

Locke Foundation Newsletter 樂居鎮基金會

Preserving Locke's history and legacy

lockefoundation@frontiernet.net Winter 2022 www.locke-foundation.org

Locke's Opera House: Star Theater A Primer on Cantonese Opera

By Stuart Walthall

You can't miss it— the strangely curious structure standing in the middle of a singularly curious thoroughfare, Main Street, Locke. Its desiccated husk, leaning and looming over the nervous souls who walk past its ancient carcass - long devoid of life, yet still breathing with mystery.

Because its scalloped arch-top entrance faces Highway 160, the Star Theater is technically located up on River Road (13939 River Road, Walnut Grove, CA 95690). However, to the many visitors who stroll (or stumble) down Locke's fractured sidewalks, the visual impact of the Star Theater is felt most emphatically on Main Street. "Is this thing gonna fall over?!"



Star Theater facing Main Street. Photo courtesy of Mitch Lorens, freelance photographer, West Sacramento, CA.

Built shortly after Locke's founding in 1915, (previously known as "Lockeport" from 1911 to 1915 when the "town" consisted of only 4 buildings constructed primarily to service the workers of the adjacent Southern Pacific Packing Shed), the Star Theater (aka The Opera House) was the signature artistic focal point of the town.

The building is a rare three-story wooden structure which offered a variety of services simultaneously. According to the National Registry of Historic Places, the Star Theater served as a movie theater, rooming house, gambling hall and a brothel. But let's focus on the original function of the Star Theater: theatrical entertainment.



Front façade of Star Theater on River Road. Library of Congress Survey HABS CA-2071-D

The theater was located up on the River Road - the second floor. (First floor entrance was located below on Main Street). The specialty on the theater's bill of fare was Opera. Specifically: *Cantonese opera*.

There are two primary categories of Chinese Opera: Peking and Cantonese. The major difference between the two is language. Peking Opera is done in Mandarin while Cantonese Opera is performed in Cantonese. Mandarin is the official dialect spoken in China, Mandarin Opera is considered the more sophisticated and more popular version of Chinese Opera. Cantonese Opera, originating in southern China's Guangdong Province, is considered somewhat rustic; its prominence



now gradually fading. However, it remains a popular art form in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau, Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Canada and United States.

Cantonese opera originated in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), beginning under the reign of the emperor Jiajing (1522-64) and developed through the centuries. Formerly, the music was almost identical to older and more established operatic types, but since the beginning of this century it has become a blend of conventional patterns and fragments from Cantonese folk melodies, popular songs, modern Cantonese instrumental compositions and even Western tunes.

Cantonese Opera music consists of innumerable melodies and tunes. The music isn't the most important

part - the lyrics are. In Cantonese opera the writers put words into this pool of melodies and tunes. One song may contain many melodies, and it is up to the singer to add his or her own personal variation and style to the melody when they sing it. Traditional Chinese instruments such as the *erhu*, butterfly harp, *pipa*, flute, and percussion make up the orchestra.

The background stories are based on a wide range of subjects, including romantic encounters, historical events, fictionalized episodes, ghost stories, patriotic happenings, moral teachings, famous classics, pseudo-religious tales and heroic epics. Beyond entertainment, the operas educate people about many facets and levels of the Chinese language, belief system, society, arts and history.

Cantonese opera acting is not the same as acting in movies or on TV. Many emotions have certain facial expressions and body gestures that go along with them. Performers also have to be careful not to ruin their makeup or hair with histrionic expressions. Traditional makeup for Cantonese Opera has very specific beauty standards and routines. The first aspect of Cantonese Opera theatrical makeup is that the actor must be the one to apply it. It can take up to an hour to be applied in the correct way, particularly for the leading characters. There are five major colors for the makeup in Cantonese opera: red, black, white, blue and yellow. Each color symbolizes a unique character, for example, red symbolizes bravery; black symbolizes loyalty; white symbolizes evil; blue symbolizes cruelty and outrageous arrogance; yellow symbolizes competency and valiancy.

