In Our Midst

The Chinese Expulsion from Eureka, California

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In February, 1885 tensions were high in the thriving community of Chinese immigrants living in Eureka, California. Approximately 200 Chinese lived in this coastal city in the heart of Humboldt County, 260 miles north of San Francisco. When a new element arrived in Chinatown brandishing weapons the larger community took notice. It was believed that these recent arrivals were establishing brothels, opium dens and gambling facilities. To make matters worse, this new element fought a series of shootouts, which made white residents increasingly anxious. Some thought that the residents of Chinatown had little respect for Eureka’s courts or police system. It was thought that the residents of Chinatown needed to control themselves, or there were some Eurekans who would see that they did. In an editorial entitled “Wipe out the Plague Spots,” that appeared in the February 5, 1885 local Daily Times-Telephone, one Eureka resident had very specific thoughts about Chinatown:

...It is where; under the fostering care of a small heathen horde, acts of riot and assassination are more and more boldly committed from month to month, and year to year....It is the pestilential quarter where Chinese gambling dens, opium-smoking hell holes, and the lowest brothels abound.... Under the present conditions of things there is not only danger from a moral point of view, but continual danger to life and property....if ever an offending white man is offered up on the alter of paganism, we fear it will be goodbye Chinatown. 1

There was a strong feeling among many of the Eureka residents that the Chinese would have to leave if any white member of the community fell victim to Chinese violence.

Eurekans did not have to wait long for the violence to reach its height. Just one day after the editorial appeared, a shooting took place in Chinatown which motivated much of the white population of Eureka to action. At approximately 6:00 p.m. on
February 6, 1885 two Chinese men began shooting at each other. Prominent resident and city councilman David Kendall was returning to his office after dinner at the time of the shooting. He was fatally wounded as he was crossing Fourth street. (See Appendix A.) He died shortly after being carried to his home. In addition, a young white Eurekan named Louis Baldschimdt was shot in the foot.2

Within a few minutes a crowd gathered at a local hall to decide the fate of the Chinese. It was irrelevant to many that they did not know who was responsible for the shooting. Members of the crowd were ready to hang residents of Chinatown indiscriminately. Some proposed a massacre, while others suggested that Chinatown be demolished.3 It was eventually decided that a committee of fifteen men were responsible for making it clear to the Chinese that they must leave Eureka within twenty four hours. On the morning of February 8, the residents of Eureka’s Chinatown boarded two steamships headed for San Francisco. Once there they melted into the large Chinatown, never to return to Eureka.

Intolerance and racism characterize the events that led to the expulsion of the Chinese population of Eureka. This paper will attempt to portray a community influenced by longstanding stereotypes and prejudices, whose fears found an outlet after the murder of councilman Kendall. It will argue that the history of Chinese and white relations in California and the nation influenced the opinions of Eureka’s white community, and that the physical location of Eureka’s Chinatown made it the object of intense scrutiny. The combination of intolerance sanctioned by the state and nation, and Chinatown’s location within Eureka, culminated in the expulsion of a segment of its population whose culture, traditions and standard of living was unacceptable to the larger community.

2
The first Chinese immigrants to enter California came in 1848 with the arrival of two men and one woman. The numbers drastically rose beginning with the announcement of the gold rush in 1849. In 1850 there were around 1000 thousand Chinese immigrants in California, with numbers hitting their peak at 75,000 in 1880. Most of the population came in the form of laborers who were looking to acquire wealth and return home with their fortunes. The chance for doing so in California was far greater than at home. The large majority of immigrants came from China’s southeastern Kwantung provinces, where political unrest and natural disasters had made it very hard to maintain a satisfactory quality of life. The Kwantung provinces had traded with other parts of the world for hundreds of years, including European nations which gave the citizens in the area exposure to Western cultures. In the early years of the nineteenth century these provinces had been subject to overcrowding, drought, and flood. There was a long history of war in this area with the citizens bearing the costs through increased taxes. These conditions increased Chinese interest in California where there otherwise might not have been.

