

AUBURN'S JOSS HOUSE

(contributed by the Joss House & Chinese History Center Committee)

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"The Chinese finished the dedication of their new Josh (sic) House in Auburn last Wednesday night with beating the tom toms, cymbals and gongs, exploding firecrackers and bombs. Fronting the entrance is the altar, on which was laid offerings of sweetmeats and candied fruits. Over the altar in Chinese characters is the precept "Always the (?) good". In the rear of the altar, seated in a chair of state, beneath a canopy of peacock feathers is Josh (sic), and beneath his chair a taper burns continually. Now and then the Keeper of the Josh (sic) beats a metal drum. The Chinese do not remove their hats or make obeisance". . .

In Auburn in 1909, not much was understood about the Chinese or their religious customs. Now, almost 100 years later, there is still little known or documented about Auburn's Chinese community. We do know that early in the 1920's fire destroyed most of Auburn's Chinatown, once again and that Charles Jung Yue, and his brothers rebuilt the Ling Ying Association building, now commonly known as Auburn's Joss House. The building served as the social and religious headquarters for the remaining Chinese community as well as Chinese school, boarding house and the association's meeting place. The building still contains the original handmade Joss House altar, (circa 1860), school desks and blackboard. The cultural and historical importance of this building is further found in its architecture. It is constructed in the board and batten style so typical of Chinese buildings of the Gold Rush era, and is one of the few remaining wooden structures in Old town Auburn. Charles Jung Yue became an important and respected member of the Auburn community and was often called upon by members of the Chinese community to help resolve difficulties, write letters to families in China and provide food and shelter to migrant workers. It is said that Charles Yue was the first licensed Chinese American gold assayer in California. Charles Jung Yue's parents, Jung Shing Yue and Tuey Shee immigrated from China and settled near Wolf Creek (Grass Valley) in 1868.

At present, work is in progress to restore the Auburn Joss House. Experts on Chinese history have been consulted in order to keep the restoration as accurate as possible. On the top floor a badly vandalized altar will be restored. In the same room, what once served as a Chinese school will be resurrected. Artifacts have been cleaned and cataloged. Downstairs, a gift shop and study area will one day bring the Chinese of the area together again.