

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JUN 16 1976
DATE ENTERED JUL 30 1976

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC ~~AND/OR COMMON~~ Oroville Chinese Temple

AND/OR COMMON
Oroville Chinese Temple

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 1500 Broderick Street
CITY, TOWN Oroville VICINITY OF CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT One
STATE California CODE 06 COUNTY Butte CODE 007

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME City of Oroville
STREET & NUMBER 1735 Montgomery Street
CITY, TOWN Oroville VICINITY OF STATE California

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Butte County Court House
STREET & NUMBER 1859 Bird Street
CITY, TOWN Oroville STATE California

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE California Historical Landmarks
DATE 1/31/62 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS California Department of Parks and Recreation
CITY, TOWN 1416 Ninth Street - Sacramento STATE California

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

See Continuation Sheets

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

See Continuation Sheets

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Sunset Magazine
 Ford Magazine
 Magazine section of Sunday San Francisco Examiner
 Western Way Magazine
 "History of Butte County" by Joseph F. McGie

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.51

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 0	6 2 3 7 2 0	4 3 7 4 5 6 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Jim P. Carpenter, Director of Parks

ORGANIZATION City of Oroville DATE February 20, 1975

STREET & NUMBER 1735 Montgomery Street TELEPHONE _____

CITY OR TOWN Oroville STATE California

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE Herbert Kleads 6-2-76

TITLE Director, Dept. of Parks & Recreation DATE _____

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Acting DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION DATE 7-30-76

ATTEST: Charles A. Herring DATE 7-30-76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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7. Description

The Oroville Chinese Temple is comprised of three buildings with a fenced courtyard, contributing courtyard structures, and surrounding landscaped area. The three buildings are: the main temple with attached Chan Room, the Tapestry Hall, and a two-story building containing both the Council Room and Moon Temple.

1. Main Temple

The Main Temple, the earliest structure of the complex, was built and dedicated in 1863. The temple is a one story rectangular building constructed of red brick manufactured in Oroville. The front facade or north side of the structure contains the entry and an open porch extending the full width of the building. The portico is enclosed by a brick wall at either end and is supported by two simple wood columns. The outer doors are of heavy planking and open to a second or inner set of doors leading to the principal temple room itself. The architectural style of the temple is simple, classic in origin, and stripped of decorative elements. It is similar in design to many Gold Rush era structures of early California in this general region.

The main temple room is known as Lake Sing Kung (literally translated to mean "room of many gods and goddesses"). On the altar table at the rear stands the figure of Kwan Kung, or Kuan Yu, God of Literature, Courage and War. To the left of Kwan Kung is Wei T'O, who is Guardian of the Monastery and a Dhamapala or protector of the Law of Buddhism. The right figure is Sing Moe or Tien How, Queen of Heavens, Goddess of Sea and Water. The carved and colorful boards in the ceiling and on the sidewalls are plaques extolling the efficaciousness of the gods in answering prayers and affording protection to the worshippers. The boards have a saying or couplet and list the names of the donors.

The Chan Room, or Suey Sing Bak, is immediately adjacent and attached to the east elevation of the main temple. This structure is also a single story rectangular building constructed of brick locally manufactured. The room extends the full length of the temple but is narrower in width.

The room was added in approximately 1870 as a private temple for the Chan family and in remembrance of Chan Low Kwan, also known as the Viscount of Pacification. Noteworthy in this room are the bridal sedan chair with curtains that was carried in parades and wedding ceremonies, and the extremely fine quality teakwood chairs.

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7. Description (cont.)

2. Moon Temple and Council Room

To the rear and south of the main temple is the Moon Temple and Council Room, a two story brick building built between 1868 and 1870. This simple rectangularly shaped building was also constructed of brick manufactured in the area.

The first floor of the building, the Council Room, was constructed first to provide meeting place needs of the large Chinese community in early Oroville.

Shortly after the building of the Council Room, a second story, the Moon Temple, was added on top of the lower floor. A balcony and balcony covering that extended around the entire structure was also added at the time of this addition. The balcony offered a watch post at all four corners where men with a gong or drum were stationed to announce an important meeting to be held below. At the sound of a steady beat, residents along Broderick Street came running to the Council Room.

