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Our Diversity: Tales from Stockton's Chinatown sought

Article provided for reprint

By Almendra Carpizo
A Stockton Record Staff Writer
Posted Aug. 20, 2016 at 3:30 PM

STOCKTON — A young Janwyn Funamura didn't have much interest in her roots growing up, but now as an adult she's helping dig up information about her family and that of others to preserve the history of the Chinese community in Stockton.

The Chinese Benevolent Association and the San Joaquin County Historical Museum are collaborating to collect first and secondhand stories of residents who lived in Stockton's once-vibrant Chinatown, which was decimated by construction of the Crosstown Freeway. The plan is to amass stories and objects to create the exhibit "Tales

of Stockton Chinatown" which is scheduled to open on or about Jan. 28, at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum in Lodi. Once the exhibit ends, the panels will be given to the Chinese Benevolent Association to start a museum. Julie Blood, the museum's collections and exhibits manager, said the two organizations have been talking about creating an exhibition for about a year and have since been researching the influence and roots of the Chinese community.

A lot of history has been collected, especially from author Sylvia Sun Munnick who has written books about Chinese communities in Stockton, Blood and Funamura said. However, the museum and association want firsthand information from families, especially those who opened businesses, to



Janwyn Funamura's father, Stanley Hing Loy, at left, and his older brother, Francis Bing Loy, are shown in this photo taken in 1925 in their father's store. Chew Ying Chong's Meat Market and Grocery Store stood at 116 East Washington St., Stockton. COURTESY

have a full picture. The exhibit will also focus on where the Chinese came from and family associations in Stockton, Blood said. The Chinese Benevolent Association

and the San Joaquin County Historical Museum hope people who grew up during the early 1900s will attend a sort of "show and tell"

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Our Diversity: Tales from Stockton's Chinatown sought

on Monday at the museum at 11793 North Mickle Grove Road to share anecdotes, photos or objects to be recorded and preserved for years to come.

The generation that was raised during those times is in their 90s and people are passing away without sharing their stories, Funamura said.

"We know there's a lot (of material) in homes," she said.

Funamura, a trustee and board

member of the museum and Chinese Benevolent Association, respectively, has learned a lot about her family's history through the research process, including finding out her aunt, Erma Lee, was the first female poultry inspector in the state.

"Those are the kind of things that have been dug up," she said.

Because the parents of Funamura have both died — her father in 1973 and her mother in 1992 — she can no

longer ask them questions.

"This is the way I get to know my parents better," she said.

On Monday, people who wish to contribute will sit down with a videographer to share their experiences about life in Stockton during their early years, and several stations will also be set up so photographs can be scanned and items collected. Blood said the last exhibition about the Chinese community was on display in 1981 and focused on the Gold Rush era.

This effort is also the first phase at getting more ethnic groups involved and connected with the museum, she

said.

It's important for people to come share on Monday, Funamura said. Or like the dilapidated dragon mosaics planted in the pedestrian mall in downtown Stockton, Chinatown will be forgotten.

Said Blood: "Without people showing up, we don't have a story to tell."

To RSVP for Monday's event, call Janwyn Funamura at (209) 931-6121 or email janwyn.funamura@gmail.com. Walk-ins are also welcome.

— Contact reporter Almendra Carpizo at (209) 546-8264 or acarpizo@recordnet.com. Follow her on Twitter @AlmendraCarpizo.

Stockton's Chinatown remembered, revered: Generations come together to preserve stories

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 By Almendra Carpizo
 Stockton Record Staff Writer
 Posted Aug. 22, 2016 at 6:29 PM
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LODI — Susan Lee can still remember the “earthy” smells that permeated the air around Chinatown.

The Chinese stores were always dark, she recalled. And there would be woven baskets full of ingredients — snails, water chestnuts and vegetables.

On Monday, the 67-year-old Manteca resident was among about two dozen people who gathered at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum to share their memories of living in what was once Stockton's Chinatown, a vibrant community decimated by redevelopment.

