

THE RED HOUSE

Just above Santa Rosa Creek as it winds through the East Village of Cambria, there's a beautiful little park, the Greenspace Creekside Reserve. It's part of a cluster of historic properties on Center Street, which also includes the Bianchini House, now the Cambria Historical Museum. The legacy of the Creekside Reserve is unique on the north Central Coast, as it was once the center of community life for as many as 200 Chinese immigrants who worked in the nearby cinnabar mines or harvested kelp and abalone along the rocky ocean cliffs.

While the Chinese workers lived near the mines or the beaches during their work weeks, on free days, they came to town. Nearly all men, the workers bunked in buildings that occupied a property on Center Street owned by Johanna Gans. They did their washing at laundries onsite, gambled and smoked opium for recreation and discussed earning enough money to return home, Chinese politics and Taoist philosophy. The Chinese center buildings included bunkhouses, laundries, a store, an opium house, and a Chinese Association Hall or Temple.

Association halls (also known as Tong houses) were gathering places that bound Chinese immigrant workers to their traditions and their culture. They were used for veneration of Taoist and Buddhist deities and saints, and for discussions that ranged from economic realities to Sun Yat Sen's revolution against China's Manchurian Dynasty. Collections were taken to provide services to destitute members of the community and in some communities, to fuel the revolution six thousand miles away.

In California, association halls were spread across the state from Oroville down the Sacramento Delta to San Francisco and south to the Monterey Bay area and the Central Valley. There also were halls in Los Angeles' China Town area. By the 1920s, many of the small-town Chinese communities, including the one in Cambria, had disbanded.

In 1919, the Warren family of Cambria bought the

property on which the Chinese center was located. The original home, to the left in the photo below, faced on Center Street. By this time, most of the Chinese community buildings had fallen, but the little Association Hall was still standing. Around 1925, it was incorporated into the house, serving as a living room. In later years, the Warren family home became known as the Red House, because of its barn red exterior.



Photo Credit: Cambria Historical Society

In 1995, Linda Warren Seek offered the property to Greenspace to be preserved in perpetuity as open space along Santa Rosa Creek. Her husband Brad concluded the sale after her death in 1999. Greenspace began to plan for its future while paying the mortgage with grant funding and major gifts from Cambrians and others who caught the vision of what this space could be. In the process, we had the Red House examined by a historic preservation team, who discovered the true nature of the "add-on."

When the main structure was damaged severely by fire in 2002, the living room area was salvaged. Work began in earnest to restore the last remnant of the Chinese community in downtown Cambria. Moved to a space directly across the reserve from its original position by the creek, the old Association Hall was painstakingly restored to its original interior and exterior, with the addition of an access ramp.

The renamed Chinese Temple was dedicated in 2005 with incense and Buddhist prayers and a performance by the Cal Poly Lion Dancers. At the same time, we celebrated a generous donation that enabled Greenspace to pay off the mortgage on the Creekside Reserve.

Twelve years later, the Creekside Reserve and the Chinese Temple are enjoyed by both Cambria locals and visitors. To celebrate the important legacy of Chinese immigrants in our town, Greenspace will present Chinese Heritage Day in conjunction with the Historical Society's Cambria Heritage Day on Saturday, May 27th from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

The afternoon will be filled with fun and information, as this legacy is celebrated and examined. At 1 p.m., Cal Poly's current Lion Dance Team in full costume will wind their way around the backyard of the Historical Museum and across Center Street to the Creekside Reserve. They will honor the spirits of the hard-working Chinese immigrants who met in the Temple with a dance in front of the restored building.



Photo: Sandy Lydon

Following this performance, Sandy Lydon, professor emeritus of history at Cabrillo College in Aptos, will speak on "Feeding the Hungry Ghosts: A Celebration of Cambria's Chinese Legacy." This talk

will focus on the traditions of the Chinese who lived and worked along the Central Coast and particularly their longing to return to China, and the pain they experienced, knowing that they would die and be buried far from their families. Come and learn how Cambrians later helped resolve this sad dilemma.

Sandy is one of California's foremost experts on Chinese immigrant history and has received multiple teaching awards and published extensively on this topic. He is the author of *Chinese Gold: The Chinese in the Monterey Bay Region*, which has been translated into Chinese. He will be working with Greenspace through the next several months in our application for California State Historic Monument status for the Chinese Temple.

After his talk, Greenspace's own Wayne Attoe and Nancy Anderson will lead temple tours, explaining more about the building's history and some of its unique features. This not-to-be-missed event is free to the public. Donations are welcome and will go to the upkeep of the Chinese Temple and future programs at the Creekside Reserve. Please contact info@greenspacecambria.org or 805-927-2866 for more information.

MEN OF CAMBRIA COOK BOOK

Save the date—June 18 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Creekside Reserve (2264 Center St.)—for a book launch and book signing of the fabulous *Men of Cambria Cook* book, written by long-time advocate and friend of Greenspace Victoria Krassensky, and beautifully photographed and designed by Craig Loud. This unique book is full of delightful culinary excursions by talented men of all ages who live right here in Cambria. The cooks write about their lives and share their favorite recipes with us—everything from appetizers and cocktails to hearty main dishes and gorgeous desserts.

The collector-quality cookbook is just \$39.95. Proceeds of all sales will go to support Greenspace's programs and expenses. The book will soon be in area bookstores and foodie specialty shops. If you purchase your copy at the launch, 100% of the purchase price will go to Greenspace!

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The North Coast area of San Luis Obispo County is a national treasure. Greenspace will protect and enhance its ecological systems, cultural resources and marine habitats through land acquisition, education and advocacy.