Because the main interest was in returning to China with the earnings from their labor, the majority of those Chinese immigrants who came to California were men. A much smaller number of women ventured to California, often to be employed in brothels found throughout the state. For those men who couldn’t afford passage to California, many entered into the credit-ticket system, which was sponsored by the Chinese Six Companies. Chinese merchants who had already been successful in California would recruit young men from their villages in China and pay for their passage, with the understanding the cost of the passage would be re-paid once they found employment in
California. Upon arrival the immigrant would be introduced to the Chinese Six Companies. This organization based in San Francisco took responsibility for entering Chinese immigrants. Run by Chinese merchants, each company represented one of the six districts of Kwantung, as well as the major clans that made up the population of immigrants. The organization had been set up in the first days of Chinese immigration after individuals had found themselves vulnerable to prejudice and violence. It was intended to create some sense of protection in an often hostile environment far from home by providing some basic necessities. The Companies sent individuals to meet each new immigrant that arrived in San Francisco. It provided a place to stay and food with the understanding that all expenses would be paid for once the Companies or the individual themselves could secure some form of employment.\(^7\) The Companies regulated its members, dealt with disputes, and handed out punishments. It provided banking services, protection, companionship, and ties to home.\(^8\)

As time went on, the Companies became the acknowledged law which Chinese immigrants had to obey and that California’s courts also recognized. Because the Chinese were ineligible for citizenship, and were represented by the Companies state courts and law enforcement rarely got involved in the lives of the immigrants. Because of the barriers of language and culture, it was almost impossible to navigate through the intricacies of California’s legal system, so individuals relied on the Companies to do it for them. In this way, it became an acceptable intermediary between Chinese immigrants and California society. Only when members of rival secret societies, known as tongs, began to cause disturbances did law enforcement get involved.\(^9\)
Originally the tongs worked in association with the Companies but eventually broke away and functioned as smaller secret societies, finding rivals in one another beginning in the early 1870s. Members of the different tongs took their grievances with them when they relocated from San Francisco to different areas of California. As a result of the hostilities acts of violence between members of rival tongs flared up in towns all over the state. The tongs played a role in the growing tension between the Chinese and white Eurekans and proved to be a decisive factor contributing to the events that took place there.

As stated earlier, the promise of gold in 1849 drew the first significant numbers of Chinese immigrants to California. Though they were some of the first to explore the economic potential of gold mining, they represented only 500 of 57,787 miners in the state in 1850. After gathering supplies in San Francisco they ventured to the southern mines of the San Jacquin, the northern mines on the American river or even farther north to Trinity County in the early 1850s. Because of the locations of different discoveries, Chinese miners could be found in all areas of California.

Chinatowns began to spring up within the mining towns. Chinese immigrants tended to experience the most security when they stayed close together. In these Chinatowns they were free to continue their own traditions, practice their own religions, and enjoy the holidays they had grown up celebrating in China. The formations of Chinatowns within larger white communities became the norm all over the state. In these Chinatowns those who weren’t mining were providing necessities such as laundries, boarding houses, and general stores to Chinese and non-Chinese miners alike.
Beginning in 1865, Chinese immigrants found employment from a source other than mining. The rush to finish the transcontinental railroad was hastened by the recruitment of Chinese laborers. Charles Crocker, a member of the “Big Four,” suggested the use of Chinese labor after successfully using Chinese workers to thwart an attempted strike by white laborers. By the end of 1865 there were three thousand Chinese immigrants working on the construction of the railroad. “Crocker’s Pets,” as they were known, were extremely hard workers. In the early months they averaged a foot of track a day, but were averaging a mile a day as they finished their progression to meet the track that had been laid through Utah. Some lost their lives because of explosions, while others died from sheer exhaustion. Despite the loss of life, Chinese labor was largely responsible for the completion of the railroad in 1869. 

Other sources of employment came in the form of laundries, domestic service, fishing, heavy construction work, and any kind of work that white laborers were unwilling to do. As Chinese immigrants began to work in industries already occupied by white laborers - clothing manufacturing, cigar-making, and shoemaking industries - they encountered increased resistance from white workers. This competition increased between Chinese and non-Chinese labor in the years following the Civil War, as the American economy experienced a postwar recession. Worsening the affects of the recession was the completion of the railroad. California’s manufacturing sector suffered, as goods from the east flowed into the state, and laborers from other parts of the country came looking for work. Because the Chinese were willing to work for low wages, many non-Chinese laborers felt that in order to compete they would be forced to lower their
standard of living.\textsuperscript{14} Though most Chinese were employed doing work that white laborers had no interest in, they were still considered a threat to white employment.

