

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District **DRAFT**Other names/site number: P-05-003527

Name of related multiple property listing:

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in California: 1850-1970

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**Street & number: 8435 East Center StreetCity or town: Mokelumne Hill State: California County: CalaverasNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

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Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

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State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

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Signature of commenting official:

Date

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Title:

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☐
- District ☒
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	buildings
<u>        6        </u>	<u>        1        </u>	sites
<u>       14       </u>	<u>        1        </u>	structures
<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	objects
<u>       20       </u>	<u>        2        </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register     0    

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE agricultural field

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE processing

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE horticultural facility

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE irrigation facility

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling

DOMESTIC: secondary structure

RELIGION: religious facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum

RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Stones and earth

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District is situated on the northeast edge of Mokelumne Hill's historic Chinatown, occupying 3.87 acres of Volunteer Gulch. The district encompasses the archaeological remains of a commercial market garden operated by the town's Chinese residents between the 1850s and 1898, a small residence area, and the community's Buddhist Temple. Six contributing sites include ruins of historic buildings and structures and the remnant of a pond for growing water chestnuts. Fourteen contributing structures include three major terrace walls and six smaller stone terraces, a produce processing platform with artifact deposit, the stone-lined channel of the gulch's relocated stream, two ditches, and a stone roasting oven. Two post-period of significance resources are noncontributing. The district remains relatively undisturbed since its abandonment and retains all aspects of historic integrity.

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#### Narrative Description

##### Environment

Chinatown Gardens occupies a portion of Volunteer Gulch within historic Chinatown in the Gold Rush town of Mokelumne Hill, California. Located in the Upper Sonoran zone (elevation

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

1,400 feet above sea level) of the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada, vegetation is dominated by grasslands, chaparral, and oaks. The town has a unique Mediterranean climate conducive to year-round agriculture. The district is located near springs at the confluence of several small drainages, insuring a year-round water supply.

### **Time Period of Occupation or Use**

Chinese are documented among the earliest residents of Mokelumne Hill, founded in 1848 during the California Gold Rush. One 1853 account states that Chinese comprised one-fifth of the town's population (*Daily Alta California*, 30 Oct 1853). Independence Gulch near Main Street, the confluence of local streams and springs, lies within the borders of Chinatown and after being mined out, was developed into commercial gardens. Terraces, residences, and work areas were likely added over the years and fully developed by the 1870s. The gardens supplied produce to townsfolk, surrounding communities, and working miners of all nationalities. The nearly complete destruction of Chinatown in the 1898 fire—and the general exodus of Chinese from the Mother Lode—ended the Garden's operations.

### **Ethnic Group**

The Chinese of Mokelumne Hill came from the Guangdong region in southwest China and primarily spoke Cantonese. There was both a Taoist and a Buddhist temple in town and several tongs were represented. While the population was primarily male, a few wives and children were present as well as female prostitutes.

### **Physical Characteristics**

The district comprises the remains of a nineteenth century commercial Chinese garden. It lies within a gulch at the edge of Chinatown that contains springs and is a confluence for seasonal streams. After being mined out during the early years of the Gold Rush, the drainage was terraced with stone walls by local Chinese for planting crops; nine of these terrace walls remain. The natural watercourse was channeled to the eastern side of the gardens and two ditches developed to carry water east and west from the gulch. A pond was established within the upper (southern) terrace where water chestnuts were grown and where a tea house sat next to a curved bridge. A cistern provided water for processing vegetables next to the road. The sites of the pond, cistern, and processing area are extant. Constructed along the eastern ditch were three residences and a stone roasting oven, remains of the four buildings and structure are present. In the later years of the Garden's operations, a Buddhist temple was constructed within its southern boundary on Center Street, the main Chinatown thoroughfare.

### **Likely Appearance During Period of Significance**

Although mention of commercial gardens associated with nineteenth century Chinese communities in the Western U.S. are not unknown (AACC Newsletter 1989[6:4]; Costello et al. 1999:150–162; Hee-Chorley 2009:46–49; Lydon 1985:236–238), depictions of these enterprises are rare. A remarkable exception is a series of photographs from Portland, Oregon, showing its Chinatown gardens in a terraced gulch with the community of Chinese buildings at its edge (Oregon Historical Society 2019; **Figure 2**). This depiction is likely close to the appearance of the Mokelumne Hill Chinatown Gardens during its period of significance. Then, as now, it was

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

bordered by the Catholic Cemetery on its east and Center Street to the south, with the gulch plunging downhill to the Mokelumne River Canyon on the north. The buildings of adjacent Chinatown to the west have been replaced with modern residences.

### **Current and Past Impacts**

In 1947, pipes for the town's sanitary facility were constructed along the western edge of the Gardens, destroying the western ditch. The other modern intrusion is early twentieth century refuse concentrated in the southeast corner of the district, near the bridge on Center Street. Some sluffing of terracing has occurred on the hillsides and the center portion of terrace wall W1 succumbed to the pressure of pond water. During fire suppression activities associated with the 2015 Butte Fire, a bulldozer cut a defensive line through the gardens, destroying the western end of the upper retaining wall (W1) and cutting a path up the eastern slope to the Catholic Cemetery. This portion of wall has been rebuilt and stone stairs constructed next to it.

### **Integrity**

Chinatown Gardens has remained remarkably undisturbed since its abandonment, primarily due to a choking growth of blackberries that thrived in the moist soils. The district retains integrity of *location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship*. It has remained relatively undisturbed since its abandonment in the late 1890s, protected by the dense growth of blackberry vines. An exception was construction of the sewer pipeline to the 1947 treatment plant which runs along the hillside within the Gardens' western boundary. This intrusion, however, was confined to the perimeter of the garden area, destroying a ditch which ran along the pipeline's contour. It has fortuitously provided easy access for public viewing and enjoyment of the gardens. Integrity of *feeling and association* are also retained, for while Chinatown itself has disappeared, Volunteer Gulch maintains its historic agricultural landscape, and the bordering Catholic Cemetery, Mokelumne Canyon, and Center Street are part of its original historical setting.

### **Previous Investigations**

The California Historic Resources Information System (CHRIS) #P-05-003527 designation encompasses the entire historic Chinatown of Mokelumne Hill. Chinatown Gardens, in the northeastern portion of this property, was first formally recorded by Napton and Greathouse (2012), then expanded by Costello (2015, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). It was further studied as part of a cultural resources study of the Mokelumne Hill Sanitary District Wastewater System where it was evaluated as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (Costello and Marvin 2021).