The Chinese Benevolent Association and the San Joaquin County Historical Museum organized Monday's event as a collaborative attempt to gather stories and objects for the exhibit “Tales of Stockton Chinatown,” which is scheduled to open on or about Jan. 28, at the museum in Lodi.

Howard Fong, 88, of Sacramento attended Monday's event to share the story about his father, Fong King Won, a revered man with a charming personality and the owner of the city's first poultry shop.

Sung Sung Market, which opened in 1940, got its name because there was no refrigeration in those days, Fong explained. In Chinese, “sung sung means fresh fresh.” As a youngster, Fong worked alongside his father going out in the mornings to the farm to catch chickens that would later be sold in the market. Chinatown was once a thriving business community and a place where people could get together, Fong said. People especially enjoyed going to Fook Chong, a soda fountain where customers could play card games.



Blanche Chin Ah Tye, 97, smiles as her daughters, Doreen Ah Tye, right, and Lani Ah Tye Farkas, center, show the wedding dress Blanche wore when she married into Stockton's Ah Tye family in 1940. They were among nearly two dozen people who gathered Monday at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum to share their memories for the exhibit “Tales of Stockton Chinatown.”

CALIXTRO ROMIAS/THE RECORD

Fook Chong, which was on the south side of Washington Street, was a favorite among many in the Chinese community and remained in operation until construction of the Crosstown Freeway. Chinatown, which included Washington Street between Hunter and El Dorado streets, was once lined with Chinese businesses, associations, gambling halls and restaurants, which many in attendance on Monday said provided delicious foods that are scarce in Stockton.

Washington Street was home to On Lock Sam, Canton Low, Marty's Shoes and Foo Lung, which were all owned and operated by members of the Chinese community.

When Frank Kim moved to Stockton in 1959, “Chinatown was in its glory,” he said. “Washington was where it was.” Blanche Chin Ah Tye, who was born in Salinas and authored the book “Full of Gold,” said she moved to Stockton when she married into the Ah Tye family in 1940. The Ah Tyes were a family with 15 children who opened a service station and garage in the 1930s.

“I think the Ah Tyes were one of the best

customers in Chinatown,” she quipped. In those days, Ah Tye said Chinatown was quaint and different from typical American stores. One man opened a store and sold live snails that he would catch in the channel. They were a popular ingredient and sold for 15 cents a pound, she added.

As attendees swapped stories, many lamented how businesses and homes were razed to make way for the Crosstown Freeway. Japantown and Little Manila, which were also in the heart of downtown, were

also displaced to make way for urban redevelopment.

If it wasn't for redevelopment, Stockton would have an old town similar to Sacramento, Kim said.

Acknowledging the site's history is important, not just for the sake of documentation, but for people who, like Lee, are “looking for roots.”

For two years, Lee has gathered photographs and objects that can give her a glimpse into her family's life growing up in Chinatown since her own time living there was brief. She said she attended Monday's event because she wanted to share what she's discovered and learn more about the community. Fong said his children and grandchildren don't know anything about the city's Chinatown, but capturing the stories shared Monday will be good for future generations.

If not, Kim said to the group: “In a few years, a student from (University of the Pacific) going down to Chinatown won't know it's Chinatown.”

For more information on the “Tales of Stockton Chinatown” exhibition, email

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San Joaquin County Historical Museum Heart and Soul of Stockton Chinatown

“We asked people for a penny. When we had scraped together 10 cents, one of us would pay to get into the movies. Once inside, that kid would open the exit door of the theater for the rest of us to sneak in. I would find a couple and sit next to them, pretending to be their child. Sometimes we got caught; other times we didn’t.” Qloun Cho Low-Poon, 88, and her little brother “Chungie” Chung Cho Gong, 87, recounted tales like this one to illustrate how they grew up as the youngest of nine children in a poor family in South Stockton during the 1930s and ‘40s. “Poor, but happy,” they said. Through tenacity and drive, they both ultimately graduated from UC Berkeley.

