

FIDDLETOWN PRESERVATION SOCIETY

The Fiddletown Preservation Society (FPS) came into being in 1964 over the issue of saving the Fiddletown Schoolhouse. Because the property had not been used as a school since 1955, the Oro Madre School District intended to put it up for sale. Members of the FPS were concerned that the schoolhouse building would be demolished. Instead, the school district deeded the schoolhouse and property to the new organization later that year. Preservation of the schoolhouse has been a target of the FPS ever since.

In September 1965, the FPS was incorporated by the Secretary of State "to preserve, maintain and restore the historical buildings, records, and relics of Fiddletown...as a living museum for the education of the general public in the history of the Fiddletown area." Earlier that year, the FPS and the Fiddletown Community Club jointly sponsored Fiddletown's first Homecoming Barbeque and Picnic to raise funds for the schoolhouse and to honor its alumni and teachers. The day featured a fiddlers' contest, the genesis of the annual event that continues to the present.

Since its inception, the FPS has been involved in several preservation projects. The organization succeeded in urging Amador County to acquire the Chinese herb store and gambling hall as historical sites. In 1968, the Chinese herb store (later known as the Chew Kee Store) was dedicated and opened as a museum, maintained and staffed by members of the FPS.

In 1978, eighteen historic sites in Fiddletown, nominated by the FPS, were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This followed a long battle in which the Fiddletown Preservation Society actively contested a proposed limestone quarry that would threaten fragile historic structures with vibrations from heavy trucks continuously going through town.

The FPS has saved Fiddletown's unique and endangered Chinese structures through grants and fundraising. Restoration work on the Chew Kee Store was undertaken in 1987. The project received the Governor's Historic Preservation Award in 1989. The Fiddletown ROCS (Restoration of Chinese Structures) project was initiated in 2001 after Amador County accepted ownership of the Chinese General Store. In 2008, exterior preservation was accomplished on both the Chinese Gambling Hall and the Chinese General Store. This project received the 2010 Governor's Historic Preservation Award.

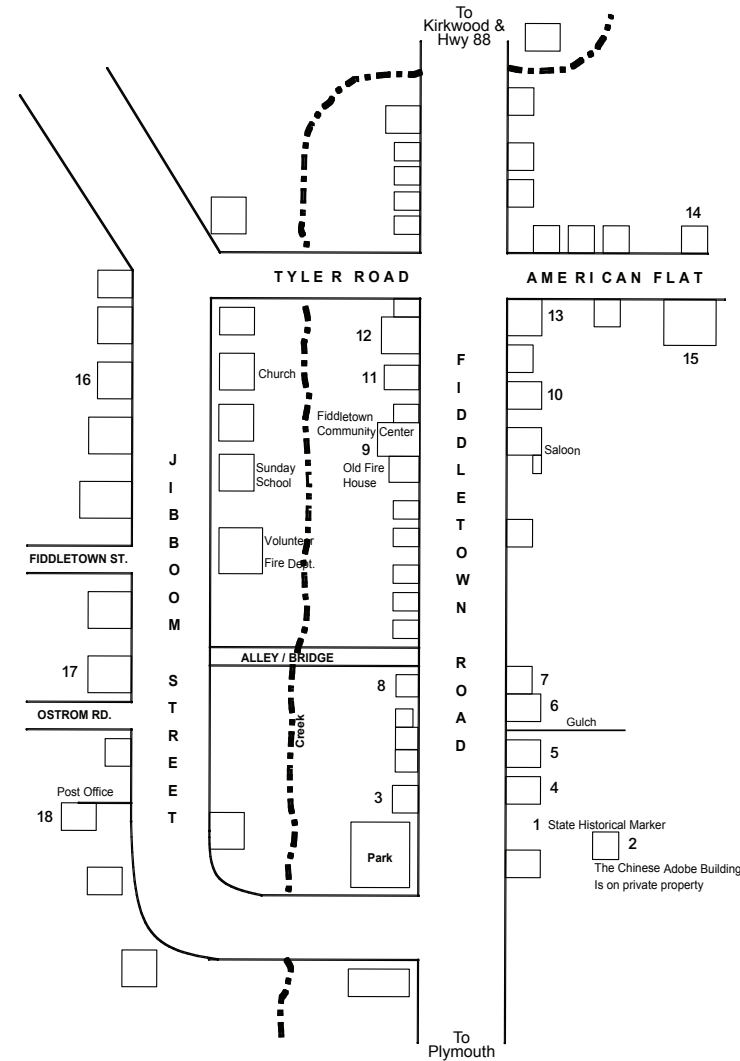
Improvements and maintenance of the buildings under our care is ongoing. The Chew Kee Store Museum, containing thousands of objects from its past Chinese residents, opens for special events and on Saturdays from noon to 4:00, April through October. Fiddletown's 1862 schoolhouse opens for special events and is available for rental.



