

GUIDE TO THE WEAVERVILLE JOSS HOUSE STATE HISTORIC PARK
PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

© 2016 California State Parks

Collection processed and cataloged by
California State Parks Photographic Archives interns

Finding Guide written and encoded by
Sam Skow

WEAVERVILLE JOSS HOUSE STATE HISTORIC PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

Park History

Weaverville Joss House State Historic Park contains roughly three acres of historical resources. Located in the census-designated place of Weaverville in Trinity County, the park sits on the west side of Main Street south of Trinity Lake Boulevard and is transected by Sidney Gulch. The park is accessible by car and by foot via Main Street.

Prior to the California Gold Rush, the area encompassing the present-day park served as home to the Wintu tribe for over 4,000 years. Living in camps along the Trinity River, the Wintu people hunted deer, elk, and small game, fished for salmon and steelhead trout, collected seeds, and harvested various indigenous plants. Because of their access to abundant resources, the Wintu were active traders with various native coastal and valley groups. With the outbreak of malaria in the early 1830s, the Wintu tribe lost around 75 percent of its population, and following the discovery of gold in 1848, the tribe further suffered the loss of its traditional lands to the influx of gold seekers from around the world. By 1865, having resisted Euro-American miners and suffered several massacres at their hands, the Wintu were forcibly resettled at Hoopa and the Mendocino Reservation. Today, the Wintu are federally recognized as part of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, and some descendants continue to live in Weaverville.

Although gold mining had occurred in Trinity County as early as 1842, the industry boomed after James Marshall's fateful discovery in Coloma in 1848. By the early 1850s, the town of Weaverville, founded by John Weaver, James How, and Daniel Bennett in the spring of 1850, had established itself as the trading and county administration center in Trinity County (**Figure 1**). Following the rise and fall of the gold-mining industry in California, by the turn of the twentieth century, the population and economy of Weaverville had declined substantially.



Figure 1. Weaverville, California, undated. Catalog # 090-18841.

Along with gold seekers from around the world, Chinese prospectors arrived in California soon after the discovery. Primarily hailing from the Guangdong Province, over 20,000 Chinese immigrated to California, arriving as early as 1851 (**Figure 2**). Staking around 2,500 claims in Trinity County by 1854, they also established numerous businesses in Weaverville. Weaverville's Chinatown boasted groceries, barbershops, doctors' offices, bakeries, restaurants, rooming houses, and a two-story Masonic lodge, in addition to brothels and gambling halls. Because of the 1850 Foreign Miner's Tax, a \$4 per month tax levied at non-white miners, Chinese immigration dropped to 4,470 individuals by 1853. By 1880, less than 2,000 Chinese remained in Trinity County, and by 1931, only 16 still lived in Weaverville.

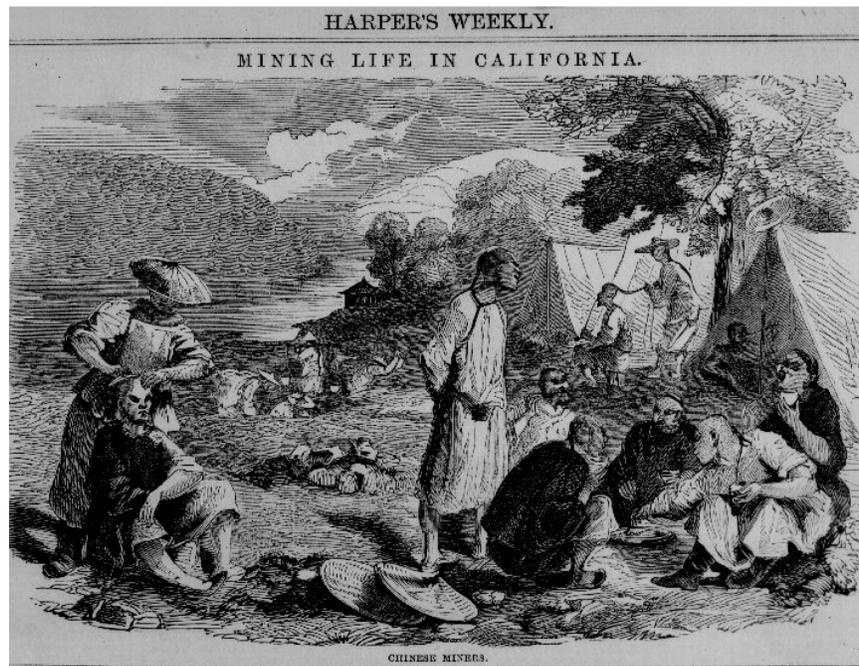


Figure 2. Engraving of Chinese mining camp from *Harper's Weekly*, undated. Catalog # 090-18750.

