

GUIDE TO THE CHINA CAMP STATE PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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Park History

China Camp State Park contains roughly 1,514 acres of natural, cultural, and historical resources. Located in Marin County, the park occupies the southwestern shore of San Pablo Bay and is roughly three miles northeast of the city of San Rafael. It is accessible by car via San Pedro Road.

Prior to European contact, the area containing the present-day park was home to the Coast Miwok for thousands of years. Living in small groups, the tribe hunted deer and small animals and gathered acorns, marsh plants, and shellfish for sustenance. The Miwok also crafted baskets and shaped abalone shells into disk beads used as regional currency. In recent years, 12 village remnants and numerous archaeological artifacts have been found throughout the park. Visitors are asked to respect and help preserve these items.

The English explorer, Sir Francis Drake was the first European to encounter the Coast Miwok in 1579 with the Spanish arriving nearly 200 years later. After the establishment of the San Francisco Mission in 1776 and its sister mission, San Rafael Arcangel, in 1817, the Coast Miwok suffered from disease, overwork, and warfare. The tribe's pre-contact population numbered around 2,000 people; by the turn of the twentieth century, that number had dropped to less than 15.

In 1844, Mexican-California Governor Manuel Micheltoarena granted Irish-immigrant Timothy Murphy 21,679-acre Rancho San Pedro, Santa Margarita y Las Gallinas, which included the present-day park. Murphy died unmarried in 1853 and left the land to his brother Matthew. When Matthew Murphy died one year later, the land was further conveyed to his nephew John Lucas. In 1869, George and John McNear purchased the property containing the present-day park, established quarry operations, and soon began leasing parcels out to cattle-grazers. The portion along San Pablo Bay's southwestern shore was sublet to Chinese shrimp fishermen who established one of the largest and most productive shrimping camps in California (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1. China Camp shrimping village, ca. 1889. Catalog # 090-15836.

By the late 1880s and early 1890s, the Chinese shrimpers in San Pablo and San Francisco bays processed almost three million pounds of shrimp per year, exporting roughly 80 percent of that to China. White fishermen and their elected officials were livid. In addition to the federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Euro Americans in California exerted tremendous anti-Chinese legal pressure at the state level. Pressured by white fishermen who claimed that Chinese bag nets killed the salmon's foraging supply, in 1886 the State Board of Fish Commissioners recommended barring the nets, a motion ultimately passed by the State Legislature in 1910. In 1897, the State Board additionally recommended a closed shrimping season between April and October, the most productive time of year. This recommendation was later enacted in 1912. In 1905, state authorities banned the international exportation of shrimp, a move that severely hampered China Camp's distribution. Although these restrictive measures compelled most Chinese shrimpers to leave, some shrimping businesses like the Quan Brothers stayed.

In the 1890s, Quan Hung Quock, like many Chinese immigrants pressured out of San Francisco, moved to Marin County. He established Yick Yuen Chinese Store in China Camp. Soon after, his two sons Henry and George Quan established the Quan Brothers Shrimping Company. In the 1910s, while netting restrictions reduced the area's Chinese shrimpers, the Quans employed motorized western boats, as well as trawl nets introduced by local fisherman Frank Spenger, in order to stay in business through the 1950s, at which point the shrimping village began to decline in earnest (**Figure 2**). Though pollution stemming from local post-war development has severely retarded San Pablo Bay's shrimp populations, Frank Quan, son of Henry and Grace Quan, lived in his family's wooden shack at China Camp, where he occasionally shrimped, shared local

history with park visitors, and ran the park's concessions stand until he passed away in August 2016 (**Figure 3**).



Figure 2. China Camp shrimping village, ca. 1950. Catalog # 090-15633.



Figure 3. Quan Family, ca. 1944. Catalog # 090-15716.

