

HALF MOON BAY HISTORY NOTE BY RIPTIDE CORRESPONDENT DAN STEGINK: In April 1865, San Mateo County's first two convicted murderers were Hop Chung & Muck Sow. While those may have been Cantonese names, they also may have been functional names (e.g., "Muck(ing) Sows"), as many Chinese came over here in the 19th century without paperwork. For those unaware, Spanishtown's (now HMB's) Chinatown was on the stagecoach turnpike about a mile inland from the Mountain Mushroom farm, where five Chinese farmworkers were murdered this past January by a disgruntled fellow worker.

"How Two Chinese Who Murdered a Fellow Prisoner Escaped the Penalty.

During the thirty years of San Mateo county's existence there is not one instance on record where the extreme penalty of the law has been inflicted upon a criminal, and there is no instance of lynch-law ever having been invoked to satisfy public feeling for the taking of human life, however popular that inexpensive style of administering justice may have been during the early and lawless days of the State. Nor is the list of murders committed in San Mateo County by any means small.

Once, however, the hangman's noose came near doing its deadly work.

It was in 1865, and the individuals who were to dance at the end of the rope were two Chinese who murdered a fellow countryman in the corridor of the old county jail on the night of Monday, April 20th, of that year. The two Chinese, whose names were Hop Chung and Muck Sow, were arrested at Spanishtown about a month previous on a charge of burglary.

One Ah Lee was taken at the same time and held as a witness, and all three were lodged in jail in this town. On the night already mentioned Chung and Sow fell upon Lee and beat him to death, and at the same time wiped out the evidence which would probably have convicted them of burglary

The crime was witnessed by a young man who was attracted by the cries of the dying person. The following day an inquest was held by Justice of the Peace Durham and Chung and Sow were held to appear at the next term of the District Court on a charge of murder. Their trial took place on the 27th of

June before Judge B. H. Dwinelle of the Fifteenth Judicial District. H. A. Schofield, then District Attorney, prosecuted the defendants and Andrew Teague was appointed by the Court to defend them. They were tried separately and both were found guilty of murder in the first degree. On the following Friday they were sentenced to be hanged, the execution to take place at the county jail on the 18th of August... . The prospects for a double hanging were exceedingly good, but the condemned decided otherwise.

The thought of dancing a jig in mid-air to satisfy the curiosity of San Mateo County people was not an entertaining one for them, and they accordingly laid their plans for an escape. One night, a few weeks previous to the execution, when the gruesome shadow of the gallows was becoming unpleasantly apparent to the prisoners, they beat down the rear door of the jail and, climbing the prison wall, escaped.

Every effort was made to recapture them, and the Sheriff, Joseph B. Kieth, offered a reward for their arrest, but they were never found. Several years afterward a Chinaman who closely resembled one of the murderers was caught, but he was subsequently discharged, as his identity could not be established.

At the time of the escape there was considerable excitement but no one blamed the Sheriff, as the jail was known to be insecure and was condemned by the Grand Jury at its sitting a few months previous."