

Press Release

For immediate release
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Sonoma County Museum presents *Year of the Tiger: Chinese Traditions in Sonoma County 1890-2022*

February 5, 2022 - Ongoing

(Santa Rosa) – (February 1, 2022) The Museum of Sonoma County (MSC) is excited to announce the exhibition ***Year of the Tiger: Chinese Traditions in Sonoma County 1890-2022*** opening Saturday, February 5, 2022, with a traditional lion dance outside the Museum at 1:30pm (details below) in celebration of Lunar New Year. In partnership with the Redwood Empire Chinese Association (RECA) and comprising of approximately twenty objects, photographs and oral stories, this exhibition details the importance and history of the Chinese American community in the North Bay. Until 50 years ago, Santa Rosa’s Chinatown consisted of a couple blocks of board sidewalks and modest wood buildings on Second Street between Santa Rosa Avenue and D Street. During its existence between the 1890s – 1940s, it included a temple, restaurants, Chinese medicinal herb shops, stores, the ubiquitous laundries, boarding houses and homes. As in most of California’s early Chinatowns, Santa Rosa’s Chinese temple was a symbol of cultural existence at the heart of day-to-day life for Chinese immigrants and the subsequent generations of Chinese Americans.

Many first-person accounts of Santa Rosa’s early Chinese residents have been lost to time. Luckily, stories of Chinatowns history and daily life have been saved by Gaye LeBaron’s Oral History Collection in her 1994 interview with Song Wong Bourbeau. “[W]e raised all our own food. And we had chickens and rabbits and pigeons and when we wanted something well, we’d just go out in the back yard and get it,” Wong Bourbeau said. She shared how the local community, including big names in Sonoma County, interacted with Chinatown’s residents in the decades after the 1880s “Yellow Peril”, which ignited anti-Chinese sentiment, racism, and violence. “[M]y dad used to uh, to, to hire all these Chinese. Well, they’d have them come over. Then, of course, he made his own whiskey and all the uh, in fact uh, Frank P. Doyle, Luther Burbank and Henry Ford, they used to come over and drink some of my dad’s booze,” said Wong Bourbeau.

Looking back at the role of the temple in Chinatown and considering contemporary celebrations of the Chinese New Year and other cultural traditions which are promoted by RECA in the North Bay, ***Year of the Tiger*** offers a greater understanding of the objects and stories of Santa Rosa’s Chinese American community and a more intimate understanding of the long history of Chinese people in Sonoma County. Judy Cheung, Secretary of RECA said, “[u]nfortunately, although the mainstream culture of Sonoma County is more aware of the Asian community, Asian pride and community participation has tremendously decreased over the past few years. RECA offers a place to share both cultures, find a place where

personal skills are highlighted and spotlighted in a positive manner... This is how RECA tries to deal with the concept of cultural alienation. Those who have a talent of being bilingual, a dancer, singer, teacher, etc., are offered opportunities to use their abilities to participate in the greater community of Sonoma County and beyond.”

Exhibition Highlights

- Oral stories from Song Wong Bourbeau (1909-1996), a first generation Chinese American, whose father, Tom Wing Wong, immigrated from the Canton region of China as a teenager. Wong became, among other things, caretaker of the temple. It is largely through Wong Bourbeau’s eyes and experiences that we see the story of Santa Rosa’s Chinatown. A year before her death, Wong Bourbeau gave MSC her collection of over 200 objects, including photographs, statues, textiles and documents, many of them related to the temple and Santa Rosa’s Chinese American Community.



Sculpture, ca 1880-1920, 95.58.133 a-b. Porcelain statues of Chinese Guardian lions, also known as Fu or Foo Dogs. The lions are pair consisting of a male and female. The male is leaning on an embroidered ball and the female is restraining a playful cub. Guardian lions are traditionally used to guard the entrances to buildings, and this pair guarded the entrance to the temple in Santa Rosa’s historic Chinese community. “[We] have what we call kitchen god and outdoor gods and all that and so it’s my chore that every morning before I went to school to put, well, incense on each one of these gods before I go to school and at night when I come home,” said Wong Bourbeau.

The Chinese temple provided a sense of collective unity for Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans; a place for individual worship and reflection and played a vital role in maintaining a connection with their cultural home. **Year of the Tiger** exhibition shows that while the Chinese American community is more integrated into the North Bay, the important threads of community, culture, language, tradition, ritual, and history remain tightly woven into the fabric of Sonoma County.



This exhibition was done in partnership with the Redwood Empire Chinese Association, founded in 1988 with a focus on sharing Chinese culture.

To support these and upcoming exhibitions contact: Annalisa Price aprice@museumsc.org 707.579.1500 ext 104.

Programs and Events

Celebrate Lunar New Year

Saturday, February 5, 2022

1:30 PM (PT)

The Museum of Sonoma County (MSC), in partnership with the [Redwood Empire Chinese Association](#) (RECA), will kick-off the Lunar New Year with a traditional lion dance in front of the Museum on Saturday, February 5, 2022 at 1:30pm in conjunction with the opening of the new exhibition **Year of**

the Tiger: Chinese Traditions in Sonoma County 1890-2022. To celebrate, the RECA Lion Team will present their performance to usher in the Year of the Tiger. The performance will take place outside, rain or shine, and visitors will be asked to wear masks and socially distance. This is a free, outdoor event, and no pre-registration is required.

Details available on our website: www.museumsc.org/events.

About the Museum of Sonoma County

Located in Downtown Santa Rosa on Seventh Street between A and B Streets, the Museum of Sonoma County (MSC) presents exhibitions of modern and contemporary art and local and regional history. MSC is open year-round with changing exhibitions, public programs, school tours, and special events. MSC preserves and manages a regional art and history collection of over 18,000 objects, the region's largest object documentation of Sonoma County's history and culture.

Mission

The Museum of Sonoma County engages and inspires our diverse community with art and history exhibitions, collections, and public programs that are inclusive, educational, and relevant.

Smithsonian Affiliate

The Museum of Sonoma County has been a Smithsonian Affiliate since 2009. Smithsonian Affiliations establishes long-term partnerships with museums, education and cultural organizations to facilitate the loan of Smithsonian artifacts and traveling exhibitions, as well as to develop innovative educational collaborations locally and nationally. Created in 1996 by an act of the Smithsonian Board of Regents, the program is overseen by the Smithsonian's Assistant Secretary for Education and Access and is one of the pillars of the Institution's national outreach efforts. Affiliates represent the diversity of America's museum community—size, location and subject—and serve all audiences. More than 8,000 Smithsonian artifacts have been displayed at Affiliate locations for the past 20 years.

Admission

Adults: \$10.00

Seniors, Students, Disabled: \$7.00

Museum Members: FREE

EBT Card holders: FREE

Children 12 and under: FREE

Museum Hours

Open: Wednesday through Sunday, 11:00am-5:00pm

Closed on the following holidays: New Year's Day, President's Day, Easter Sunday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Friday after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas; please visit our website for additional closures.

Images ([click here](#) to view and download)



Sculpture, Chinese Guardian Lions, ca. 1880-1920, porcelain, 17"x 12", Song Wong Bourbeau collection.



Photograph, Tom Wing Wong Family Portrait, ca 1917, 10.5"x 11.5", Song Wong Bourbeau collection.



Photograph, Song Wong outside, ca 1920s, Song Wong Bourbeau collection.



Photograph, View of Second Street and Chinatown in Santa Rosa, ca 1900.