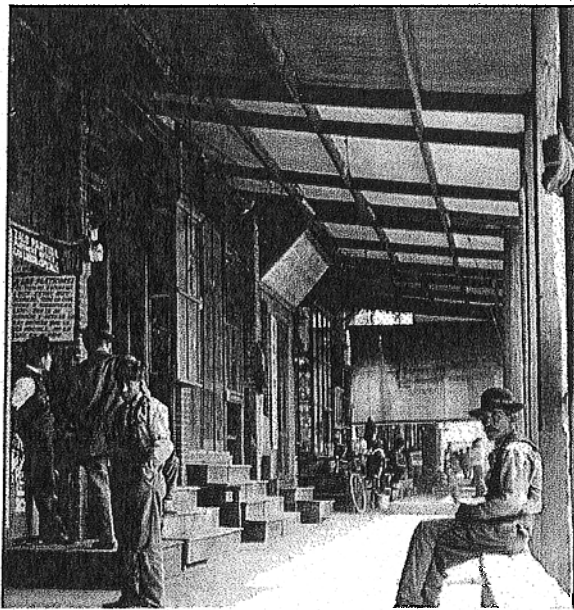


Figure U: Mexican employment office in Chinatown (photograph courtesy of the Online Archive of California <http://ark.cdlib.org>).

proprietors listed were predominantly Chinese and Japanese, the area included people and businesses with European surnames. It is not clear if these people lived in the area or were proprietors of Chinatown businesses and resided elsewhere.

### 1930s

Although single male laborers living in boarding houses (the most populous group at the turn of the century) were still present in Chinatown in 1930, these men were now the exception rather than the rule. The 1930 census records show Chinatown's Chinese performing jobs such as: dry goods clerks and

merchants, cafe managers, grocers, druggists, doctors, waiters, cooks, meat cutters, herb salesmen, clerk, laundrymen, housekeepers, a soft drink operator, and club house porters and managers.

By the 1930s Chinatown's Japanese community appears to have been nearly as large as its Chinese community. The Japanese residents consisted of both families and single male laborers. According to the 1930 census records, occupations included: farm laborers, pool hall managers, restaurant owners, grocery salesmen, dry goods salesmen, bookkeepers, restaurant workers, life insurance salesmen, vegetable stall managers, store clerks, barbers, carpenters, and movie show managers.

Chinatown's Mexican population appears to have settled primarily on F Street around Kern and Inyo Streets. Unlike early Asian immigration patterns, the Mexican community consisted of families rather than single men. Some worked as farm laborers, and there was also a barber, a rooming house operator, pool hall operator, and hotel clerk. Although welcomed in the 1920s as

an answer to the labor scarcity question, the Great Depression and job shortages caused changing attitudes toward Mexican immigrants. As a result, U.S. officials pressured Mexicans to “voluntarily” return to Mexico; outright deportation was sometimes the result.<sup>155</sup>

#### 1940s

On December 7, 1941, the United States declared war, and many Chinese and Japanese enlisted.<sup>156</sup> As a result of wartime labor shortages and changes in popular sentiment, in 1943 the Exclusion Act was revoked, however, it was not until 1965 that “nation of origin” quotas were ended. Chinese immigrants were finally eligible for citizenship. In addition, in 1945 the War Bride Act and the G.I. Fiancé Act allowed Chinese Americans to bring their wives into the country.<sup>157</sup>

For the Japanese the 1940s were particularly bleak. With Japanese involvement in World War II, the question of the Japanese allegiance to the U.S. was raised. At first the Japanese in Fresno were subject to a curfew and not allowed on the streets between 8 pm and 6 am. Persons found in violation could be shot.<sup>158</sup> Soon, Executive Order 9066, signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt February 19, 1942, called for creation of internment camps

for the nation’s Japanese. Although the excuse was “military necessity,” the Japanese were interred without evidence of

