

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: William Chew Chan Interview Number: 39  
 Chinese Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Tapes: 3  
 Date of Interview: 1/7&12/80 Length: 2 Hours & 36 Minutes  
 Interviewers: S. Cheng & B. Chen  
 Others Present: Wife & Grandson  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u>	Side: <u>A</u>
1	006-013	William Chew Chan's (WCC) mother was born in China. Father born in San Francisco. Grandfather came from China.		
	014-020	WCC's father was born in 1884.		
2	021-039	Father moved down to Los Angeles after the earthquake and farmed in Vernon. Father raised asparagus, cauliflower, rose potatoes. The main vegetable was asparagus. Father leased about twenty or so acres.		
	040-047	Grandfather was in laundry business. At that time most Chinese were in laundry and restaurant.		
	048-053	Grandfather married grandmother in China and brought her over to the United States.		
	054-062	WCC's father had two daughters and seven sons, only one of them graduated from Pomona Poly Tech in farming.		
3	063-078	Family farm at Downey was sold to the State of California around 1950. The family had the farm since 1921 or 1922. Father chopped down the fruit trees and grew asparagus. It was about thirty acres farm.		
	078-079	Father's name is Ah Wone (德旺).		
	080-099	Father's name was on the building of 1050 Grand Avenue, in San Francisco because father was the leader of the Wu Family Association.		
4	100-112	Father owned two properties: before World War I, 25 acres and ten acres in Vernon; after World War I, bought another piece of property -- Downey.		
	113-114	WCC was born in China.		
	115-120	Father went back to China to get married in 1900's and left WCC's mother in China. WCC was born in 1911.		

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	121-126 127-138  139-141	WCC came to the United States in 1919 with his uncle. Father went back to China approximately every two years. Whenever Chinese made enough expenses for the trip they went back to China. WCC was the second child and had one older brother and one younger sister. [Note: the background noise is running water].
5	142-148 149-158  159-176	WCC's three paternal uncles were not born in San Francisco. Most of maternal uncles and aunts were in China. One of the maternal uncles lives in Phoenix. He was the one who brought WCC to the United States. WCC stayed in Angel Island when he first came to the United States for about two weeks. WCC was questioned -- names, age, etc.
6	177-193  194-201  202-206 207-220	WCC came to Los Angeles right after the Angel Island, and lived in an apartment on Juan Street, Old Chinatown. Father had about one or two helpers during the off season, ten to twelve helps during the season. During the summer WCC had to help father in the farm. Mother helped in the farm in Downey due to the lack of labor.
7	221-228  229-232  233-250  251-262	Father put seven kids through college except WCC. All the children are all professional men now. Father did not make too much money. He put everything he made to his kids. Father moved to Downey in 1932. WCC was in China for two years and got married. Came back to the United States in 1933. Wife could not come to the United States until after World War II.
8	263-280    281-290  291-307 308-318	WCC went back to China a couple of times during World War II. [Note: Grandson was crying in the background]. WCC was stationed in Kunming (昆明) in China. WCC has five boys. First three born in China, two born in Los Angeles. WCC's apartment had four rooms for the whole family. In Old Chinatown stores area and residential area were mixed.
9	319-331	There were butcher shops, grocery, herb stores, restaurants, gambling hosues.

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	332-335	The gambling was against the law then, but was not enforced like now.
	336-369	The neighbors were Chinese. The kids played baseball and basketball -- had teams to represent Chinatown and 9th Street Market area in the mid 20's. Played semi-pro ball games with Mexicans and others -- East Los Angeles and Evergreen Playground.
	370-376	Lo Wah (羅華) team was formed to represent 羅華華會.
10	377-399	First went to Mr. Tom's Chinese school for three to four years after American school. Mr. Tom was a good Chinese teacher.
	400-421	WCC went to Macy Street School, then went to Central High School where the Board of Education situates now. It was originally Los Angeles High School.