Anti-Chinese sentiment had been expressed in the mines, but was gradually spreading through the entire state. White miners and laborers resented any competition from Chinese immigrants. Chinese laborers were often called “Coolies,” and were seen as equivalent to slaves. They were understood to be continually in the service of the Six Companies. This was especially distasteful to Californians who believed that the status of the “Coolies” was analogous to black slavery of the recent past. Exacerbating matters was the realization that Chinese immigrants were not going to adopt American ways. Wherever they lived in California they gathered together and create Chinatowns. They didn’t appear to have an interest in learning English or comprehending American culture. Rather than being seen as an asset to the economy, these immigrants were considered to be a drain because they sent most of their earnings home and what they didn’t send home they spent in Chinese stores. These sentiments coupled with reports of various Chinatowns containing dark buildings full of gambling, prostitution, opium smoking, violence and contagious diseases increased feelings that Chinese immigrants were a nuisance to society.\textsuperscript{15} These beliefs fostered a fear for the morality, health, and well being of the white community.

The California legislature listened and responded to the growing anti-Chinese sentiment through a series of laws that attempted to limit the rights of Chinese immigrants. The first laws applied specifically with Chinese immigrants were passed as a result of the reaction to Chinese presence in the mines. Mining districts were set up by white miners as a mechanism of regulation in the new and rapidly growing mining areas.
White miners at first found the Chinese a mere curiosity but were increasingly resistant when they perceived a threat to their ability to work in the mines. As a result non-Chinese miners forced most of the Chinese out of the lucrative mining areas with many mining districts passing miners' codes banning Chinese immigrants from mining in the area. In 1852 white miners convinced the legislature to pass a foreign miners tax. Aimed at discouraging Chinese immigrants from working in the mines, the three-dollar a month tax was enforced by tax collectors who kept part of the fee for themselves and were allowed to take property of those who failed to pay. Tax collectors justified extreme violence and in some cases murder of Chinese miners by claiming that the immigrants attempted to resist paying the tax.\textsuperscript{16} Restricted from most mines and fearing for their lives, Chinese miners either stopped mining altogether or they mined the areas that had already been abandoned.

In addition, the legislature also passed laws intended to limit the rights of Chinese immigrants in areas other than mining. In 1855 a bill was passed which levied a tax of fifty dollars against any ship that brought immigrants to California who were not eligible for citizenship, a law that was later found unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{16} White sentiment was increasingly oriented towards the elimination of Chinese immigration, and the legislature responded by passing acts that either limited the rights of the Chinese in California, or that openly called for the cessation of further Chinese immigration.

As early as 1858, the California legislature passed a law called, \textit{An Act to Prevent the Further Immigration of Chinese or Mongolian to this State}, with the knowledge that it would be found unconstitutional. In 1862 a law known as, \textit{An Act to Protect Free White Labor against Competition with Coolie labor and to Discourage the Immigration}
of Chinese to the State of California, was passed by the state and called for the taxation of all Chinese laborers not working in agriculture. Another act passed in 1866 was entitled An Act for the Suppression of Chinese Houses of Ill-Fame making it possible for a landlord to discriminate against potential Chinese occupants. The law allowed the owner to deny use of a property to a Chinese immigrant based solely upon the suspicion that prostitution might take place on the premises. It wasn’t until 1874 that the law was changed to include all brothels. Each of these acts were indications that Chinese immigrants that they were unwelcome in California. They also made it easy for Californians to justify discrimination and violence against Chinese immigrants, and sent a clear message to the Chinese that they had little protection under California law.