## **CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES**

### **Terrace Walls**

Dominant are three large terrace retaining walls (W1 [partially rebuilt], W2, and W3) made of mud-mortared local stone. Walls are approximately 60 feet long. W1 is five feet high, W2 is seven feet high, and W3 is eleven feet high. These retaining walls supported soil buildup to create level areas for growing crops on a slope. Smaller terracing within these larger plots provided smaller adjustments in elevation resulting in more efficient irrigation. Six small terrace

### **Nine Contributing Structures**

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

walls are between one and three feet high. Retaining walls in the southwest corner of the district mark terracing for adjacent Chinatown residences.

### **Rock-lined Stream Channel**

### **One Contributing Structure**

As the mined-out gulch was filled with soils for gardening, the natural watercourse was realigned to the east into a rock-lined channel running below the Catholic Cemetery, just beyond the eastern boundary of the District.

### **Pond Remnant**

### **One Contributing Site**

A pond is noted in historic accounts (McMillian 1948, Lagomarsino 1989, Garamendi 1963) where the Chinese grew water chestnuts, with a tea house and “curved bridge” (neither extant) nearby. A large depression in the upper terrace is bordered by a curved, stone retaining wall on its eastern side and retains moisture throughout the summer. This is presumed to be the location of the agricultural pond.

### **Platform and Cistern**

### **One Contributing Structure and One Contributing Site**

Adjacent to Center Street is a large platform, approximately fifty feet square, supported by stone retaining walls on the three sides away from the road. A rock-lined cistern, about twenty feet in diameter, is located off the northeast corner of the platform. This is interpreted as a processing and staging area for produce, accessible to the street, with the cistern providing necessary water. Surface collection of an exposed artifact deposit on the northwest corner of the platform yielded remains suggesting commercial activities: twenty-nine large Chinese, brown-glazed stoneware storage jars, eight medium Chinese, brown-glazed jars, five Chinese porcelain bowls, five Euro-American bowls and plates, and ten aqua- and clear-glass bottles. The collection is archived at the Mokelumne Hill History Society. The deposit extends undisturbed beneath the surface for perhaps several feet.

### **Ditches**

### **Two Contributing Structures**

Two ditches carried water east and west out of Volunteer Gulch. The east-running ditch took water out of the gulch at the east end of the upper retaining wall (W1) and carried it past the cabin sites. This ditch has been followed for approximately one-third mile as it contours around an adjacent hillside, likely feeding downstream mining sites. The western-running ditch picked up water entering the gardens from the southwest; it was largely destroyed by construction of the 1947 sewer pipeline.

### **Cabin Ruins**

### **Three Contributing Sites**

Midway down the gardens, alongside the eastern ditch, is a row of at least three dwelling sites separate from the main Chinatown. They may have housed garden caretakers. The buildings were cut into the hillside and the walls lined with stones, many now fallen in as considerable sluffing has occurred since abandonment. Floor levels are about 2.5 feet above the ditch and front footings next to the watercourse are strong. There is a wide work area extending beyond the ditch at the location of the cabins. The back walls of the cabin depressions are about 3 feet high from floor level, making the dwellings semi-subterranean. The best preserved of the three is C1,

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

measuring 9 feet wide and 8 feet deep. Cabins C2 and C3 are approximately 6.5 feet square on the interior. It is not known if additional sites lie north under the thick brush.

### **Roasting Oven**

### **One Contributing Structure**

Between cabins C1 and C2 is a stone roasting oven. Also called a pig-roasting oven, these communal cooking features have been documented on several Chinese sites in California (Costello et al. 2004:6.70–6.73; Medin 2002; Maniery 2001). They were typically used to roast whole pigs for community celebrations, often built into a hillside to provide support. The vertical roasting oven rises some 5 to 6 feet above the level of the ditch. It is constructed of mud-mortared local stones, the top opening measuring 3 feet wide and 18 inches deep. This opening narrows to 2 feet wide about 2 feet below the top. The opening is clear some 4 feet down into the oven before encountering collapsed soil. The mouth to the lower reaches of the oven is marked by large stones extending toward the ditch.

### **Buddhist Temple Foundation**

### **One Contributing Site**

Facing West Center Street was the community's Buddhist Temple. Its front (southern) end rested on a stone-formed earthen footing, approximately 20 feet square. The wood frame, one-story building extended on piers out into the gardens, measuring about 30 feet long. Built between 1890 and 1895, it survived into the 1920s when the dilapidated building was captured in a photograph (**Figure 1**).

## **NONCONTRIBUTING RESOURCES**

### **Sewer Pipeline**

### **One Noncontributing Structure**

In 1947, a sewer line (#P-05-003526) was constructed down the western embankment of Volunteer Gulch. This destroyed much of the western ditch line and did not extend to the garden area. The surface of the sewer line was maintained as an access road to the treatment plant until the plant's abandonment in 1973. The line is retained as an easement by the Mokelumne Hill Sanitary District and is used when necessary for fire suppression activities.

### **Soil Outwash and Refuse**

### **One Noncontributing Site**

In the southwest corner of the district there is an outwash of soil sediment from a drainage that passes under a single-lane bridge on East Center Street. Domestic trash, along with the occasional tire, was dumped off of this bridge between circa 1920 and 1970. This deposit of soil and artifacts is concentrated in an alluvial fan that is easily discernable. It has obscured the upper reaches of the channelized stream bed, diverting water into the pond area and blowing out the center of Terrace Wall W1.



Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☒ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: ASIAN (Chinese)

AGRICULTURE

ARCHAEOLOGY: HISTORIC-NON-ABORIGINAL

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

RELIGION

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1850-1898

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

Chinese American

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criteria A and D in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Asian (Chinese), Agriculture, Landscape Architecture, Religion, and Archaeology: Historic–Non-Aboriginal. As the only known extant such Chinese garden in California, the district represents a unique association with Chinese commercial agriculture and offers information potential on agricultural methods and the lifeways of the gardens’ caretakers. The period of significance begins circa 1850 when gold miners abandoned Volunteer Gulch and Chinatown began to develop commercial agricultural gardens and closes in 1898 when residents moved away after a fire destroyed most of Chinatown. As a property type associated with Migration and Community Formation, Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District meets the registration requirements of the *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in California, 1850-1970* Multiple Property Submission.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Beginning in 1848, Volunteer Gulch—like most of the vicinity—was mined for gold. After the gulch was abandoned in the early 1850s, Mokelumne Hill’s growing Chinatown began to develop commercial agricultural gardens, taking advantage of the mild climate and abundant water. Written accounts from Mokelumne Hill residents and historic documents identify the district as the location of commercial gardens operated by the town’s Chinese community. Property ownership, the location of the Buddhist temple, distinctive ceramics of large Chinese storage jars, and the pig-roasting oven next to the cabins all attest to this cultural affiliation.

***Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in California, 1850-1970 (AAPI in CA)*<sup>1</sup>**

Agriculture was included as a subset of Property Types Associated with Migration and Community Formation. Property types include vernacular agricultural landscapes, packing houses, barns, stables, produce markets, nurseries, worker bunkhouses/lodging houses, and ranch/farm houses. Properties may also include canals, irrigations systems, and levees.

The associated resources of *Agricultural Feature Systems*, including areas occupied by workers, are oriented primarily or exclusively toward production for market or personal consumption. Such resources may include barns, sheds, granaries, fencing, corrals, pens, fields, orchards, activity areas, trash dumps, agricultural machinery, water conveyance and storage systems/irrigation features, troughs, access roads, and silos. Specialty buildings and structures related to the function may exist, such as milk houses or creameries, poultry sheds, slaughterhouses, cold storage or ice house, or loading chutes, as well as buildings for associated craft industries, such as weaving, spinning, woodworking, or metalworking.

<sup>1</sup> National Register of Historic Places, *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in California, 1850-1970*, Multiple Counties, California, National Register #MC100004867, Section F, Pages 135-139.

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

There is generally a work area for food production (fields, orchards, dairy), or animal raising. Permanent worker housing buildings (bunk houses, lodging houses) or complexes and temporary camps used by workers may be adjacent or found in different areas of the property. Depending on the size of the operation, there may be independent parts within the same property that function differently and all support the operation.

Buildings and structures such as barns, sheds, and worker housing associated with agricultural farm properties were generally constructed of wood framing. Log, stone—including fieldstone foundations, and metal may also be part of the construction.

As an agricultural property owned and/or operated by AAPI individuals or families, or where AAPIs made up a significant portion of the labor force; an open landscape with a range of agricultural resources that include gardens, agricultural outbuildings and related features such as fencing and water conveyance/irrigation systems; a property that may have played a significant role in agricultural development for regional markets, whose relationship between built and landscape resources is retained, Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District meets the registration requirements for properties associated with Agriculture as a subset of Migration and Community Formation.

### **Criterion A**

The arrival of Chinese to the U.S. West Coast resulted in important political, economic, and demographic changes. Although there were many places where immigrant Chinese lived in California, very few of these locations have survived to the present day with such excellent integrity as Mokelumne Hill's Chinatown Gardens. The district embodies distinctive characteristics of Chinese commercial gardening of the nineteenth century. The rarity of this important economic enterprise enhances the district's significance. One garden site has been reported extant in Idaho (Kingsbury 1990; Reddy 1994) and no others are known in California.

### **Criterion D**

While Chinese comprised nearly ten percent of area miners between 1860 and 1880, they are largely absent from the written record. Information on their lives and activities is supplied almost exclusively by accounts of non-Chinese and through archaeological studies of their camps and communities. Few sites of Chinese gardens have been identified in the U.S., making the Mokelumne Hill Chinatown Gardens particularly important as a source of rare information on this agricultural industry. Intact features and archaeological deposits have been identified that include information related to site typology, technology, engineering, immigration, commerce, community, and labor practices. In addition, the remains of domestic buildings and structures can provide significant information on the lives of the gardens' residents including aspects of their relationship with the larger community, demographics, subsistence, economics, and cultural adaptations.

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

## Historic Context

Like other gold seekers, the Chinese came to the Mother Lode hoping for luck. Most worked in groups with their countrymen, patronized Chinese establishments in towns, and sent money back home to their families. In 1860, the population of Calaveras County was more than 16,000 with Chinese comprising twenty-two percent (Giovinco 1980). While most Chinese residents were miners, towns such as Mokelumne Hill, Jackson, San Andreas, Angels Camp, and Murphys developed Chinatowns that provided services for countrymen far from home. Miners found familiar food, dry goods, clothing, temples for worship, gambling, medicines, and camaraderie. Chinese merchants frequently came to California with their wives and children and increased their families while here. The California-born Chinese were U.S. citizens and formed the base for the next generation of entrepreneurs. When the gold ran out and racial prejudice resulted in laws restricting Chinese immigration, Chinatowns in the Mother Lode disappeared. By 1910, only forty-five Chinese people were recorded in Calaveras County (1910 US Census).

Mokelumne Hill's Chinatown stretched along East Center Street, from present-day Shutter Tree Park, east to the edge of the Catholic Cemetery, and south up the street later called China Gulch. Its terraced gardens encompassed nearly four acres of land down adjacent Volunteer Gulch. This community was one of the largest Chinatowns in the county and featured two temples: the Taoist Temple east of the intersection of East Center and China Gulch, and the Buddhist Temple farther east (Costello 2020a, 2020b). The Chinese belonged to fraternal organizations which, among other services, guaranteed the return of their mortal remains to their hometowns if they died abroad. Temporarily interred in one of two cemetery locations—one near the Protestant Cemetery and one near the Catholic Cemetery—it is likely that most graves are empty as remains were traditionally disinterred and sent back to China. Three tombstones survived and are in the town archives.

Chinatown was nearly wiped out by a fire in 1898, started when the Buddhists dynamited their rival Taoist Temple. Although some rebuilding took place, the community never recovered. Most Chinese returned home after years of working in California, many because of increasing bigotry and discrimination and others retiring with their families on often substantial earnings in Gum San (Gold Mountain). A few Chinese, however, remained as part of the local community. By the 1920s, four elderly Chinese men remained in Mokelumne Hill, occupying decrepit stone and adobe buildings in what became Shutter Tree Park, named for an iron shutter from merchant Chung Kee's store that became embedded within an adjacent Ailanthus tree. This shutter is incorporated into a mosaic mural of local ceramic sherds bordering the park, which features a depiction of Chinatown Gardens (**Figure 3**).

