

In 1866, three Chinese businessmen – Ah Toy, Ah Charlie, and Ah Lee – leased land at the corner of Market Street and San Fernando Street in downtown San Jose.

The block soon became the center of Chinese immigrant life in Santa Clara County, with an estimated 1,000 residents. Stores, restaurants, doctors, scribes, temples, an opera house, and festivals drew thousands of visitors on weekends and holidays.



1877



1887

The cultural vibrancy of the Market Street Chinatown offered little protection from the rising tide of anti-Chinese violence. On May 4, 1887, the Market Street Chinatown was destroyed in an arson fire. The San Jose city council quickly acted to prevent Chinese residents from rebuilding their homes and businesses in downtown San Jose.

Despite pressure to leave the city, San Jose's Chinese residents partnered with non-Chinese landowners to establish the Woolen Mills Chinatown and the Heinlerville Chinatown in other San Jose neighborhoods.

The buried traces of the Market Street Chinatown were rediscovered in 1985, when artifacts were unearthed by the construction of the Fairmont Hotel and the Silicon Valley Financial Center.

Local Chinese Americans advocated for proper excavation and study of the artifacts. Eventually, the City of San Jose Redevelopment Agency contracted a private company, Archaeological Resource Service (ARS), to monitor construction activities.



1985

During a three year period, ARS detected and excavated 63 archaeological features, recovering over 400 boxes of artifacts.

At the time, the collection was described as the most significant assemblage of Chinese American artifacts in the United States. Yet until recently, the artifacts were stored in a municipal warehouse, inaccessible to researchers and to the public.

This installation by contemporary artist Rene Yung offers a rare glimpse into this buried chapter of San Jose's history.



2001