

Bunchgrass Historian

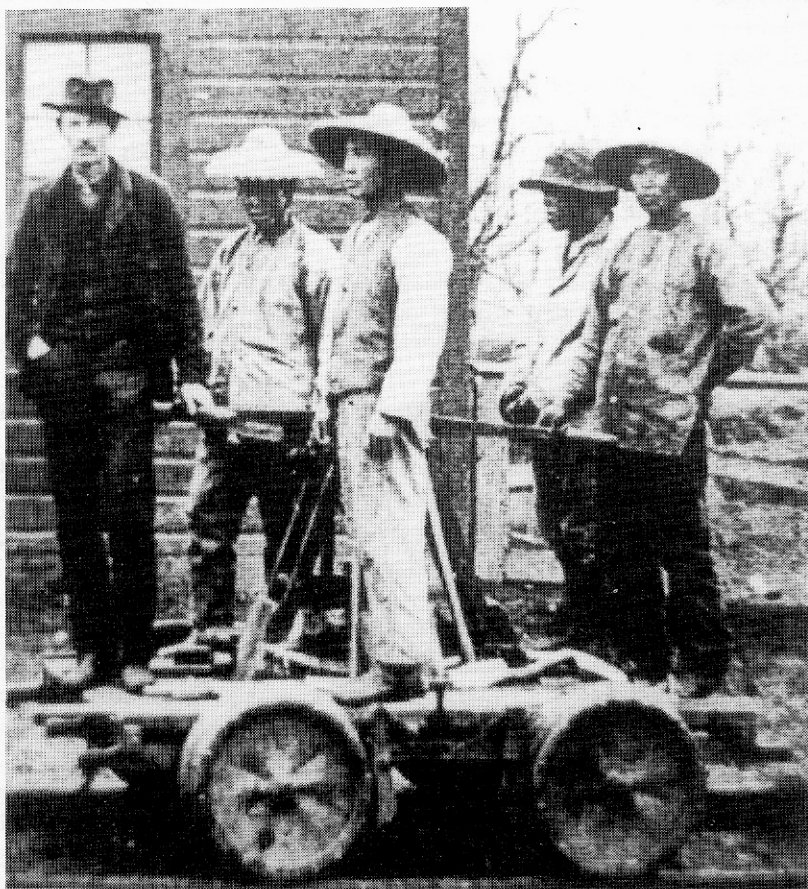
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CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN WHITMAN COUNTY



In This Issue . . .

This is the first in a series devoted to immigrant groups that played a part in the making of Whitman County history. By focusing attention upon a particular group of people, we hope to add a new dimension to the way our readers understand Whitman County's past, as well as a new appreciation for the marvelous complexity of local history. The group with which we begin this project is an unlikely one. Its members are the least known and poorest understood of all the early arrivals to the Palouse. When we look around we find none of their place-names, buildings, or graves to bear witness to their once having been here. Yet their monuments are all around us and will certainly outlast *all* the flimsy structures thrown up by other early immigrants. These people were Chinese. They built railroads, laid ties, and lined track. They hauled earth and piled gradings that enabled railroads to enter the county. The next time you see a railroad grading in Whitman County, or anywhere in eastern Washington for that matter, remember that it was almost certainly put there by Chinese laborers.

But the story of Chinese immigrants in Whitman County begins, not with discussions of the major oriental communities in Colfax or Palouse, but beyond the county's borders—in fact, beyond the borders of the United States itself. To understand the plight of Chinese workers here, we must understand the circumstances surrounding their departure from the Far East. Steven Leibo's "From Whence They Came: the Chinese Departure from East Asia," is intended to provide "*Bunchgrass*" readers with this information. Leibo's article, read in conjunction with William F. Wilbert's well-researched essay, "The Chinese in Whitman County, 1870-1910," shows Whitman County, like most of the western world, was infected by a virulent strain of anti-oriental bias in the late nineteenth century.

It is clear that Chinese workers, the coolies, were victims of this bias from the beginning. Exploited by railroad companies as a source of cheap labor, they were run out of communities once their work was completed, or when whites feared "unfair" competition. Seen as a "yellow peril" they were frequently victims of violence. Chinese in Whitman County, like Chinese elsewhere in the Northwest, were ridiculed, berated, and seldom received "equal justice before the law." This issue of the *Bunchgrass Historian*, while it cannot make right these past wrongs, will relate the story of a much maligned group of people. To the thousands of unknown coolies who built our railroads, to Chinese miners, to Chinese businessmen who operated some of the earliest businesses in the county, we dedicate the following pages. □

Fred C. Bohm, Editor



The Chinese first came in significant numbers to Washington Territory in search of gold. They came either from San Francisco, the oldest and most populous established center of Chinese in the United States, or directly from Fukien and Kwangtung Provinces in southeast China, via Portland, Oregon and later Port Townsend, Washington.

From Whence They Came: The Chinese Departure From East Asia

by Steven A. Leibo

The Chinese eighteenth century was among the most illustrious of China's long imperial history. Few dramatic rebellions occurred and the lengthy and prosperous reign of Emperor Ch'ien-lung, 1736-1795, saw the population soar. Her borders were expanded into neighboring Central Asia and when an English envoy, sent by his majesty George III, requested trading relations he provoked the haughty reply, "We possess all things . . . and have no use for your country's manufactures."¹ Or as one commentator put it, "It has just been observed that the Ambassador was received with utmost politeness, treated with the utmost hospitality, watched with the utmost vigilance, and dismissed with the utmost civility."²

Europeans had long been fascinated with the Middle Kingdom, as the proud Chinese called their land. The Romans used silk from the Far East but knew little more than at some great distance lived a people who produced the much desired material. Much later, in the fourteenth century, Europeans read with interest and great skepticism, the tales, and that is what they were thought to be, of Marco Polo.

