

Preserving Cultural and Natural Riches in the Central Coast

*The Legacy of Asian Families in the Monterey Bay Region
From the 1800s to Today*



An educational booklet by



PACIFIC GROVE
MUSEUM
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HISTORY

***Monterey Waterkeeper and the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History
Preserving Cultural & Natural Riches in the Central Coast: The Legacy of
Asian Families in the Monterey Bay Region From the 1800s to Today***

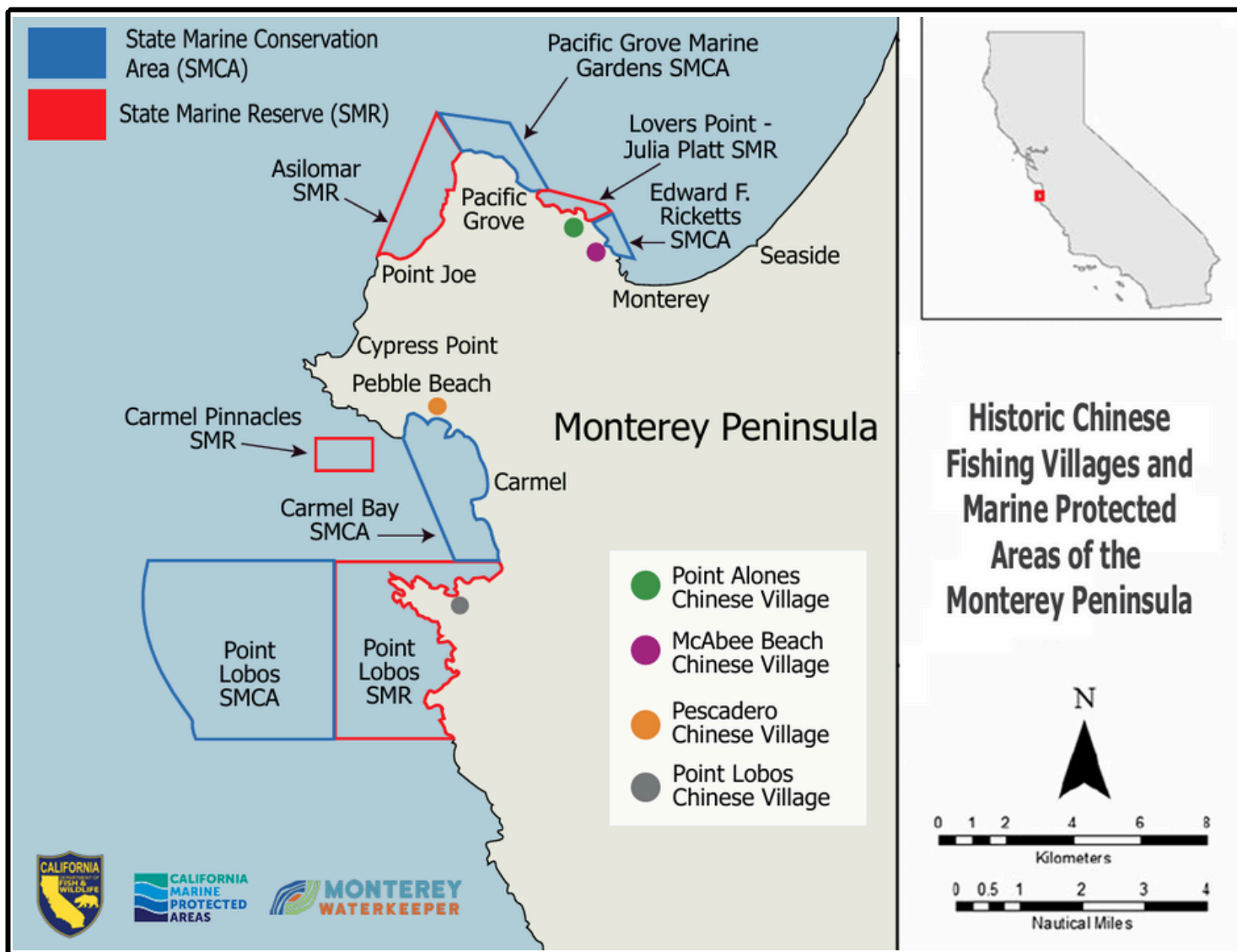
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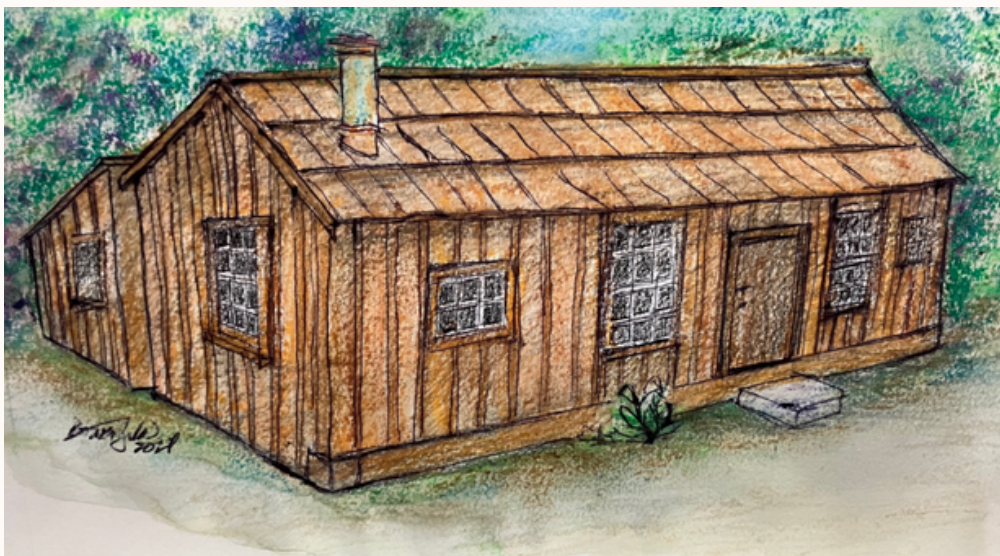
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From the meandering Salinas River to coastal wetlands that hug Monterey Bay, down to the jagged coastline of Big Sur, California's Central Coast has hosted diverse people and stories for thousands of years. This story takes place on both land and sea around what we know today as Monterey, Pacific Grove, and Carmel-by-the-Sea. The Indigenous residents of these areas include members of the Rumsen Ohlone and Esselen communities.