On the north side of Mokelumne Hill's Chinatown, members of the historic community developed commercial gardens in a gulch known for its abundant springs. In the early years, China Gulch (later a street name) referred to the gulch itself, running north to the Mokelumne River; it is since known as Volunteer Gulch. Beginning in the 1860s, the land along Volunteer Gulch was developed by the adjacent Chinese community to eventually include three major agricultural terraces, a pond, a tea house, a bridge, two ditches, a Buddhist temple, three cabins, and a pig-roasting oven. Merchant Sun Li Tee (b. ca. 1808) owned a portion of the Gardens

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

along Center Street (Block 21, Lot 18) as well as other properties in the vicinity and may have been involved in the enterprise. There are no Chinese identified as gardeners in Mokelumne Hill census documents.

A town resident, Cecile Vandel McMillian, remembered the gardens from her childhood (Calaveras Weekly 30 July 1948):

...(O)n the hillsides of China Gulch today you can still see the rocked terraces where they spent long hours raising vegetables. Here they farmed with rude farm implements like the farmers of their homeland used. They carried water to these gardens on poles over their shoulders. At each end of the pole was a water container. A can was punched full of holes and attached to a long handle and used as a sprinkler.

On the flat on Center Street below what is now the Catholic Cemetery was a pretty sunken garden with a lily and fish pond and a curved bridge, very pretty in form, beside a small Chinese tea house.

Produce from the gardens supplied the local Chinese community, other townsfolk, and surrounding miners. Mokelumne Hill has a unique microclimate that supports a wide range of year-round crops as well as citrus trees. Water chestnuts (not the poisonous kind) were reportedly grown in the gardens' pond and remembered by other town residents:

...(A)t the bottom of the Catholic Cemetery hill was a huge pond where they grew and harvested a type of water lily. They dug up the bulbs from the edge of the pond and ate them. [Lagomarsino 1989]

Water chestnuts, or Chinese potatoes, were grown in water in these gardens. [Garamendi 1963]

Also in the Gardens was the town's Buddhist Temple (**Figure 1**):

Down in the Gulch near the wooden foot bridge which crossed China Gulch on Center Street, was a Buddhist Joss House. At the back of the upstairs room was a large statue of Buddha. On each side of the statue punk sticks and incense burned in brass containers. On the wall behind Buddha was a yellow dragon flag. On the walls were prints on rice paper and long panels of Chinese writing. [McMillian 1948]

After the Chinese inhabitants left, Volunteer Gulch, fed by local springs, was ignored by townsfolk and became choked with blackberries penetrated only by adventurous children. In 1947, a sewer line was cut along the western boundary of the Gardens; it was abandoned in 1973. Much of the gulch was purchased in the 1970s by local landowner June Davies and, following her death, was auctioned off by the County of Calaveras. The location of historic Chinatown Gardens was known to members of the Mokelumne Hill History Society who, between 2015 and 2018, acquired the nearly four acres encompassing the district. Many of its

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

resources were exposed by the 2015 Butte Fire that scoured out much of Volunteer Gulch. Under Society ownership, the area has been cleared of brush and fallen vegetation and historic resources identified and preserved. The area was incorporated into the town's fire break with Cal Fire crews assisting with vegetation maintenance.

### Data Sets

The most extensive archaeological data in the district encompass sites and structures related to commercial gardening activities practiced by the Chinese. While references to such gardens are common in descriptions of historic Chinese communities, the remarkably intact archaeological remains in the Mokelumne Hill Chinatown Gardens are the only known extant examples in California. They include nine terrace walls (large and small), a realigned water course, two ditches leading around adjacent hillsides, a pond for growing water chestnuts, a processing area next to the adjacent road, and a cistern and artifact deposit related to produce processing. The setting and relationships of these sites and structures remain historically intact, and individually they have excellent integrity.

Also within the gardens is a residential area with architectural remains of three dwellings and a roasting oven structure. The hillside below the dwellings is covered in brush and most certainly contains artifacts related to the occupants' activities, typically including ceramic, glass, and metal, as well as faunal items. Remains of the Buddhist temple in the southern extent of the gardens include foundations of the wooden building.

### Research Questions and Relevant Data

Beginning in the 1980s, identification, excavation, and analysis of Chinese sites in California have produced extensive literature on the material culture of this ethnic group (Rose and Kennedy 2020; Williams and Voss 2008). These studies are used to address specific research questions concerning differences and similarities within and between Chinatowns as well as issues regarding the cultural practices of Chinatown residents. The studies often address larger themes of ethnic display, boundary maintenance, and urban geography (Costello et al. 2004: 3.2 to 3.6). Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District, with excellent integrity as a single component site with diverse remains, contains the potential to address research questions important for understanding a unique aspect of the Chinese experience in California.

#### *How was the commercial garden developed as a functioning cultural landscape?*

The variety, location, quantity, and relationships of the district's sites and structures define the historic cultural landscape. Analysis will provide information on operations as well as the sequence of feature construction. Identifying the district's function is basic to understanding its development and use. Was the garden developed incrementally, with additional terraces added as the enterprise expanded? Where did the imported earth come from used to fill the mined-out gulch? When was the processing area next to the road constructed, and the pond with its teahouse and bridge? Did the two ditches carrying water away from the gardens precede this commercial development? Some of the land was owned by non-Chinese and presumably leased by the garden entrepreneurs; what was the relationship between these two groups?

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

Data Requirements: The data sets in the district have the potential to address the above questions through their diversity and integrity. These include the locations and physical attributes of the agriculture-related sites and structures (terrace walls, relocated stream channel, pond site, processing area, and water cistern) as well as artifact deposits related to the processing area and residences. Documents related to ownership and leases can provide information on legal economic agreements.

*Beyond the production of produce for sale, how were the Gardens incorporated into the larger Mokelumne Hill Chinatown community?*

The presence and locations of the residences, communal roasting oven, and temple provide invaluable and unique information on how the gardens were integrated into the larger Chinatown beyond their commercial contributions. Were the residents in the dwellings garden workers? Is there evidence of economic or social differences between the gardens' occupants or between them and those living in town? Roasting ovens are traditionally used for communal events, tying the garden to activities in town. Was the oven owned by the gardens' proprietor and operated by the residents of the dwellings? Is the tea house and bridge referenced in historic accounts evidence of commercial activities beyond gardening, or use of the location for social gatherings? The late-constructed Buddhist temple (ca. 1890) served the population's religious community and documents their emerging influence. How do the building's attributes compare with others in California Chinatowns? What is its relationship with the town's Taoist temple and events leading to the fire of 1898?