P.O. Box 53, Fiddletown, CA 95629

www.fiddletown.info

Fiddletown Historical Map



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| 1. State Historical Marker | 7. Billie Brown House | 13. Isaac Cooper House |
| 2. Chinese Adobe | 8. Atkinson Store & Livery Stable | 14. Fiddletown (Oleta) Schoolhouse |
| 3. Chew Kee Store | 9. Community Center & Erauw Store (now Library) | 15. Fiddletown Public & Masonic Cemetery |
| 4. Chinese Gambling Hall | 10. Fiddletown's General Store | 16. James Head House |
| 5. Chinese General Merchandise Store | 11. Thielon & Muller Brewery | 17. H.C. Farnham House |
| 6. The Forge | 12. Schallhorn's Blacksmith & Wagon Shop | 18. Post Office Lobby |

Today, Fiddletown hosts two active, nonprofit community organizations:

FIDDLETOWN PRESERVATION SOCIETY welcomes new members interested in preserving and promoting Fiddletown's historical legacy and buildings. To become a member or make a donation, visit online at www.fiddletown.info

FIDDLETOWN COMMUNITY CENTER maintains the Community Hall and Library and provides event space, community services, and local gatherings. To become a member or make a donation, visit online at <http://fiddletowncc.org>

THE FIDDLETOWN

Self-Guided Historical Walking Tour

FIDDLETOWN PAST AND PRESENT

The small hamlet of Fiddletown is resonant with vestiges from its Gold Rush past. Several vintage structures still stand, evoking the time when Fiddletown was a bustling place. As you stroll through the town, imagine what it must have been like with horses and wagons stirring up dust on the unpaved main road, the sounds of hammers striking anvils from numerous blacksmith shops, ladies dressed in finery of the day, men clutching pouches filled with gold dust, merchants inviting you to purchase their wares, music from dance halls and gambling joints, and people speaking German, French, Spanish, Chinese, as well as English in its variant forms.

Fiddletown began as a mining camp during the height of the Gold Rush, with ample placer gold deposits that attracted miners from all parts of the world. The story goes that it was named by early settlers from Missouri who fiddled during slow times when there was no water in the creeks for mining, a frequent occurrence in the summer. Music was always a part of this town, but so was fiddling around.

By 1853 Fiddletown evolved into a trading center for nearby mining camps and for farms in the neighboring Shenandoah Valley. Its commercial area during this period of growth featured fifteen to twenty stores, four hotels, several blacksmith shops, a carpenter's shop, four taverns, a couple of bakeries, two or three restaurants, dance halls, and even public baths. With a church, post office, and school, it was quite a civilized town. In its heyday, the town's population was about 2,000.

Fiddletown had one of the larger Chinese communities in the region, comprising about a third of the total population in the 1860 census and eventually about half in the 1880 census. The Chinese population inhabited nearly all of the western part of Fiddletown. Geographically, the town's population was divided by the small creek lying between the Chinese General Store and the Forge. Europeans and Americans lived to the east of the creek and the Chinese community lived to the west. Only four buildings remain in the Chinese district: the Chew Kee Store, the Gambling Hall, the Chinese General Store, and the Chinese adobe (privately owned).

Fiddletown never developed the deep quartz mines present in other parts of the county. By 1878, logging and agriculture took over. The town even lost its identity after a wealthy citizen, Columbus A. Purinton, became embarrassed by the melodious name when signing hotel registers in San Francisco. He along with some townsfolk convinced the state legislature to change the name to Oleta, the name of an unidentified woman. This change lasted until 1932 when residents petitioned the U.S. Postal Service to restore the original gold rush name, and so once again the town became known as Fiddletown.