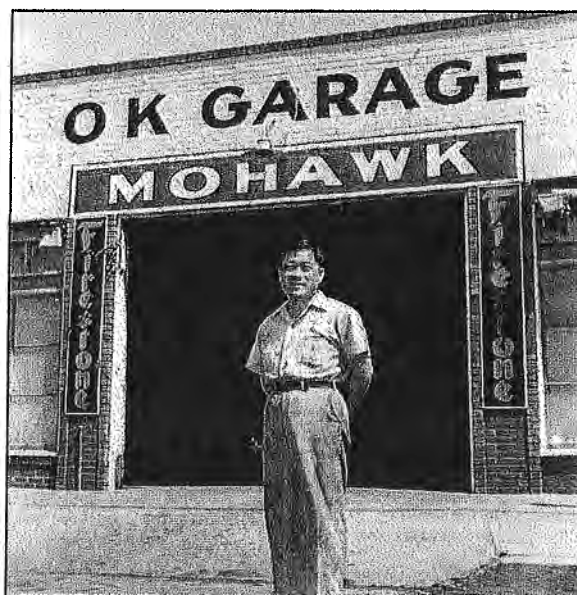


Figure V: Tom Inouye, in front of his O.K. Garage at 1403 Kern Street (photograph courtesy of the Online Archive of California <http://ark.cdlib.org>).

<sup>155</sup> National Park Service, “A History of Mexican Americans in California: Revolution to Depression: 1900-1940.”

<sup>156</sup> Wong, 16.

<sup>157</sup> Library of Congress, “Immigration . . . Chinese: Legislative Harassment.”

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/inmig/chinese5.html>, 27 October 2005.

<sup>158</sup> Transcript, Nori Masuda Oral History Interview, 9 June 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 49.

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sabotage or criminal activity. Initially, thirteen temporary detention camps called assembly centers were established in California to house the Japanese until more permanent camps could be built in remote sections of the West. One assembly center was located at the Fresno Fairgrounds. The former Sugar Pine Lumber Company in Pinedale (just north of Fresno) also served as a regional relocation camp for Japanese-Americans from Washington, Oregon, and Northern California. Chinatown's Japanese Americans prepared to depart their homes and businesses; storeowners stashed merchandise and boarded their shops. Fresno's Japanese were first sent to an assembly center in Fresno and then transferred to an internment camp on the Gila River in Arizona or to the camp in Jerome, Arkansas.<sup>159</sup> *Ex Parte Endo* issued December 16, 1944, rescinded the exclusion orders and closed the internment camps in the United States. However, many Japanese did not return to their former homes. For example, the Masuda family who had formerly owned stores on China Alley and later on F Street, found it too difficult to reopen, and instead began working in the fields. Nori Masuda, one of the family's older sons delayed his return to the Fresno area because of prejudice against the Japanese in the neighborhood.<sup>160</sup>

During the 1940s Fresno's Chinatown was increasingly multicultural. In the larger West Fresno area, there were Italians, Greeks, Blacks, and Asians.<sup>161</sup> Relations were friendly. Pete Rokas, a Greek American noted the exchanges with neighbors of different ethnicities. At Christmas the neighbors would exchange food: homemade wine from his father or Greek pastries from his mother, tamales from their Mexican neighbors, and raviolis from a nearby Italian family.<sup>162</sup> Within Chinatown the number of Blacks and Mexicans increased and Chinatown was called "*El Barrio Chino*" and "Mexicantown."<sup>163</sup> World War II caused a labor shortage because many workers, including Mexican Americans, enlisted. Those who remained were able to get jobs in

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<sup>159</sup> Setencich, Eli, "Age Has Caught up to Fresno Landmark." (*The Fresno Bee*, 8 April 1996).

<sup>160</sup> Transcript, Nori Masuda Oral History Interview, 9 June 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 33, 52 and 55.