Nevertheless it was only after the arrival of the Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that regular reports began to arrive in the West concerning conditions in the huge empire, an empire whose population dwarfed that of Europe. By way of example the population of China was perhaps 200 million in 1750 while that of France, the most populated European nation, totalled only twenty million. Fifty years later, in the United States, the figure was four million, less than the smallest Chinese province.³ Chinese society was clearly larger than Westerners had ever imagined.

For theologians China offered fertile breeding ground, not only for countless converts for Christ, but the possibility of resolving one of Europe's oldest theological battles. Europeans, convinced of perfidy in the centuries long Jewish rejection of Christ, believed that Western rabbinical groups had purposefully deleted specific references to the Christ in the Old Testament in order to deceive their followers. As word arrived in the early 1600s of long isolated communities of Chinese Jews, it was hoped that at least "undoctored" copies of the Jewish Bible could be obtained. If the Chinese Jews were as isolated from Western Jewry as it was thought then the rabbinical deception would be uncovered. Surely, it was hoped, success would lead to the conversion of these "unbelievers" in Europe's midst, the people of Jesus himself. For over a century, in fact until the mid-nineteen hundreds, Westerners struggled to obtain copies of the

Chinese Jewish tracts. In the end, Chinese Jewish Bibles proved substantially the same as those in the West,⁴ but Western religious interest in China nevertheless continued unabated.

Religious Westerners, however, were not the only individuals interested in China. In the mid-eighteenth century, the period of the Enlightenment, philosophers like Voltaire were fascinated with China. For them China represented a place where a universal religion of reason, instead of “superstition,” prevailed. Speaking of China Voltaire commented:

*One does not have to be an enthusiast for the achievements of the Chinese to recognize that the constitution of their empire is the most excellent the world has ever seen, . . .*⁵

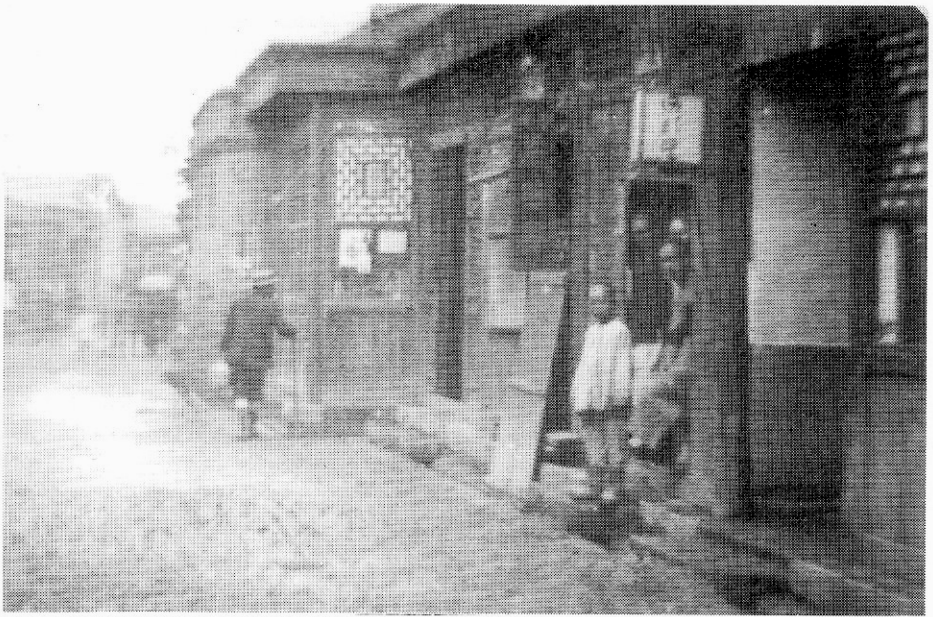
Unfortunately much of the enthusiasm for the supposedly idyllic, rational Chinese empire was undermined by the convergence of various historical ironies. At the end of the eighteenth century, China’s most illustrious age was nearing an end, while the West, in contrast, was engaged in a dynamic industrial revolution, growing in strength and arrogance. Coincidentally, Western accounts of China, which had for generations been dominated by reports from the urban Jesuit missionaries were increasingly contradicted by reports of Western businessmen, individuals whose impressions differed remarkably from the enthusiastic Catholic missionaries.⁶ For these merchants, men less interested in China’s literary civilization and who themselves practiced the profession most despised in China, that of businessman, China hardly seemed the wondrous land of the Enlightenment enthusiasts.

By the early decades of the nineteenth century Sino-western relations had changed drastically. No longer did Europeans display awe of the great civilization of the Ch’ing dynasty. Europeans had their own growing strength to be proud of and China was entering a period of political and economic decline.

The proud Chinese eighteenth century gave way to a century of turmoil. The prosperous 1700s willed its descendants the legacy of an expanding population less and less able to proportionately expand its food supplies. Her 1750 population of 200 million had by 1850 become 450 million.⁷ Natural disasters added to the suffering of the population. In 1852 the Yellow River overflowed its banks causing untold misery. There was little the Chinese could do about these disasters. Nature was but one of the several elements which turned the brilliance of the eighteenth century into the sorrow of the nineteenth.

Two principal issues dominated nineteenth century Chinese economic and political life: The first, a series of internal rebellions, the largest of which, the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864, devastated the country, and caused the death of more than twenty to thirty million people;⁸ this was at a time when the entire population of the United States was only about thirty-one million people. The second almost constant pressure from the West which forced opium on the Chinese, kidnapped its citizens and occupied its coastal cities.