In the early 1850s, a small group of men and women set sail from Guangdong Province, China to Monterey Bay.(1) The California Gold Rush had just begun. There were also many wars and hardships in China during that time. These half-dozen families sailed on thirty-foot boats called junks across the Pacific Ocean.(2) Their journey was difficult and long. Most likely, the families ate dried foods from home and fished during their long journey across the ocean.

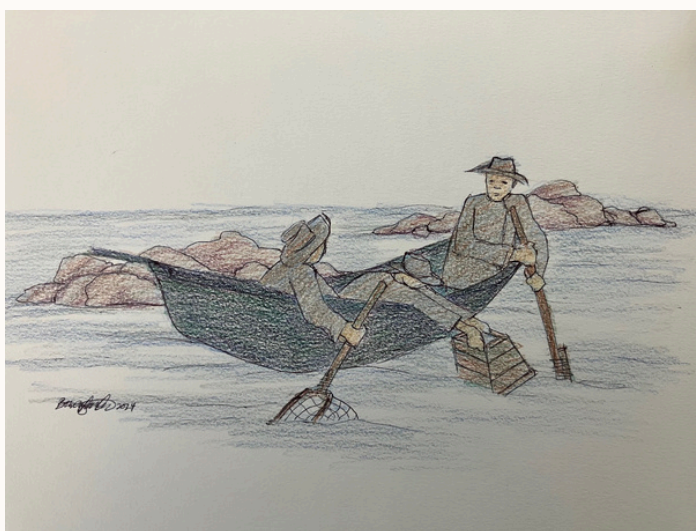
One of the several boats that set sail landed in Mendocino County, while another was shipwrecked near Point Lobos.(3) Members of the Rumsen Ohlone living in their traditional seasonal village nearby helped care for the shipwrecked Chinese. The Chinese families built cabins at Point Lobos, including what is known today as the "Whalers Cabin" at Point Lobos State Natural Reserve.