Data Requirements: Data sets in the district have the potential to address the above questions through their diverse collection of resources and associated artifact deposits, all with good integrity. They include the dwelling remains and associated artifacts located both within the resources and along the front embankment. The artifact deposit associated with the processing platform includes commercial storage containers as well as table wares, suggesting overlap with town activities. Roasting ovens are studied for attributes of construction as well as artifact content, including faunal remains and charcoal which provide information on their use. Remains of the Buddhist temple foundations can provide information on its construction and use, along with documentary evidence (e.g., photos).

*How did the Chinese adapt their farming practices to the Sierra Nevada foothills? What traditional methods of farming were continued? What innovations were made?*

How do practices identified in the gardens compare with traditional gardens in China and with descriptions of other West Coast gardens from documentary sources? Were ponds growing water chestnuts common in Chinese gardens? As two Italian commercial gardens were also present in Mokelumne Hill, were the Chinatown Gardens located on land no one else wanted? Moving drainages and building terrace walls indicate a labor-intensive occupation; was this a common Chinese method adapted to the available landscape? Did garden workers traditionally live next to their crops? Semi-subterranean dwellings are often found on rural Chinese sites; were these in the district different in some ways?

Data Requirements: Data sets in the district have the potential to address the above questions through their landscape attributes and diverse collection of resources and associated artifact deposits, all with good integrity. Data include the locations and physical attributes of the



Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

agriculture-related sites and features—terrace walls, water channels, pond site, processing area, residence site, and roasting oven. Also important is documentary information on traditional commercial gardens in China and those in the Western U.S. and other overseas locations such as Australia and New Zealand.

*What crops were grown in the gardens?*

As the gardens' location had year-round water, and Mokelumne Hill is uniquely favored with a climate that supports citrus, the gardens could have produced crops in all seasons. Were the crops restricted to typical Chinese items or planted for sale or trade with non-Chinese populations? The latter would indicate more integration of Chinese within the town community. Were traditional medicinal plants grown in addition to food produce? The gardens are thought to have served area miners and nearby communities as well as residents of Mokelumne Hill. How was produce transported? Did customers come to a market area on the processing platform to purchase items?

Data Requirements: Data sets in the district have the potential to address the above questions through a diverse collection of sites, structures, and associated artifact deposits, all with good integrity. Evidence of historic plantings is available through seed and pollen analysis (macro and micro fossils). These can be recovered from the processing area, domestic residences, cistern, siltation strata in the pond site, and in soils retained behind terrace walls. Traditional food and herbal remedies have been identified in studies of Chinese American experiences in the West and can provide comparative material. Documentary information on methods of produce distribution from other Chinese gardens can provide comparative material.

*How did the lives of residents living within Mokelumne Hill's Chinatown Gardens compare with those from other Chinese sites in the West?*

Archaeological studies of other sites in the Western U.S. can be used to evaluate artifact collections related to the gardens' residents. Particularly relevant are the presence and quantities of items related to food consumption (e.g., ceramics and faunal remains), recreation (e.g., gambling and opium and alcohol consumption), and work (such as tools). How did life in the Sierra Nevada foothills—a rich gold mining area—differ from that in Chinatowns of larger cities? Is there a wider range of goods present in urban areas? Also of interest is the presence of non-Chinese goods in collections, suggesting levels of integration into California cultural networks (including Anglo European and Hispanic). How isolated were the Chinese residents of the gardens from the surrounding town's culture?

Data Requirements: Data sets in the district have the potential to address the above questions through artifact deposits associated with the Garden's residents, which have good integrity. Refuse deposited down the hillside in front of the dwellings will reflect the lives of the occupants. Artifacts that can be closely dated can also provide information on the development of the commercial facility.

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

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Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

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Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☒ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository: California Historical Resources Information System, Central California Information Center; Mokelumne Hill History Society

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 3.87 acres

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 10 Easting: 700,809 Northing: 4,241,721

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District is defined by Calaveras County as Tax Parcel No. 018-003-023, 3.87 acres at 8435 East Center Street, Mokelumne Hill. The district is confined to Volunteer Gulch, bordered by East Center Street on the south, the Catholic Cemetery on the east, private residential property on the west, and the northern extent of Volunteer Gulch on the north.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries of Chinatown Gardens are consistent with those in place during its period of significance. Center Street has always bordered the southern edge of the property while the Catholic Cemetery, established in the early 1850s, provided the eastern boundary. The western extent of the district is defined by the side of the gulch and by the presence of hillside terracing identifying the locations of Chinatown's buildings. The northern extent of the gardens as defined by the steeply descending ravine of Volunteer Gulch indicates that agricultural features will not extend much beyond those already identified.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Julia G. Costello, Ph.D.  
Organization: Mokelumne Hill History Society  
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City or Town: Mokelumne Hill State: CA Zip Code: 95245  
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Telephone: (209) 286-1182  
Date: August 2022; Revised September 2022, October 2022

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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
City or Vicinity: Mokelumne Hill  
County: Calaveras  
State: California  
Photographer: Julia Costello  
Date Photographed: July and September 2022  
Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 7 District overview, camera facing southwest
- 2 of 7 Large terrace wall W2, camera facing south
- 3 of 7 East ditch and cabin sites, camera facing northeast
- 4 of 7 Cabin C1, camera facing north
- 5 of 7 Roasting oven, camera facing north
- 6 of 7 Roasting oven front, camera facing east
- 7 of 7 Temple foundation, camera facing east

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.