Fiddletown maintains a rural charm that melds old with new. Local enterprises include equestrian services at each end of town, *Brown's English Toffee* on Main Street, and many home-based businesses.

Fiddletown's Historical Sites

STATE HISTORICAL MARKER: The bronze marker designates Fiddletown as California Historical Landmark no. 35. The marker was dedicated in 1934.

CHINESE ADOBE: Located on a hill to the south of the Chew Kee Store, this building was originally constructed with adobe brick by Chinese. It consists of a single room with a large loft area beneath the roof. The original function of the structure is unknown. The building is privately owned.



CHEW KEE STORE: The Chew Kee Store was built by Chinese workers during Fiddletown's heyday in the mid-1850s. The thick walls are made of rammed earth, an ancient Chinese construction technique. The store was originally established as an herb shop by herb doctor Yee Fung Cheung who arrived during the Gold Rush to attend to the medical needs of Chinese miners and railroad workers. In the 1880s, the merchant Chew Kee took over. The store functioned as an herb shop, grocery, and community center for the Chinese population. Chew Kee and his wife Sigh Choy added the wooden rooms at the rear of the building, including two kitchens. In 1913, they left the store to their adopted son Fong Chow Yow or "Jimmie" Chow, who lived in the store for most of his life and, fortunately, kept the contents of earlier occupants. Preservation work includes reattachment of the wooden rooms, a new roof and porch, and artifact repair.



CHINESE GAMBLING HALL: The Chinese Gambling Hall, with a brick facing and schist-mud lime mortar walls, was most likely constructed by Chinese laborers in the late 1850s or early 1860s. It was used as a gambling hall in the 19th century and owned for many years by Yee Fung, likely the same Yee Fung Cheung who founded the Chew Kee Store across the street. The rear wall consists of the bare earth and rock of the steeply sloping hillside to the south.

The building is square, rather than the common rectangular shape. Note the single small window. The Gambling Hall underwent exterior restoration in 2008 to stabilize and weatherproof the structure. The front portion was rebuilt brick by brick by expert masons.



CHINESE GENERAL MERCHANDISE STORE: The Chinese General Store is a two-story brick structure constructed in the mid to late 1850s by Euro-Americans. Like many gold rush buildings, it has iron doors to protect it from fire. It was deeded in 1871 to the Chinese merchant Foo Kee, owner of more property in Fiddletown than other Chinese residents. This structure served as a Chinese merchandise store with an upstairs loft that

could be used for storage. The building, which had large fissures beneath the upstairs windows, was stabilized and weatherproofed in 2008.



THE FORGE: The Forge was built in the late 1850s or early 1860s as a blacksmith shop, one of several in Fiddletown. The property was deeded in 1871 to blacksmith Isaac McClary. In 1892 it was sold to William "Billie" Brown, a blacksmith who also became Amador County Surveyor and Fiddletown Postmaster. The front is brick; the sides are lime-rubble mortar. When the building was used as a blacksmith shop it had three sets of large iron doors in the front. The doors were later

converted to the three arched windows. The interior contained enormous bellows from blacksmith days. In the 1960s the rubble wall on the east side of the Forge building threatened to collapse from exposure to weather, and it was replaced by a concrete brick wall in order to save the building.



BILLIE BROWN HOUSE: Blacksmith Isaac McClary lived in this house adjacent to the Forge. Billie Brown purchased both buildings and this became his home. The main part of the house was constructed in the 1850s from local brick, referred to by locals as "Chinee" brick. Two additions were made later: a bedroom in the 1940s and the eastern wing in the 1960s. The brick structure was originally divided by wooden partitions into several small rooms, which were removed to create one large living room, probably in the 1940's when the bedroom was added. There is also a lean-to wood structure in the rear of the building that houses the kitchen, with a 'cold room' built into the hillside for food storage, originally with a roof covered with soil for insulation.



ATKINSON STORE & LIVERY STABLE: Built in 1883, this house was once the Atkinson General Merchandise Store, operated by Charles Atkinson. Next door to the west, was a large livery stable, which also belonged to Atkinson. Goods were hauled between Fiddletown and the railroad station in Latrobe.