There is a very specific order to application of make up. White powder must first be applied loosely to the skin and as evenly as possible. Contouring is not the style here. The red foundation is then puffed around the eyes, jawbones, and cheekbones to create a natural and soft look. There should be a gradient effect where it gets lighter as it goes down the face. The bridge of the nose should also be emphasized through



Different make-up on performers is used to denote character's status: villain, warrior, royalty, scholar.

the color and be very straight. Next, "phoenix eyes" are created through round, upward pointing black eyeliner and black mascara. The eyebrows are straight and also pointed upward, a darker color than the natural color, but making sure to not become too thick. The lipstick is then applied fully, making careful note to round the corners and create a nice, scarlet hue. Finally, the fringe strips are applied to frame the face. Individual strips are meticulously placed



one at a time through adhesives on the back. There are different patterns depending on one's face shape, although the aim is to create a more oval face, as that is deemed as the prettiest shape.

Cantonese opera costumes provide socio-historical contexts and are designed for symbolic and aesthetic effect. Embroidered theatrical costumes are common in Cantonese opera. The costume design is largely determined by sex, role, plot, personality, environment and occasion. Costumes are basically classified into python ceremonial robes, armor, gowns with sloping collars, cloaks, official robes, gowns with vertical collars, coats and so on. Each type of costume is matched with a particular headgear, footwear and facial make-up.

Traditionally, opera was performed in large temporary bamboo venues specially built for the occasion. Opera companies travelled, often by foot, carrying their props with them. Opera came to the people, not the other way around. Temporary theatres meant that operas could be performed anywhere, even on remote islands, bringing villagers into contact with wider regional culture. Cantonese opera troupes performed for sugar cane workers in Hawaii. Performances often coincided with important religious or clan events. Until the 20th century all the female roles were performed by males.

Another difference between the two Opera forms is

length. Clarence Chu, Locke business owner who once owned the Star Theater building: "My parents used to take me to Cantonese Opera. I hated it! It was so loud and so long!". Peking Opera is shorter. Characters, situations and music are developed at a much quicker pace. Cantonese Opera (referred to as the Mother of Chinese Opera) can be VERY long. It is not unusual for a traditional Cantonese Opera to run four to five hours or longer.

Performers and musicians most likely traveled by ship from San Francisco Chinatown to perform at the Star Theater. Locke residents enjoyed the familiar tales of heroism as they did in the villages of Guangdong. The nostalgia brought joy to their lives as strangers in a strange land. It allowed them to forget the distance from home and entailed separation and loss, and to forget the immediate drudgery, alienation, and loneliness in a land of ghosts. A theater was eagerly sought as a refuge and a home, even for just a moment, in the life of a sojourner.

The heydays of Cantonese opera in Locke began to wane in the 1920's. However, the Star Theater continued to serve up "entertainment". The bottom level of the building housed a store which offered gambling. Its back room functioned as a brothel. Sacramento police had been making arrests for prostitution at the Star Theater as early as 1919.

Throughout the next several decades gambling, prostitution and opium were the stock and trade of the Star Theater. Further insight into those forms of entertainment offered at the once-grand theater, and the town of Locke, shall be topics for future articles.

All Locke buildings are privately owned, with the exception of the Locke Boarding House Museum, which is a unit of California State Parks and Recreation. Likewise, the Star Theater is privately owned. Consequently, any structural repairs, rehabilitations and restorations are the responsibility of the owner of the building. In addition, it is extremely difficult to procure grant funding for a privately-owned property.

A goal of the Locke Foundation is to acquire historic buildings and restore them. As a 501c(3) non-profit corporation, the Locke Foundation may be eligible to apply for grant funding.

And for those of you who worry about the Star Theater crumbling to the ground any time soon, Fear not - its skeleton is secured with an elaborate system of internal cross bracing. However, its exterior is an ever changing shell.

Sources:

Canadian Museum of History
RunRun Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.
www.chinaculture.org

Eddie Jang: Delta's Horatio Alger

By Carol Lee

All photos courtesy of Jang family

Preface: This article was written after an oral history interview on April, 2021. Edward Jang passed away in his sleep on August 26, 2021. He was 100+ years young. This publication is close to his birthday...truly a celebration of his life.



Edward "Eddie" Jang was born on December 8, 1920. He laughed easily and often throughout his Oral History Project interview. Eddie's vitality, enthusiasm for life and cheerful disposition made it very difficult for anyone to believe his age. In fact, he often asked people to guess his age, prefacing his challenge by giving them a 10-year handicap. Understandably, the guess was always off — significantly. Eddie loved people, was very social and eager to share his

life stories.

Eddie's parents came from Dong Ah village, Guangdong China in the late 1800s. Initially his father started a grocery store with an uncle and several partners, each investing \$1000 at the time. Dad soon decided to follow the trend of going into farming. The Jang farm was located on Steamboat Slough and served the family well. All of his children were born in rapid succession starting with Tim, the oldest, born in 1910. Eddie is the seventh of ten children, 5 boys and 5 girls (Tim, Wynne, Lily, Lena, Ruth, Edwin, Edward, Joe, Edgar and Betty).