Whalers Cabin

While it is difficult to say exactly where in Guangdong Province the families came from, and whether they were members of a particular ethnic group, people referred to them as “boat people,” or Tanka.(4) Tanka were a ethnic group in China that lived on their boats, and in some cities, were not allowed to live on land.(5)

The Chinese families fished along many parts of Monterey Bay, including Point Alones (near present-day Pacific Grove), Point Lobos, and Carmel Bay. In the 1850s, while the Gold Rush took place in the Sierra Nevada mountains, these families pioneered the commercial harvesting of abalone in the Central Coast.(6)



Chinese Abalone Fishers

The Chinese built flat-bottom wooden boats called sampans to catch sea life.(7) They harvested abalone during low tide, and would pry the abalone off of rocks by a wedge on the end of a pole before taking them onboard using a boat hook or long-handled net.(8) Many Chinese people gathered abalone along Monterey Bay and Big Sur in the 1850s and 60s, drying and shipping the abalone to China as a delicacy.(9) They used the abalone shells for jewelry, buttons, and abalone inlays in furniture.(10)

The Chinese also harvested many other marine species, including squid, shark, rockfish, halibut, mackerel, sardines, salmon, and seaweed.(11) By the mid-1870s, the Chinese were shipping almost 100 tons (220,462 pounds) of dried fish annually throughout the State and abroad.(12)

Quock Mui was born at the “Whalers Cabin” around 1859. She was the first Chinese woman documented to have been born in the Monterey area, and had a sister and a brother.(13) People called Quock Mui “Spanish Mary” because she spoke many languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, at least two dialects of Chinese, Rumsen, and English. Later, Quock Mui married and had six children. Her family eventually moved to Pescadero (near present-day Pebble Beach) before moving to Point Alones. When her husband would go fishing, she took care of the household and gathered seaweed.

As the Chinese families fished along Monterey Bay, they lived in cabins and tight-knit communities at Point Alones, Point Lobos, and Pescadero Point.(14) By 1870, Point Alones was the biggest Chinese fishing village in the area with at least 47 Chinese.(15)



Point Alones Chinese Fishing Village

Photo Credit: Hopkins Marine Station at Stanford University

The Chinese families also dried and exported squid. In 1892, the Chinese from Monterey County shipped 357,622 pounds of dried squid to San Francisco, China, and other places.(16) The dried squid was used as food and fertilizer for fields.(17)

Just before entering the harbor are rocky points, palisades and towers, some covered with mosses, others bald and gray . . . [a] little farther on we come to a group of Chinese fishermen's huts, where they are quite extensively engaged in drying fish, spreading them on tables from a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet in length, and turning them each day until thoroughly dry.

- *Santa Cruz Weekly Sentinel*, Volume 9, Number 2, 18 June 1864



Point Alones Chinese Fishing Village
Photo Credit: Hopkins Marine Station
at Stanford University



Children at Point Alones
Photo Credit: Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History
Photography Collection

In 1880, the Pacific Improvement Company (owned by Southern Pacific Railroad) bought land in the Monterey Peninsula and opened a scenic drive, now the famous 17-Mile Drive.(18) The Jung family at the smaller Pescadero Point village began a stand selling polished abalone shells and other ocean souvenirs.(19)

What were the impacts of Chinese fisheries, such as abalone and squid, on the Monterey Bay's ecosystems? This is a difficult question to answer because there is very little information on the scale and ecological impacts of these fisheries. For example, no study was done on how much abalone existed in the 1850s around the time the Chinese first came to Monterey Bay, or how much remained when abalone harvesting was banned in shallow waters in the early 1900s.(20)

Today, there may be different opinions about whether the Chinese fisheries were sustainable. However, it is important to remember that the Chinese used every part of what they caught or harvested. Nothing was wasted.(21)



Fishing in the Early 1900s in Monterey Bay

Photo Credit: Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History

Photography Collection

There was an abundance of fish when the Italian fishermen came to Monterey Bay by the first trains of the Monterey and Salinas Valley Railroad in 1874.(22) Portuguese whalers and fishermen arrived earlier, in the 1850s.(23)

Soon, other fishermen began cutting the fishing nets of the Chinese.(24) This forced them to give up daytime fishing and instead fish for squid at night.(25) The Chinese fishermen would put a fire pot on the edge of the sampan, which attracted the squid to the surface like moths to a flame. It was in this way that the Chinese fishermen began the commercial squid fishery that is still thriving today.



