

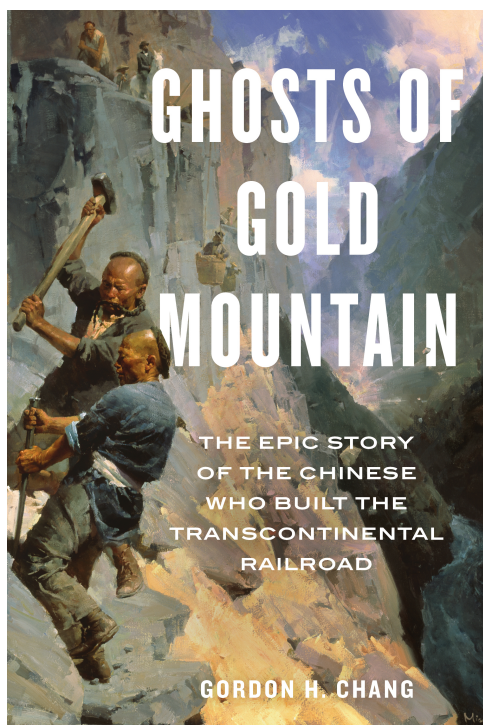
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September Monthly Meeting Chinese Workers and the Transcontinental Railroad: A discussion with Gordon Chang

2019 marked 150 years since Chinese immigrants completed work on the first transcontinental rail line that connected the East and West Coasts of the United States. Between 1864 and 1869, thousands of Chinese laborers were employed on the Central Pacific Railroad, which began in Sacramento, ran through the Sierra Nevada mountain range, crossed Nevada, and ended in Utah territory. Though their contribution to building the country's infrastructure was immense, few Americans knew anything about the history. The Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project at Stanford University, begun in 2012, has aimed to end this historical silence. Bringing together an interdisciplinary group of more than one hundred scholars from around the world, the project has constructed the most detailed history to date of this pivotal event in US history.



© Paul Yeung, South China Morning Post



Join us for our September meeting when project co-director Professor Gordon H. Chang will discuss the development of the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America project and its path-breaking research. Professor Chang has recently authored *Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019). He is also the co-editor with Professor Shelley Fisher Fishkin of *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad* (Stanford University Press, 2019). The edited volume includes twenty-one chapters documenting various aspects of this important history. Joining Professor Chang will be former CHSSC Vice President, Dr. William Gow who wrote the chapter, "The Chinese Railroad Worker in United States History Textbooks: A Historical Genealogy, 1849-1965, included in the edited volume.

CHSSC Meeting will be online on Zoom:

Wednesday, September 2, 2020

Program: 7:00 PM

To register, send an e-mail to info@chssc.org



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President's Letter

September marks a big change in our monthly meetings. We will no longer enjoy regional speakers in the company of friends, but Zoom meetings will allow new opportunities. Our September speakers from Stanford University are the well-known Gordon Chang and former CHSSC Vice President, Will Gow.

With eyes on the future, this month CHSSC received a grant for expanding our walking tour program for school kids. Although students are learning from home during this school year, our members will work behind the scenes to develop new experiences for a variety of future visitors.

As we move forward with our plans to renovate the houses, Eugene Moy and his wife, Susan Sing visit CHSSC almost daily. Susan plants flowers and vegetables. Gene tends to the exotic fruit trees donated by past board members Betty Gaw and Jack Ong. They both spend hours weeding. Next year the public will be able to enjoy our Heritage and Visitors Center.

Willard Wong, owner of Superior Poultry and Peking Poultry, surprised us by getting a corporate membership for both businesses as well as making major donations from both. Superior Poultry, one of the first fresh poultry businesses in LA New Chinatown, was founded in the 1920s. We thank him for his generosity.

CHSSC publicized the slate in the Special Summer News 'N Notes. We have received no additional nominations for the position of officers or members at large. At the end of the September Zoom meeting, we will formalize the new slate by voting.

Susan

Thank you to our donors!

New Corporate Members

Superior Poultry: owner Willard Wong
Peking Poultry: owner Willard Wong

Major Donor

Willard Wong

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Susan Dickson, President
Linda Bentz, Vice President
Felicia Tabing, Secretary
Teresa Chung, Treasurer
Gordon Hom, VP for programs

MEMBERS AT LARGE

John Chan
Wendy Chung
Cindy Fong
Laureen Hom
Winifred Lew
Franklin Mah
Eugene Moy

MISSION STATEMENT

The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California was organized in November 1975. The purposes of the Society are:

1. to bring together people with a mutual interest in the important history and historical role of Chinese and Chinese Americans in southern California;
2. to pursue, preserve, and communicate knowledge of this history; and
3. to promote the heritage of the Chinese and Chinese American community in support of a better appreciation of the rich, multicultural society of the United States.