Legislative action against Chinese immigrants did not solve the problem of competition between Chinese and non-Chinese labor. The Workingmen’s party, which rose to prominence through the guidance of Denis Kearney, became a third party voice for the rights of Californian labor and a powerful force against the Chinese. The party represented the interests of white workers and the working poor. It advocated direct election of the president, an eight hour work day and compulsory education for all children among other things. Yet the issue that was foremost in the minds of its members was Chinese labor. The party wanted to legally eliminate the use of Chinese labor by corporations in California and consistently called for an end to Chinese immigration. During the mass meetings of the party that took place in San Francisco’s sandlots, the cry was “The Chinese Must Go!” Kearny strongly argued this point.

We have made no secret of our intentions. We make none. Before you and before the world we declare that the Chinaman must leave our shores. We declare that white men, and women, and boys, and girls, cannot live as the people of the great republic should and compete with the single
Chinese coolie in the labor market. We declare that we cannot hope to drive the Chinaman away by working cheaper than he does. None but an enemy would expect it of us; none but an idiot could hope for success; none but a degraded coward and slave would make the effort. To an American, death is preferable to life on par with the Chinaman.¹⁸  

The Workingmen’s party gained popularity all over the state. At the second constitutional convention in California, the it succeeded in its intentions to rid the state of the use of Chinese labor through two clauses. The California Constitution, which was put into effect in 1879, contained two articles stating that Chinese immigrants could not vote in California nor was it legal to employ a Chinese laborer in state or local public works.¹⁹

The Workingmen’s Party found a great deal of support from individuals in Eureka. Growing discontent with state government, tax laws, and the power of the railroads led to the formation of the party in Humboldt County. It has been argued that Anti-Chinese sentiment was not a significant issue for the Workingmen’s Party in Humboldt County because Chinese laborers did not directly compete for jobs with white laborers. Only a small number of Chinese could be found in the logging industry, which was the major source of employment in the county.²⁰ Yet other sources show that Chinese labor was a powerful subject. One source claims that as often as once a year there would be a local scare about labor and wages. Preconceptions that white laborers suffered because of competition from Chinese immigrants or that they faced reduced wages as a result of this competition, were not based in fact. Yet the perception that this was indeed taking place was present and very real in the minds of white Eurekans.²¹ They experienced the same fears as their fellow Californians about Chinese laborers. In most cases such fears were inconsistent with the truth because in Eureka, as in other parts
of the state, Chinese workers occupied positions that white workers were generally not interested in. When employers tried to bring Chinese workers into industries that were significant sources of employment for non-Chinese laborers, they encountered much resistance from their employees in Humboldt County. In a letter to the editor of the People's Tribune, the official newspaper of the party, one resident of Eureka echoed the prevailing sentiment in California about Chinese laborers.

The nation is yet in mourning for five hundred thousand of her best and bravest sons, who laid down their lives that their posterity might enjoy the blessings of a free country; but no sooner was African slavery abolished at such a dreadful cost of blood and treasure—which will cripple generations yet unborn to make good—a far more dangerous and servile race of slaves than those that it cost the nation so much to abolish. Hordes of these Chinese slaves only await the bidding of their masters to invade our land, devour our substance and bring our laboring classes down to their base level. 22

These types of comments illustrate that at least for some followers of the Workingmen’s Party in Humboldt County, Chinese laborers were perceived to be a threat to the livelihood of white workers. This can be further seen in the overwhelming support that the Humboldt Workingmen’s party gave to the new constitution after the convention in 1879. They campaigned for the ratification of the constitution with complete dedication and it was overwhelmingly approved in the county. 23

With the support of Humboldt County, California increased pressure on the national government to enact legislation that would restrict Chinese immigration, by 1880. In order to do so a new treaty had to be negotiated between the United States and China. In the past, hopes of promoting trade between the two nations had made it essential that the United States enter into successive treaties with China in 1844, 1858, and 1868. The first two treaties did not state what rights Chinese immigrants were
guaranteed, but the Burlingame treaty of 1868 was a little more specific in that it allowed
Chinese immigrants the same rights as those enjoyed by citizens of the United States.
President Garfield successfully renegotiated the treaty, which proclaimed China’s
agreement for U.S. regulation of Chinese immigration. Two years later the California
legislature passed the Chinese exclusion act of 1882.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United
States of America in Congress assembled, That from and after the
expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the
expiration of ten years next after the passage of this act, the coming of
Chinese laborers to the United States be, and the same is hereby,
suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any
Chinese laborer to come, or, having so come after the expiration of said
ninety days, to remain within the United States.