COMMUNITY CENTER & ERAUW STORE: Fiddletown's Community Hall was built in 1934 as a dance pavilion. Fiddletown dances attracted people from surrounding communities. In the 1950s, the hall was used for roller skating. Since 1946, the community building was owned by the Fiddletown Community Center, which made many improvements in the first decade of 2000. The brick building abutting the hall was constructed about 1853. Now used as the community library, it was originally owned and operated as a store by the Belgian merchant Peter Erauw, who sold merchandise and other provisions to the early residents of Fiddletown.



FIDDELTOWN'S GENERAL STORE: The General Store was built in 1858 of local brick and was first owned by merchants Sloat & Kaull. Merchants James Burt and James Head (Burt & Head) took over the business in the 1860s, supplying hardware and mining equipment in addition to food, clothing, and medicine. Since the ground rises in the back of the lot, the front of the store was built to rise several feet above the level of the street, making it easy for customers to load their wagons with purchases. The wooden warehouse to the west was built around 1915. The store functioned continuously under a variety of owners until the end of the 20th century. It is presently a private residence.



THIELON & MULLER BREWERY: This house was built at a later time on top of a basement that formerly served as a brewery, first operated in the 1860s by Thielon & Muller. Beer was kept cool in the thick walls of the basement, consisting of large hand hewn stone blocks and a marble floor. The brewery was a large operation that had a business office and malt mill, probably on the adjacent lot. A barley house was located up a hill to the south. Henry Shroeder of Hanover acquired the brewery after Conrad Muller died in 1874 and ran it for another twenty years.



SCHALLHORN'S BLACKSMITH & WAGON SHOP: The Schallhorn Blacksmith and Wagon Shop, built in 1870, is a massive building constructed with rectangular hewn blocks of rhyolite tuff, which is easily worked when first quarried, but hardens after exposure. The blocks measure 12x18x10 inches; walls are three feet wide in the basement, narrowing to 1 1/2 -2 feet at the top.

A second story was added by Christopher Schallhorn in 1880 with the original roof serving as the floor. He remained in business until the early 20th century. From the late 1940s until 1968, Nathan Randall operated the Wagon Wheel Café on the first floor,

which attracted locals as well as tourists. A front porch was added. The upper floor contained a museum featuring local artifacts, including the Joseph Pigeon blacksmith shop which was moved there from the west end of town.



ISAAC COOPER HOUSE: This gothic revival house was built by John Chestnut in 1861 for his bride Patience Neff. Note the pencil finial in front, indicative of a merchant. The home was purchased in 1875 by Charlotte Cooper, whose husband Isaac retired to Fiddletown after a successful real estate career in Des Moines, Iowa. Isaac Cooper, the nephew of author James Fenimore Cooper, farmed and operated a mine in Fiddletown. In 1975, the house was gutted by fire and its last inhabitant, a widow named Mrs. Frinchaboy, barely escaped.



FIDDELTOWN (OLETA) SCHOOLHOUSE: Similar to other schoolhouses in the county, the Fiddletown Schoolhouse consists of wood frame construction with clapboard siding, a porch and a belfry on top. Built in 1862, it operated as a one-room schoolhouse until it was split into two classrooms in 1946-7. The school was closed in 1955 when students were relocated to Plymouth. This was Fiddletown's second schoolhouse. The first schoolhouse was built in 1852. Restoration of the schoolhouse is ongoing.



FIDDELTOWN PUBLIC & MASONIC CEMETERY: This site actually contains two cemeteries, the public cemetery and the Masonic cemetery, at the crest of the hill enclosed by a chain link fence. Both historic cemeteries contain graves of Fiddletown pioneers and families who settled here. Fong Chow Yow, Fiddletown's last Chinese resident, is the only Chinese person buried in the cemetery. A third cemetery, the I.O.O.F., cemetery is just east of town.



JAMES HEAD HOUSE: James Head, a wealthy merchant and owner of the General Store, built this stately gothic revival house on Jibboom Street around 1862. It also has a pencil finial, indicating the home of a merchant.



H. C. FARNHAM HOUSE: Hiram C. Farnham built this home in 1855 for his bride Eunice Haynes. It overlooked the creek and the steam-powered sawmill that Farnham and partner James McLeod constructed in 1853 to serve the new gold strike in Fiddletown. In 1993 the house was named an historical site by the Native Daughters of the Golden West and the Amador County Historical Society.



POST OFFICE LOBBY: The lobby of the Fiddletown Post Office is filled with historical photographs of Fiddletown people and places. It is worth a visit.