<sup>161</sup> Transcript, Pete Rokas Oral History Interview, 9 July 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Chacon, 394.



industries previously closed to them. The labor situation led the U.S. and Mexico to create the *Bracero* Program (which peaked in 1959 with 450,000 workers).<sup>164</sup> According to Froylan Ramirez, who came to the Fresno area as a *bracero*, the program enrolled Mexican workers for six-month contracts and issued them passports. Ramirez worked on farms in the area harvesting oranges, broccoli, peppers, chilies, and other produce. After his contract expired, Ramirez, like many *braceros*, remained in the area. He later settled in West Fresno.<sup>165</sup>

### **1950s and 1960s**

In the 1950s and 1960s the trends established in earlier decades continued, and the neighborhood was increasingly diverse. In addition to residents of Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese heritage, people with European and Russian last names had moved into the neighborhood. Businesses with Hispanic or European names were common. In addition to serving the residents of Chinatown, the area was a destination. According to Noe Lopez, a Mexican American who drove Mexican migrant laborers into the neighborhood on their days off, the men came to shop for clothes, entertainment, and the opportunity to socialize. In Chinatown the laborers, "liked to go to the movies, a lot of them and a lot of them liked to go and drink at the bar probably see girls. They were all young men and they all came and went in different directions but most of the time they stuck together"<sup>166</sup>

By the 1960s most of the buildings on China Alley were vacant. As opportunities increased, many successful Chinese moved out of Chinatown and into the suburbs.<sup>167</sup>

### **1970s and 1980s**

By the 1970s city directories indicated that there were more businesses with Hispanic names than any other ethnicity. Similarly, the majority of residents on China Alley had Hispanic last names.

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<sup>164</sup> National Park Service, "A History of Mexican Americans in California: Revolution to Depression: 1900-1940."

<sup>165</sup> Transcript, Noe Lopez and Alice Lopez Oral History Interview, 9 July 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 1-3.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>167</sup> Wong, 20.

However, the neighborhood was still known for its diversity, as a 1981 newspaper article notes: "There is no other place in Fresno and few in the United States where you can walk a block from a Buddhist temple to Mexican restaurants and cantinas to Chinese and Japanese restaurants, barbershops, laundries, a big modern fish market and banks."<sup>168</sup> However, there was one service less frequently offered in the 1980s in Chinatown. The neighborhood had served as the city's red-light district but in the 1970s this activity began to shift to other areas of Fresno.<sup>169</sup>

#### 1990s

In the 1990s Chinatown's population was predominantly Hispanic and Japanese and was smaller than in the past decades. The rooming houses on China Alley had been closed and few buildings (residential or commercial) were left on G Street.

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<sup>168</sup> Jim Steinberg, "Chinatown: A Move to Keep 'Flavor'" *The Fresno Bee* (29 June 1981).

<sup>169</sup> Chacon, 394.

**CONTEXT: Contributions of Significant Individuals**

**Tong Duck (Sam Wing Chee) (1849-1937)**



*Figure W: Tom Duck  
(photograph courtesy of  
Fresno County: the  
Pioneer Years).*

Tong Duck, also known as Sam Wing Chee (or Gee), arrived in Millerton in 1869 and worked in his uncle's general merchandise store. Building on his experience there, Tong Duck partnered with Tong Sing to create a similar firm, which provided miners with equipment. During the mass relocation from Millerton to Fresno in 1873 and 1874, many Chinese residents hired Duck's firm to move their furnishings in the large freight wagons his company used to transport supplies to the Chinese in the gold mines.<sup>171</sup>

In Fresno Duck and Sing built the first large-scale brick building in Chinatown, which housed their general merchandise store. In addition to providing supplies, the store served an important role for California's itinerant Chinese labor force. The store functioned as a stopover for Chinese traveling between San Francisco and Los Angeles, and mail for Chinese workers throughout the San Joaquin Valley was held at the store.<sup>172</sup> It is not clear where the store was located, however, the 1899-1900 Fresno County Business Records lists Tong Duck & Co. as "trader[s]" located at 1121 G. Street, which may be the address of the business. In addition to retail, Tong Duck became interested in agribusiness and financed orchards and vineyards in the nearby communities of Hanford, Armona, and Lemoore.<sup>173</sup>

Tong Duck also played an important role in Chinatown's social and religious life. Tong Duck and Tong Sing, who served as head of the Sam Yup Association, built the company's joss house in 1889 on China Alley between Tulare and Mariposa Streets. In addition to his other ventures, in the 1880s Tong Duck built the two-story opera house on the east side of China Alley north of Tulare Street. The theater was destroyed by fire at the turn of the century.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Chacon., 375-376.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Opper, 5.

