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THE CHINESE WERE ONCE HERE—Their Presence and Legacy by Elaine Zorbas

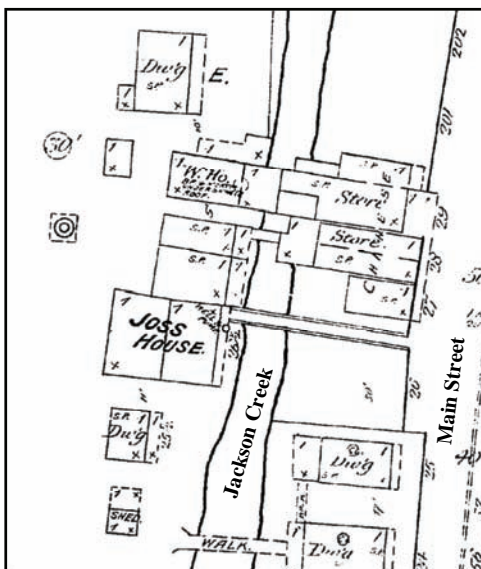
During the mid to late 19th century people from China, often dressed in blue quilted jackets and billowy trousers, were a common sight in Amador County. Practically every town had a Chinatown, or at least a Chinese presence. These people mined along the rivers, gulches and creeks for decades, reworking abandoned claims. They also worked to build the roads, ditches, and the Amador Canal.

Chinese cooks staffed hotels and restaurants and served in private homes. They were gardeners and farmhands, grew vegetables and planted orchards. Chinese grocery and merchandise stores, gambling halls, opium dens, temples, brothels, boarding houses, hotels, laundries, and herb stores were found in many of Amador County's chinatowns. Why did they come, where did they stay, what was their life like here, where did they go, and what is the legacy?

California was called "gam saan" or Gold Mountain by the Chinese. Most came from the Guangdong Province around Canton, a region plagued by a shortage of land, flood, famine and civil war. Like many others seeking gold, they hoped for riches and a better life. In 1852, about 25,000 Chinese entered California. Many

headed to the gold regions, including our own area, then still part of Calaveras County. The same year, the California legislature reenacted a Foreign Miner's Tax of \$3.00. That tax, which leveled off in subsequent years to \$4.00 per month (after reaching a high of \$6.00 per month in 1856), was to be applied exclusively to the Chinese. Half of it went to County Government. From 1854-1870 Amador County garnered \$137,019 from its Chinese miners.

Early statistics on the Chinese in Amador County are sketchy, and even later Census and other records give an undercount of the Chinese population, since they obviously avoided government offi-



A section from the 1890 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Jackson shows the layout and extent of Jackson's Chinatown.

Preserving Amador's Chinese Heritage: The Fiddletown Preservation Society Needs Our Help

The Chew Kee Store in Fiddletown is a County museum, open to the public on Saturdays from 12:00-4:00 p.m., April through October. It is staffed by volunteers from the Fiddletown Preservation Society. In 2002 the Society received a grant in the amount of \$203,000 from the California State Office of Historic Preservation. The monies are to be used to stabilize and preserve the exteriors of the Fiddletown Chinese Gambling Hall and the Chinese General Store. That grant must be matched by the end of this year or work cannot proceed and the grant money will be lost. For information on how you can help, contact the Fiddletown Preservation Society, P.O. Box 53, Fiddletown, CA 95629 or visit www.fiddletown.info.



The Chew Kee Store in Fiddletown (courtesy Fiddletown Preservation Society)