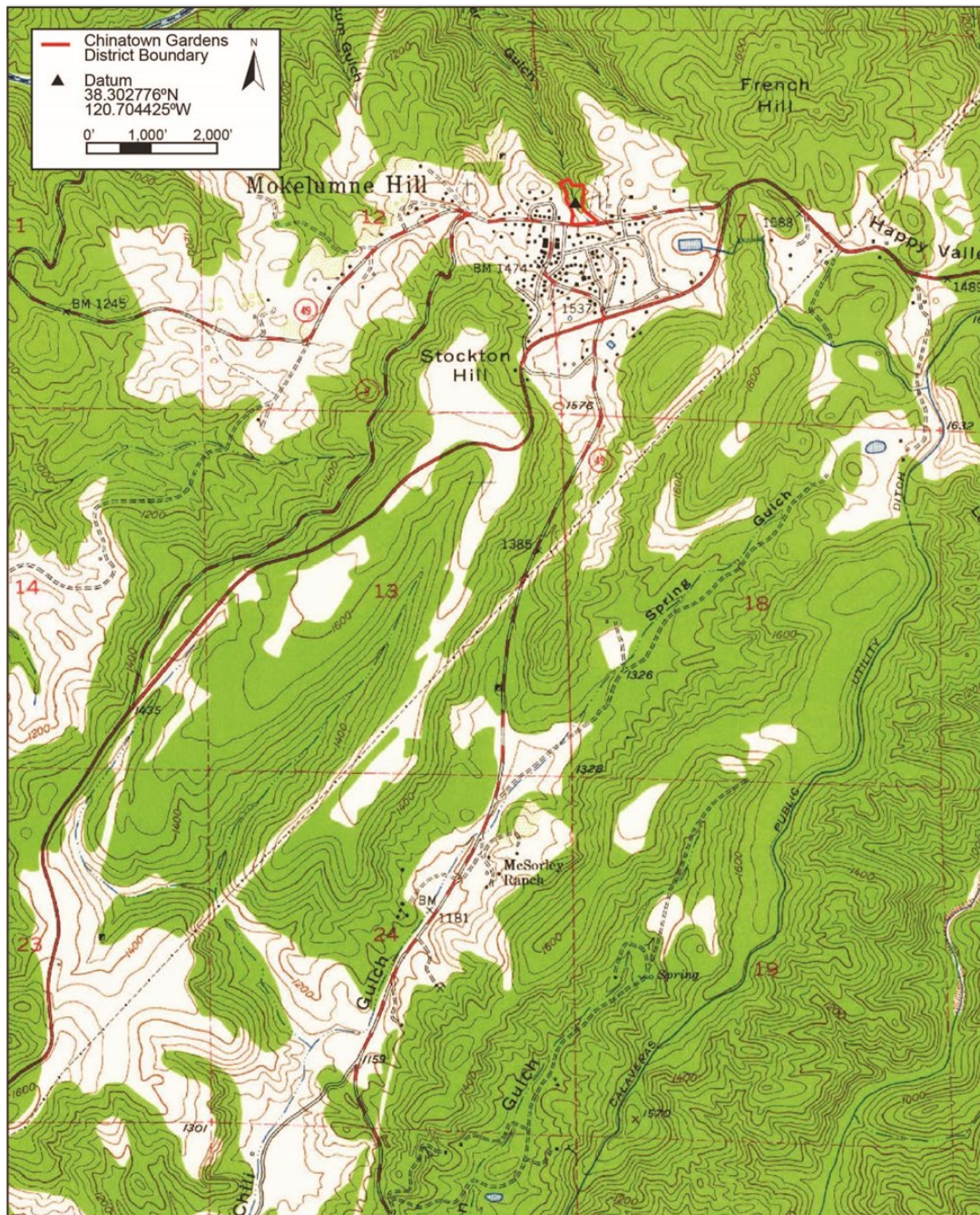
Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

