

Cathay in Eldorado: the Chinese in California

China Camp

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The Book Club of California

Not all of the Chinese who retreated to California after the 1869 driving of the Last Spike at Promontory, Utah Territory, put an end to their railroad careers became cooks, waiters, shoemakers or cigar rollers in San Francisco. Since their native province of Kwangtung or Canton had hundreds of miles of coastline, many of Charley Crocker's graders and tracklayers were ex-fishermen. It was only natural that some would pick up lines, hooks and nets when they cast down their C.P. R.R. picks, sledges, spikes and tie plates. The Asians found that California waters teemed with salmon, bass and sturgeon, and such shellfish as clams, crabs, abalone and shrimp.

During the 1870's Chinese fishing colonies began to appear from Monterey Bay to Tomales Bay. Two major shrimp fisheries were off Hunter's Point in San Francisco Bay and Point San Pedro on Marin County's San Pablo Bay shoreline. Between tiny Rat Island and McNear's Beach on the north side of Point San Pedro a shallow cove became the site of China Camp, the only surviving Chinese fishing village in California. Its ten to fifteen acres lay about 200-300 yards below the residence of Richard Bullis.