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Yosemite Pilgrimage Report

BY JACK SHU

This year the weather conditions for going up Sing Peak were very nice. Due to COVID 19 and trying to keep safe, many of our regular participants stayed at home to be safe. Seven climbers made it to top on Aug. 4th.

All of us hike and climb mountains for different reasons and for this annual trek to Sing Peak we commemorate the contributions of Chinese in the Sierra Mountains. For 2020 however, we also want to remember our friends and relatives who have passed away this last year. Some had succumbed to COVID 19 and others to something else. We honor all of them and may they know that as we experience the fresh mountain air, beautiful view of the lakes and Sierra Mountains, our thoughts include memories of them.

The NPS, the NPCA, and CHSSC held our annual Yosemite pilgrimage online. Learn about the National Park Service's recent progress turning a historic laundry building into a museum. If you were unable to "attend", [click here to watch the program](#).

Grant from the Society of Architectural Historians

BY SUSAN DICKSON

This month CHSSC received a \$3,900 grant to support a Chinatown walking tour project that will develop innovative ways to organize field trips for schools with underserved youth to study urban design, historic architecture, public space design, and community engagement. CHSSC will upgrade docent training and handout materials. The grant will also provide buses for school field trips.



Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files

BY LINDA BENTZ

In our on-going series to share Chinese Exclusion Act Case files, this month Soon Poy of Santa Barbara will be featured. In 1899, Soon lived in Santa Barbara and applied for a Return Certificate to visit China and return to the United States. According to his application, he was 46 years old; 5 feet and 3 ½ inches tall and weighed 132 pounds, and his occupation was fisherman.¹ Census data from 1900, show that Soon was married, and he could read and write English. However he was not able to speak the language. It is unknown if Soon's wife lived in the United States.

Born in China in 1852, Soon arrived in the United States in 1870. He initially lived in San Francisco where he worked in the shrimp industry. Moving to Santa Barbara in 1881, he continued his work in the fisheries by harvesting abalone. By 1896, he had enough money to invest in Sun Lung and Company. The company, located at 36 East Canon Perdido Street, participated in the commercial abalone industry.

Soon invested \$1000 in Sun Lung and Company and was one of seven partners in the business. To finance the abalone enterprise, partners invested capital and held shares. Five of the partners invested \$1000, while Soon Jo, the manager, held a \$2500 investment. Fong Ping, the final partner, held a \$1500 share. To claim merchant status under the Chinese exclusion laws, a Chinese resident needed to invest at least \$1000 into a business. This tenet in the law explains why the majority of the partners in Sun Lung and Company invested exactly \$1000 in the business.²

Soon claimed additional assets during his interview for a Return Certificate. He stated he held \$200 - \$300 in fishing equipment. These included boats and fishing tackle. A majority of Sun Lung's fishing operations consisted of abalone harvesting on the California Channel Islands. This mollusk was considered a delicacy in China and an important commodity for domestic commerce. Historical documentation suggests that the Chinese abalone trade began in the 1850s near Monterey and then moved to central, southern, and Baja California. Abalone meat was dried and sent to Chinese communities in the American West. The largest market, however, was in China where a dense population relied on marine products. An intricate network was created to export these products to the homeland.

On the Channel Islands, abalone had been free from predators for about 30 years when Chinese fishermen arrived around 1856. Seasonally, crews of Chinese fishermen traveled to the various islands on chartered vessels. They were dropped off to harvest abalone for three to four months. The remains of their fishing camps are extant today and contain a

¹ Soon, Poy. Chinese Exclusion Acts Case Files, #588. Record Group 85. National Archives, Pacific Region, Riverside, California. 1899

² Salyer, L. E. *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law*. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press), 1995.

