

The Heritage Society of Pacific Grove NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to Maintaining the Beauty and Individuality of Pacific Grove

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Digging Pacific Grove's Chinese Heritage

by Sally Aberg



The Chinese Fishing Village near Cabrillo Point in the late 1800s (top). And, above, from a similar vantage point, the back of the Monterey Boat Works at right, and the Aquarium in the distance.

Calendar

APRIL

WILDFLOWER SHOW

April 18 – 20

Museum of Natural History
Forest and Central

GOOD OLD DAYS

April 12 – 13

Downtown Pacific Grove

2008 CALIFORNIA PRESERVATION CONFERENCE

"Balance and Complexity: The
Vineyard and Beyond" Napa, CA
Wednesday, April 23 through
Saturday, April 26
Registration: 415-495-0349

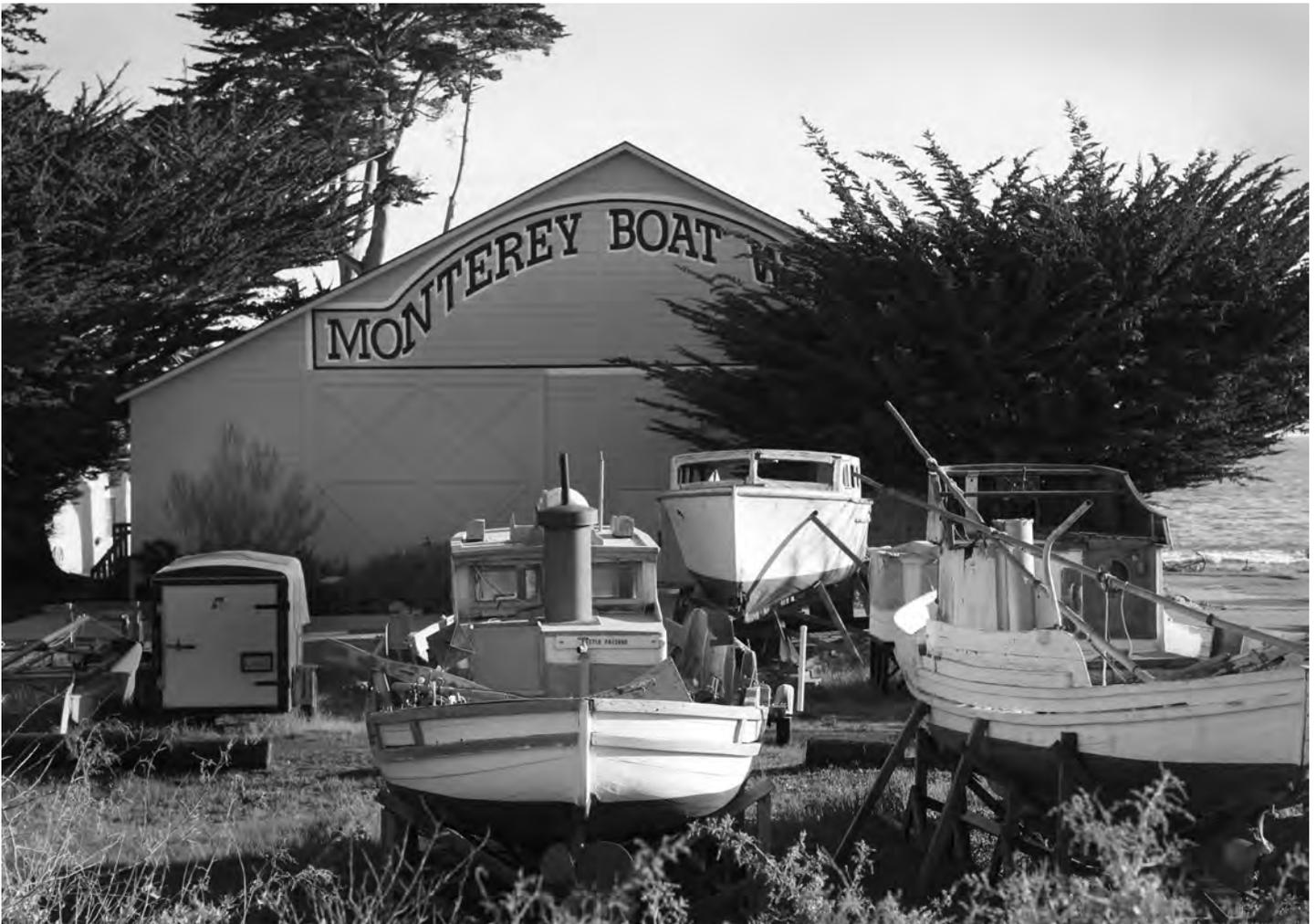
MAY

HERITAGE HOUSE AWARDS

Friday, May 9, 7pm
Museum of Natural History

Early immigrants to the Monterey Peninsula made immense contributions to both this region and our entire state. In an exciting slide lecture to a standing-room-only crowd at the Museum of Natural History on December 15th, Stanford University graduate student Bryn Williams illuminated the role that Chinese immigrants in particular played in local history.

Williams, who is a doctoral candidate in Cultural and Social Anthropology, began his talk by defining archaeology as a window into a bygone era through the study of a people's cultural and material remains.



Monterey Boat Works, as viewed from the Rec Trail along Oceanview Blvd., where the dig took place.

History tells us the big events, he explained, but archaeology reveals the mundane but important realities of everyday life. Combining evidence from oral and written histories with physical artifacts results in much more accurate assumptions about a culture.