<sup>174</sup> Grimes.

Between 1875 and 1908 Tong Duck made frequent trips back to China to organize his estate there. While in China he married three times. In 1898 he wed Kong Soo Lum, his fourth wife, in Fresno, and the couple raised fourteen children. Tong Duck retired in 1930 and died in 1937 at 89 years of age. Kong Soo Lum died in 1938.<sup>175</sup>

#### **Ah Kit (1830-1895)**

Ah Kit was one of Chinatown's most well-known residents. He was born in China and came to the United States in the 1850s. After his arrival in Mariposa County, California, like many Chinese, he initially sought his fortune in the mines. He soon settled Millerton and opened a blacksmith shop. Although racial relations were tense in the state, most of Kit's customers were American.<sup>176</sup>



Figure X: Ah Kit  
(photograph courtesy of  
Fresno County: the  
Pioneer Years).

Ah Kit expanded his interests and became business partners with Jefferson M. Shannon, a hog raiser among other professions. This venture was the first Caucasian/Chinese partnership in central California.<sup>177</sup> When the county seat moved to Fresno in 1873, Ah Kit and Jefferson Shannon opened a blacksmith shop on Merced Street between H and Broadway Streets. Jefferson Shannon was a deputy sheriff of Fresno County, the first railroad station agent, and salesperson of town lots for the Pacific Improvement Company. His involvement in land sales enabled Shannon to acquire lots in a favorable part of town when it was established.<sup>178</sup> As a result, Jefferson and Kit were able to build a blacksmith shop at Fresno Street and I. However, as a result of racial agitation, all Chinese, including Ah Kit, soon moved across the tracks, to Chinatown.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>175</sup> *Opper, 5.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid., 6.*

<sup>177</sup> *Rehart, 27.*

<sup>178</sup> *Opper, 7.*

<sup>179</sup> *Winchell.*

In the late nineteenth century Kit was one of the few Chinese in Fresno to have a wife and family in the U.S.<sup>180</sup> When Ah Kit's first son was born in 1867, he named him Jefferson Shannon Kit after his friend and business partner.<sup>181</sup>

The last six or seven years of his life, Ah Kit was a merchant. Ah Kit never returned to China and remained in Fresno until his death in 1895. His passing was noted in the Fresno Daily Expositor, a citywide newspaper, "The death of Ah Kit in Chinatown yesterday removes a character more generally known among the pioneers of this county than any other of this countrymen."<sup>182</sup>

#### Dr. Buntaro Okonogi

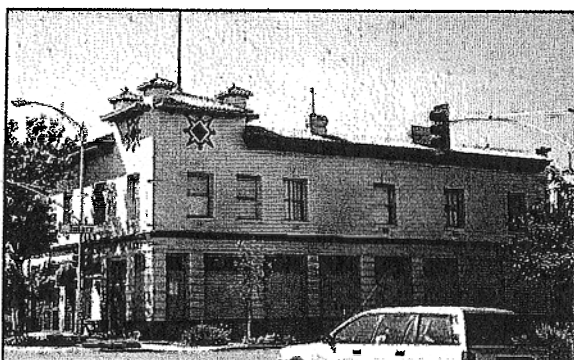


Figure Y: Fresno's first Japanese bank, the Industrial Bank of Fresno at Tulare and F Streets.

In 1908 Dr. Buntaro Okonogi established the first financial lending institution for Fresno's Japanese population, the Industrial Bank of Fresno. Okonogi hired San Francisco architect John C. Dressel to design a structure to house the institution at Tulare and F Streets. The building was a two-story brick structure with Mission Revival style ornamentation. Okonogi served as president and director of the Industrial Bank, which

made farm and building loans to West Fresno residents. For several years the West Fresno Branch of the Bank of Italy operated side by side with the Industrial Bank in the structure at Tulare and F Streets. Other tenants included the *Japanese American Newspaper*, Japanese Association of Fresno, T.K. Tomita-General Business Agency and George Photography Studio.<sup>183</sup> Okonogi also founded a Japanese hospital.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Rehart, 27.

<sup>181</sup> Opper, 7.

<sup>182</sup> Wong, 529.

