

# SAN JOSE CHINATOWNS HERITAGE FAIR

*by Laura Potter, Maya Yamane, Matthew Mau, and Brianna Lister*

## Project Statement:

### DESCRIPTION

Our project will focus on the San Jose Chinatowns. We will be creating plans for a celebratory heritage fair at S. Market St. across from the San Jose Museum of Art. A variety of stands offering different activities will teach fair-goers about Chinatown culture; for example, there will be booths with traditional food and Chinese gambling games. Other booths' simulations of archaeological work, such as pot-shard sorting, will help to familiarize residents with the archaeological process. Large maps will show the public where the buildings of Market Street Chinatown existed in relation to the modern buildings standing on Market Street today. Finally, the fair will feature talks about the historic site, given by cultural experts like Connie Young Yu.

### ABSTRACT

San Jose Chinatown no longer exists except in archaeological records and memories. Aggressive nationalist sentiment drove Chinatown to relocate several times between 1862 and 1931, and today few San Jose residents know that a Chinatown once existed in this area, let alone the important role the past Chinatowns played in shaping their city. As a result, the central heritage issue for San Jose Chinatown is this blatant absence of information.

We plan to address this lack of awareness by disseminating information at a fair to celebrate the Chinatowns that existed in San Jose's past. The fair will introduce the story of these Chinatowns to San Jose residents and supplement descendants' knowledge of their ancestors' history in this region. Rather than focusing on retribution and forgiveness for past wrongdoings, this event will be a celebration of heritage to educate the public about the history of San Jose.

### INTENDED AUDIENCE

We plan to direct the San Jose Chinatowns Heritage Fair towards a diverse audience of present-day San Jose residents and descendants of Chinese immigrants, as well as tourists or any other passersby. The educational content at the fair, ranging from Chinese gambling games and traditional food to specific information about archaeological findings, will be family friendly and inclusive of all ethnicities and ages. The variety of activities will guarantee that everyone at the fair can find a booth that interests them and ensure that all fair-goers come away with an enhanced understanding of the culture and history of the San Jose Chinatowns.

## **MAIN SOURCES CONSULTED**

“Archaeology of Early Chinese and Japanese San Jose.”

[http://www.sonoma.edu/asc/projects/sanjose/Part\\_of\\_San\\_Jose\\_History.pdf](http://www.sonoma.edu/asc/projects/sanjose/Part_of_San_Jose_History.pdf).

Chinese Historical and Cultural Project Website. <http://www.chcp.org/>.

Market Street Chinatown Archaeological Project Blog.

<http://marketstreet.stanford.edu/>.

Yu, Connie Young. 2001. Chinatown, San Jose, U.S.A. History San Jose and Chinese Historical and Cultural Project.

## **PROJECT GOAL AND EXPLANATION**

The goal of our heritage fair is to provide an opportunity for all kinds of people to learn about the Chinatowns of San Jose. In particular, we aim to educate Chinese immigrant descendants and the residents and employees of San Jose about the often overlooked history of Market Street Chinatown, whose past lies buried beneath today’s busy city streets. Holding this heritage fair at the park on Market Street allows us to engage our target audience in a celebration of the culture and history of this area. Ultimately, we want the public to gain awareness and knowledge about the San Jose Chinatowns, and the fun educational games and enticing food at our interactive heritage fair will draw large crowds so as to make the greatest possible impact.

## History Poster Information:

### **From Market to Vine, and Back Again**

San Jose Chinatown transitioned from Market Street to its temporary location on Vine Street in 1870, when a fire razed the buildings of Market Street to the ground. The Chinatown remained in this new location until 1872, when the determined Chinese population finished rebuilding the home on Market Street.

Over a century later, in 1985, excavation for the construction of a big new hotel called the San Jose Fairmont began, revealing the forgotten site of historic Market Street Chinatown. Hasty “salvage archaeology” and disorganized excavations from 1985 to 1986 tell us that Market Street Chinatown was highly developed for its time, with its own sanitation and city planning, homes, community buildings and cultural organizations. Most of the remains found at Market Street Chinatown were subsurface features due to extensive fire damage. Very little excavation has been continued since the mid-1980s at Market Street, since the area nowadays serves as a functioning city used by San Jose residents daily. However, we do know that Market Street was both a cultural community center and a residential haven for the Chinese immigrant community from 1862 to 1870 and 1872 to 1887, with a population of two to three thousand at its peak.

### **More Fire and the Move to Woolen Mills and Heinlenville**

On May 4, 1887, a second fire destroyed Market Street Chinatown. Many suspected arson because of the exceedingly strong anti-Chinese sentiment at the time, but no one was ever convicted. Chinatown moved once again, this time dividing up into two communities, one named Woolen Mills and another called Heinlenville.

### **Woolen Mills**

Named after the San Jose Woolen Manufacturing Company, the local factory that employed many of the Chinese men living in the area, Woolen Mills was a well-organized and planned community with an elaborately designed sewage and hydrant system. In 1896, the factory was one of the largest in California, producing flannel, blankets, knitted underwear and cloth for men’s clothing. The mill’s success caused its employee count to grow from 43 employees in 1871 to almost 200 by 1884, so the Woolen Mills Chinatown, located two blocks south of the factory, was primarily home to the male laborers. There were also some merchants and at least one barber, but the Chinatown was essentially a home base for single men. Some men were also employed by the Angora Glove Factory and nearby farms. There was a Chinese theater, two restaurants, two joss houses (temples), commercial and residential buildings, a laundromat, a warehouse, and possibly even a brothel.

