

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Chinaman Joe of Point Joe

Was Point Joe named for a Chinaman or was the Chinaman named for Point Joe? Who knows? There was an Oriental, in the early 1900s, known to the residents and the tourists who enjoyed the 17 Mile Drive as Chinaman Joe. Joe had a great deal of ingenuity which was proven in the construction of a shack built from the wreckage of the steamer St. Paul, it is said.

It was located on Point Joe where he used the natural rock outcroppings for a foundation for his rustic abode. There he sold shells and seaweed of all sorts to the visitors who stopped and to the Del Monte guests enjoying the drive in the large many-seated conveyance drawn by four horses. This was Joe's livelihood when he was not herding the band of goats which roamed the beach and meadows near the point.

The Chinese were pioneers of Monterey, although there are few of these Orientals still here today. Chinatown was located about one mile from the outskirts of the town on one of the numerous little bays that line the coastline. The largest settlement was at Point Alones, now the location of the Hopkins Marine Laboratory.

The locations chosen by the Chinese were admirably settled for the business carried on by these enterprising citizens – fish curing and abalone shell shipping.

According to the old Monterey Handbook, published in 1875, the inhabitants of Chinatown were frugal, industrious, and well behaved. Little or no crime ever occurred among them and the editor reported that so far as his experience went, they were a sober, honest set of men, and compared favorably with their countrymen throughout the state.

One of the more picturesque Chinese was "Tim," a California-born Chinaman who spoke English and Spanish as fluently as a native. The census of Chinatown in 1879 was as follows: Man Lee Company, three men and three women; Sun Sing Company, three men, two women and three children; Man Sing Company, four men and one woman; Sun Choy Lee, 11 men, and one woman; Bow Lee Company, eight men, and Lai Lee Company, eight men. There were also about 20 men and eight women outside of these different companies in various employment in the town and neighborhood.

The Chinese industries were in 1875, fishing for rock cod, halibut, flounders, red and blue fish, yellow tail, mackerel, sardines and shell fish the greater part of which was split open salted and dried in the sun for exportation to San Francisco, then to the mines, and abroad. It was estimated in that year that 100 tons of fish were shipped from Monterey.

The Chinese sold abalone shells for \$20 a ton in the ready market. They owned about 20 boats, nearly all of which they built themselves and which they sailed Chinese fashion. They also dried seaweed which they shipped to their countrymen in San Francisco who used it in their food.