Beginning on Sunday, January 29, 2017, from 12-4 pm, the public will have the opportunity to go back in time and relive Stockton Chinatown when it was a colorful, bustling business district in the area now traversed by the Crosstown Freeway that links Highway 99 and Interstate 5. Washington Street: Heart and Soul of Stockton Chinatown is an exhibit at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum in Micke Grove Park, Lodi, that is a collaborative effort between the museum and the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA) of Stockton. Research has involved holding a series of four “Show ‘n’ Tell” sessions with members of the Greatest Generation, and their descendants; they delved into their memories and dusted off storage boxes, painting a remarkable picture of a time and a culture in Stockton that is in danger of being forgotten. As well, home visits and a trip to a still-existing businesses were made to gather material.

These memories and artifacts from a bygone era will be preserved

and shared, thanks to the efforts of Julie Blood, Collections and Exhibit Manager, with the aid of museum docents (volunteer educators). Washington Street: The Heart and Soul of Stockton Chinatown will chronicle Sam Fow (Cantonese for “third city”) from the early 1900s through redevelopment in the 1970s.

The exhibit’s Opening Day will utilize the spacious buildings and grounds of the 17-acre museum. Beginning at 12 noon, the museum will come alive with Chinese cultural activity stations, including a costume photo booth for cell phone pictures; children’s activities with paper crafts and Chinese yo-yo; a market display of Chinese cooking ingredients; local Chinese authors ready to answer your questions and sign their books; introduction to the popular mah jongg tile game; discovering your Chinese zodiac sign; and learning about Tai Chi exercise. Arrive early, between 12:00 – 1:30 pm and be one of the first 200 guests given the opportunity to purchase a \$5 Chinese plate luncheon. At 2:00 pm, the thunderous beat of the lion dance drums will beckon all visitors to the Erickson Building for the exhibit ribbon-cutting ceremony. After the opening ceremony, until museum closing at 4:00 pm, you may view the exhibit and enjoy tea and home-baked cookies in the Tea Room.

The museum is located within Micke Grove Park at 11793 N. Micke Grove Road, Lodi CA 95240. The entrance is at the corner of Armstrong and Micke Grove Roads. The parking fee of \$6 per vehicle is charged at the entry station. The museum admission fee is waived for this event. Museum membership is welcome. A one-year membership includes a full year of the parking fee and museum admission, as well as visits to the popular Critter

Corral petting zoo during the summer.

Don’t miss the opening of the museum exhibit on January 29, 2017, 12-4 pm, or visit before the exhibit closes in May 2017. The exhibit is auspicious for three reasons: (1) Chinese New Year (Year of the Rooster) begins the day prior to Opening Day; (2) The last Chinese exhibit at the museum, Golden Mountain, took place in 1981, also the Year of the Rooster; (3) The exhibit coincides with the conclusion of the museum’s 50th anniversary year and the beginning of the Chinese Benevolent Association’s Centennial Celebration.

Janwyn Loy Funamura, museum trustee and docent, as well as immediate past president of Stockton CBA, has learned a thing or two working on this project. She found out from the family of Hong Gong, aka “John Kee”, that, using pounds of bean sprouts delivered as a measuring stick, her father was an extremely successful businessman as co-owner of The Chopstick, Stockton’s first Chinese food take-out restaurant. Visit Washington Street: Heart and Soul of Stockton Chinatown, and take a step back in time!