END OF SIDE A

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2 SIDE A

1	001-008	Introduction.
	009-012	WCC attended UCLA campus on Vermont. In 1931 he went back to China.
	013-017	After American school, went to Chinese school for four years.
	018-026	Chinese school teacher name was Tom. There were Los Angeles Street, Methodist Church and Sunset Chinese schools.
2	027-044	Between 30 and 35 Chinese students in the school. Most other Chinese students were native born. They understood more English than Chinese so the teacher explained the class in English.
	045-050	WCC attended high school in China in 1931 for one year and ten months.
	051-066	Went back to China, lived in Hoipin (原平) Sung Wah Lei (泗和里). The family built a home and road in the village in 1931.
3	067-073	WCC went back to China for marriage arranged by the parents.
	074-081	WCC lived with cousins and relatives in the village. The relatives made the marriage arrangement for WCC.
	082-086	WCC got married in 1932 and stayed in China for two years.
	087-099	Returned to the United States in 1933, stayed in Downey with father. WCC remembers the earthquake.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	100-104	WCC went to old UCLA campus for a year.
	105-113	WCC quit school and worked. Father was not happy and sent WCC back to China.
	114-125	WCC studied business accounting in college. WCC quit school because he needed money.
	126-135	Father's farm was located on Paramount Boulevard, south of Manchester Boulevard in the City of Downey.
	136-142	Aside from WCC's family, there was another Chinese family who owned the farm on Suterbacker Road (?) owned by Wing Chong Lung family.
5	143-155	Stayed in Downey for a year. Then worked for Chung King [Produce] as a salesman for six months. Later joined the Elite Produce as one of the partners in 1946.
	156-172	WCC could not bring the wife over. After the War, WCC was able to bring her over as GI's wife. WCC was in the service for four years.
	173-182	Father was able to bring mother over before 1924 when the law still allowed citizens to bring their wives over.
6	183-195	WCC has five children, three born in China and two born in Los Angeles. After World War II, before discharge in the United States, WCC went to visit the family two times.
	196-202	WCC's wife and children did not come to the United States until March, 1948.
	203-214	WCC worked in the City Market in 1933 to 1938, selling vegetables.
	215-218	WCC took the orders and packed up the vegetables for the customers to pick up. Sometimes he delivered them.
	219-224	From 1938 to 1941 WCC went to Phoenix and worked for a friend in the grocery business.
7	225-237	The friend's grocery store sold American grocery, no Chinese foods. All the customers were Americans. The business was just so-so.
	238-241	Had chance to contact with other Chinese in Phoenix.
8	242-288	In 1940, WCC registered in Phoenix. Asked for deferment. WCC was crazy about the service and had three years of ROTC in high school and also took advanced military course. Got discouraged by being shorter than the others. Got three months deferment. WCC was drafted.
	289-290	WCC was a staff sergeant.
	291-297	WCC was sent to Fort Bliss, Texas, El Paso in the Medical Corp.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	298-318	WCC wanted to go to the infantry instead of being in the Medical Corp. Later felt he was lucky.
	319-324	WCC was never in the front; was in Kun Ming ( <u>昆明</u> ) with the S.O.S. headquarter.
9	325-327	WCC was sent to China, probably they needed interpreters but was never asked to work as an interpreter.
	328-343	WCC in the signal corp climbing poles, laying lines. One of the Chinese boys fell from the pole and died.
	344-352	WCC was released in 1946 at Fort MacArthur.
	353-369	WCC did not go back to Phoenix. Worked in the Elite Produce [Market] used most American names.
	370-381	WCC put in a few thousand dollars [into Elite Produce] to become a partner.
10	382-399	Four worked in the Elite Produce. It was a small outfit, not like the other big ones. More or less the second jobber.
	400-403	Had all kinds of customers: Chinese and Americans.
	404-407	WCC worked in the produce business until retirement.
	408-417	WCC and partners sold Elite in 1962. Then worked for a Japanese firm: Fujishigi.
	418-426	Kenneth Ung worked there too.
	427-437	WCC wrote to relatives in China before wife came over. After wife came over, wife wrote to the relatives in China.
11	438-450	WCC felt attachment to China before, but not anymore since the Communist took over. But there is still sentimental attachment -- and he would like to go back to visit.
END OF SIDE A		