The origins of the Taiping Rebellion, perhaps the most destructive civil war in all human history begins with the personal story of Hung Hsiu-ch’üan, a frustrated student from China’s southern province of Kwangtung. Hung had spent much of his life trying unsuccessfully to win a government post through the rigorous civil service examinations. Finally after more failures he emerged himself in the study of Christian missionary tracts received years before. Eventually the failed Confucian scholar, believing himself to have received divine illumination, concluded that he was the second son of God, the younger brother of Jesus Christ—destined to lead a Chinese style Christian empire. Gathering a group of followers, and creating a new theology which



—Courtesy of Thomas L. Kennedy

“The prosperous 1700s willed its descendants the legacy of an expanding population less and less able to proportionately expand its food supplies. Her 1750 population of 200 million had by 1850 become 450 million.”

combined elements of both Christian and Chinese tradition, Hung had, by 1851, proclaimed the formation of *T'ai-p'ing t'ien-kuo*, the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace. For the next fifteen years, led by the messianic Hung, the Taipings, from their base at Nanking, challenged the mighty Ch'ing Dynasty of Peking. During these years, as millions died in civil conflict, China found itself faced with yet another challenge, the Westerners.

The Taiping goal was to destroy the Ch'ing dynasty. Nevertheless the arrival of the powerful foreigners was as dangerous and, in the end, more destructive to Chinese tradition. In the late eighteenth century, Europeans had been confined to the southern port of Canton. There the English purchased tea and sought a product that they could offer in exchange. The Chinese, disinterested in the products of English mills, accepted only silver. Westerners found their reserves draining away. A product had to be found which the Chinese population would find worthy of purchase. The importation of opium solved the problem. China soon found, as British and Americans carried thousands of chests of opium to her shores, that her own silver was draining and the southern provinces were economically depressed by the affects of the drug.

But China received little Western sympathy when, in the late 1830's she tried to stop the lucrative importation of opium. Her agent, Lin Tse-hsi, even composed a moving letter to that most illustrious of Western rulers, Queen Victoria:

We find that your country is sixty or seventy thousand li (three li make one mile) from China. Yet there are barbarian ships that strive to come here for trade for the purpose of making a great profit. The wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians. That is to say, the great profit made by the barbarians is all taken from the rightful share of China. By what right do they then in return use the poisonous drug to injure the Chinese people? . . . Suppose there were people from another country who carried opium for sale to England and seduced your people into buying and smoking it; certainly your honorable ruler would deeply hate it and be bitterly aroused.⁹

But Lin Tse-Hsu's plea for Western cooperation against the opium trade went ignored. Later, his efforts to suppress the trade provoked the Opium War, 1839-42. China, defeated by superior English military technology, now had to expand, not reduce, Western trading rights. Within twenty years, especially after the resumption of war, 1857-60, China began slowly to lose jurisdiction within her own country. The ubiquitous American, English, French and other Westerners now had the right, guaranteed by Western arms, to live beyond Chinese law. They were, regardless of their residence in China, beyond the authority of the Chinese officials—responsible only to agents of their own countries.

Westerners established themselves in foreign enclaves throughout coastal China, in Shanghai, Foochow, Ningpo and elsewhere. For a century they would live as a new elite within China's borders. But these occidentals wanted more than mere trading rights, the opportunity to sell opium and to live in China without the responsibilities of residence. Just as China's millions appeared to offer untold markets for Western goods, her teeming population seemed a likely source from which to replace the scarcity of labor in the international market since the decline of the African slave trade in the 1830s.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century as Westerners arrived in China in greater numbers, they became increasingly aware that China's apparently limitless population offered fertile recruiting ground for the labor needed in the various American colonies. In Peru, Cuba, and the French Caribbean, workers were in demand, as they would be later in the United States to help build the great transcontinental railroads. The Chinese found themselves threatened by unscrupulous American, Spanish and English kidnappers greedy for the profits a boatload of coolie laborers brought. One Canton resident has described vividly the methods used to obtain "volunteer" recruits for the American coolie ship the *Flora Temple*:

*Before sending the men, all are mustered in the large room or compound, and the keeper cries out that those who are willing to go are to take one side and those not willing the other. Then the unwilling ones are flogged into acquiescence; I was so flogged myself. There were men of family and men of literary pretensions among the captives. These were most reluctant to go and were most flogged . . . On one occasion there were four or five of the most reluctant flogged until nearly dead . . .*¹⁰

That the coolie trade was little different from the notorious African slave trade against which so many Westerners had been aroused is graphically revealed in an 1847 Havana newspaper ad:

*FOR SALE: A Chinese girl with two daughters, one of 12-13 years and the other of 5-6, useful for whatever you may desire. Also one mule . . .*¹¹

By the late 1850s the European authorities, who occupied Canton, during the Second Opium War, recognized the danger the kidnappings could cause for themselves. Aware that the Americans required labor to replace the African slave trade, yet concerned that growing Chinese anger could turn the entire population against them, the European authorities at Canton decided to act. They had reason to do so. The Cantonese were greatly aroused. Individuals thought to be involved in the "trade" had already been murdered brutally by Chinese crowds. The merchant community in April 1859 submitted a petition explaining that 60,000 to 70,000 people had already been carried off—that entire family lines were being destroyed.¹² As the British Consul viewed the situation:

*The acts of violence and fraud connected with the coolie trade at this port . . . have lately reached such a pitch of atrocity that a general feeling of alarm spread through the population, accompanied by a degree of excitement and popular indignation which rendered it no longer possible or safe for any authority interested in the peace of the place to remain inactive.*¹³