**Captions;
Pictures (continued top page 11)**

- Gail: Telling the story of Quong Wah Yuen Chinese Delicatessen and Market: Gail Chin Gulick-Tucker, representing the nine children of Bill Chin and Lily Saichun Wong Chin
- Shelton: Reminiscing about childhood experiences on Washington Street: Shelton Yip, son of Marty and Rosie Yip, owners of Marty’s Shoe Store; Shelton was accompanied by his sister Sandra Yip Shibata.
- PatBook: Showing her Uncle George Fong’s book of memoirs: Patricia Chan Hing, one of five daughters of Charlie and Sadie Chan
- Still: Speculating on the use of a still found in her great-aunt’s closet: Janwyn Funamura, cousin to the discoverer, Susan Lee
- Cheryl: Creating Chinese delicacies from the unwritten recipes of her grandmother: Cheryl Lee, granddaughter of Sadie Lee who was the owner of Yet Bun Heong Bakery, working these days at the bakery’s third location in the Filipino Plaza in downtown Stockton
- Virginia: Virginia Lee, 88, daughter of Yet Bun Heong’s original owners brought a colorized family photo to Yet Bun Heong Bakery. The photo depicts Virginia with her older sister Rose, brother King, and parents.
- Mae: Home visit yields first-hand stories, few pictures - left to right, Mae Lee, 93, daughter of Lee Yuen, prominent Stockton Chinatown businessman, pictured on wall; and Julie Blood, San Joaquin County Historical Museum Collections/Exhibits Manager
- What’s inside: Visit the San Joaquin County’s upcoming exhibit, Washington Street: Heart and Soul of Stockton’s Chinatown, to discover what unique artifact was carefully wrapped in this package. Left to right, Janwyn Funamura from the Chinese Benevolent Association and Violet Toy Yip whose father, Frank Bing Toy, owned Pacific Hardware at 119 E. Market Street
- Cataloguing artifacts: Busy «Show «n» Tell» session at the museum: Left to right - Mrs. Tong Gong Lee, whose husband owned Minnie Gong Lee Restaurant, and her daughter Katherine Gong Meissner; museum volunteers - photographer Harley Becker and docents Patti Williams and Connie Rice





Janwyn Loy Funamura adjusts an article of Chinese clothing from the Ah Tye family for the landmark exhibit "Washington Street: The Heart and Soul of Stockton Chinatown," which opens Sunday at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum. "We want them to remember. It's the idea of, like, walking down memory lane. Younger people have to think about how to contribute to chronicling all this gathering." CALIXTRO ROMIAS PHOTOS/THE RECORD

Chronicling Chinatown's heart and soul

Landmark exhibit tells rich story of Stockton's Chinese-American experience

By **Tony Sauro**
Record Staff Writer

An old wooden chest revealed the ideal artifact: A queue.

Braided hair — similar to a ponytail — that had been meticulously tied up with red string and preserved in a small package for 75 years.

"My dad kept everything," said Violet Toy Yip, who's contributed her father's hair to history. "He kept records of everything. Lots of it's in Chinese, of course, so I really didn't understand it. "When I discovered it,

I knew he was interested in artifacts. I thought it was unique and might be interesting."

So did Julie Blood. Now, the queue — with the tales it tells and conversations it'll prompt — is part of "Washington Street: the Heart and Soul of Stockton Chinatown," an exhibit that opens Sunday at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum in Lodi's Micke Grove Regional Park.

"That one's really neat," said Blood, the museum's manager of collections and exhibits who assembled the display that runs through May 28.

It weaves together four historical strands:

It's the museum's first exhibition centered on Chinese culture since



A queue on display at the exhibit tells a poignant story of the Chinese-American experience in Stockton, when a young Frank Toy cut it off in humiliation after bullies tied it to a seat when he fell asleep. It's been carefully preserved for 75 years.

SEE CHINATOWN, B2

CHINATOWN

From Page B1

“Gold Mountain,” a 1981 examination of immigrants from China who took part in California’s 19th-century Gold Rush; the Chinese Year of the Rooster begins today; 2017 is the museum’s 50th year; and it’s the centennial of Stockton’s Chinese Benevolent Society.

When construction began in 1969 on Stockton’s Crosstown Freeway, it was routed through the center of Chinatown — Washington Street — paving over part of Stockton’s multicultural legacy. Immigrants from the Philippines and Japan also were displaced.

“I still feel very badly about that ‘redevelopment,’” said Toy Yip, 85, who was a San Joaquin County court recorder for 30 years. “I believed they did it purposely, for the reason of eliminating ‘skid row’ and Chinatown.”

The queue, once mandatory for young men in China, tells a poignant story that’s emblematic of the immigrant experience in mid-20th-century Stockton.

When he was 13, Frank Toy (1883-1981) — Violet’s father, who owned Pacific Hardware Store — fell asleep in a movie theater. A group of Italian kids tied his braid to the seat. Humiliated, Toy cut the “trademark” off, wrapped it in paper and string and preserved its memory.