TAPE 2 SIDE B

1	001-017	In 1937, WCC's father planned to take brothers and sisters to China to study Chinese. But because of the bombing of Shanghai, they did not go.
	018-028	Before father passed away, in a way, the family have kept up the traditions, especially in marriage. WCC did not care anymore. WCC's youngest son married to a Japanese girl. WCC did not mind it.
2	029-033	WCC associated mostly with Chinese and had a very good Mexican friend but not too many White friends.
	034-040	WCC mostly lived in Old Chinatown and did not go outside of Chinatown, [so did not have much association with Whites].

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	041-048	Until 1931 or 1932, WCC went back to China, father moved to Downey. In the 1950's, the State made the family sell the property.
	049-052	The family moved to Coliseum area. The sister lived near Venice and Nortom with mother.
	053-059	WCC lived in Downey and had very good neighbors and never had negative experiences living there.
3	060-074	WCC did not have trouble acquiring property in Coliseum area. But further west WCC knew there was trouble buying houses. "A lot of them don't want to sell it to you color people." Even at the Vermont area. You either had to have a White friend buy you the house, then resell it to you. But even then, the neighbors would not like that.
	075-079	WCC felt "if they don't want me as a neighbor, I don't want to live there. That's why I came right back to Coliseum."
	080-090	In the Coliseum area there were mostly Whites who sold their houses and moved out to the San Fernando Valley. If they can get more money they sell the house to you. So when the Chinese and colored people moved in they had to pay more to get in.
	091-096	When WCC moved to Coliseum there were predominantly all Whites.
	097-100	Before the war most Chinese lived in Chinatown.
	101-103	There were a few Chinese living outside of Chinatown and came to Chinatown to have Chinese school with WCC.
4	104-112	Most Chinese who lived outside of Chinatown could converse with White people. They are more fluent in English. It was not because of the financial status.
	113-118	Quite a few who lived in Chinatown could afford any place. But they rather be in Chinatown or sometimes their business required them to stay in Chinatown.
	119-125	WCC identified himself as a Chinese. When WCC got sick he used Chinese medicine mostly or cold remedy.
	126-131	WCC had never been in the hospital until he went into the service. WCC was sent to William Borma General Hospital for a general examination.
	132-137	Parents did not have much recreation. Went to show. Chinese shows were very seldom [shown].
5	138-146	Very few Chinese operas. WCC went for curiosity, did not understand the 唱大戲 -- Chinese opera.
	147-151	WCC played balls, basketball, baseball, tennis, for recreation.
	152-158	Back in 1926 to 1929 [approximately], WCC played on the baseball team.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	159-182	Whole bunch of kids in Chinatown played together in the barn in Chinatown. Barn was used for horses and wagons. Later no horses, WCC and [friends] cleaned up the field. Later the city built a playground, club house, there for Chinese kids.
6	183-193 194-202	Sometimes went to other playgrounds: East Los Angeles Playground and Evergreen Playground, with the Mexican kids. WCC played with other teams, but not Japanese team. Back to the 20's, the Chinese and Japanese did not get together much.. They hardly played with each other. They fought.
7	203-230 231-240 241-246 247-249 250-262 263-268 269-270	Had nine to play baseball. Ray Lue was pitcher, first base was George Tom, coach Victor Wong. WCC played second base. The outfields were George Wong, Kenneth Ung. Brother Glenn Chan filled in once in a while. Then Jimmy's brother Alan. Catcher was George Lee. Victor Wong was in the movies now and then. He was on the King Kong. WCC considered his team as a semi-pro team. Walter Chung was there playing too. The team played until about 1930's. Never got paid to play outside of Chinatown. There might be a price for it. That is about it. Won one or two trophies. The team played together almost every week. The coach was not a professional, he was older than the [other players].
8	271-278 279-290 291-298 299-302 303-307	The team was the first and only [baseball] in Los Angeles. Look how many Chinese people here [now]. They should have two or three baseball teams. They do not even have one. WCC only practiced basketball with the other kids. He was not good enough to play -- was too short for one thing. WCC and [friends] did not have much social activities, except now and then they had a party at the playground. WCC did not think he was special just because he played baseball. WCC joined Chin Wu Yuan (陳胡袁) Family Association.
9	308-330 331-336 337-341	After the War, [Chin Wu Yuan] built a new building in Chinatown, Bernard Street. Father was also a member of Chin Wu Yuan Family Association and donated a building [in San Francisco]. But being at Downey, he hardly had time to come down here [to the Association]. Grandfather spent most of the time in San Francisco, so WCC did not know much about him.