The allied authorities who controlled Canton finally concluded that a regular, completely voluntary, means of emigration had to be established. Legal emigration houses were established by the English, French, Spanish and other Western nationals. Inspectors were guaranteed access to the recruits and closely interrogated them about their willingness to accept the terms of the voluntary labor contracts. Nevertheless while the legal emigration facilities were being set up, American and Spanish shippers continued to seize Chinese for the nefarious trade. Generally the Americans in China worked, not to secure labor for the United States, but to deliver coolies to Cuba.¹⁴

Although Americans were quite involved in the Opium trade, and in using their vehicles to transport coolies to the Americas, the majority of Chinese who arrived in the United States appear not to have been kidnapped but free emigrants and contract laborers attracted by the discoveries of gold in the 1840s and later labor opportunities associated with the building of the Central and Northern Pacific Railroad lines.¹⁵

The nineteenth century, like the twentieth was a true “time of troubles” for the proud Chinese empire and its people. Possessors of one of the world’s oldest and largest continuous civilizations they had been racked by disasters which devastated numbers equivalent to the entire population of the United States. Western military pressures, opium, and the disruptions associated with the arrival of foreigners undermined the traditional economies, especially those of the southern provinces from which the majority of emigrants, willing or otherwise came. From 1840 to 1900 some 2.4 million Chinese left their homeland for Southeast Asia, Peru, Hawaii, the Caribbean and North America.¹⁶ For most there must have seemed little choice.

Notes

¹Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York; Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 212.

²J.L. Cranmer-Byng, “Lord Macartney’s Embassy to Peking in 1792,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* IV:1-2 (1957-58): 183.

³E.A. Wrigley, *Population and History* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1969), pp. 153, 205; Charles O. Hucker, *China’s Imperial Past* (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 330.

⁴Michael Pollack, *Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries; The Jewish Experience in the Chinese Empire* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980), chapters 4-5.

⁵Wolfgang Franke, *China and the West: The Cultural Encounter, 13th to 20th Centuries* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967), p. 62.

⁶Ibid. pp. 63-64.

⁷Wrigley, *Population and History*, p. 205.

⁸S. Y. Teng, *The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 411-12.

⁹Ssu-yü Teng and John K. Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West: A Documentary Survey 1839-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954, Atheneum, 1963), pp. 25-6.

¹⁰Nye to Ward, December 18, 1859, House of Representatives Executive Document no. 88, p. 28.

¹¹*Diario de la Habana*, June 12, 1847, cited in Robert Lee Irick, “Ch’ing Policy Toward the Coolie Trade, 1847-1878,” Ph. D. Thesis (Harvard University, 1971), p. 1.

¹²Alcock no. 1, incl. 2, F.O. 881:894, Confidential Print, p. 4, British Public Record Office.

¹³Alcock to Bowring, April 12, 1859, F.O. 881:894, Confidential Print, p. 1, British Public Record Office.

¹⁴Irick, “Ch’ing Policy Toward the Coolie Trade, 1847-1878,” p. 121.

¹⁵Stephan Thernstrom, Ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 219.

¹⁶Ibid. p. 218.

The Chinese in Whitman County 1870-1910

by William F. Wilbert

In late February, 1888, during the height of anti-Chinese sentiment in the Northwest, the white residents of Tekoa, Washington ordered all Chinese to leave town. They were given a few hours notice, some rough assistance with their packing, and directed to return to Farmington, the origin of the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company branch line being constructed by Chinese laborers. Just a few days later an unnamed "Chinaman," failing to take note of a sign stating that "no Chinese need apply" for work on the O. R. & N., made the fatal mistake of asking for a job. He was hanged for his efforts, without benefit of a hearing. He very probably could not read English and it is unlikely that he was fully aware of the extreme hatred his race then engendered in the residents of Tekoa, largely railroad workers new to the region and anxious to secure an economic foothold. It was a classic case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

This deplorable treatment of Chinese laborers by white residents was not restricted to the town of Tekoa or to Whitman County; it was common throughout much of eastern Washington and northern Idaho during the 1880's. Chinese were viewed with a mixture of suspicion, contempt, and fear. They were foreigners of another race who kept to themselves, spoke little English, dressed in pajama-like clothing, cotton shoes with cotton or wood soles, and straw hats, shaved their heads save for a long braided queue, worshipped exotic gods, ate curious foods, and practiced strange customs. In order to understand why the white population of Whitman County reacted so strongly against the Chinese, it is first necessary to outline briefly the course of Chinese immigration to the region and to describe the kinds of work that they performed. Labor is what attracted the Chinese to America, and it was conflict with white laborers, first in the mining areas, then while working on railroads and in urban centers, that caused them considerable grief.

Chinese Miners in the Northwest

The Chinese first came in significant numbers to Washington Territory in search of gold. They came either from San Francisco, the oldest and most populous established center of Chinese in the United States, or directly from the Fukien and Kwangtung provinces of southeast China, via Portland, Oregon and later Port Townsend, Washington. Many Chinese miners in the Northwest were financed by the Six Companies, known to the Chinese as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Associations. The Six Companies, which actually numbered up to nine, were family and district associations led by merchants based in San Francisco. These merchants provided economic, social, and charitable services for their people. This included such things as overseeing distant mining or business operations, collecting money to be sent to families in China, and transportation of the bones of deceased Chinese for proper burial in their homeland. Those Chinese who immigrated directly to the Northwest were quick to make contact with representatives from the Six Companies. Many of the immigrants managed to pay for their passage from their own savings, but a significant number were obliged to contact Chinese middle-men who advanced them passage money under the condition that they pay their debt after arrival, an arrangement much like the indentured servitude which brought many European immigrants to colonial America. Although many Chinese eventually became life-long residents of the United States they considered themselves sojourners, hoping one day to return to their families in China. Almost all Chinese immigrants were working-age males. Only wealthy urban merchants or coastal fishermen brought their wives to America; Chinese women found in the interior usually worked as prostitutes.