With this act and successive amendments, Chinese immigration to the United States was
suspended almost entirely.

Eureka’s white residents followed the events taking place in the state and nation
with much interest, and supported the opinions of the majority in California. Like towns
throughout the rest of the state, Eureka had a Chinese population of its own. The Chinese
had first come to Eureka en route to the Trinity and Klamath River areas in order to mine
for gold. By 1874 an area that came to be known as Chinatown had been established in
Eureka. Like other Chinatowns in California, this one was composed mostly of men and a
few prostitutes. Chinese laborers occupied the same kinds of positions as their
counterparts all over the state. Those who weren’t mining worked in laundries, domestic
services, and were responsible for growing the vegetables that supplied the town. Many
were also recruited through agents for the Six Companies to construct the Eel River and
Eureka Railroads in 1883.
As in other parts of the state, these men brought their culture, language, and traditions with them. They were interested in co-existence with white Eurekans, but did not necessarily adopt their values or interests. Like their fellow countrymen in other parts of the state, Eureka’s Chinese residents did their best to create a sense of home by continuing to practice their traditions, celebrate Chinese holidays, and continue cultural practices that were common to all Chinese. New Years was a major celebration marked every year by Eureka’s Chinatown. Merchants closed their shops, as preparation for the celebration took all day. Eureka’s Chinese also continued to hold beliefs that were brought with them from China. They believed that spirits populated the area, just as they had in China. In their distinct community they interacted and relied upon one another more then they did with white Eurekans. For the most part, the Chinese kept to themselves creating a universe all of their own in the middle of the otherwise homogenous city of Eureka.

Eureka’s Chinatown was a small square block area between F and E Streets, bounded by Third and Fourth streets and located in the heart of what is now the business district. (See appendix A.) It has been described as an area full of:

...poor shacks. The land and property belonged to white citizens who had a profitable investment, renting to the Chinese for six to eight dollars each month. The ground on which these shacks were located was low and swampy, and a creek followed a gulch which ran through the block from northeast to southeast and emptied into a slough below the present Fourth and E streets. The slough had been filled at Fourth Street to improve the street, and thus cutting off the creek and leaving Chinatown without drainage. Into this area a stagnant pool of water developed, and the refuse from kitchens of seventeen houses and outhouses was dumped.
Though Chinatown was kept very clean, and the immigrants themselves were known for their cleanliness, the odors from the area reeked of sewage, and the Chinese were often blamed for the smell.

White Eurekans response to the foreign microcosm in their midst was a mixture of curiosity and fear. One Eureka resident later recalled that she and her friends would purposely go to Chinatown after school to see how the Chinese lived. Another resident who remembered Chinatown from when she was a child, said that she would purposely avoid the Chinese side of the street. Those who employed Chinese laborers were pleased with their work, and those who rented to them were happy to receive rent for the hardly livable shacks. Yet for many Eurekans Chinatown was thought to be harmful to public morality.

Perhaps because of popular thought Chinese immigrants in Eureka were often the victims of prejudice and violence. The Chinese were consistently subjected to random acts of violence. Children would throw rocks at Chinese homes. One Chinese man was nearly killed by a white man while picking blackberries in the woods outside of Eureka.

Beginning in the early 1880s, armed factions from differing tongs took up residence in Eureka’s Chinatown. Brothels, opium and gambling facilities were established, increasing feelings of anxiety about the influence of Chinatown on the white community. The newspapers became incensed when it was found that two white women had visited the opium dens.