<sup>183</sup> Rehart, 112.

<sup>184</sup> Transcript, Nori Masuda Oral History Interview, 9 June 2005, by Suzanne Guerra and Margo McBane, West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project, 29.

**Amy Purcell (1882-unknown)**

Amy Purcell was born April 8, 1882, in Marion Center, Kansas, and in 1911 she graduated from the Baptist Missionary Training School in Chicago. Although Purcell would spend the majority of her work life in missionary service in Fresno, she began her vocation in the Pacific Northwest where she worked with Japanese in Seattle from 1913 and 1914 and then among Italians in Portland until May 1915. Her first paid commission was in San Francisco in March 1916. She remained in San Francisco through May 1918 at which time she returned home after the death of her mother<sup>185</sup>

In September 1918 the Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society and the Northern California Baptist Convention sent Purcell to work as a missionary at the Chinese Mission in Fresno, a position which paid \$55 per month. In a 1936 letter to Miss Oliver Russell, Woman's Home Mission Society in New York, Purcell described her early work and the predominance of single men in Fresno's Chinatown, "When I began my work here in the fall of 1918, shortly after Miss Bennet left, there were only a few Chinese homes, but many boys and young men living in stores and rooming houses. In the summer time they all went out to work in the fruit. My work was almost entirely with young men, save for the English lessons I was giving the women in their homes. There were few children."<sup>186</sup>

The Chinese Mission on 1053 E Street consisted of two front rooms used for religious services and lodging for single Chinese young men in back. The first instructions Purcell received from the director of the American Baptist Home Mission Society were to go house to house teaching English and explaining her beliefs to all Chinese. Her duties also included: instructing women in domestic duties and the care of the family and the sick; organizing social gatherings; and creating wholesome activities for all age groups such as choir, sewing, cooking, Mother-Daughter teas, Guild Girls and, of course, a Bible Study class and Sunday School.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> *Opper* 12, 13.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, 14.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Gradually, Purcell made inroads into the Chinese community through teaching young men English at the mission and visiting the homes to teach the few Chinese women to speak English and learn sewing and cooking. As more Chinese viewed the U.S. as their permanent residence, Chinese men began to bring wives to the U.S. and start families. In response to this change in Fresno, Purcell started a nursery school in the early 1920s. During the 1920s the list of the Mission's activities expanded and included girls' art classes, picnics, home-canning lessons, family nights, three language schools, and a women's society. In addition, Purcell personally aided the Chinese with their citizenship papers. For years Purcell was assisted by her trusted volunteer Ruth Nelson.<sup>188</sup>

After decades in Fresno's Chinese community, in 1942 Purcell requested leave of absence due to ill health. Two years later she returned to Fresno's Chinatown. As a fitting culmination of her work, the First Chinese Baptist Church was organized in 1946. Purcell retired the next year.<sup>189</sup>

### Tong Sing

Tong Sing settled in Millerton's Chinatown in the mid nineteenth century. He partnered with Tong Duck to create a firm, that provided miners with equipment. During the mass relocation from Millerton to Fresno in 1873 and 1874, many Chinese residents hired Sing's firm to move their furnishings in the large freight wagons the company used to transport supplies to the Chinese in the gold mines.<sup>190</sup>

In Fresno Sing and Duck built the first large-scale brick building in Chinatown, which housed their general merchandise store. In addition to providing supplies,

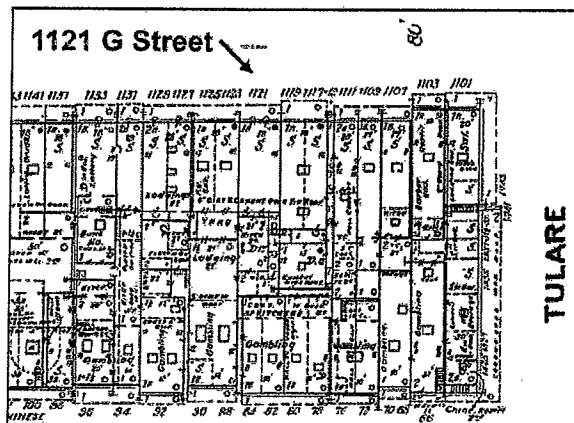


Figure Z: 1898 Sanborn Map showing 1121 G Street, the possible location of the Tong Duk & Co., store.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 17