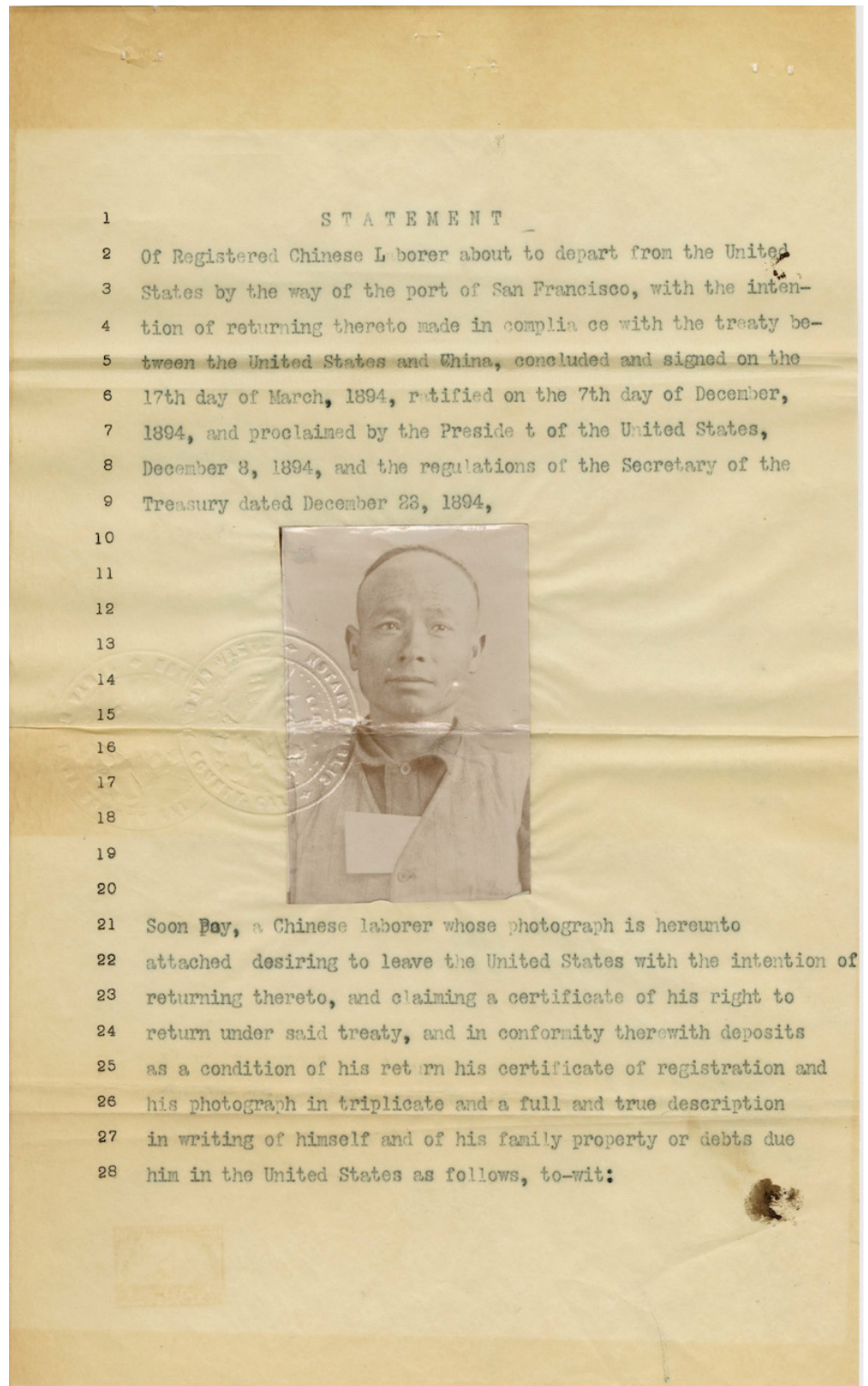


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combination of the following features: scatterings of rice bowls and stoneware food storage jars; tent pads or houses; well-defined hearth features; drying racks or stone patios for meat drying; stonewalls and clusters of black abalone shells embedded in historical soils and sediments.

Chinese merchants negotiated access to the fisheries with the owners or lessees of the islands. On Santa Cruz Island in 1908, Soon Poy, representing Sun Lung and Company renewed their fishing contract with the owners of the island who operated the Caire Company. Soon proposed that the terms of their contract remain the same, "one hundred fifty pounds [of abalone] out of every one thousand pounds that are gathered both of meats and shells."³ Other island owners or lessees allowed Chinese fishermen to gather abalone on the islands.

It appears that Soon Poy was granted a Return Certificate and he was able to visit his family in China. Sun Lung and Company remained in Santa Barbara until its demise in 1915. What happened to Soon Poy? Continued research is needed to learn more about his life in California.



³ Georgia C. Overton, Unpublished manuscript, n.d. Cited in Helen Caire, *Santa Cruz Island a History and Recollections of an Old California Rancho* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1993), 140.



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CHSSC Board Slate

Officers

President: Susan Dickson
Vice President: Eugene Moy
Vice President, Programs: open
Secretary: Laureen Hom
Treasurer: Franklin Mah
Membership Chair: Cindy Fong

Members At Large

Caitlin Bryant
John Chan
Cindy Fong
Laureen Hom
Bak Jong
Angela Lancaster
Felicia Tabing
Howard Wang

Chinese Brown Glazed Stoneware Jars

Our July-August article on the CHSSC articles prompted these memories from Edgar Wong.

I remember seeing many of the stoneware shapes in your News 'N Note article and of those shown in Ref 1.

In my parent's home, we had a large globular jar (~Ref 2) for the thousand-year-old eggs and the pear- shape bottles (~Ref 3) that had the Ng Ka Pay and the Mui Kwei Lo liquors.

