

## Relocation

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CHUNG SAI YAT PO TRANSLATIONS BY DANNY LOONG]

THROUGHOUT San Francisco's history, there were white European Americans who desired to dislocate Chinese Americans from Chinatown and redevelop the area's prime real estate.

In 1904, a publicly-traded company incorporated to achieve just that goal. The United States Improvement and Investment Company published their plan in the February 1905 issue of the Merchants' Association Review. "It is the purpose of this company," Vice President and Spokesman John Partridge wrote, "to acquire title to at least two-thirds of Chinatown, [and] move the entire Chinese population to a suitable and improved location on the Bay shore," where people were to live in a remote, self-contained planned development that could be visit-

ed by curious tourists. Towards this end, in 1904 the company had already acquired "the property bounded by Bush, Broadway, Stockton, and Kearny streets," according to the incorporation announcement in the November 18, 1904 San Francisco Call.

After the earthquake and fire, some white San Franciscans chose the moment to try to eliminate Chinatown from the city. The San Francisco Chronicle on April 25, 1906 reported that as the real estate board discussed rebuilding according to the 1905 Burnham plan for San Francisco,

Agent Speck suggested Hunter's Point. Thomas Magee said that Hunter's Point was Mayor Schmitz's choice. The fact

that a corporation headed by John Partridge and other capitalists started some time ago to transfer Chinatown to the vicinity of the Six-Mile House was mentioned. Chairman Howell is to appoint a committee which will make a recommendation to the Real Estate Board concerning Chinatown."

Printing from temporary Oakland headquarters, Chung Sai Yat Po worked to keep the Chinese community informed of happenings throughout the refugee and reconstruction period. Working without their printer's type, the issues were hand-lettered. On April 29, 1906 Chung Sai Yat Po featured this editorial, "On how the Chinese should rebuild Chinatown as soon as possible":

Ever since the city has been devastated by fire, all Chinese yearn to rebuild their community and their homes. However, though everyone wants to rebuild, everyone insists in different ways. Why? Westerners have suggested moving the Chinese people out of Chinatown. This suggestion has been raised for quite a while and for quite a number of times. Now that the Great Fire has happened, it provides an opportunity to raise the issue again. Can we not move? There is widespread public opinion that now Chinese must necessarily move out of Chinatown. But if we try our best to fight to stay, who knows who will win in the end? If we are united, if we help ourselves and help each other, we can make the difficult possible. I humbly offer the following suggestions for the Chinese to tackle the present situation.

1. Hire famous attorneys to represent us as soon as possible.
2. If the Chinese living in Chinatown are also themselves landlords, they should restore their buildings as soon as

possible. And there is no need to inform local officials. According to U.S. laws, if the land belongs to the building owner, the landlord has the right to build on his land. Local officials have no right to stop him. The present city officials are [with the anti-Chinese union faction]. If we apply through them, they will try to stop us. So it's better not to go through them.

3. If the Chinese rented from the western landlords, the Chinese renters should speak with their landlords as soon as possible and ask them to rebuild and rent them the building. Western landlords like to rent their houses to Chinese because the rent in Chinatown is higher than elsewhere. Secondly, Chinese are content with the status quo and they demand very little, if at all, from their landlords. Western landlords find renting to the Chinese good deals.

The above three strategies should be implemented by we Chinese quickly, or we will soon regret it.

A May 2, 1906 Chung Sai Yat Po article warned of further discussion about relocation schemes, translating the following article from the San Francisco Examiner:

On the eighth day of this moon, San Francisco Examiner reported thus: Those who managed the properties of Chinatown said that the lands in Chinatown would eventually be sold to rich westerners to build opulent residents because the hill behind was an effective wind barricade. And in front was the arresting beauty of the port and the river. Furthermore, Chinatown was right next to the commercial areas that offered great convenience. Chinatown in the old days was an expensive location. Now that Chinatown is burnt down to the ground, perhaps the same

Today the proposed relocation site is largely marshy land with a power relay station, between Bayshore Boulevard and the Cow Palace. Along the western boundary of the property, Schwerin Street intersects with the only lasting impression the relocation scheme left on the landscape, a road named Partridge Avenue.

Anna Naruta, 2006



high price can be fetched once more. In fact, many people have gone there to negotiate prices.

#### **REBUILDING**

Chinese Americans organized against the relocation schemes. The Oakland Tribune on May 10, 1906 reported on a meeting and protest against the Hunter's Point relocation scheme, featuring the speech of Pastor of Berkeley's First Chinese Congregational Church in and Alameda County courts Chinese Interpreter Gee Gam, who asserted "the Chinese would never 'stand for this oppression.'"

The Chinese Legation had visited Governor Pardee, and the San Francisco Chronicle April 30, 1906 reported their statement against coerced relocation: "I have heard the report that the authorities intend to remove Chinatown, but I cannot believe it. America is a free country, and every man has a right to occupy land which he owns provided that he makes no nuisance."

Recognition of the economic value of Chinatown, international political pressure, and rapid rebuilding by San Francisco Chinatown merchants and organizations all contributed to the reconstruction of San Francisco Chinatown at the location where it had stood since the California Gold Rush had first enticed people from all over the world.

After the reconstruction of San Francisco Chinatown was well underway, the San Francisco Call (November 18, 1907) published an article lauding the decision of Chinese merchants to remain and rebuild San Francisco Chinatown:

One of the best and most encouraging evidences of San Francisco's supremacy in the control of oriental trade is indicated by the rapid re-establishment of the Chinese merchants in this city. Probably no class or section suffered a greater loss as a result of the disaster of April, 1906.

The loyalty displayed by these firms since the fire and at a period when other coast cities were bidding strongly for their favor shows a great and abiding faith in the future of the town. This commercial courage is well marked in the permanent rebuilding of bazaars, theaters, shops and temples.

#### **SOURCES**

Merchants' Association Review, "San Francisco May Be Freed from The Standing Menace of Chinatown," February 1905, Collection of San Francisco Public Library San Francisco History Center.

Wiley, Peter Booth, The Burnham Plan, National Trust Guide: San Francisco. America's Guide for Architecture and History Travelers, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000.