In 1910, a fire damaged this balcony. In 1949, the north portion and one fourth of the east portion of the balcony were replaced.

The outstanding feature of the Moon Temple, also known as Wong Fut Tong, is the circular entrance signifying the circle of life. The room itself is dominated by a huge statue of Buddha.

Noteworthy in the Council Room is the particularly beautiful screen of carved wood and gold leaf hanging at the rear wall. Two procession shrines which were carried in parades during festivals are displayed in this room.

Other than general building maintenance, the only restoration projects have been to replace portions of the Moon Temple balcony found to possess dry rot or damaged by fire.

3. Tapestry Hall

The Tapestry Hall was built and dedicated in 1968. It was designed by a Chinese architect, Phillip Choy, and constructed of modern 8" x 16" building blocks in a style similar to the existing older structures. The parapet wall and roof were designed to correspond with those architectural elements of the Main Temple. Handsome wooden screens flank the entry doors.

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7. Description (cont.)

The building is divided into three parts: a display hall, a tapestry hall, and living quarters for the caretakers. The Hall was designed and built to display an important collection of tapestries and Temple artifacts held in trust by the Chan family.

In 1968 fencing was constructed to create a three building complex with a brick paved courtyard between the buildings. The brick pavement pattern in the courtyard is a basic Chinese design called clouds. Wood latticed pergolas and a pavilion were constructed as part of the courtyard design and an authentic replica of a Chinese worker's modest dwelling was placed in the south-east corner of the complex.

The plants and trees, except for annual bedding plants, are known to be common to China. The Dawn Redwood and Ginkgo trees are examples of plants placed in the garden. Many existing trees previously planted by the early Chinese were retained during the construction of the Tapestry Hall. These include fig trees from which the Chinese made fig brandy, Ailanthus trees (Chinese Tree-of-Heaven), and Black Locust Trees.

The large rock is uncut, unpolished Butte County Jade and was the gift of Mr. Earl Simmons of Concow.

Also in 1968, the outside grounds surrounding the Temple were landscaped and a parking lot was constructed to the north of the complex across Broderick Street. At this time, the pool, courtyard, and contributing structures were designed and built.

Except for the recent addition of the Tapestry Hall, the Chinese Temple has retained a high degree of integrity. Portions of the original complex, however, were affected by a 1907 flood. Flood damage to the Temple and its many artifacts was repaired by the Oroville Women's Community Club in 1949, at the same time that the balcony was replaced.

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Supplemental Information: Report on damage done to the Chinese Temple Complex by recent Oroville Earthquake.

8 October 1975

R-4032.03

City of Oroville
1735 Montgomery Street
Oroville, California 95965

Gentlemen:

Subject: Inspection of the Chinese Temple Building

This letter presents the results of inspections made in September 1975 by Jack Call and Bob Braithwaite. The inspection consisted of a visual examination of the interior and exterior of both buildings. Plans on the buildings were not available.

Both buildings are unreinforced brick masonry bearing wall type with wood frame roofs. Although lime mortar was used, it is generally hard and the brick is of good quality for the era.

Damage done by the recent earthquake, to these structures, was not great and we feel there is little imminent hazard at this time. There is some cracking of the walls and parapets, some of which was present before the earthquake and may be due to foundation settlement rather than directly due to earthquake forces.

Although the imminent hazard is small, a great deal of work will be necessary to alleviate the earthquake hazard inherent in these buildings.

Sincerely,



Jack E. Call
Structural Engineer

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8. Significance

The Oroville Chinese Temple is an important complex of architectural, social, and religious significance. It is a unique and interesting survivor of the Chinese community that thrived in the city of Oroville during the early years of the state. A portion of the complex was completed in 1863 when there were an estimated 10,000 Chinese located in the Oroville area. Although these Chinese came to America with little material wealth, they brought their strength, bravery, industry, and the rich heritage of the civilization they left behind. This heritage was embodied in the Oroville Temple which became the religious, business, and social center of the Chinese community. It remained the center of importance until the 1920's and 30's, when difficult economic times and racial strife forced many Chinese residents to migrate out of the area. At the present time, many Chinese still come to worship according to the tradition of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Since 1959, the Temple Complex has been open to the general public as a museum dedicated to Chinese culture and tradition.