In the 1920s and 30s the Jang family, like other Chinese, was not able to own the land they worked. As sharecroppers, they grew a wide assortment of fruits and vegetables (pears, tomatoes, sugar beet, plums, peaches, cherries, celery, and more). Crops were rotated to keep from depleting the soil. Profits, if any, were subject to many conditions and variables, and only realized at the end of the season when the debt to the bank was repaid. Laborers' wages were reasonable, \$1.50 a day or 15 cents an hour for a long days work.

Mrs. Jang, Mom, started each day at 4:30AM preparing the morning meal and cleaning up after the 14-18 workers. Once finished she repeated the routine for the family breakfast and getting the kids ready for school. Between preparing breakfast, lunch and dinner for workers and family there was laundry and other household chores. Additionally, often there was a late

night meal (*siu yah*). All this hard work was made more difficult for a woman with bound feet intended for a privileged life of leisure.

Growing up in the Delta, the Jang kids took full advantage to play whenever possible. The calm of Steamboat Slough offered a safe place to cool off and swim, especially on those hot summer days or after a hard days work. All the siblings were good swimmers and very athletic. Eddie recalled swimming laps across the width of the slough and of jumping off the bridge. The sandy beach nearby offered the perfect setting to relax afterward or to entertain friends.

As a child growing up with so many siblings, one might wonder how Mom could manage both the unruly brood and the demands of the farm. Yet it is what Mrs. Jang did day in and day out. The children developed a buddy system where a brother and sister would pair up, watching out for each other and sharing chores inside and outside. Eddie recalled the times when Dad went to National Dollar Store in Sacramento to purchase 10 pairs of shoes for his 10 children. Not sure of their sizes, Dad guessed and bought what was available. Arriving home Dad tossed the 10 pairs onto the floor saying, "Ok. Take your pick," as a free for all scramble ensued. It is this scenario of ill-fitting shoes that Eddie attributed to the poor condition of his feet.

Thankfully the abundance of the farm provided for the demands of their large family. Mom would say, "It's time to have chicken for dinner," That signaled the two fastest sisters to chase down a few chicken that would collapse on the spot from exhaustion. During harvest season the farm packed its own fruit. Everyone looked forward to making ice cream with the scrumptious prized peaches. Eddie picked 800 boxes a day and the sisters packed the fruit for shipping. Their pier along the levee accessed the river, which was a bustling thoroughfare for riverboats that carried produce to market. Once boxes of cherries were shipped to the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, paying an



Mr. & Mrs. Edward and Louise Jang step out of the San Francisco Court House on their wedding day, July 24, 1943."

exorbitant \$27.00 a box instead of the regular price of \$2-\$3.00.

One summer day, after attending the Sacramento State Fair, a group of local friends from Courtland (Louise Lee, her sister Kimberly and her boyfriend) stopped by to visit the Jang clan. A fun day was had by all and that evening the three were returning to San Francisco. Since Eddie was also driving back to San Francisco he asked Louise if she might want to ride back with him. She said, "Sure I'll ride with you." Thus began their lifelong friendship. With a sheepish grin he revealed that at the end of the ride Louise prompted, "Now you come and see me tomorrow." With each passing day she repeated it until, as Eddie put it, "Next thing you know we were together." Louise and Eddie were married in 1943 and raised 4 children (Robin, Cheryl, Randy, and Kimberly). He had 9 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. After almost 74 years together Louise passed away on Eddie's birthday. The joke is that "she made sure I would never forget her."

In 1937 or 1938, the Draft Board only allowed two of the Jang brothers to help on the farm and the others were required to find defense work or be drafted. Remarkably, six of the ten Jang children enlisted. Most notable, sister Wynne enlisted in the Army and was stationed at Hamilton Field before being transferred to the Pacific to serve with General Douglas MacArthur. It was extremely rare for a Chinese woman to serve. Additionally all five of the Jang brothers enlisted in the Air Force or Army.