One resident of Eureka, Reverend Charles A. Huntington, understood the inherent double standard that existed in the minds of many white Eurekans. He pointed out the inconsistency of anti-Chinese sentiments in his memoirs:
Chinatown was said to endanger the public morals by reason of their use of opium, their habit of gambling, and their heathenish disregard for Christian morality, thus being hated as a menace to public morals. However, if they gambled, it was among themselves, as no white men went into Chinatown to gamble or dissipate with opium or whiskey. If the Chinese drank whiskey they bought it in bulk and drank it at home. No one ever saw a drunken chinaman drunk on the streets. They did not loiter or drink in a bar or saloon. And yet they were hated as enemies of society and a danger to the morality of a Christian city.\textsuperscript{34}

Reverend Huntington compared the evidence that many Eurekans provided to support the argument that Chinatown was a dangerous element in Eureka to similar activities in the white community. These activities were for the most part considered acceptable by white citizens of Eureka:

White people were not thus ostracised because of their undisguised immorality. In what was called the lower levels of the city were half a dozen blocks, more or less, densely populated, in which a chaste woman could not be found and who were employed in all the arts and devices known to the trade of the harlot, to entice young men into the meshes of destruction. Gambling saloons at every corner stood open night and day. But though their moral effect was evil, it was legalized by the government, encouraged and patronized by a numerous class of the people, who were loud mouthed against the demoralization of Chinatown.\textsuperscript{35}

As Reverend Huntington explained, there was an unexplained difference between those judgements held about the Chinese community, and those made about the white community in Eureka, though both communities contained brothels, saloons, and gambling.

Nonetheless, anti-Chinese sentiment continued to grow, especially after the introduction of rival tongs to the Chinese community. They waged violence against each other, and apparently had little respect for Eureka's laws. They refused to testify against one another when called into court and would lie under oath. In 1884 a number of
shooting matches took place between rival tongs and each time there were arrests, there were no conclusive results. Well into 1885 the gun matches continued in Chinatown. In one case, a bullet passed through the wall of a house owned by a white citizen.\(^{36}\) A newspaper article described an outbreak of violence on February 1 of the same year, which took place just outside the building that housed the paper:

> Just as we were going to press last night a serious riot broke out in the Chinese quarters just opposite our office. Some ten or twelve shots were fired, and noise enough made to shake the bones of Confusious. We do not know the extent of the damage, but we saw one Chinaman laid out with a bullet through his lung. Dr. Davis took the ball out of his back. He is a gone Chinaman. We saw another fellow with a wound in his hand. The officers captured about a half a dozen pistols, and locked up as many Chinamen.\(^{37}\)

Another newspaper stated that if residents of Chinatown refused to behave they should be made to leave town.\(^{38}\) Once white Eurekans believed the activity of the tongs posed a threat not only to individuals in Chinatown but also to members of the white community, they became less and less tolerant of their Chinese neighbors.

> When Councilman Kendall was shot on February 6 years of history, prejudice, and frustration erupted into collective action. Twenty Chinese men were arrested for being involved in the shooting of Councilman Kendall. News of the violence spread through town quickly. When the crowd was alerted that a Chinese man had been arrested for shooting Kendall, it became difficult to control vigilante behavior:

> The officers after considerable difficulty, in which the Chinaman was pretty badly used by the crowd succeeded in getting him to the lock-up. By this time several hundred men had gathered around the corner of Fourth and F, some yelling to burn them out; others to hang them all, etc.\(^{39}\)

As hundreds of people gathered near Chinatown, with the intention of taking matters into their own hands, Eureka's Sheriff Brown called out the National Guard in order to be

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\(^{36}\) A newspaper account of an outbreak of violence in Chinatown.

\(^{37}\) Description of an incident where a bullet passed through a house owned by a white citizen.

\(^{38}\) Statement from a newspaper that residents of Chinatown should be made to leave town.

\(^{39}\) Account of the arrest of a Chinese man involved in the shooting of Councilman Kendall.
prepared should the crowd try to take over the jail. In an effort to calm the crowd and come to a consensus about how to handle the situation, it was proposed that a meeting be held at Centennial hall. Six hundred men crowded into the building to take part in the discussion. Reverend Huntington recalled that it took much effort to quiet the calls for violence against Chinatown:

...And nothing but cool remonstrance of a few level headed business men of the city, saved Chinatown from being made a scene of slaughter and blood. For a resolution was actually proposed to go in and massacre every Chinaman in the place. And when this measure was frowned down, the next proposition was to loot Chinatown, demolish their tenements and drive the occupants beyond the city limits unsheltered and unprotected.