Architecturally, the original temple grouping of three buildings, (the Main Temple, the Chan Room, and the Council Room/Moon Temple) forms a unique complex, combining architectural design elements of both eastern and western cultures. The simplicity of decorative elements of the structures reflects the constraints of early California pioneer life.

The complex is also significant as an expression of religious architecture.

The Main Temple is similar in style to numerous structures of the Gold Rush era in this vicinity. The structure has classic design origins but is essentially stripped of the decorative elements that traditionally accompany that style. The false-front parapet with flattened pediment suggests its classic origins, as do the flat arches of brick over the building entrances. The porch or portico is supported by two simple wood columns that flank the entryway. In this country, particularly in the south, classic and Greek revival styles are often accompanied by open porticos and loggias. The Main Temple portico suggests this style. Chinese characters adorn tall narrow boards placed on either side of the main entrance. These white characters on a dark background provide a strong decorative element unusual to traditional classic decoration.

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8. Significance (cont.)

The most unusual stylistic element of the structure is the closure at both ends of the otherwise open portico by a brick wall extending from the facade to the outer edge of the porch. Perhaps the origins of this design stem from a combined need for weather protection and a desire for seclusion and privacy, due to the religious nature of the building.

Materials used in construction of the building are red brick manufactured in the area and wood.

The Chan Room, also known as Suey Sing Bak, stands immediately adjacent to the Main Temple building, sharing one wall in common. Such placement of an additional religious structure or room adjacent to a principal place of worship is also found in Christian cathedrals in the form of chapels. The design of the Chan Room is very similar to that of the Temple. However, the parapet design is handled less skillfully than is that of the Temple and the narrower proportion of the building results in a squarer look to the facade.

The Chan Room's open porch is also enclosed by brick walls at each end. Due to the narrowness of the structure, it is more private and secluded in feeling. Supportive columns, not being structurally necessary, are absent.

When the Chan Room was added next to the Temple, efforts were made to integrate its design with that of the existing structure. The overall visual effect of the Temple and Chan Room is one of a single structure rather than two separate buildings.

The Council Room and Moon Temple are combined in a simple two story rectangular brick structure. Design elements of classic origin are flat arches of brick over the doorways and simple brick cornice line.

The most outstanding design feature of the structure is the circular entry to the second floor Moon Temple, signifying the Chinese circle of life. It also suggests the idea of perfection. The placement of this single complete circle in the otherwise virtually unadorned wall surface is most dramatic. The interior of the Moon Temple, dominated within by a large statue of Buddha, is perhaps the most religious room in the Oroville Temple Complex.

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8. Significance (cont.)

Another unusual design element of this structure is the projecting course of brick that completely encircles the building several feet below the roof line. Too low to serve as a cornice, its effect is to visually divide the building horizontally into unusual proportions.

The Tapestry Hall was built in 1968 to exhibit an extensive collection of Oriental artifacts left to the city by the descendants of the original Chinese families. The architect, Philip Choy, designed the structure to reflect the design of the original buildings. The parapet wall and roof design incorporate the design of the Main Temple. The Hall is constructed of modern 8" x 16" building blocks.

Courtyard Garden and Contributing Construction

In 1968, fencing was constructed to create a three building complex with a brick paved courtyard and Chinese garden between the buildings. The brick pavement pattern in the courtyard was designed by Philip Choy and is a basic Chinese design called clouds. The plants within the courtyard are all of Chinese origin, with the exception of some of the annuals. Many of the plants were gifts, some as memorials.

The Pavilion or gateway structure employs Chinese style architectural forms in wood as does the latticed pergola at the courtyard periphery. A pond lies near the Pavilion.

The Chinese worker's dwelling on the opposite side of the Moon Temple from the courtyard, is a replica of a typical early California Chinese immigrant worker's hut.

Also in 1968, the outside grounds surrounding the Temple were landscaped and a parking lot was constructed to the north of the complex across Broderick Street.

Other than general building maintenance, the only restoration projects have been to replace portions of the Moon Temple balcony which had dry rot.