In addition to establishing various businesses, Weaverville's Chinese population also built a Taoist temple. Referred to as a "Joss House," a corruption of the Portuguese word for god, "*deus*," the Weaverville Joss House was built in 1853, but burned down by 1861. Quickly replaced, the next Joss House burned down in 1873. The third temple, the present-day building, was erected in 1874 (**Figure 3**). Also serving as a social hall, fraternity house, and travelers' hostel, the Weaverville Joss House has ornate wooden detailing, is painted blue to replicate the sky, and possesses two Chow Win Dragon Fish on the temple roof for protection from fire. The interior contains multiple male and female deities, an altar with candles, incense sticks, oracle fortune sticks, wine cups, and pictures, a conference room, living quarters for the temple attendant, and a boarding room with bunk beds for Chinese travelers. Aside from the introduction of protective railings and electricity, the temple has been preserved as it was first constructed in 1874 (**Figures 4 and 5**).



Figure 3. Weaverville Joss House, ca. 1888-1925. Catalog # 090-18521.



Figure 4. Weaverville Joss House, April 18, 2014. Catalog # 090-P83082.



Figure 5. Weaverville Joss House (interior), April 18, 2014. Catalog # 090-P83098.

By the 1930s, the temple had been continuously owned by the Chinese Church Society since its construction. However, following an extensive robbery in 1934, the Weaverville Chamber of Commerce took over administrative duties, appointing Moon Lee, a Chinese resident of Weaverville, as the temple's primary caretaker. Having pursued the building's inclusion in the state park system for decades, Lee ultimately granted the property to California State Parks in 1956. The park was originally classified a state historic monument before it was reclassified a state historic park in 1970. The following year, it was listed as a contributing resource to the Weaverville Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Weaverville Joss House Association, preserves and interprets rare historical resources at Weaverville Joss House State Historic Park. Containing one of the last remaining Gold Rush-era Chinese Taoist temples, the park also includes an interpretive museum that tells the story of the Chinese in California and displays handmade weapons and equipment. The park is open Thursday through Sunday and is day use only.

Scope and Content

The Weaverville Joss House State Historic Park Photographic Collection spans the years circa 1854 through 2014. While roughly 10 percent of the images are undated, the bulk of the collection covers the years 1956-1960 and 2012-2014. There is a total of 457 cataloged images, including 201 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 46 35mm slides, and 210 born-digital images. Photographs originated primarily from California State Parks staff.

The collection mainly depicts the Taoist temple and includes historic and contemporary interior and exterior views of the property. Exterior views feature the building's ornate detailing, the temple entrance, and the nearby footbridge. Interior views document the temple, including depictions of the altar, alcove, figurines, tapestry, incense, lanterns, and candles. Interior views also depict the priests' quarters with all attendant period furnishings, as well as images featuring former caretaker Moon Lee.

The collection also features historic and contemporary views of other built features of the park and surrounding area. Park images include the visitor center, interpretive panels, park signage, picnic areas, and the commemorative rock monument. Views of the surrounding area include Main Street, the McClintock Property, and other buildings in Weaverville.

Also included in the collection are depictions of various events at the park. Events include Bomb Day celebrations held in 1905 and 1974, temple restoration efforts in the 1950s, the park's dedication ceremony held circa 1957, the construction of the visitor's center in the 1950s, the 1961 dedication of the arched footbridge, and the Weaverville Joss House centennial celebration in 1974.

The collection also includes various historic images documenting Chinese immigration history in California. Images includes numerous illustrations, drawings, and engravings of Chinese immigrants and daily life in various Chinatowns from *Harper's Weekly*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, *Vanity Fair*, and other publications. Other historic images include solo and group portraits of Chinese miners and families, and views of San Francisco's Chinatown.

Related Collections

Certificates of Nativity and Identity, Weaverville, Trinity County, California, UC Berkeley: Ethnic Studies Library.

Chinese in California, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Foreign Miners Tax Documents, California State Library: California History Room.

Trinity County Records, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Weaverville Joss House State Historic Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Weekly Trinity Journal Accounts, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

Altar	Footbridge
Bomb Day	<i>Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper</i>
Chinatown	<i>Harper's Weekly</i>
Chinese	Illustration
Construction	Interior
Dedication ceremony	Interpretive panel
Drawing	Miner(s)
Engraving	Moon Lee
Entrance	Portrait
Exterior	Priests' quarters

Restoration
Tapestry
Temple
Visitor Center