

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Helpful Book For California Chinese**

The November issue of Bancroftiana, the publication of the Friends of the Bancroft Library, University of California, has a delightful story concerning the Chinese in California. It was on Jan. 15, 1877, that there appeared the following notice in the "Oriental," a Chinese newspaper in San Francisco:

"Chinese-English Phase Book For Sale," printed by J. Hoffman, 821 Washington St., S. F.

"A newly published Chinese-English phase book is now on sale. Contains various types of conversation and a list of chief California city names. It is very useful for the Chinese. Those who wish to have a copy, please come to the Congregational Church School in Portsmouth Plaza. The price is reasonable. S. Wong."

This announced what appears, on the basis of the research of our good friend and bibliographer, Yuk Ow, to have been the first Chinese printing in book form in California, and presumably, in the United States.

An excellent copy of this rare volume (only the Huntington Library is recorded as having one, and the Bancroft found no bookdealers aware of its existence) has just been acquired by the Bancroft Library to add luster to its growing collection of materials relating to Chinese in California:

The English title page reads:

An English-Chinese Phase Book together with the Vocabulary of trade, law, etc. Also, A complete list of Wells Fargo & Co.'s offices in California, Nevada, Etc. Compiled by Wong Sam and Assistants. San Francisco: Cubery & Co., Book and General Job Printers, 414 Market Street, below Sansome. 1875.

The Chinese page is slightly different:

Chinese - English Phase Book 1875 First year of Kuang-hsii in Ching Dynasty Compiled by Huang Wu-ti (seal Hoffman, Printer, Washington. Street.

Clearly this book of 299 pages had two printers, one responsible for the English text in letter press, and the other, a lithographer for the Chinese characters, for which no types were available then.

The first section of this intriguing volume contains phrases in English with their Chinese equivalents; it

apparently was assumed that the immigrant Chinese would find these most useful in his daily social and business life. Thus he would learn to say, "I want to get a vegetable-hawker's license," "You ask too high a price," "He assaulted me without provocation," "He squatted on my lot," "He tries to extort money from me," "He cheated me out of my wages," "I could not help it," and "I did not intend to break it." The book obviously affords an insight into the situation of the Chinese in California at the time.

The second section, which lists the Wells Fargo & Co., offices, has its own Chinese title page. Literally translated it reads: 1

"Place names of the Gold Mountain for Back and Forth Letters."

A note from Joseph B. Fratessa, past president of the Assn. of the United States Army, Monterey Tri-County chapter, explains the reason why nothing has been done in the last few years about the future plans for the preservation of Fort Mervine on Presidio Hill.

"On Nov. 13 there appeared an article in the Peninsula Diary which accurately reported that Frank Groves had been appointed by me to head a committee to study the possibility, of restoring old Fort Mervine in the Presidio of Monterey.

"Because Mr. Groves felt that others would be much better qualified to carry out this assignment he asked (May 21, 1959) and was granted release of this assignment. The balance of the committee carried on the research.

"The project was abandoned several months later because sufficient concrete data was not available from the Historical Division of the Army."