The Chinese Temple complex was originally constructed in order to answer the social and religious needs of Oroville's sizeable Chinese population.

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G. Significance (cont.)

It was during the Hung Chee Dynasty and the Kuang Hsu Dynasty that most of the early Chinese arrived in the vicinity of Oroville. Many were imported as laborers by American railroad and lumber companies. Many others also came in search of the wealth and prosperity promised to all by the myth of the Gold Rush.

The Emperor Quong She of the Ching Dynasty celebrated the 29th year of his reign by providing money for the construction of the temple at Oroville. The work was done by the residents of the settlement using bricks fired in a local kiln. When the building was completed in 1863, the Emperor sent two priests from his court to dedicate the structure. The priests brought a huge brass incense burner, weighing two tons, which was donated to the temple. On the burner, which sits at the entrance of the temple today, the Emperor inscribed a message to those who would use "The Temple Beside the River", extolling the wonders of Gold Mountain (California).

The growth of the Chinese community attracted the attention of the Chinese Six Company. A representative was sent to Oroville to oversee the affairs of his countrymen. His arrival in 1870 led to the start of the Fong Lee Company which established the Chan family as social and business leaders of the Chinese community.

The main room of the temple building was the worship room and contains the statues of three Chinese gods. The Fong Lee Company built an addition to the main room as a private temple of worship for the Chan family.

As the problems of the large Chinese community increased, a need arose for a meeting place or town hall where elders and citizens could meet for advice, discussions, and assistance. In response to this need, the Council Room was built. It soon became the center of activities for the Chinese community. Here banking was done, feuds were settled, letters were written, and most importantly, the arrangements for the transportation of the bones of the dead to China were made. Here too, the Chinese consul used to sit when he visited the settlement.

An inscribed board in the Council Room testifies to the use of the building as a meeting place as well as to the remarkable ability these early pioneers displayed to govern themselves and effect a safe and stable community. The following statement is a translation of the transcription on this board.

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8. Significance (cont.)

"Rules and Regulations of This Community"

The nation has clearly stated in laws how to reward good and punish evil, therefore, there should be no reason why the market place should not have guidelines as to how to revere the upright and to despise the depraved. Ever since the establishment of the town of Oroville, the Chinese and white communities have worked together without discrimination and our fellow villagers have lived together harmoniously without trouble. Oroville is surely a town where everybody lives according to the same principles and deportment.

Recently we have heard that neighboring towns have set up tongs, each of which set about to recruit members. Often quarrels and other small matters have developed into murders and major disputes. Once started there is no end to the involvement and result in troubles.

We sincerely fear ignorant people of our community will imitate the tong example and involve themselves too deeply; therefore, in order to prevent this, we gather together the people of the community and establish the regulations listed below.

1. Military equipment is strictly forbidden. People of the community are forbidden to carry pistols or knives. Each family associations and stores of this community is forbidden to post bond for those wayward ones carrying weapons, who, upon being searched and jailed by the white policeman, were found to be tong members.

2. The stores and family associations and families of this community are forbidden to hide those who fomented trouble in other communities and then fled here for refuge. This is to avoid involvement.

3. In obedience to the orders given to us several times by the white officials the illicit establishment of tongs in this community is forbidden. Each number of our community should keep up our good image.

If there are those wayward ones who would not obey the above regulations, then the entire community of Oroville will discuss it with them. Since we were afraid that oral agreements are insufficient; therefore this document has been established as proof of our agreements.

Dated January 1, 1900, by the people of the commercial establishments in the community of Oroville."

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8. Significance (cont.)

The Tapestry Hall, the newest addition to the complex, was built by the Park Commission to house the collection of priceless artifacts which had been held in trust by the Chan family until they could be displayed appropriately. Visitors to the complex may now enjoy and appreciate interesting artifacts of another culture that has contributed significantly to the early and social and economic development of the state.

The complex is a Temple of assorted deities and various worships which include Taoism and Confucianism in the Main Temple and Buddhism in the Moon Temple.

When the property was deeded to the City in 1937, stipulations required that persons of Chinese ancestry or religion be allowed the right to worship at the Temple complex. Today, people of these faiths visit the Temple to worship.