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>190</sup> *Chacon*, 375-376.

the store served an important role for California's itinerant Chinese labor force. The store functioned as a stopover for Chinese traveling between San Francisco and Los Angeles, and mail for Chinese workers throughout the San Joaquin Valley was held at the store.<sup>191</sup> It is not clear where the store was located, however, the 1899-1900 Fresno County Business Records lists Tong Duck & Co. as "trader[s]" located at 1121 G Street, which may have been the address of the business.

Tong Sing's role in the Chinese community was much more than that of merchant; he organized and was head of the Sam Yup Association.<sup>192</sup> Along with his business partner Tong Duck, he built the joss house at 1023 China Alley in 1889. The building was a very narrow, long, two-story structure. Lodging was located on the first floor, and the joss house on the second. In some accounts the Sam Yup Association was called a tong. However, tongs (fraternal organizations) were often confused with the district associations, which were frequently held responsible for actions members took on behalf of tongs.<sup>193</sup> The tongs and district associations began in San Francisco in the 1860s and spread to Chinatowns throughout the state. Some were initially organized to provide burial in China if their members died in America. In addition, the immigration of many Chinese was sponsored by tongs. Workers had the burden of paying off immigration loans in addition to providing for daily needs.<sup>194</sup> The organizations soon grew to include criminal elements that controlled gambling, prostitution, opium dens, and labor racketeering.<sup>195</sup>

Whether the blame was justified or not, the Sam Yup Association was charged for Chinatown's tong violence in the 1890s in local newspapers, "There is a bitter war going on between two Chinese societies known as the Sam Yup and the See Yup, and matters have assumed a nature of such grave importance that bloodshed will inevitably result unless the local authorities take immediate steps to quell the disturbance."<sup>196</sup> Tong Sing was not directly mentioned in newspaper

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<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>193</sup> *Selland.*

<sup>194</sup> *Clough and Secest*, 61

<sup>195</sup> *Selland.*

<sup>196</sup> *Wong*, 529.



reports of violence. Similarly, no evidence was found of any direct associations with Tong Sing and vice operations. However, if the descriptions of the Sam Yup Association's involvement in tong activities were accurate, it is likely that Tong Sing, as head of the organization, was involved. Although his contributions may have been both beneficial and unsavory, Tong Sing undoubtedly played a prominent and powerful role in early Chinatown.

**Hi Loy Wong (c.1856 – 1926)**

Born and educated in China, Hi Loy Wong came to California at sixteen years of age in search of gold. His parents arranged for him to be married before he left China in order to insure that he would someday return home. He was later hired by Mr. Miller, "Cattle King of the West," a prominent cattle rancher with ranches in California, Nevada, Oregon, and Arizona.<sup>197</sup>

After his arrival in California, Hi Loy Wong married Lily Lum. Prior to the wedding, the couple had not met but had only exchanged photographs, a practice known as a "picture-marriage." Marriages of this type were arranged by matchmakers with photographs of the two parties. Lily Lum was born in the town of Almaden, in the San Jose area. At the time of their marriage, Lily was thirteen, twenty years junior to Hi Loy Wong. The couple wed in San Francisco but then moved to Fresno to open the Hi Loy Company a general merchandise store on G and Kern Streets. The couple would eventually have fourteen children.<sup>198</sup>

In addition to his work at his store, Wong contracted Chinese labor for the farms in the area. Chinese came to Fresno looking for work in agriculture. Hi Loy would contract them and provide them with everything they needed for their jobs—groceries, denim clothing, bamboo hats—all on credit from his merchandise store.<sup>199</sup> Hi Loy built the brick building at 900 block of G Street. In addition, Hi Loy Wong was involved in the Chinese community and taught Confucianism.<sup>200</sup> He never returned to China and died at the age of 68.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> *Opper, 9*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid., 10, 11*

<sup>199</sup> *Chacon, 376.*

<sup>200</sup> *Grimes.*

<sup>201</sup> *Opper, 10, 11.*

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