

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 18, 1952

### **Chinese New Year**

"Kwong Hee Fat Choy" as a Chinese salutation means "Happy New Year."

The New Year celebration for the Oriental has just ended, having begun about the middle of February and lasting for three weeks. We have found a story which we are sure will be of interest to old and newcomers alike. Monterey at one time had a large Chinese population living as squatters near where the Hopkins Marine Station is now located. A beach there is still known as China Beach.

A reporter of 1891 wrote a description of the activities of Chinese New Year in the local Oriental quarters and of the preparations in advance of the celebrations. Mrs. J.C. Anthony of Monterey has also given us some interesting details remembered from the Peninsula of the old days.

As the speaker of "Kwong Hee Fat Choy" gives the salutation he holds his hands before him and rubs them in a manner suggested during a cold snap. The Chinese never take hold of each other's hands; the art of hand shaking is unknown to them. They content themselves by speaking out the compliments of the season in a clear and distinct tone, all talking at once as they stand near the sacred table where they indulge in the usual tea cup and Chinese gin – at least that was the way the New Year was celebrated in Monterey sixty-one years ago.

It was and still is the custom of the Chinese to square up all their debts with each other at a time prior to the beginning of the holidays, even though one man borrows from another to pay the first. This is done, as has been written many times, to keep off the mortgage which the Devil would otherwise hold over the soul of the delinquent one.

In 1891 the approach of "Kwong Hee Fat Choy" kept the female population in the Chinese village busy for several weeks. The Cypress reporter told how a collection of old newspapers every one that could be bought, went into adornment for the walls of the dingy shanties. The cobwebs, accumulated since the previous year, were carefully swept down; new tin-foil ornaments and punk sticks were placed at the front

doors, and an extra supply of punctured paper for distribution in honor of the Devil, was received.

The deafening rattle of firecrackers announced to the Peninsula that the holidays were here, and with that announcement appeared the army of our Christian urchins, eager to dine at Confucius' table, although that dignitary might never enter their minds at any other season of the year."

Mrs. Anthony agrees with The Cypress writer – the Chinese were greatly imposed upon, and the "hoggishness displayed by the local urchins and residents of adult age, in grabbing for Oriental nuts, candies and fire crackers offered by their hosts must have left a very unfavorable impression in the latter's mind of our boasted civilization."

The feast in the old days lasted for three weeks. During all that time every Chinaman in the land endeavored to make his peace with the Devil; believing that God, being good and charitable, they had nothing to fear from Him, while his Satanic majesty, being a bloodthirsty, cruel nature, would do them harm unless bought off with offerings made by the Chinese.

Mrs. Anthony, who came to Monterey more than half a century ago, recalls many of the old day festivities and Chinese New Year in particular. She remembers the village very well, its many Chinese lanterns, all lighted; the roast pigs on the door steps, the candy, nuts and the many, many firecrackers given away and fired.

Looking back to those days, Mrs. Anthony recalls the squid fishing and drying by the Chinese in Monterey. Mrs. Anthony was the owner of the Log Cabin wood yard in Pacific Grove and sold wood to Chinese for their fishing boats. Those fortunate people who have witnessed torch fishing in the Hawaiian Islands, will realize how beautiful the procession of fishing boats on Monterey Bay were when the Chinese went fishing for squid with a fire of pitch logs on wire racks at the back of the boat. The red flame reflecting on the water attracted the fish and made them visible to the fishermen who caught them in nets. The fish were dried and much of the finished product sent to China.

The late J.C. Anthony had twenty-five wood camps, Mrs. Anthony recalls, within the Del Monte forest, then known as the P.I. Company property. The woodsmen were mostly Chinese in the very early days but later the Japanese were in the majority. There were ten to a dozen men in each camp. In those years almost every

guest room at Del Monte Hotel had a fireplace and almost all of the four foot wood cut in the camps went to warm the guests at this famous hotel.