The Reverend protested these ideas, and tried to get the crowd to sympathize with those Chinese who had nothing to do with the shooting. Another witness to the meeting recalled Sheriff Brown’s comments:

Sheriff Brown got up, and he said, “Before there was anything done, I want you to understand that I am the Sheriff of Humboldt County, sworn to uphold the law and I will do so to the end.” And then he says, “that if anybody starts anything violating the law,” he said, “they’ve got to reckon with me and my deputies.”

Perhaps it is because of Sheriff Brown’s warning that the mob did not erupt into further violence. The final plan agreed upon by the majority was to send all residents of Chinatown on a ship bound for San Francisco.

A committee of fifteen men was chosen to notify the residents of Chinatown that they would have to leave. The committee sent for three members of each of the tongs and informed them that they would have to abandon their homes within twenty four hours. The following morning all residents of Chinatown and any Chinese from the surrounding areas gathered as many of their belongings as possible and were held in
warehouses until February 8 when they could be shipped to San Francisco. A gallows was erected in the middle of Chinatown with a sign on it that stated, "Any Chinaman seen on the street after three o'clock will be hung to this gallows." It has been said that the gallows was erected to scare the Chinese into compliance, yet it was nearly put to use when one young Chinese man was caught being sheltered by Reverend Huntington’s family. The crowd went so far as to put the noose over the young man’s head but was held back by the reverend of the Methodist church. Delayed by fog, the two ships loaded with 210 passengers and 150 tons of merchandise did not leave for San Francisco until February 7, 1885. With little warning and no way to protest, the Chinese passengers left for San Francisco, some of whom had made Eureka their home for up to fourteen years.

Within the next few months, towns all over Humboldt County replicated the proceedings in Eureka so that the Chinese were effectively expelled from the entire county. In October of 1885, Eureka’s Times-Standard ran an article announcing that the expelled Chinese would sue Eureka:

The Chinese Consul-General at San Francisco has announced his intention of submitting a claim against the Government for $100,000 damages alleged to have been sustained by the former Chinese residents of Eureka, by reason of what they are pleased to term their “expulsion.” They claim their property was destroyed and that they were compelled to leave without the opportunity of collecting debts due them.

The article suggested that Eureka couldn’t possibly owe anything to its former Chinese residents because any unpaid debts could only come from their fellow Chinese. It went on to say that since the Six Companies were responsible for mediating disputes between Chinese, they should deal with the problem. As it turned out, Eureka won the case and
the Chinese were not compensated for any loses they had incurred as a result of the expulsion.48

In the past many students of history have retold the events that led to the expulsion of the Chinese from Eureka in 1885, but in most of these treatments an essential element is noticeably missing from the story: the question of why is never answered. Why were the Chinese expelled from Eureka and Humboldt County, when they weren’t expelled from all over California? What made it possible for the expulsion to take place in Eureka?

The events that ended in the expulsion of the Chinese population from Eureka began taking shape in the early interactions between White miners and Chinese miners decades before the expulsion. It took place in towns and cities throughout California and in other parts of the nation. Instead of being seen as equally deserving of the rights and benefits of the California landscape, the Chinese were consistently relegated to an underclass by the rest of California. Their appearance, language, and customs naturally set them apart, and made them an easy target for racism and violence. They were accused of being harmful to the public morality because of gambling, prostitution, and opium smoking, even though in reality there were plenty of non-Chinese participating in these kinds of activities. They were forced out of the most valuable gold mines simply because of their race. They became the bane of labor in California because of their willingness to do backbreaking work for low wages. It was well established that a Chinese immigrant would not be protected under California law. Laws made it acceptable to discriminate and abuse Chinese immigrants. Through legal and non-legal means, individuals, the
state, and the nation did their best to make the Chinese an invisible underclass, hated, abused, and in the best cases, ignored.

The Chinese recognized that they were not protected by the court system in the United States so they sought protection through each other. The Six Companies became the provided a sense of security for the Chinese in California. Because the Six Companies was the only form of protection and organization that was open to Chinese, the Companies were recognized by both the Chinese and non-Chinese residents of California as the source of regulation for Chinese immigrants. This acknowledgment, coupled with the understanding that the American court system would not provide justice for the Chinese, created an extralegal system which had the affect of further separating the two communities.