Eddie chose to seek training in San Francisco in 1939 and found work at the Kaiser Shipyard in Richmond from 1940 to 1941. However, after two years of allowed deferment, Eddie enlisted in the US Army Infantry. During his time in the service there were two events that remained etched in his memory. One, while in the Infantry Eddie was promoted to train the trainees. This assignment required three separate occasions when troops were to hike 25 miles carrying a full field pack. On the last hike, Eddie's ingrown toenail was so painful that he was truly suffering. The Captain recognized his pain and ordered him to the infirmary immediately. After a quick assessment, the doctor suddenly, without warning, used pliers and pulled out the nail. The pain was unbearable and unforgettable.

Eddie rose to the rank of Sergeant before being honorably discharged from the US Army. For his service Edward Jang was awarded the Chinese American WWII Congressional Gold Medal.

Eddie's second memory is of a loss that haunted him his entire life. The ultimate sacrifice of Eddie's parents was sending their six children to war. Fortunately, all six returned home safely — but not quite soon enough. Returning home on furlough from Louisville, Ed found Mom very ill and suffering from the compli-

cations of diabetes. Sitting at his mother's bedside, it was heartbreaking as Mom repeatedly asked, "Where are all my other children?" Regrettably, his five siblings were serving overseas and unable to furlough home. Mom passed two days later at the age of 64.

Upon his return home Eddie reconnected with Buddy, a friend from his shipyard days. Borrowing \$3000 from his father and another \$3000 from the local bank, he and two partners opened a grocery store, Chung, Chung & Jang. There were a series of grocery store ventures with different partners that followed. One included the mom n' pop "Eddie's Market" with his wife. Eventually he and his brother Joe opened sever-



WWII Army Sergeant Edward Jang, a Chinese American veteran, was selected for the Bay Area Honor Flight to Washington DC. He was one of four veterans at the Arlington National Cemetery to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier."

al large successful supermarkets. All of these stores were located in the East Bay.

Eddie retired at age 65 and had great fun playing thereafter. With his wife by his side they traveled the world, including as many as 60 cruises. Eddie and Louise loved to dance the night away and were known to only stop when the band quit for the night. He loved gardening and to the end continued climbing the ladder for the last avocado at the top. Most recently he acquired a modest "new" used Toyota truck to haul bags of fertilizer and bark from the local garden supply store. If Eddie had secrets for longevity, other than his good genes, they might include exercise, eating right, and doing what you love with a carefree outlook. In the face of adversity and the "tough days", Eddie replied with a smile and his head held high, "Life goes on."

Life goes on without Eddie Jang now. After his passing his family gathered in his garden to harvest buckets of tomatoes, beans and fruit. Anything Eddie planted flourished and this last bounty was no exception. The family has wonderful memories of his long life and was thankful for his peaceful passing. Louise and Eddie are together again...no doubt sharing a dance once again.

Square and Circle: Oldest Chinese American Service Organization

By Eileen Leung



The Square and Circle Club derives its name from an old Chinese couplet translated as "In deeds be square, in knowledge be all-round". The Square and Circle Club is believed to be the oldest active Chinese women's service organization in the United States and has served the San Francisco Bay Area for over 80 years. Comprised primarily of professional women of Chinese descent, the mission of the club is to promote local community issues, provide monies to organizations and persons in need, and act as a social fellowship for the club members.

It was formed in 1924 by a group of seven young women: Daisy Wong Chinn, Jennie J. Lee, Ann Lee Leong, Ivy Lee Mah, Bessie Wong Shum, Daisy K. Wong, and Alice Fong Yu. The group originally came together to raise funds for flood and famine victims in China and the first fundraiser was a benefit dance that successfully raised \$250 for relief packages. After the success of the event, the Square and Circle Club turned their attentions to the local San Francisco community, embarking upon what has become a much respected and longstanding philanthropic tradition.

Early service projects focused upon orphans, healthcare, and educational activities. Fundraising for projects at Laguna Honda Hospital, the Chung Mei Home for Chinese Boys, the Mei Lan Yuen Home and the Ming Quong Home for Chinese girls, took the form of raffles, benefit dances and variety shows. From the late 1920s through the early 1940's, the Square and Circle Club produced many well-attended events that showcased popular themes, dances and music of the era and provided funds for the many service projects of the club. "It Happened in Zandavia", presented in 1933, was the first such musical and featured boys from the Chung Mei Home performing alongside the women of the club.

Above and beyond raising money, members often volunteered their time to a variety of community projects including assisting with local tuberculosis screening and visiting the patients of the Laguna Honda Hospital. In addition to serving the community, Square and Circle Club also organized dinners, picnics and anniversary parties for the growing numbers of members. While the club's main focus was local service, the women did become active in larger volunteer arenas such as involvement with the Chinese War Relief Association, supporting a bill promoting rights of entry and U.S. citizenship to Chinese persons, and voicing staunch support of boycotts against Japanese products during World War II.