In 1955, the McNear family sold the area containing the present-day park to Stegge Development Corporation. That company then sold it to Latipac Corporation, which transferred the land to the New York California Industrial Corporation in 1967. Although these companies had set their sights on residential development, concerned citizens in Marin County began to petition to preserve the property. In 1976, the

California State Parks Foundation purchased the bayside land and conveyed it to the State of California, which classified it a state park two years later.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Marin State Parks Association and the Friends of China Camp, preserves and interprets natural, cultural, and historical resources at China Camp State Park (**Figures 4 and 5**). In addition to the restored 39-acre China Camp village, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, the park also includes a lush expanse of coastal marshland, oak woodland, chaparral, and grassland habitats. Recreational activities include kayaking, windsurfing, nature-watching, hiking, horseback riding, biking, camping, and fishing. The park also offers summertime Campfire and Junior Ranger programs as well as the annual Heritage Day celebration of Chinese culture.



Figure 4. Restored China Camp, August 19, 2009. Catalog # 090-P65871.



Figure 5. *Grace Quan*, August 29, 2009. Catalog # 090-P65998.

Scope and Content

The China Camp State Park Photographic Collection spans the years 1888-2009, with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1888-1897, 1910-1993, 2001, and 2009. There is a total of 599 cataloged images including 365 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 104 35mm slides, and 130 born-digital images. Photographs originated from various sources including the Quan family and California State Parks staff.

The collection primarily depicts the historic China Camp shrimping village. Images include: landscape views of the camp with buildings, piers, coastlines, and beaches; Chinese fishing junks, sampans, sail boats, and row boats, both docked and at sea; fish-drying platforms at Point San Pedro and Hunter's Point; Rat Rock Cove, an island in San Pablo Bay; and China Camp's main road, often congested with automobiles.

Also included are numerous historic photographs donated by Frank Quan. Images mainly depict several individual and group portraits of the Quan family, including Grace, Alice, Henry, George, Georgette, Genevieve, Bertha, and Milton Quan as well as Quan Hung Quock, Ye See Quan, and Frank Quan himself. The Frank Quan Collection also contains other historic images including: Quan Hung Quock's Yick Yuen Chinese Store; Frank Quan's restaurant; local fishermen posed with recently caught

sturgeon; and images from the set of *Blood Alley*, the 1955 action-adventure film shot on location at China Camp.

The collection also includes more contemporary documentation of China Camp primarily captured by California State Parks staff in the course of daily park business. These images include: the China Camp shrimping village with buildings both in ruins and later restored; San Pablo Bay with cliffs, piers, boats, and fishermen; picnic areas, campgrounds, hiking and biking trails, and other recreational features; cyclists and kayakers; the China Camp house museum exhibit, including various fishing-related objects, exhibit panels, photographs, maps, banners, and diagrams; aerial views of the park, including tidal mud flats, trees, mountains, piers, beaches, bridges, roads, buildings, and boats; and the reproduced historic Chinese fishing junk, *Grace Quan*, built by San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park volunteers in 2003.

Related Collection

China Camp State Park Collection, California State Parks.

The Chinese in California Virtual Collection, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

Aerial view	Johnny Holmes
Alice Quan	Landscape view
Bay Beach	Main Road
Bertha Quan	Mud flats
Bill Sais	Museum
<i>Blood Alley</i>	Norman B. Scofield
Campground	Pacific Ocean
China Camp	Pier(s)
Chinese Dragon Dance	Point San Bruno
Chinese fishing junk(s)	Point San Pedro
Clam shed	Portrait
Exhibit(s)	Quan Hung Quock
Fish drying	Rat Rock Cove
Fishermen	Sampan junks
Frank Quan	San Francisco Bay
Frank Spenger's Shrimp Camp Wharf	San Pablo Bay
George Quan	San Quentin Point
Georgette Quan	Shrimp boiler
Grace Quan	Shrimp camp
Grandmother Quan	Shrimp nets
Group portrait	Shrimp Village
Henry Quan	Softshell Clam Farm
Hunter's Point	Sturgeon

Weber Point
Winnowing machine
Ye See Quan
Yick Yuen Chinese Store