

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Early-Day Chinese

In the little handbook published in Monterey in 1875 there appears an interesting and different story of the life and work of the Chinese who formerly lived on the shores of Monterey Bay. They had several settlements from time to time but the largest was at Point Alones, now occupied by the Hopkins Marine Station. We can remember in years gone by when some of us were children, the Chinese who sold seashells at Point Joe and other places around the 17 Mile Drive, adding a great deal to the charm of the trip.

The following paragraphs are quotations from the 1875 booklet:

"Chinatown is distant from Monterey about one mile from the outskirts of the city on one of the numerous small bays that line the Bay of Monterey. It is admirably selected for the business carried on by its enterprising citizens - fish curing and abalone shell shipping. Its inhabitants are frugal, industrious, and well behaved. Little or no crime occurs among them, and so far as our experience goes, they are a sober, honest set of men, and compare favorably with their countrymen throughout the state.

"Tim, a California - born Chinaman, speaks English and Spanish as fluently as a native. The census of Chinatown is as follows: Man Lee Company, six men, two women and one child; Yee Lee Company, six men, two women and three children; Man Sing Company, four men and one woman. In connection with these companies are others of Carmel, Pescadero, and Portuguese Bay: Sun Choy Lee Company, eleven men and one woman, and Dal Lee Company, eight men. There are about 20 men and eight women outside these companies in different employments in the town and neighborhood.

"The Chinese industries are fishing for rockfish, cod, halibut, flounders, red and blue fish, the greater part of which are split open, salted, and dried in the sun for export to San Francisco, whence they find their way to the mines throughout the state, and abroad. It may be estimated that the amount of dried fish exported averages nearly 100 tons.

"The Chinese collect also great quantities of abalone shells, which find a ready market at \$20 a ton. They possess about 20 boats, nearly all of which are built by

themselves. They are sailed in Chinese fashion. During the past month they have commenced shipping fresh fish to Gilroy, San Jose, and other interior towns. Although they import from San Francisco the greater part of the merchandise, they purchase very liberally of the merchants in town. As a result, their trade is always for cash; they are very desirable customers in these hard times."

The above is a history of the important part the Chinese played in early Monterey, and now we have so few.