References:

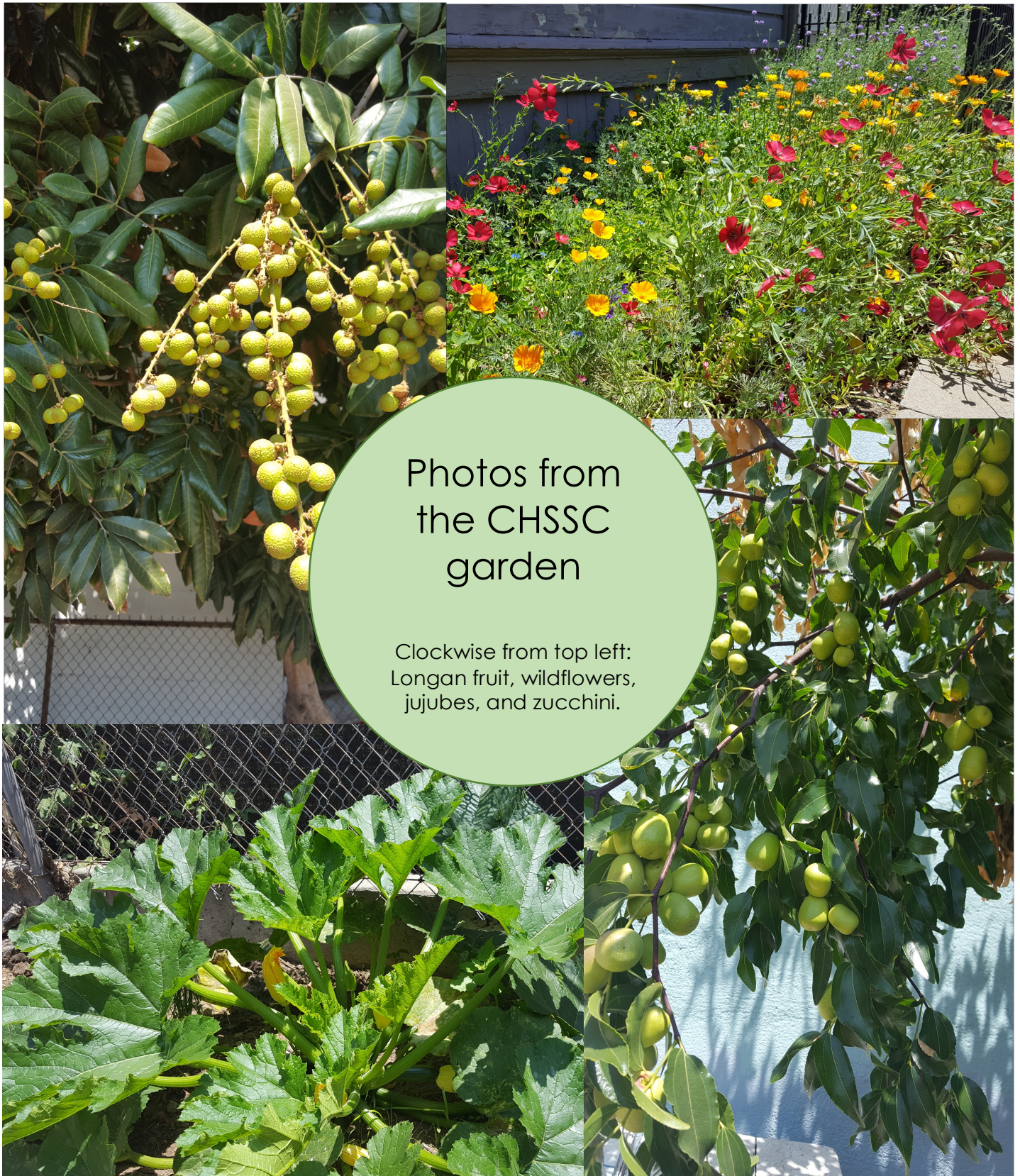
1. Chinese Brown Glazed Stoneware: Sacramento H156 Project, An Emic Study (the what it is & not what it does), Philip Choy interviewed <https://bit.ly/3fkPLBo>
2. Storage Jar: Thousand-Year-Old Egg <https://bit.ly/30G8EdX>
3. Liquor Bottles: Ng Ka Py (Made from Melon), Mui Kwei Lu (Distilled from Sorghum) <https://bit.ly/2MXkpon>
4. Ng Ka Py Liquor: Taste Description by John Steinbeck, Ingredient in the Fu Manchu Cocktail <https://bit.ly/3d3Tou7s>

Note: Edgar Wong provided significant research, writing, and advisory support for the CHSSC's Portraits of Pride publishing project.





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Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

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Website: www.chssc.org

*Please help us save paper and postage,
email us to indicate your preference for an online newsletter at info@chssc.org.*

Community Calendar

Have you checked out our updated website for CHSSC and Community events? Look for upcoming webinars and Zoom conferences about Chinese American culture and history.