He often had rolled his queue up and “stuffed” it under a cap to avoid being bullied.

When Violet’s brother, orthodontist Edward Toy, died last year at 85, she inherited the box, braid and other mementos that are part of the exhibit.

It spans Chinatown’s history from 1910 to 1970 and “how the Crosstown Freeway killed (it),” said Blood, a Vallejo native who lives in Sacramento. “The main thing to take away is the strength of the human character. How many hardships they under went to get to America ... and all the discriminatory practices they faced here.

“It was their perseverance. They really wanted to succeed. They wanted to see their children succeed and become doctors, lawyers and professionals.”

The Chinatown odyssey mostly involved mom-and-pop businesses (restaurants, hardware stores, laundries, gas stations) that are familiar aspects of Stockton’s Chinese diaspora.

Mostly linked to southern China’s Guangdong province (“or however they spell it now,” Toy Yip said), a sense of communal unity was preserved by Chinatown.

The exhibit includes a “giant lion head,” from the Chinese Benevolent Society, Blood said. A 60-foot-high Tiki wood carving: “Everybody tells me it represents a fertility goddess,” Blood said. “That’s okay. It means

this’ll be a very fruitful exhibit.”

Artifacts “on loan” from Sonoma State University’s Archaeology Center as well as items found during “excavations of the original Chinatown center.”

Preparatory community show-and-tells were held in September, October and December. “Any stories of Stockton’s Chinatown,” said Blood, a Sacramento and California State University, Stanislaus graduate who switched her aspirations from a teaching career to museum work. “It was very successful.”

Janwyn Loy Funamura, a Stockton pediatrician, hopes to assemble a book’s worth of such memories and emotions.

She’s never forgotten her educational Chinatown days. She was 5 when her family moved to the Country Club district.

She attended public school (Daniel Webster Junior High, Madison Elementary, Stagg High). For seven years, though, she spent two hours weekdays and Saturday to learn basic subjects in Chinese at the now 93-year-old Confucius Church on East Lafayette Street. The Chinese language still is taught there, where she is an active advocate.

“I became kind of a commuter,” said Loy Funamura, 67, a Stanford University and University of California, Davis graduate and Stockton pediatrician. “All of us, after we went to college, asked,

If you go

Where: San Joaquin County Historical Museum, 11793 N. Micke Grove Road, Lodi
When: Noon-4 p.m. Sunday (first 200 guests receive Chinese plate lunch)
Admission: \$5
Information: (209) 953-3460

“Why didn’t I listen?”

“One of the things that actually stuck with me was calligraphy. I can copy (the written language’s) lettering. It was drilled into us.”

She said “Washington Street” (an east-west artery paralleling the north side of the Crosstown Freeway) is designed for two “audiences”: post-World War II baby-boomers who lived through the experience, and generations that didn’t.

“They’ll take home different messages,” said Loy Funamura, who helped develop the museum’s concept as a docent and board member. “The ‘boomers’ are the ones we rely on to get the stories. We need to capture and record those stories now.

“We want them to remember. It’s the idea of, like, walking down memory lane. Younger people have to think about how to contribute to chronicling all this gathering.”

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LODI LIVING

S.J. County Historical Museum celebrates Stockton's Chinese history

'Washington Street' is a window into Stockton's vibrant past as 'third city'

By Kyla Cathey
LODI LIVING EDITOR

At noon on Sunday, visitors to the San Joaquin County Historical Museum will be in for a treat.

The museum will open a window into the history of Stockton's Chinatown, the vibrant business district that once stood along Washington Street.

Museum guests will be able to watch a lion dance, meet local Chinese-American authors and cooks, learn to use chopsticks, snap selfies in a costume photo booth, learn about mah jong, tai chi and the Chinese zodiac, and visit the new exhibit inside the museum.

"We will have menus from some of the businesses, we have a sign on loan to us from the Haggin Museum from the Bow On society, we have some Gold Rush-era objects to introduce how the Chinese came to Stockton," Collections and Exhibits Manager Julie Blood said.

