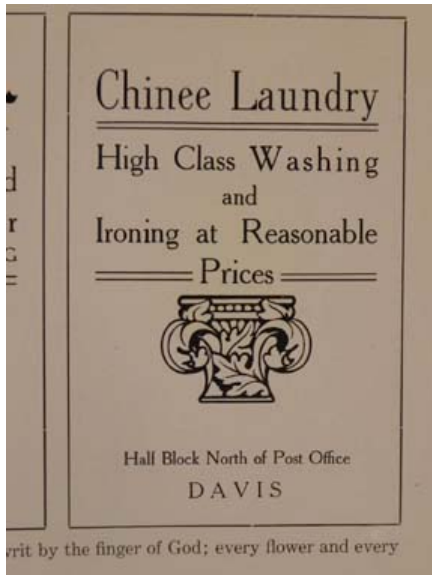


Accompanied *Gibson House* exhibit (2012) about early Chinese in various Yolo County communities

Some Historical Records of Chinese in Davis before 1900

By Dennis Dingemans, for Kathy Harryman

From the 1914 Yearbook of the University Farm -- an advertisement for the Chinese Laundry in the 300 block of today's G Street



Because there are few newspaper records for Davis until the *Enterprise* started publishing reliably in 1898, we have only sketchy details of what seems to have been a typical experience for Chinese living and working in and near Davis. Gardener, cook, restaurateur, construction worker, and laundry proprietor are occupations reported by the Davis Chinese and these are common for rural and small town Chinese in the Nineteenth Century.

We know Chinese were active in building the California Pacific Rail Road when the line from Vallejo through Davis was built between 1867 and 1869. The Solano County Historical Society is the source for the information that Chinese were particularly associated with the digging of a substantial tunnel for the line where it went through rather than around a ridge of hills west of Fairfield at today's Cordelia.

The Sanborn Insurance Maps for Davis/Davisville for 1888 and 1891 show and label as "Chinese Dwellings" a pair of small 20x20 square foot houses located adjacent to the railroad tracks in Downtown Davis. They were located east of the tracks about 50 feet north of 4th Street--in what would justly be described as an isolated, "wrong side of the tracks" location.

The map for 1907 shows similar structures surviving but they are now labeled "Ice" and "Coal" as if the dwellings had been converted to non-residential uses. Nearby, in 1888 and 1891 maps, are two "Chinese Laundry" establishments on either side of the 300 block of today's G Street. The one on the east side gets replaced after 1900 by a blacksmith shop. The laundry on the west side gets replaced by today's Davis *Enterprise* building some time after 1911. In 1900 there is a Chinese dwelling unit located just north of the G Street laundry -- suggesting that perhaps the more successful of the two laundries enabled their proprietors to move in to a dwelling adjacent to their work. For a while after 1900 a "Chinese Saloon" also is located near the laundry.

The 1899 Davisville *Enterprise* reports on the employment of two Chinese residents. Louie Chee Fook is described as being buried in the Davis Cemetery since he died in a hunting accident in 1888 near his rural garden plot in South Davis. Fook was said to have grown and marketed vegetables from his land that he rented from the Montgomery family. Fook's friend, Charles/Charlie Quay, is described as a cook for Hunt's Hotel on the 200 block of what is today G Street.

Later on, it might be noted, G Street's Sacramento Cafe was long operated by members of the Young family, with the elder Young couple being immigrants from China. Marie Young, daughter who grew up working in the cafe, still resides in Davis and is happy to talk about her family's past.

#

<http://ychs.org/publications/chinese.html>