## Location Map

Portion of 7.5' USGS Quadrangle Map: Mokelumne Hill, CA, 1948

Zone: 10 Easting: 700,809 Northing: 4,241,721

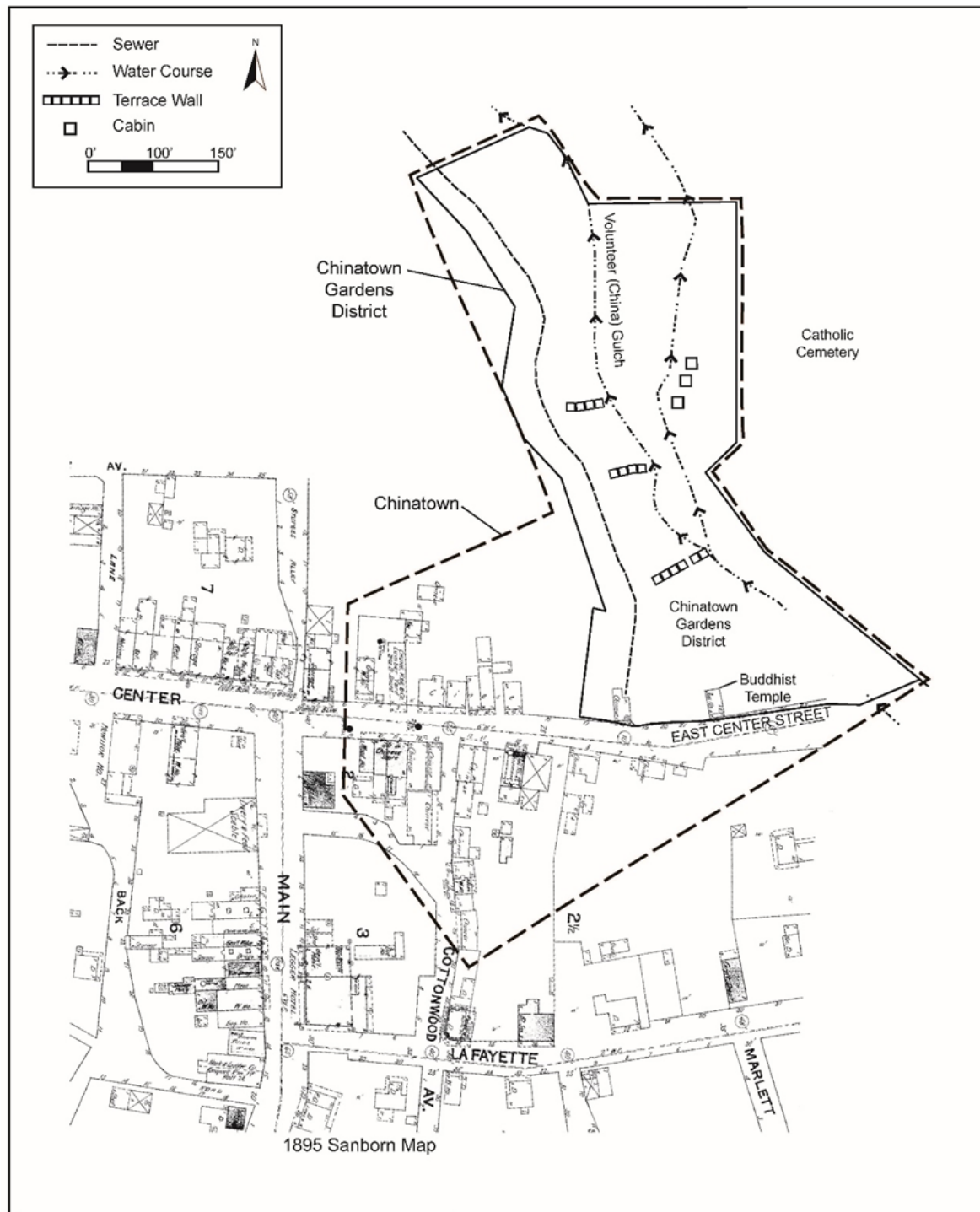


Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

## Boundary Map

District map overlaid on portion of 1895 Sanborn Map





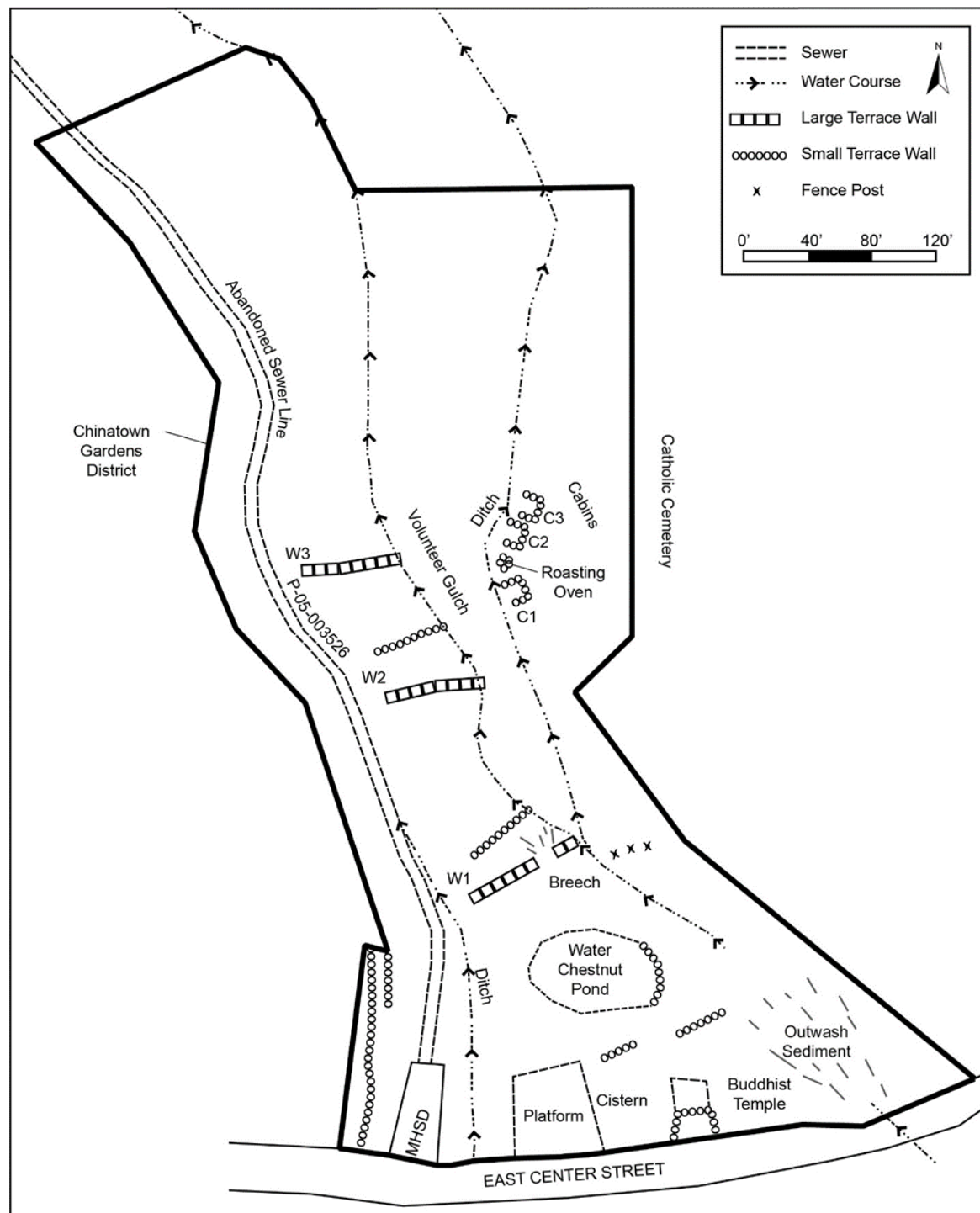
Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District

Name of Property

Calaveras, California

County and State

## Sketch Map



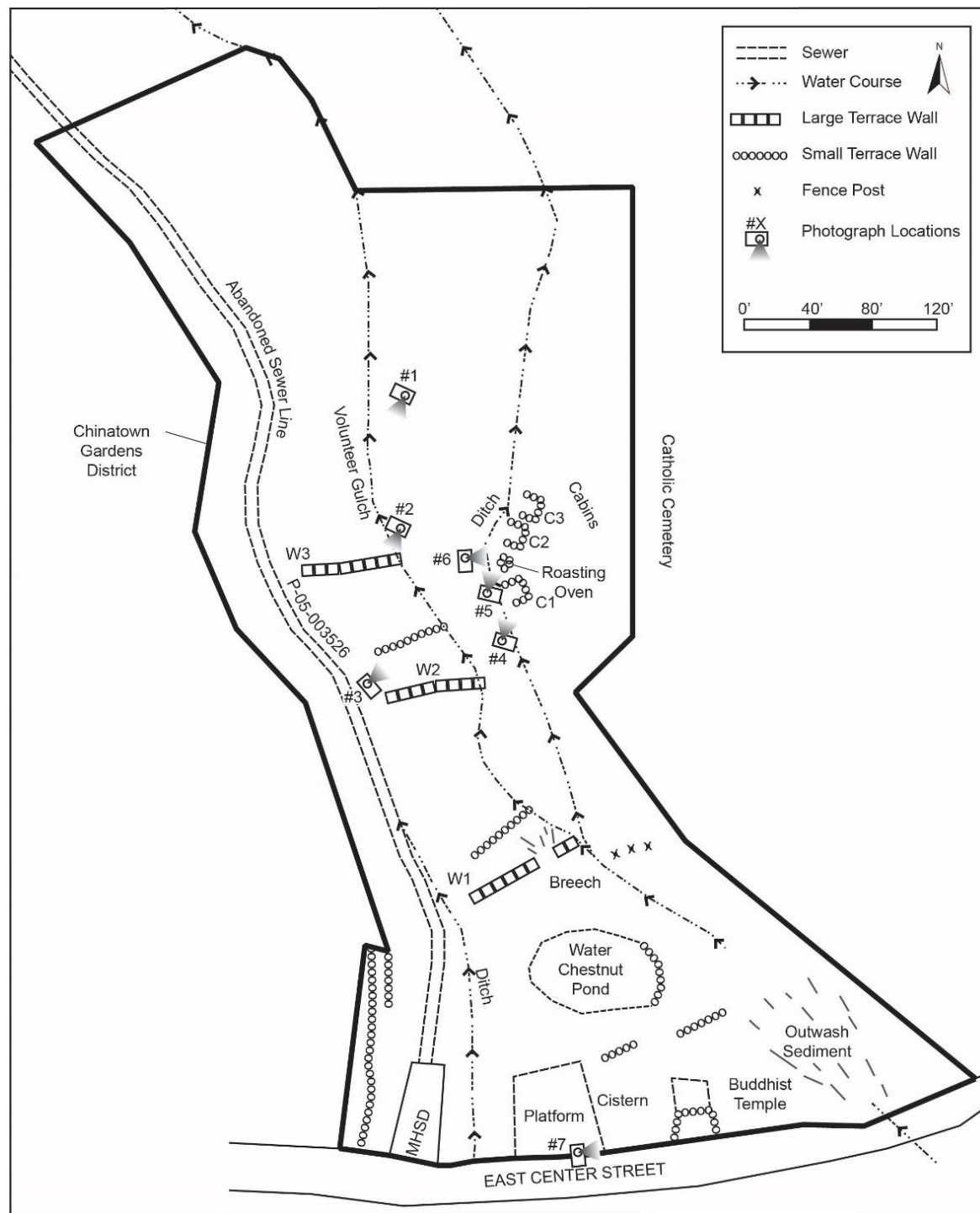
Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District