Chinese immigrants followed the mining frontier blazed by white miners. They sought the "New Eldorado" discovered in 1848 in California; headed for Nevada, southwest Oregon, the upper Columbia River and British Columbia in the mid 1850's; then ventured on to Idaho, Montana, Colorado and as far east as the Black Hills of South Dakota in the 1860's and 70's. The first major strike in Washington Territory was made in 1855 near Fort Colville and quickly attracted the notice of placer miners, some of whom were Chinese. In 1862 there was another strike a few miles above the point at which the Methow River enters the Columbia. These diggings attracted significant numbers of Chinese, as did the east side of the Columbia at its confluence with the Chelan River where a Chinese village existed in 1875. During the 1860's and 70's Chinese miners were at work on the Columbia and its tributaries from Walla Walla northward; their camps and villages could be seen up and down the Snake and Salmon Rivers in Idaho, and they were busy exploring the Palouse River, especially the Hoodoo region in Idaho where, according to Garret Kincaid's *Palouse in the Making*, they operated mines until about 1890.

The Chinese were excellent miners and careful to avoid confrontations with white miners. They typically took over the abandoned diggings of white miners and worked the trailings for a profit. Nearly self-sufficient Chinese camps and small settlements were built in the vicinity of the most lucrative mines. The larger camps were usually run by a "boss," often a representative of one of the Six Companies and a man fluent enough in English to deal with white miners and merchants. The Chinese had their own carpenters who could build sturdy houses without nails, and their own cooks and doctors. Wherever feasible they planted orchards and gardens to supply their own and,

for a profit, the needs of the white miners. Instead of relying on white commercial transportation systems they organized their own pack trains. And, wherever they established a settlement, they planted the delicate-looking ailanthus, the Tree of Heaven, a reminder of their homeland across the seas.

It was said that after a Chinese worked a digging there would not be enough gold left to fill a bug's tooth. Placer mining in the latter half of the 19th Century involved a great deal of manual labor. Gold-bearing rock had to be dug by hand with a pick and shovel, the larger rocks being crushed with hammers or by dragging heavy stones over partly broken ore. Rockers or the "long tom" were used to further separate gravel from gold, and finally the basic implement of placer mining, the pan, further purified the trailings into gold dust. Chinese miners refined these mining practices and introduced new methods of their own, culled from their experience with the irrigation systems in South China. They built extra long sluices and, if the water sources at rich digging proved inadequate, aqueducts and canals to transport volumes of water. In order to dry riverbeds they constructed wing dams with pine-timbered channels sometimes as long as 900 feet, and they employed their own treadle pumps to divert water. Later on they leased hydraulic mining equipment from white miners and were able to wash down large volumes of ore and gravel in one operation. But the real secret of Chinese mining was simple: they worked harder, longer, and more diligently than white miners.

Whites reacted to the Chinese with mixed feelings. Some thought they were good workers and admirable people; others disliked and resented the presence of an alien race. Mark Twain, writing in *Roughing It*, speaks highly of the character of the Chinese miners while deploring their treatment in the West:

They are quiet, peaceable, tractable, free from drunkenness, and they are industrious as the day is long. A disorderly Chinaman is rare, and a lazy one does not exist. So long as a Chinaman has strength to use his hands he needs no support from anybody; white men often complain of want of work, but a Chinaman offers no such complaint; he always manages to find something to do. He is a great convenience to everybody—even to the worst class of white men, for he bears the most of their sins, suffering fines for their petty thefts, imprisonment for their robberies, and death for their murders. Any white man can swear a Chinaman's life away, but no Chinaman can testify against a white man. Ours is the "land of the free"—nobody denies that—nobody challenges it. (Maybe it is because we don't let other people testify.)

The initial success of Chinese miners engendered admiration and some envy, but their "peaceable, tractable" nature was often interpreted as an invitation for exploitation.

Despite the fact that the Chinese did not encroach on the best diggings of the white miners, they became the victims of sporadic outbursts of violence. There is an often repeated story that Strychnine Creek in the Hoodoo region was so named when white miners in the 1870's killed a group of Chinese by poisoning the stream from which they drank. Kincaid states that the years when the Chinese were active in the area "might be termed an era of crime": "On more than one occasion, criminally inclined whites, or someone, thinking the Chinese had collected quite a sum, massacred the settlement of the Chinese for the glittering wealth they were supposed to possess." In 1884 a farmer living twelve miles east of Palouse City discovered the bodies of three murdered Chinese placer miners on the banks of the Palouse River. Ab Galloway, a young man living in the area, was arrested on suspicion of having committed the crime, but acquitted at his trial for lack of evidence. Similar isolated incidents occurred throughout northern Idaho, but in 1887 one of the most infamous atrocities committed against the Chinese in America happened along the Snake River above Lewiston, Idaho. Eight men from a cattle camp near the Snake armed with revolvers and Winchester's attacked and killed 33 (some reports say 31) unarmed Chinese miners and ap-

parently robbed them of some \$55,000 in gold. No one was ever charged with this crime and the perpetrators were only discovered in 1891 after the death-bed confession of Hugh McMillan, one of the murderers.