Chinese Squid Fishing at Night

Around 1895, Ootosaburo Noda and other Japanese also came to Monterey Bay and contributed to the development of the local fishing industry.(26) The Japanese fishermen also fished for salmon and dove for abalone in deeper waters.(27) They built a fishing colony in Monterey.(28) In fact, Noda and Harry Malpas opened the Monterey Fishing and Canning Company, the first cannery on Cannery Row.(29)

The Point Alones fishing village was near Hopkins Marine Station, a science research station.(30) Many scientists from around the world came to Monterey Bay to study marine species in the Monterey Canyon. The scientists hired Chinese fishermen to help collect samples of different species, including hagfish and hagfish embryos. Hagfish is a slimy fish that lives deep in the Monterey Canyon. It is one of the earliest vertebrates and an important ancestor of humans.



Hagfish

Illustration Credit: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Quock Tuck Lee, Quock Mui's brother, was a skilled fisherman who collected hundreds of hagfish embryos to support Bashford Dean, a professor of zoology at Columbia University who studied vertebrate evolution.(31) Professor Dean wrote: "The collection of hag-fish eggs has been due to the labors of practically a single fisherman, Ah Tack Lee, whose energetic help is thus almost a sine qua non [indispensable]."(32)

Tuck Lee and other Chinese fishermen also helped scientists collect hundreds of Chimaera, an ancient, shark-like fish.(33)

The 1890 US Census recorded 155 Chinese living at Point Alones. The families included the Quock, Ma, and Gong families, among others.(34) In the early 1900s, the Pacific Improvement Company began negotiating with the Chinese fishing community at Point Alones about relocating the village. (35) The Company wanted to turn the land into other developments.(36)

In 1905, the company announced that the Chinese would have to leave Point Alones when their lease expired in February 1906.(37)

A tragic fire broke out at Point Alones on May 16, 1906, and many buildings in the village burned to the ground. An eyewitness account described someone setting the remaining village on fire and cutting the village's fire hose.(38)

Local newspapers reported:

Someone cut the water main during the fire and this shut off the meager supply of water completely. Many disgraceful acts of vandalism were witnessed and the looters had a merry time stealing from the stores. There seemed to be no order, and the officers from Monterey, who had no jurisdiction In Chinatown, did all they could to suppress the looters. - *Evening Sentinel, Volume 10, Number 297, 21 May 1906.*(39)

While it will be hard at this time to fix an estimate on the loss, the more intelligent Chinese residents figure that the destruction of the buildings will be in the neighborhood of \$20,000 and the loss of valuables and household effects will be nearly double that amount. The glow from the flames could be plainly seen in Salinas. - *Salinas Daily Index May 17, 1906*



Point Alones After the Tragic May 16, 1906 Fire

Photo Credit: Monterey Public Library California History Room Collection

The Chinese families did not leave willingly after the fire. While the Pacific Improvement Company built a fence around the burnt portions of the village, more than 100 villagers stayed in the few unburnt buildings outside of the fence.(40)

The families tried to salvage their belongings and rebuild their homes, but guards hired by the Pacific Improvement Company did not allow them to enter. After these struggles, the Company filed charges of assault and destruction of private property against Tuck Lee and other villagers who tried to rebuild the village. These charges were later dismissed by a local judge.(41)

In Fall 1906, the Chinese families negotiated long term rental of McAbee Beach to start a new fishing village there.(42) Many families from Point Alones moved to McAbee Beach in 1907, and many others moved to Chinatown near present-day downtown Monterey and even further. Some returned to China.