Name of Property

Calaveras, California

County and State

## Photo Key



Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

**Figure 1** Abandoned Buddhist Temple on East Center Street, 1920s; courtesy Mokelumne Hill History Society



**Figure 2** Chinese buildings with gardens below in Portland, Oregon, 1892; courtesy Oregon Historical Society

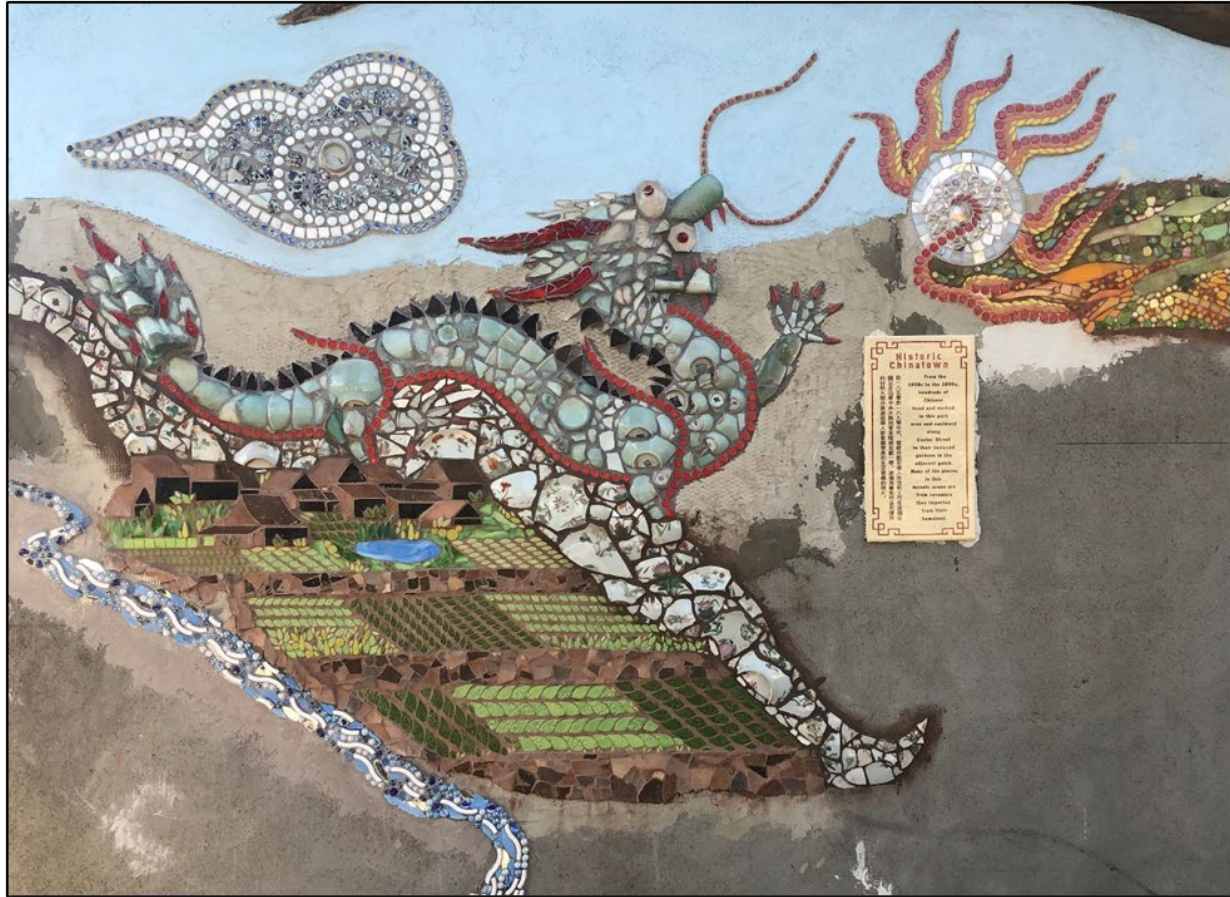




Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

**Figure 3** Mosaic depicting Chinatown Gardens, incorporating Chinese ceramic sherds from the district, 2021; photo by Julia Costello





Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

**Photo 1** District overview, camera facing southwest



**Photo 2** Large terrace wall W2, camera facing south





Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

**Photo 3** East ditch and cabin sites, camera facing northeast



**Photo 4** Cabin C1, camera facing north





Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

**Photo 5** Roasting oven, camera facing north



**Photo 6** Roasting oven front, camera facing east



Chinatown Gardens Archaeological District  
Name of Property

Calaveras, California  
County and State

**Photo 7** Temple foundation, camera facing east