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	342-363	The Family Association had banquets. Everybody chipped in. Like older people, seven or eight dollars, kids were half price.
	364-379	Did not join the Family Association and CACA until 1950's. Chinese who were the ones that came from China were generally more interested in joining the organization.
10	380-387	WCC did not join any other organizations before the War, joined the American Legion after the War.
	388-408	In high school, WCC joined the tennis club and loved to play tennis. Played tennis almost every other day in Griffith Park.
	409-431	There was quite a few Chinese who played tennis but not too many. Not even too many kids going to school at that time. When WCC graduated from Lincoln High School, he was the only Chinese and there was another Japanese girl.
11	432-452	Most Chinese (kids from China) when they were fifteen, sixteen, they had to go to work. Their fathers could not afford to send them through school.
	453-479	WCC was the only Chinese in his class and mixed with Americans very well at school.
	480-487	The Depression started when he graduated from high school. The crash of 1929, September.

END OF TAPE 2

TAPE 3 SIDE A

1	001-004	Father was affected by the Depression but not as much as other people.
	005-010	Father had asparagus farms. There were not too many asparagus farms.
	011-017	Around the 20's, the Biltmore Hotel was considered the most expensive hotel in Los Angeles. They put in orders [of asparagus] ahead of time.
	018-025	A lot of WCC's friends were affected by the Depression but held up a lot better than other races.
2	026-039	Even though Chinese were affected by the Depression, they could not go for the Welfare because they thought people might look down on them. Workers would borrow money from WCC's father rather than go on Welfare.



## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	040-046	Before World War II, there were Chinese in farming (manual labor). Every summer WCC went to farm and help his father.
	047-055	During the off season, the father only needed one or two helps to do the cultivation and irrigation. During the asparagus season, WCC's father had to hire six to twelve people.
	056-058	In the 20's, the farm worker got a dollar a day.
	059-063	A secretary might get \$30 a month. Managers or supervisors got about \$10 or more.
	064-066	A loaf of bread cost about five cents.
3	067-073	The workers got room and board. Breakfast before the sun came up. They quit when the sun went down. A lot of times they had to light the candle when they ate. After dinner they went to sleep, that's all.
	074-078	WCC's father hired mostly Mexicans and Chinese.
	079-084	All through the summer, if WCC and his brothers were lucky, they would get a dollar. They would go to the movies and get ice cream. Movie cost them five cents, later on, ten cents.
	085-092	In 1930, WCC was getting \$20 a week [working in the produce market]. At that time working in the farm could earn \$50 a month.
4	093-106	Every other year WCC got a raise [in wages]. WCC was able to save money. Family was not with him, so he saved money and sent money back every other month.
	107-120	WCC sent money back to China through the bank. The family in China would get the Chinese money through exchange in Hong Kong.
	121-127	Before 1930, WCC's father sent money back to China through the bank too. Not through the Family Association.
	128-134	Some people sent money back to buy land, WCC just saved his money.
5	135-143	Father bought quite a lot of property in China. WCC was going back to China to manage the property.
	144-151	WCC wanted to leave the children in China to learn Chinese.
	152-159	Father said the best thing was to put the money in real estate and land. But none of the children did.
	160-166	Before [1949], the wife managed Father's property. Later the Communists took over everything. So WCC does not have any [reason] to go back to China.
	167-173	Most Chinese born Americans have the sentiment to go back to China.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	174-187	WCC thought most of the Chinese found their wives in the United States. Only WCC's older brother and WCC got married in China through arrangement. The rest of the brothers married in the United States.
	188-201	Most of the American born wanted to marry here in the United States. Probably their parents like them to go back to China to get married there.
	202-209	Some Chinese preferred sons, some didn't. WCC's youngest son has one daughter and wants another daughter.
	210-220	WCC's parents in a way preferred sons. WCC did prefer son over daughter. He has four sons.
7	221-236	WCC would like to have son go to Chinese school in Chinatown but due to busy working day and night, there was no time for WCC to take the children to go to Chinese school.
	237-245	WCC's working hours were 6 a.m. to 1 p.m., 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. A lot of other produce market workers had the same working hours, but it's not a typical schedule.
	246-256	Now the produce market opens at four o'clock in the morning and closes around noon time. Used to be like twelve hours a day in the 30's. In the 20's, it was worse -- from 7 p.m. until the next day noon time or even until one o'clock in the afternoon.
	257-267	WCC has to speak Chinese because wife does not speak English. WCC's mother could not speak English either.
	268-274	Children speak very little Chinese. Granddaughter learned a few Chinese words with WCC's wife, but would not speak with WCC.
8	275-287	WCC would not consider Chinese marrying to Japanese and Koreans interracial marriage. In the 20's one neighbor was married to an Italian girl, one married to a Mexican girl.
	288-290	Chinese did not care about it [interracial marriage].
	291-297	WCC's parents would not mind but would not like it if WCC married a non-Chinese.
	298-312	WCC did not like the arranged marriage at all. But WCC actually knew the wife before the marriage was arranged in China.
9	313-331	WCC saw American movies with Chinese roles in them. WCC did not like the way Chinese were portrayed in the movies, but he felt there was nothing he could do. Especially no one would listen to you anyway regardless of how much you protest.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	332-344	WCC [did not like the Chinese being] called "Chink," "Chinaman," in the movies. They always made fun of the Chinese.
	345-363	In the 30's the Chinese all wanted their children to be in any professional job like accounting. You cannot expect the children to be a congressman. Maybe a lawyer. What can you do? Now you can expect them to be anything.
	364-373	When WCC got out of high school, he could not get a job as a city or county worker. The opening for Chinese never came.
	374-380	WCC went into produce market job because he felt he did not have any other choice.
10	381-396	All brothers were college graduates, Glen was a civil engineer from U.C. Berkeley -- 1934; Paul graduated from S.C. Dental School; Chester is a public accountant working for the Department of Water and Power.
	397-405	Brother, Paul, did not have a hard time.
	406-410	Sisters all went through Junior College. They worked and later became housewives. One is a dental assistant, the other one is an assistant to school teacher.
11	411-453	Brother, Gordon, graduated from Cal Poly at Riverside after service. He got his masters degree in Arizona in Agriculture. The youngest brother graduated from the University of Nebraska and became an orthodontist, now working in Torrance.
	454-469	Older brother, the civil engineer, never had difficult time finding a job. Chester, the accountant, first got a job in Pasadena.