After World War II, the women of the Square and Circle Club continued to further the philanthropic activities of the club while pursuing their own educational and career advancement. The musicals and variety shows continued to be very popular with titles such as "Goo Ma Steps Out", "Once Upon a Holiday", "Song of Dynasty" and "My Fair Co-ed". The club's popular fashion shows and New Years Eve Charity Balls began during this time and continued with great success. Always innovative in their fundraising ideas, the club launched the publication of a Square and Circle Cookbook in 1976, *Cooking with Square and Circle*, which sold out its 5,000 copies and went into a third printing. Many of the members have been individually recognized and awarded for their community leadership and accomplishments. The club's first president, Alice Fong Yu, was the first Chinese American teacher hired into the San Francisco Unified School District, and after a long and respected career in elementary education and speech therapy, had a Chinese immersion school named for her in 1996, the Alice Fong Yu Alternative School.

The Square and Circle Club's mission to "promote and foster philanthropic projects and community service" has remained unchanged since its inception in 1924. Through its fundraising efforts and volunteer projects, the club has provided support for YMCA and YWCA camperships; scholarships to City College, San Francisco State University, Mills College and the annual Close-up Washington, D.C. program; equipment for On Lok Senior Health Services and Chinese Hospital; and funds for the Asian Women's Shelter, Chinatown Youth Center, San Francisco Public Library, Chinese Education Center, the Chinese Newcomers Service Center, and Laguna Honda Hospital to name a few.

In 2004, the Square and Circle Club donated their archives to the San Francisco Public Library's History Center, where it will be available for internet access worldwide.

The club's storied history is essentially a chronicle of Chinese women's growing independence and their emergence as capable and caring individuals in the own right; it is a story of achievement and inspiration.

Locke Foundation's newsletter has reached the milestone of 10 years of continuous publication with this issue. We hope members and friends have enjoyed Locke's folklore: history that is preserved by the people of the culture, consisting of traditions, experiences and perspectives belonging to a specific culture.

Locke Foundation Needs your Support

Now in existence for nearly two decades, the Locke Foundation continues to expand its programs, activities and offerings to the public .

Our mission is to educate the public about the historic legacy of Locke and to tell the compelling stories of California's immigrant experience. Unfortunately, the current Covid-19 crisis has caused the LF to cancel its signature events and fundraising activities - particularly its 2021 Fall Fundraising Banquet.

In order to meet our mission and to provide services in our community, we rely on the generosity of individuals, organizations and businesses for support. Without this assistance we would not be able to serve the public while accomplishing our mission goals.

We ask that you make a commitment to support our annual appeal by making a cash donation to the Locke Foundation. Our goals this year include: expand the Locke Scholarship Program - providing financial assistance to deserving local high school seniors; the preservation and cataloging of the Locke Boarding House Museum Artifact Collection and the translation and transcription of the Locke Oral History - Early Re-

cordings Archive.

Ongoing activities include: operation of the Locke Boarding House Museum, the Locke Foundation Quarterly Newsletter, maintenance of our beautiful Locke Memorial Park, docent led historic walking tours, funding Locke website and much more.

Your generosity will make a difference by allowing us to continue our meaningful work. Every donation is significant - regardless of size.

The Locke Foundation is the only organization whose sole mission is to advocate for the town of Locke - its preservation, history, legacy and its future.

Locke Foundation/Donation
P.O. Box 1085
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locke-foundation.org/about/make-a-donation

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You can honor Locke's legacy through the Locke Foundation:

1. **IRA Gift:** For those aged 70.5 and older, you can make a gift directly from your IRA to meet your required minimum distribution without paying federal income tax on the withdrawal. This provision may be attractive to retirees who don't need all the current income from their IRA to meet current living expenses.
2. Leave a gift to the Locke Foundation through your will or living trust without reducing your current income. Gifts of retirement plan assets can provide tax advantages and can be given to LF by naming us as a beneficiary.
3. Donate books, photos or artifacts relevant to the Locke experience to Locke Foundation to preserve and share for future generations.

For more information on arranging a planned gift to LF, please send email to: lockefoundation@frontiernet.net

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Due to Covid-19 concerns, the 2022 Chinese New Year Celebration in Locke has been cancelled.