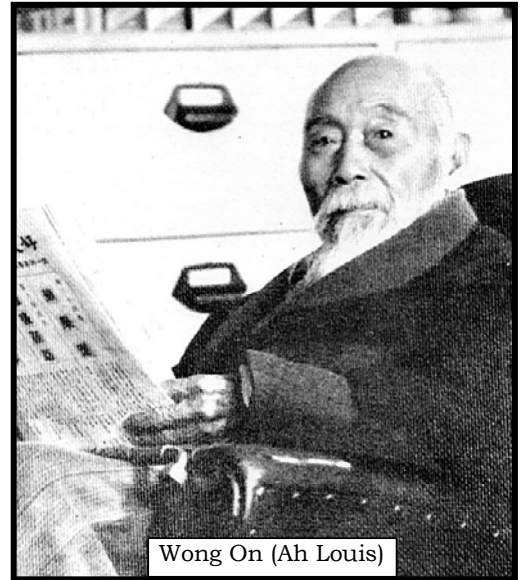


CHINESE CONTRIBUTIONS TO SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Chinese pioneers established the first brick kiln in the county (1872), mined gold and quicksilver (1874-1882), built the narrow gage railroad from Avila to San Luis Obispo and beyond (1875), built two Cuesta Grade stage roads, the Paso-Cambria Road (HWY 46) and the Arroyo Grande-Huasna Road (1876), reclaimed land around Laguna Lake (1882), built the Southern Pacific Railroad (1886-1894), ran commercial vegetable gardens throughout the county, were restaurant cooks, dry-goods shop-keepers, ran import/export businesses, were doctors, owned laundry companies and had a host of other professions both on the ranches and in the towns.

Although the 1860 census lists no Chinese in San Luis Obispo County it is likely that Chinese families were already here, living along the coast, harvesting and drying seafood for export to China. At the height of the Chinese pioneer period, at least 2,000 lived and worked in the county. Most returned to China following the passage of laws listed on the back of this sheet, but three families from that period still reside in the county; the Gin family, the Chong family and the Louis family.

The most well known Chinese resident in the county was Wong On. His life story provides a great example of a Chinese pioneer in the county. Wong arrived in San Francisco in 1861 at the age of 21 and spent a few years in the California and Oregon goldfields. Wong was probably given the name of Ah Louis (Ah-Lou-e-e) by an Oregon storekeeper in the late 1860's. In 1870 Wong was working as a cook at the French Hotel in San Luis, he also cooked for the San Miguel Mission and the Port Harford Hotel. In 1872 he established the first brick kiln in the county. In 1874 Ah Louis established a store in San Luis. His deed to the land is the oldest surviving deed in the county. His kiln provided bricks for the construction of his store, the first brick building in the county (corner of Chorro and Palm Streets, SLO). The store is still owned and operated by Howard Louis (Ah Louis son). Ah Louis bricks were also used to build the railroad roundhouse, the county courthouse and the east wing of the mission. In 1877, Ah Louis began bidding on road projects, building many of the projects listed above. Chinese men wishing to travel to California but lacking the passage fee would be sponsored by Ah Louis and in exchange would work for him as part of his labor pool until they had paid off their passage. Ah Louis farms provided much of the food for his workers but also produce for shipment to San Francisco. At the height of his holdings, Ah Louis had 3,580 acres under cultivation. A 1907 railroad weight slip lists more than 40 tons of Ah Louis potatoes bound for San Francisco. Ah Louis Road connected two of his farms. Unfortunately, after his death it was renamed Biddle Ranch Road.



Wong On (Ah Louis)



Elsie Louis born 1914
grand-daughter of Ah Louis