Eureka followed the state and the nation in its sentiments concerning its own Chinese residents. Area newspapers consistently voiced the same concerns over Chinatown’s influence on public morals, as did other communities all over California. Eureka and Humboldt County were influenced by what was being said about Chinese immigrants in other parts of the state, even when those things didn’t apply there. When the Workingmen’s Party gained popularity in Humboldt County, Eureka residents identified with the issue of Chinese competition, even though in reality Chinese labor did not compete with white labor.

The expulsion was an event that wasn’t in keeping with the rest of California. There were elements unique to Eureka and its Chinese residents. The forces that combined to create the expulsion came largely as a result of the remote location of Humboldt County, and the location of Chinatown within the city. Because Eureka was
located over two hundred and sixty miles north of San Francisco, it was not easy for the
Six Companies to protect or control Chinatown. Because of this, the tongs that waged
war with one another had no real opposition except from the town’s white police and its
courts. With little police control, or any regulation from the Companies, the violence
continued unabated.

The location of Chinatown within the city limits of Eureka created a sense of fear
about the violence that had been taking place there, and increased prejudices about the
residents of Chinatown. Because of the sewage problem the Chinese were seen as
uninterested in their own cleanliness, despite the fact that they took great care with their
personal appearance. Making matters worse was the fact that the Chinese population
lived in such close proximity to the larger community. It was close to the residences of
white citizens, was centered a block and a half from a local newspaper and another half a
block from a popular public hall. The larger community was faced with the sights,
sounds, smells and violence taking place in the heart of the city. Fears, latent prejudices,
and visibility combined in the minds of much of Eureka’s white population to convince
many that Chinatown must somehow be dissolved.

The shooting of Councilman Kendall was all that was needed to turn the white
population completely against the residents of Chinatown. On February 6, 1885
prejudices and fears found an outlet in the expulsion of Eureka’s Chinese population.
Local, statewide, and national anti-Chinese sentiment enhanced scrutiny of a population
located in the middle of Eureka, and the accidental shooting of a white Eurekan
combined to bring about the end of the thriving Chinatown. It would be many years
before Chinese would return to Eureka.
EUREKA'S CHINATOWN
(Approximate locations...)

February 6, 1885

EUREKA CHANNEL
Humboldt Bay

reference prepared by
Andrew Tennyson

Mud Flats

FISHERMEN

HOMES and BUSINESS areas---

COUNCILMAN KIMBALL killed by bullet

Mob formed in minutes to march on Chinese

COUNCILMAN Kendall's residence

The Humboldt Times

To Chinese gardens in Hillsdale area...

Gardens in western part of community---

More gardens in Pines Pasture area...
The expulsion of Eureka’s Chinese population was an extreme example of what was possible when the racism of the majority white population was given a catalyst to act. Fears and prejudices that had been fostered through years of Chinese and white relations and were sanctioned through state and national legislation were enhanced for Eureka’s white community by the physical presence of Chinatown in the heart of Eureka. The violence in Chinatown served to bring these elements together, and accidental victim though he was, councilman Kendall’s death became the deciding factor in the call for action.
Notes


3. Ibid., 32.


9. Loftis, 163.

10. McLeod, 228-229.


13. Loftis, 164.


15. Loftis, 169.


17. Ibid, 162-163.

19. Saxton, 128.


23. Cornford, 301.

24. Heizer and Almquist, 158.


28. Carranco, 27.


32. Carranco, 29.

33. Ibid, 30.


36. Carranco, 30.


38. Carranco, 30.

40. Carranco, 32

41. Monroe, 3-4.

42. Sam Kelsey, Interview by Martha Roscoe, 16 September, 1961, 6.


44. Carranco, 39.

45. Monroe, 4.

46. Carranco, 34.


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Humboldt Times, 3 April 1886, 2.

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Appendices

Map of Eureka’s Chinatown, Prepared by Andrew Genzoli. Humboldt Room Pamphlet Collection, Humboldt State University Library, Arcata, Ca.

Photograph of Eureka’s Chinatown, Photographer Unknown. Humboldt Room Pamphlet Collection, Humboldt State University Library, Arcata, Ca.