The exhibit is a tribute to Stockton's Chinese-American settlers and modern residents. Chinese immigrants began settling in California in the mid-1800s, drawn by the Gold Rush.

Stockton soon held the third largest Chinese-American population in the U.S., and became known as "Sam Fow," or "third city," in Cantonese. (San Francisco and Sacramento were Dai Fow and Yee Fow, first and second city, respectively.)

"The heart of Stockton's Chinatown was Washington Street," Blood said. "It was essentially the main business street of Chinatown."

The San Joaquin County museum has worked with the Chinese Benevolent Association of Stockton to create the Washington Street exhibit.

They held show-and-tell meetings with members of the Chinese-American community who remembered Washington Street in its heyday as well as the Chinese residential neighborhoods on Channel



Julie Blood, collections and exhibits manager at the museum, left, shares a laugh with Susan Lee of Manteca, center, and Yuki Yamashita in the tearoom as they prepare for the new exhibit "Washington Street" at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum at Micke Grove Park in Lodi Thursday afternoon. The exhibit shares the history of Stockton's Chinatown.



A lion dance head is exhibited ahead of the opening for "Washington Street."



Matt Peterfreund hangs a lantern in the tearoom.

Street.

Gong Lee, who owned Gong's Restaurant, contributed some of the items. So did the daughter of Tommy Lee, who owned the Islander restaurant and nightclub.

There will be a traditional Chinese worker's hat and jacket, family heirlooms, lots of photos and other items loaned by area residents and the Chinese Benevolent Society.

While there was a large Chinese-American neighborhood on Channel Street, the focus will be the shops and businesses that once lined Washington Street.

The exhibit is centered on 1915 to 1970.

That's when the Washington Street Chinatown — along with Little Manila and Japantown in downtown Stockton — were evicted to build the Crosstown Freeway.

"What essentially caused the death of Chinatown was the Crosstown Freeway," Blood said.

IF YOU GO

When: The exhibit opening will be from noon to 4 p.m. Jan. 29. The exhibit will run until May 28.

Where: San Joaquin County Historical Museum, 11793 N. Micke Grove Road, Lodi.

Highlights: At the exhibit opening on Sunday, the first 200 visitors can spend \$5 to enjoy a Chinese plate luncheon. A lion dance will be performed at 2 p.m. from the Ledbetter Barn to the Erickson Building. A tea room in the exhibit will have tea and home-baked cookies.

More information: 209-331-2055, www.sanjoaquinhistory.org

Many of the Chinese businesses that remained open moved to Harding Way, but the neighborhood was gone.

The exhibit was the brainchild of Blood and Dr. Janwyn Funamora, who serves on the county museum's board. They wanted to help the Chinese Benevolent Association get its own museum off the ground. When

the exhibit at the county museum closes in May, many of the artifacts will be transferred to the CBA museum.

The exhibit was timed to open at the beginning of the Lunar New Year, a major holiday in Chinese and many other Asian cultures.

The last exhibit focusing on Chinese-American history at the muse-

um was in 1981, and shared the role of Chinese immigrants in the California Gold Rush.

Blood hopes the new exhibit will shine a light on an often-forgotten group of Stockton's early settlers, and create more dialogue among the county's residents.

"What I'm most excited about is seeing the reaction from the community, because they've all worked so hard in helping me to tell this story," she said.

NEWS-SENTINEL PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEA AHBECK

Stockton's Chinatown exhibit stirs memories



The Chan Brothers Lion Dance Troupe perform during the special exhibition called "Washington Street; The Heart and Soul of Stockton Chinatown," that opened Sunday at San Joaquin County Historical Museum. PHOTOS BY CALIXTRO ROMIAS/THE RECORD

By Joe Goldeen
Record Staff Writer

Bustling Washington Street, before construction of the elevated Cross-town Freeway began in the late '60s, was the cultural and commercial hub of Chinese-American life in Stockton. Sunday, it was recalled fondly by hundreds of visitors to the San Joaquin County Historical Museum in Micke Grove Regional Park during opening day of a new exhibit - "Washington Street: The Heart and Soul of Stockton Chinatown."