END OF SIDE A

TAPE 3 SIDE B

1	004-006	Chester later got a job in the Department of Water and Power and is still working there.
	007-013	WCC did not have any kind of high hopes in terms of his children's jobs. WCC just like to see them get a good job as they like. "It isn't what I like, it's what they like."
	014-023	Back in the thirties, Chinese owned more than half of the produce market, mostly second jobbers -- the wholesalers rather.
2	024-034	WCC did not go to the farm to purchase the produce very often unless the commodity is really short that he and others would

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	024-034	go to farm and picked them up. If they had connections with farmers, the farmers would automatically bring the goods to the market.
	035-042	The profit of the produce market house was between fifteen and twenty percent.
	043-053	In the 1940's, WCC's company was doing very well, averaging maybe about twelve hundred dollars.
	054-058	In the thirties, WCC worked for a Chinese owned Mutual Produce house which had about five workers. It was considered a small house.
	059-062	The owner also did the same job as the other workers did.
3	063-068	WCC thought the work [in the produce market] was hard but not too hard.
	069-074	The grocery business was not a hard work but a long hour work. In Phoenix, WCC worked from twelve to fifteen hours daily. But the profit was not as great as produce business.
	075-095	Most Chinese worked in San Fernando Valley before the War, in Compton, in the twenties and thirties. But after the War, hardly any, all the older farmers sold out the farms and went back to China, the children would not continue working in the farms.
4	096-111	Gordon got his M.A. in agriculture after father sold out the farms. He worked as a researcher in the University. Now he is helping brother.
	112-114	Father never returned to China for retirement.
	115-125	Father sold the Vernon property which was industrial land. The tax kept on going up. Could not make enough for the taxes. Father made pretty good money compared to the other Chinese families.
	126-136	Most of the other Chinese farm owners were also pretty much well-to-do. But the farm workers did not make much.
	137-142	The farmers were either single or had wives in China and they had to send money back to China.
5	143-147	Some single farmers gambled. That's why there were gambling houses in Old Chinatown.
	148-157	There were lot of colored people who came to Chinatown to gamble -- mostly played Keno.
	158-168	WCC thought the Chinese got along fairly well with the Whites.
	169-174	Chinese people did not have too many conflicts among one another. Maybe among the gambling people.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	175-194	Most of the farmers came from villages and were originally farmers. If they were not farmers they would take other jobs as grocery, restaurant jobs. The sun is very hot during the summer time, especially during the asparagus season.
	195-212	During the rest of the season, the farm workers applied for odd jobs like restaurant during the weekend. If you were willing to work in the farm, you are willing to work any kind of job.
	213-216	WCC did not think the family association is that much of a help in terms of finding jobs.
7	217-229	Father found the workers in Chinatown. The workers knew who owned farms and would call the owner [WCC's father] for jobs.
	230-239	Father went out to work early in the morning and came back at night. He learned to drive. In 1921, the family bought a first Model-T Ford.
	240-247	Family owned only Model-T. Family used horses and track. No engines and any mechanical tools were used.
	248-252	Farmers lived in the farm house right in the farm.
	253-268	Father hired a cook who got up early, cooked for the other workers. After breakfast he would go out and work in the farm. An hour or an hour and a half earlier, the cook will come back and cook the lunch. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon, after washing dishes, he would go out and work again. He got extra pay as a cook.
	269-271	The cook cooked Chinese food.
8	272-286	Father provided room for about six or seven workers in the farm. The Mexican workers did not live in the farmhouse.
	287-292	The farm house was a room for six beds and no kitchen.
	293-296	No women on the farm.
	297-304	The workers would come to Chinatown by street cars during the weekend, maybe once a week.
	305-310	After 1931, WCC's family moved to Downey.
	311-318	In 1933, when WCC worked in the produce market, he lived on Spring Street in Chinatown. There were Chinese and a few Mexicans.
9	319-330	After the War, in 1954, WCC moved to Coliseum area, and lived there for 23 years. Then moved to Monterey Park until now.

END OF TAPE 3

END OF INTERVIEW

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