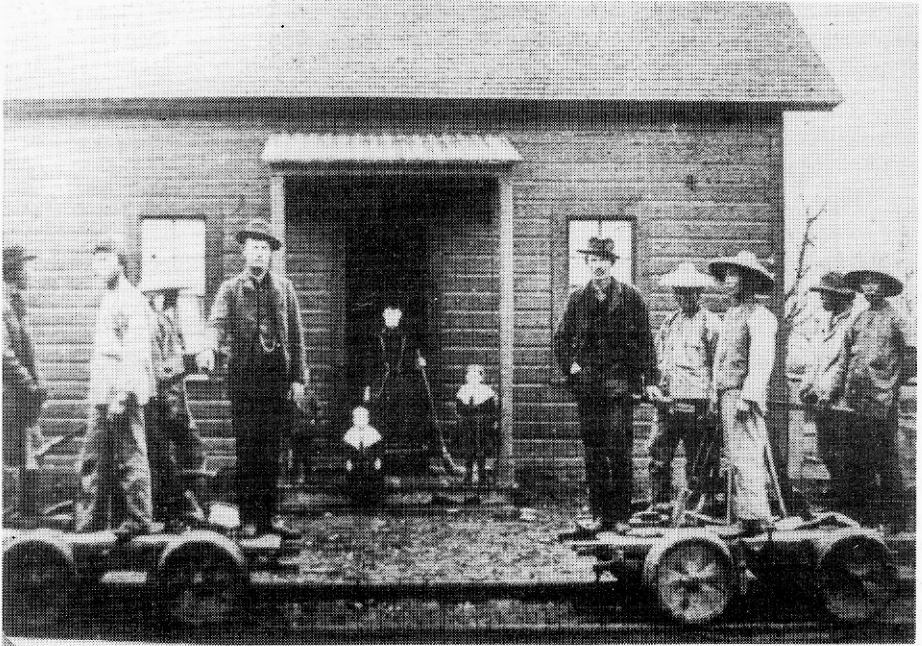
Official Harassment and Labor Conflict

But the white attitude toward the Chinese was not consistently violent. When they first came to Washington Territory they were generally tolerated. Many whites, agreeing with Mark Twain's assessment of the race, found something to admire in their obvious virtues. Nevertheless, as sojourners they had vulnerable legal status and territorial laws directed at the Chinese demonstrate that the dominant white ruling class, more often than not, took advantage of Orientals.

In 1862 the territory doubled its poll tax on all male residents from one to two dollars, and specifically designated the Chinese as taxable. However, on the western side of the state where many Chinese worked in the growing logging and canning industries, this was in addition to a stiff China Poll Tax of \$6 per year (reduced from \$16 in 1862). In 1863 the legislature decided to take further advantage of the Chinese through taxation by passing "An Act to Protect Free White Labor against Competition with Chinese Coolie Labor and to Discourage the Immigration of the Chinese in the Territory." This act initiated the Chinese Police Tax of \$6 per quarter to be levied on every resident "Mongolian" regardless of sex. As an afterthought it was considered only fair that payment of this tax exempted Chinese from the poll tax. Sheriffs collecting the Police Tax were given the incentive of being allowed to keep 25% of their gleanings. The law was amended in 1865 to change the tax from \$6 per quarter to \$16 per annum. On the surface this sounds like a reduction in the rate, but in practice annual collection made it more likely that a Chinese could be asked to pay more than once if he changed his residence or lost his tax receipt. Sheriffs were able to confiscate property in lieu of cash and tax delinquents could be compelled to work off their debts on territorial road work which paid one dollar per day. This amendment also reduced the sheriff's incentive from 25% to 10% except in areas of high Chinese concentration.

Strangely enough, Chinese were allowed to vote in some instances, even though they were not citizens, and they were accorded some rights to testify in court. Since they could be compelled to do road work it was decided in 1867 that they should be allowed to vote in elections concerned with roads, such as road supervisor or secretary. On the other hand, when it came to school elections Chinese could not vote, even though they paid either direct or indirect property taxes. In 1866 "An Act Relating to Witnesses and Evidence" gave blacks in Washington the right to provide evidence in court cases involving whites, but Chinese were specifically denied this right. By 1869, however, the territory reversed itself on this point, probably in response to the Burlingame Treaty which greatly improved Chinese-American relations and, to some extent, the status of Chinese in America. That same year the Police Tax against "Chinese Mongoloids" and "Kanakas" (Hawaiians) was repealed, and the poll tax began assessing Chinese at the same rate charged whites.

By and large, unfair treatment of the Chinese proved the rule. Official exploitation through exorbitant taxation encouraged the private sector to take further economic advantage of the Chinese. Landlords typically leased land to Orientals at higher rates than those charged white farmers. Similarly, in urban areas white owned land and



—Courtesy of the Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections
Washington State University Libraries

Chinese Railroad Workers photographed with their white supervisors and members of a white family at Cayote Junction. “. . . the Chinese proved themselves excellent railroad workers capable of supreme feats of physical endurance. They could match the work of the more physically robust Irish laborers . . .”

shanties in impoverished areas were rented or leased to Chinese at rates that poor whites could not afford. That the Chinese could pay such inflated costs and still make a livelihood for themselves, plus modest profits to return to their families in China, merely attests to their frugality and willingness to work hard. In many ways, as we shall see, the Chinese were punished by the dominating white classes simply because they were much better at practicing the American work ethic. Whites often complained that Chinese worked as virtual slaves for their contract bosses or the Six Companies and received “coolie wages” on which no person of European stock could survive. While it is true that Chinese did undercut the wages paid some laborers, they pressed hard to receive the going rate of pay whenever they could. And one of the major reasons they were motivated to be so competitive was because they had far more rent and taxes to pay than whites.