Mee Yoke Hong, born Mee Yoke Wong 84 years ago at 125 E. Washington St., remembered downtown Stockton's Chinatown as a wonderful place to grow up.

"My father was a cook in a restaurant there. It was a nice neighborhood. I have many friends on Washington Street who grew up there too," said Hong, the mother of three and grandmother to five.

Hong was so pleased the exhibit focused on the street where she was born, she brought her birth certificate along to show people. In 1932, her birth



Stockton resident Mee Yoke Hong, 84, near the photo, top center, where she lived on Washington Street in Chinatown.

cost her parents \$50, according to a notation on the original document.

Dr. Janwyn Loy Funamura, a Stockton pediatrician who along with museum staffer Julie Blood helped organize the exhibit six months in the making, said it captures the life of the era through photos, artifacts

and stories. While many of the items on display came from the collections of the Bank of Stockton, the Haggin Museum and University of the Pacific, many more of the items have never been seen by the public until now.

SEE EXHIBIT, A8

EXHIBIT

From Page A1

"The most unique resources came out of people's basements, attics and shoe boxes," Loy Funamura said.

One historic photo shows members of the Chinese Girls Drum Corps as they prepared to participate in Stockton's 1951 Fourth of July Parade. What's important to remember is that housing discrimination against all Asian people was quite prevalent in Stockton at that time, keeping those of Chinese, Filipino and Japanese descent primarily south of downtown.

93-year-old downtown Stockton booster Mel Corren grew up near the old Chinatown and still maintains friendships with many residents he grew up with, including Bob Hong, Mee Yoke's husband.

"It used to be one of the best attractions for Stockton. People came from far and near to eat at the (Chinese) restaurants. It had culture like we don't have any more, but we're doing something about it," said Corren, active with the Save Downtown Stockton Foundation.

"Get the word out that downtown Stockton lives again," he said, believing that the Chinatown exhibit will help spark renewed interest in the city's historic core.

"It's so special," Corren said.

Blood, who coordinates the historical museum's exhibits, said one important aspect of the project that the public should grasp is "how the death and demise of Stockton's Chinatown affected life in Stockton."

Retired Superior Court Judge Frank Kim noted that the early



Nadiine Chan Carter, left, Custis Chan, and Rachel Chan, in Chinese clothing in Costume Corner booth, during special exhibition called "Washington Street; The Heart and Soul of Stockton Chinatown," that opened Sunday at San Joaquin County Historical Museum. CALIXTRO ROMIAS/THE RECORD

Chinese in Stockton could not travel north of Main Street, "but we had our own Main Street, and that was Washington Street, the heart and soul of the old Chinatown. That was our Main Street."

Kim referred to the county's long history of diversity, with immigrants arriving from throughout the world.

"As we look to the future, we should never forget the past. The old Chinatown is where the early immigrants came — you hear their tales and you see the artifacts, how they endured and how they persevered so that their descendants today will live the good life due to the hard work of those in the past," Kim said.

Jeff Lee, 45, brought his son to the exhibit Sunday. For Lee, a third-generation Stocktonian, the event was like old-home week as he ran into several people who were customers of the Stockton Poultry shop on South San Joaquin Street where he worked as a child and teenager. Today, he

works for Chicago Title Co.

"I remember all the Chinese delis on San Joaquin Street that used to be on Washington Street (before the freeway). Today is important because I don't want it to be forgotten. That's why I brought my son," Lee said.

Lion dancer Jason Chan — one of the five Chan brothers who formed a well-known lion dance troupe decades ago — came from his home in Mountain View to join two of his brothers, Brian and Dennis, in a traditional performance for the crowd attending the exhibit's grand opening.

"I wouldn't miss it. Our parents had a grocery store called Cosmos in Chinatown. It had a deli, fresh produce, fresh live fish, and delivery. You don't see that anymore," Chan recalled. "Good memories."

—Contact reporter Joe Goldeen at (209) 546-8278 or jgoldeen@recordnet.com. Follow him at recordnet.com/goldeenblog and on Twitter @JoeGoldeen.