For Bryn Williams, the culture under investigation is the Chinese community of Pacific Grove's Pt. Cabrillo, now home to the Hopkins Marine Station but once the site of a thriving Chinese fishing village, one of the largest and most prosperous in the United States. From Pt. Cabrillo, abalone and squid were shipped across the United States and even back to China, making the Monterey Peninsula a major nexus for the Chinese diaspora. In addition

to their international fishing industry, Pacific Grove's Chinese opened shops to sell abalone shells to tourists and had quite a bit of interaction with the early Methodists on retreat as well as year-long residents in town.

This Pacific Grove Chinese community was part of one of the largest population movement events in history. During the 1800s, 100,000 Chinese from every social class followed long-established trade routes around the globe from England to Peru to escape their country's wars, unrest, chaos, disease and poverty. Thousands sought their fortunes in California's Gold Rush as miners and eventually prospectors. Others worked laying track for the railroads or were recruited to labor in agriculture or retail.

Pacific Grove's Chinese village at Pt. Cabrillo was not the first such settlement in the Monterey Bay area. In the early 1850s, a small group of Chinese who had by-passed the gold fields and work on the railroads, preferring to fish for their living, established a village at Pt. Lobos.

Eventually they settled at Pt. Cabrillo, expanding into a stable population of men, women and children—the birthplace to multiple generations of Chinese Americans. Numbering as few as 12 up to 200 at their peak, they were central to a much larger historical process that had an impact on the social, cultural and economic foundation of California.

By 1906, however, anti-Chinese sentiment and racial

discrimination were running high. Many Pagrovians complained of the foul smell of the squid. That same year, a suspicious fire that most believe was deliberately set burned down most of the village. No one died in the blaze, but the community was essentially destroyed and never rebuilt.

Whether arson or accident, some locals felt the Chinese should not be forced to leave. Others who harbored ill will towards the Chinese openly queried why it had taken so long for Pacific Grove to clear them out. A year later the Pacific Improvement Company put up a fence around the area where the village had once stood. A few Chinese holdouts refused to acknowledge the eviction notice by the P.I. Company



Stanford student Claire Menke excavating (top) and screening artifacts at the site of the Chinese Fishing Village.



Bryn Williams, earning his doctorate in Cultural and Social Anthropology at Stanford, led the archeological dig at Hopkins Marine Station in 2007.

until attorneys were hired and the Chinese lost their case. Shortly thereafter Stanford's non-controversial Hopkins Academic Institution took over the Point.

In late 2006, Bryn Williams and his team conducted a surface survey of test pits on Pt. Cabrillo. With the help of historic photographs and the cooperation of PG gophers, which often throw up artifacts smaller than their heads while tunneling, Bryn concluded that the site was indeed significant enough to warrant an archaeological excavation. After ascertaining that when the area was bulldozed decades ago to build the Boatworks, much historical evidence ended

up lost to the sea, so Bryn determined that the area under the Boatworks would prove to be the most promising place to dig.

And dig they did, for five weeks last summer. After representatives from the local Chinese-American community dedicated the research with a small ceremony to acknowledge their ancestors and reflect upon their living legacy, the field study got underway. A fascinating collection of everyday items used by the Chinese fishermen and their families were unearthed. Among the historic artifacts are goods made in China, the United States and England including pottery shards, iron tools, glass, bowls, pots, abalone

shells, Chinese and American coins and medicine bottles from both Western and Eastern healing traditions.

The most productive and highest concentration of finds were discovered underneath the Boatworks building, an area that has been less disturbed over the years. All these artifacts were taken back to the anthropology lab at Stanford to be traced, identified, photographed and analyzed. Williams' research is ongoing and his conclusions, still tentative. Williams hopes his work will ultimately help dispel myths that exist about early Chinese immigrants.

During his talk, Bryn passed around some of the ceramic

objects his team had uncovered in their dig to give audience members the opportunity to hold tangible links to our town's past. As we sat there in the Museum of Natural History handling these objects, he speculated that some residents of our old Chinese village might have visited the Museum themselves, since the history of the Museum and their community intersected in the late 1880s. We also learned that it was the hard labor of Chinese immigrants that created Pacific Grove's 150-acre foot reservoir.

For further information, email Bryn Williams at bryn@stanford.edu.

New Members

Diane Reid
Ruth Hobar
Mahendra & Lanita Lama

REMINDER

Please renew your membership to the Pacific Grove Heritage Society. Keep in touch, support preservation, and make history a priority.

All opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the Board of Directors, but are meant to stimulate interest in and discussion of preservation issues.

California Preservation Conference 2008

by Carolyn Eisen

The 33rd Annual California Preservation Conference is scheduled for Wednesday, April 23, to Saturday, April 26, 2008, and will be held in Napa.

The theme, Balance and Complexity: The Vineyard and Beyond, will encompass over 40 Educational Sessions and Workshops, taught by over 100 expert instructors.

The conference will also feature several exclusive tours and mobile workshops that highlight Napa Valley's agriculture, architecture, and history, including the following.

- A Great Vintage – The Buildings of Hamden McIntyre
- Future Landmarks of the Napa Valley (architecture of modern wineries)
- Preserving the Historic Resorts of the Napa Valley
- Green & Green: Sustainable Agriculture and Architecture
- Napa County Heritage Tourism: Past, Present and Future
- The Donnell Garden
- In the Field with the Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program (Ramos Sherry - House, Krug Winery)
- Vintage Napa: Luther Turton's Legacy

Also, there are the traditional conference special events, which will take place in historic venues including the Napa Valley Opera House, COPIA, The Culinary Institute of America and Beringer Vineyards.

For more information regarding registration, hotels and volunteering, please call (415) 495-0349 or ceisen@californiapreservation.org.

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