When, in the 1880's, competition in the truck farming business and for unskilled labor became fierce, an ironic situation developed. Organized labor, small businessmen in competition with the Chinese, and produce farmers began to cry “the Chinese must go!”, expecting little resistance from the white community. However, landlords, the railroad companies, and districts which took in huge tax revenues from the Chinese tended to defend their presence in the territory by quietly resisting overt anti-Chinese

activities. Unfortunately for the Chinese, the rich and the established protected them only when it involved little risk. The outcries of the anti-Chinese coalition became increasingly strident. The 1800's and 90's saw eastern Washington and north Idaho flooded with more and more white laborers in search of jobs. The possibility of a genuine Yellow Peril inflamed the imaginations of increasing numbers of the white population, fueled by generally negative treatment of Orientals by the press.

Chinese competition for the labor market was particularly acute in the early years of Whitman County. Official census reports in these days should be read with some suspicion, especially when listing the non-white population. Actual Chinese populations were frequently under-represented, as it was common to count them in impersonal groups. Nevertheless, the 1880 census reports the remarkably high figure of 530 Chinese inhabitants in Whitman County when the total population was only 7,014. In other words, at a conservative estimate a little more than 7.5% of the population was Chinese. This in itself is a significant percentage of the population, but when it is remembered that virtually all these Chinese were working age males, they may well have represented more than 15% of the Entire male work force, a much more impressive percentage and conceivably a threat to white laborers. Yet early white residents of Whitman County were largely farmers and cattlemen and it was well known that the Chinese population was artificially high as a result of temporary employment by railroads and various small telegraph companies that would soon be consumed by Western Union.

The Chinese became favored by railroad companies after their impressive track record building the Central Pacific. According to Leland Stanford, president of the company, it would have been "impossible to complete" the western portion of the transcontinental railroad without the help of the Chinese, who he praised as being "quite, peaceable, patient, industrious, and economical." At first the owners of the Central Pacific had been skeptical of Chinese workers; they were thought to be too small and frail for the arduous work of grading, hefting iron tracks, and pounding mile after mile of spikes. But the Chinese proved themselves excellent railroad workers capable of supreme feats of physical endurance. They could match the work of the more physically robust Irish laborers who, for the most part, built the Union Pacific, and their skills at rock cutting and blasting proved superior to that of Cornish miners imported for the difficult tasks of building tressels and tunnels over the precipitous gorges and through the granite mountains of the Sierra Nevadas and the Rockies.

A considerable portion of the railroad building in eastern Washington was done by the Chinese. They built the first standard-gauge railroad in the Northwest at Ainsworth, a construction and ferry town that existed from 1879 to 1884 a half mile from the mouth of the Snake River, and completed most of the work on the Texas Ferry Railroad eastward in the direction of Colfax, Washington. They graded virtually all railroad lines in Whitman and Spokane counties and laid tracks for the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company from Tucannon to Riparia, from Riparia to La Crosse, from La Crosse to Colfax, from Colfax to Farmington, and from Farmington to Tekoa. At first this work elicited little ill feeling from the white community, although Chinese residents were decidedly not welcome in the area. A notice in the *Palouse Gazette* in March, 1878 reads: "Another invoice of Chinamen just arrived in Colfax. Who needs them?" In 1884 a Stock Exchange crash threw the region into a depression. Heated competition for menial labor ensued, including work that whites had previously thought fit only for coolie workers. By 1885 the Chinese population in Whitman County dropped significantly (probably to something less than 200) and by 1888, as

we have seen in the case of the Chinese lynching in Tekoa, anti-Chinese sentiment had become extreme. This continued well into the 1890's as is illustrated by the fact that the businessmen and residents of Farmington circulated a petition early in 1893 threatening to turn over railroad access rights to another company if the Union Pacific persisted in hiring Chinese.

Urban Chinese in Whitman County

Most Chinese were indeed sojourners in Whitman County; when the railroad and telegraph companies no longer offered them work many headed for the territory's major urban centers—Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane—all of which had thriving Chinatowns by 1880. But some Chinese stayed in such towns as Colfax, Palouse City, Pullman, Tekoa, Garfield and Oakesdale where they plied trades that had proved profitable since mid-century for Chinese in America: manual labor, laundry work, truck gardening, and work as household domestics. That they also engaged in some extra-legal activities such as gambling in the form of the popular “Chinese lottery” is likely. There may also have been some trade in opium, a vice often associated with the Chinese, although the opium trade owed its existence to British and American profiteers. Opium smoking and the use of other opiates such as laudanum was fairly widespread in the late 19th Century and there were few governmental restrictions on its use for whites. A territorial act in 1883 designed to prevent opium smoking was directed exclusively at Chinese. The offense was considered a misdemeanor punishable by a maximum fine of \$100, imprisonment, or both. Illegal opium smuggling was channelled along the same route as the illegal importation of Chinese laborers; that is, across the Canadian border to Colville, then to Spokane and southward. There is no hard evidence to suggest that such trafficking occurred in Whitman County, though it is certainly possible that some small-scale trade existed. At any rate, to many whites the mere presence of Chinese gambling and the drug trade was further reason to keep Orientals in their place in the urban environment, and newspapers of the day were filled with colorful stories suggesting that the Chinese were by nature sinister and immoral.