Ching Shin was one of the richest and most influential Chinese on the west coast during this period in history, and research indicates that he may have leased the land for the Woolen Mills Chinatown for ten years. He built the Garden City Cannery there and was responsible for the employment of hundreds of Chinese. The cannery was closed after a few years when Shin returned to China, however, and by 1901 most of the Woolen Mills residents had moved to Heinlenville. The vacated buildings' wood frames were susceptible to fire, and sure enough, another arson fire burned this settlement down in 1902.

Once again, the Woolen Mills site was happened upon by accident, when a construction crew began to work on State Route 87 in the late 1900s. Excavations at this location were carried out by a group called Past Forward, Inc., and revealed evidence of the aforementioned water system and detailed city planning, which is surprisingly constant throughout all of the San Jose Chinatowns despite how much the community had to move and rebuild, time and time again.

## **Heinlenville**

Heinlenville was the other Chinatown built after the Market Street fire in 1887. Unlike Woolen Mills, it was much more family-based, with women and children in addition to men.

John Heinlen, a German American who came to San Jose as a farmer, realized the difficulty of establishing a community and raising a family in America. The Heinlens had lived in Ohio and Indiana for some time, where they were subject to anti-German sentiments. Thus, John Heinlen sympathized with the Chinese and believed that they deserved a community to help their population thrive. Also, in the 1890's, the Japanese settled near Heinlenville and constructed a Japantown along its edge. The Heinlenville Chinatown flourished until the 1930's, surviving an earthquake in 1906. Its schools, shrines, stores, gambling houses, etc. allowed children to be raised with a traditional Chinese background within the walls of Heinlenville. However, the Heinlen family's bankruptcy during the Great Depression initiated the downfall of the Chinatown, and the Chinese Americans slowly integrated into society. The site of Heinlenville was converted into a storage yard, marking the end of the living legacy of San Jose's Chinatowns.

To this day, archaeologists are working to uncover the remains of the Heinlenville Chinatown and early Japantown. The Chinese Historical and Cultural Project worked to recreate Heinlenville's temple. The CHCP also holds a "Chinese Summer Festival" to promote Chinese culture at their museum in Santa Clara valley. This festival focuses mainly on the Heinlenville Chinatown, so our fair is meant to commemorate and inform the public about the overlooked Chinatown at Market Street. It will also involve a new audience, as those closer to downtown San Jose will be more inclined to interact and learn about their city's past. The Heinlenville Chinatown was built as a result of the Market Street fire, which is important to recognize, as current projects tend to solely highlight Heinlenville. In the future, the CHCP intends to reopen the site of Heinlenville.

for archaeological excavations, housing, and commercial use. Hopefully, they will also acknowledge the Market Street Chinatown, as it provided a steppingstone for the success of San Jose's last Chinatown.

## **Sources**

<http://www.chcp.org/>

Lum, R.M. 2007. "Finding Home Again: The Story of the Chinese Historical Cultural Project and Its Efforts to Reclaim the Forgotten Historic Chinatowns of San Jose, California." In *Branching Out the Banyan Tree*. San Francisco, CA: Chinese Historical Society of America. Pg. 125-128.

Yu, Connie Young. 2001. Chinatown, San Jose, U.S.A. History San Jose and Chinese Historical and Cultural Project.

## **Opera Poster Information:**

### **Chinese Opera Theatre**

On the main stage prepare to be wowed by the moving performance put on by the Cantonese Opera Association of Silicon Valley. A local non-profit, the COASV is committed to preserving and promoting traditional Chinese Opera theatre.

Traditional Chinese opera is a fully immersive experience that combines singing, dancing, acrobatics, clowning, pantomime, and martial arts to present historical events, poetry, folklore, and mythologies of immortal Gods and Goddesses. Fair attendees will be able to have much of the same experience as former Chinatown residents visiting the Chinese Opera Theater that once stood in the San Jose Market Street Chinatown. The Opera Theatre served as a gathering place for the entire community; attending a performance was a social affair full of excitement, laughter, and fun.

## **Games Information:**

### **Chinese Games of Chance**

At the Games Booth, we have two games that were extremely popular in the Market Street Chinatown. Fan Tan, translated repeatedly diving, is a game played on a small board placed in the middle of a table. The board is labeled on each side by the numbers; 1, 2, 3, and 4. The dealer then places a handful of small beads or coins in the center of the table and covers it with a small bowl. Each player then places a bet on the number of their choice. After all bets have been made, the

dealer proceeds to remove four at a time until only one group is left. Whichever player bet on the number of beads in the final round wins the game and takes the money. Pak Kop Piu is another popular game similar to a modern lottery. In this game 80 Chinese characters; often chosen from the Thousand Character Classic, a poem featuring 1000 unique characters used to instruct children; are selected and players pick a character of their choice. Later that evening the winning characters are selected and patrons with matching characters are declared winners.

In Market Street these games served as a way of socializing with the wider Chinese community. Numerous Chinese immigrants even living outside of Market Street would make weekly treks to Chinatown's gambling dens to enjoy good company and play these games. A significant fact is the role of chance in the most popular games, this reflects many of the beliefs of the time that considered it better to be lucky than wise or smart. The games were seen both as an affirmation and means of gaining good luck.

The outside community often looked down on the Chinese for playing gambling games. It was widely believed to reflect a poor work ethic and weak self-control. However, this was not the case: the odds for many of the games were not too bad, and rarely resulted in extreme debt. Many of the individual winnings along with 5-10% of the gambling house's profit also ended up being donated to community initiatives such as the building and maintenance of schools and temples.