

Mistaken Identity: Case #1344

The year was 1890. San Francisco, Stockton, Auburn and many other towns in northern California had substantial populations of Chinese.

This case involves a very young and comely Chinese woman from San Francisco named Chuey Fong who married a young Stockton merchant named Go Sam. Go Sam had purchased his wife from her mother for \$200. Her mother even came from China to officiate at the ceremony.



Newlyweds Cheuy Fong and Go Sam arrested in case of mistaken identity. The arresting officer goes to prison in 19th Century justice case. Photo courtesy of: Placer County Museums

It seems that some of the San Francisco Chinese did not approve of the marriage and fomented a conspiracy to kidnap her and resell her to someone of more prestige than the Stockton merchant. It is thought that Chuey Fong, herself, was in on the conspiracy.

The plan was to have Chuey Fong arrested on charges of robbery, specifically, a charge by an Auburn Chinese woman named China Mollie. Mollie claimed that Chuey had stolen jewelry from her.

A warrant was issued. Constable H. L. Fick was sent to Stockton to arrest Chuey and bring her back to Auburn. As part of the plot, a warrant had also been issued for the arrest of Go Sam for selling opium. Constable Frank Swift was sent to Stockton to arrest Go Sam. Swift brought a man named Chin Ah Fee to help him identify Go Sam.

According to testimony, constables Fick and Swift traveled to Stockton together without realizing that they were after separate but related people. They met at Go Sam's store and arrested the newlyweds.

They all boarded the same train in Stockton, with Swift and Go Sam headed to Sacramento and Fick and Chuey bound for Auburn. At the stop in Sacramento, a Chinese man named Mow Lin Gut boarded the train along with a Chinese woman named Poy Ching. Poy Ching was described in the court testimony as "a hag," "the

large one,” the “old, dark one. A complete contrast to the petite, slight and very beautiful Chuey Fong with her highly prized bound feet.

Go Sam was taken to the Sacramento jail by Constable Swift while Fick and the two Chinese women and two Chinese men continued on to Auburn. Whether Constable Fick was in on the murky plot is unknown but he made a very unwise decision in housing his prisoner. There was no “women’s jail” in Auburn until 1905 when the little space under the stairs was refashioned for that purpose. Fick decided to take Chuey and Poy to a place “where they would be more comfortable” - Chinese Mollies! She was the very same Mollie who had preferred the charges against Chuey. The fact that Mollie ran a whore house did not seem to Fick to be a problem either.

When Fick returned to Mollie’s a few days later to take Chuey to her court appearance only Poy Ching was there. Fick took her along to Court and presented her as Chuey Fong. When her identity was questioned, Fick claimed he couldn’t tell the difference between the two women.



Poy Ching mistaken for the bride
Courtesy Placer County Museums

All the witnesses called certainly could. Several people from the train and train station and the carriage driver were called to testify. They clearly saw the physical differences between the two women.

Fick was charged with letting a prisoner escape by Justice Fulton. In the meantime, the Grand Jury in Stockton found a “true bill” against Fick for kidnapping and Fick was transferred to a jail in Stockton.

At the trial in Stockton, the jury took less than half an hour to find Fick guilty and he was sentenced to not less than one nor more than ten years.

What happened to Chuey Fong? She was last seen in the company of two Chinese men and one Chinese woman, most likely Mow Lin Gut and Chin Ah Fee and Poy Ching, in a carriage headed for Clipper Gap, most likely to catch the train to San Francisco.

--April McDonald, Auburn City Historian