Unfortunately, Chinese families ran into another conflict. Neighbors and businesses complained about the smell of squid drying on the beach, and in response nearby cities prohibited squid drying.(43) Chinese families that could no longer fish began working at sardine and anchovy canneries in the 1900s to 1930s.(44) By 1920, only six Chinese commercial fishermen remained in the Monterey Bay Region; none were left by 1935.(45)

In the meantime, the number of Japanese fisherman, abalone divers, and laborers who processed fish in the canneries grew until they were forced to leave the Monterey area when World War II began in December 1941.(46)

If the Monterey Peninsula was once home to many Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian families, why are most of these families no longer living there today? In order to understand why things are the way they are today, we need to understand the laws and historical events that have shaped the course of history.

In the 19th and 20th Centuries, there were many discriminatory acts and laws against people of Asian descent. In 1878, a resolution adopted during a public protest stated: “We, citizens of Monterey County, in mass meeting assembled do hereby avow ourselves upon the side of the white versus Chinese labor now and for all time.”(47)

The Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882. This Act banned most Chinese from entering the United States. Moreover, it prohibited people of Chinese descent who were already US residents from becoming citizens. (48) Other laws that excluded people of Asian descent from immigrating to the US or becoming citizens passed soon after.(49)

From 1913 to 1948, the Alien Land Law prohibited anyone who was not allowed to be a citizen from owning land in California.(50) However, this law was only applied to people of Asian descent.(51)

These laws meant that Asian families could not legally immigrate to the United States. The families that were already here were not allowed to become citizens, and therefore were not allowed to own land.

Before the Twentieth Century, most of the field workers in the Salinas Valley were Chinese. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 led to a shortage of field workers.(52) Although other Asian laborers such as Japanese and Filipino workers were later brought in to work the fields, they were also eventually excluded.(53)

To protect the long-term health of our marine life and habitats, the California State Legislature passed the Marine Life Protection Act in 1999. The new law directed the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to redesign California's existing patchwork of marine protected areas into an ecologically connected network. The new statewide network was completed in 2012, and includes 124 marine protected areas covering 16 percent of California's jurisdictional waters.(54) Each marine protected area has specific rules about activities that are allowed or prohibited in them.

The historic Chinese fishing villages were adjacent to four marine protected areas: Lovers Point-Julia Platt State Marine Reserve, Edward F. Ricketts State Marine Conservation Area, Carmel Bay State Marine Conservation Area, and Point Lobos State Marine Reserve.

It is very important that we respect the cultural heritage and protect the biological diversity and abundance of these and other marine protected areas. We must all follow the rules that apply to these special places:

- *Lovers Point-Julia Platt State Marine Reserve(55)*
No take is allowed
- *Edward F. Ricketts State Marine Conservation Area(56)*
No take is allowed except for recreational hook-and-line of finfish & commercial bull kelp & giant kept harvesting by hand
- *Carmel Bay State Marine Conservation Area(57)*
No take is allowed except for recreational hook-and-line of finfish & commercial bull kelp & giant kept harvesting by hand
- *Point Lobos State Marine Reserve(58)*
No take is allowed

Today, many descendants of the Point Alones Chinese Fishing Village and other fishing villages in the Monterey peninsula gather every May to remember the burning of the Point Alones village. They walk from Lovers Point to Hopkins Marine Station holding pictures of the villagers to honor their contributions, remembering their sacrifices that make the Monterey Bay region a better place to work and live.

Let us remember that the coast belongs to everyone and that we are all responsible for taking care of it.



2022 Walk of Remembrance

Photo Credit: Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As you discuss the story of Asian families in the Monterey Bay region with your classmates and family, consider the following questions:

1. Did you know about the stories of the Asian families in Monterey Bay before you read this booklet?
2. How do the stories and ways that Asian families lived in Monterey Bay relate to you and your family's stories?
3. What are some ways you would like to share the stories about how these families lived, what happened to them, and how their legacies could be carried forward?
4. How diverse, abundant, and rich were Monterey Bay's marine ecosystems in the 1800s and early 1900s compared to today?
5. Why do you think marine protected areas have rules about the types or amount of marine species people can take?
6. What are some things you could do to help protect our coastal and marine ecosystems?

To learn more about California's
marine protected areas, scan the QR
code below or visit:

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs>



NOTES

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