Stereotyping in the popular press and in everyday conversation was a typical tactic employed by the white populace to control the Chinese. They were rarely referred to by name, even when they were well known to the community. Individuals were variously called “Chinaman,” “John Chinaman,” “Chinee,” or “Celestial,” a reference to the “Heavenly Kindgom” of the Manchu Dynasty which ruled China until 1911. The race as a whole was dubbed “The Heathen Chinee,” “Sons of Confucious,” or “Men of the Flowery Kingdom,” this last phrase another reference to Manchu China. Such belittling epithets made it easy for whites to believe that Chinese were not individual people, that they had no concept of the “American way of life,” and that they need not be accorded full legal protection. After all, the racist illogic ran, the Chinese do not know the true value of human life, so why should they be treated like human beings? And, despite the fact that whites persistently and deliberately keep the Chinese employed in restaurants, laundries, and as live-in domestics partly because of their habitual cleanliness, rumors abounded that they were “unclean” and might spread such exotic diseases as leprosy or bubonic plague.

As urban dwellers the Chinese fought such prejudice by adopting white customs, dress, and speech. This was particularly crucial for Chinese living in small towns where they were more than usually conspicuous. Photographs of Chinese shop owners in the Northwest during the 1880's and 90's depict dapper, serious-looking gentlemen dressed in suits with vest and tie, wearing polished leather shoes, and sporting neatly combed occidental haircuts. The myth that Chinese had to wear a queue in order to enter heaven is a product of white folklore. The queue denoted subordinate class status, and had no deep religious significance. In any way they could the Chinese sought to emulate the model American citizen, even though only Orientals born in the United States were accorded citizenship.

Urban Chinese had every incentive to appear normal and unthreatening in the last decades of the 19th Century. In 1882, at the urging of Californian politicians, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act which banned the immigration of Chinese laborers for 10 years and prohibited Chinese naturalization. This was followed by the Scott Act in 1888 which prohibited the re-entry of any Chinese returning to China to visit relatives. Such legislation did much to encourage anti-Chinese activities on the territorial and state level. In September of 1885 a mob massacred 28 Chinese in Rock Springs, Wyoming and in November of the same year another mob, stirred up by Mayor Jacob Weibach and the Knights of Labor, evicted the entire Chinese population of Tacoma, Washington. This was followed by a similar eviction of Chinese in Seattle in February of 1886, despite the fact that the Seattle government, religious organizations, and troops dispatched by President Grover Cleveland defended the Chinese from the hostile white populace. Seattle's Chinatown revived rather quickly, but Tacoma did not permit Chinese residents until 1915.

In Whitman County most Chinese settled in Colfax, Pullman, and Palouse City. Their laundries and small shops selling oriental goods were patronized by all, but the Chinese themselves were ostracized by the white community. That few whites had an accurate conception of the true number of Chinese in their cities is attested by the confusing mention that the Colfax Chinese community received in the *Commoner*. In 1893 one reporter stated that the town had 200 Chinese "at an easy estimate." A year later the same paper reported that "it has been commonly thought that Colfax contains some 40 Chinese." In March 1894 the Internal Revenue Service verified that the Chinese population of the town was really 105. At this time the entire population of Colfax was close to 1700 people, which means that the Chinese comprised about 6% of the population.

Few residents of Colfax today are aware that their city was once the site of one of the largest Chinese populations in eastern Washington. (In 1890 Spokane's Chinatown had a population of some 340.) Colfax's "Chinatown" was not the distinct and visible oriental city-within-a-city of San Francisco or Vancouver, B.C., but a loose collection of small shops, wash houses, and lodgings clustered around the junction of Main and Canyon streets and along the back alleys facing the south fork of the Palouse River. Early Colfax newspapers commonly described their Chinatown as an exotic area populated by thriving and largely peaceful "almond-eyed Sons of Confucius." Gambling dens, houses of prostitution, and joss houses (pidgen English for Chinese temples of worship) are hinted at but never described in detail. Colfax's Chinatown, as such, probably existed for little more than a decade. The city was visited by a series of devastating fires in the 1880's and early 1890's. On July 22, 1881 most of the wood-

structured town burned to the ground and 51 weeks later, after major reconstruction was underway, another fire broke out burning, among other things, H. M. Boone's stable and a Chinese wash house located behind it.

Most Chinese businesses and dwellings were in the cheapest wooden buildings and must have been wiped out as the 1882 fire swept past Canyon street. Ten years later, the town rebuilt and Chinatown at its peak, another major fire broke out, only to be followed 15 months later by yet another. This last fire began in the Baldwin Hotel and an early history of Colfax tells us: "It must have burst forth with sudden fury, for Night-watchman S. H. Carter had passed the place a few minutes before its discovery without seeing a sign of anything wrong." The white hotel patrons might easily have perished were it not for the heroic efforts of an unnamed Chinese house servant who aroused them in time to make their escape. Two hours later, we are told, "the hotel and the opera house and other property, the whole being valued at about one hundred thousand dollars, were in ashes." As if this ill luck were not enough two further disasters which must have had devastating effect on Chinatown struck Colfax in 1893. On June 5 the Bank of Spokane Falls in Colfax closed its doors in response to a national panic that threw many people into poverty. Then in early December the Palouse River flooded causing further hardship.

A Chinese Exodus

The urban Chinese in the Palouse Country were not the victims of an organized governmental ouster such as occurred in Tacoma, but they were the target of a generalized harrassment which grew in intensity and ventured well beyond legal boundaries. Consequently a majority of Chinese left the region as frustrated out-of-work whites, often of German, Irish, or Italian extraction, and small business interests became increasingly intolerant of the oriental presence in what they considered their communities. Working class whites were eager to blame somebody for their troubles and many were provoked by the Chinese ability to prosper even in hard times. As early as January 1892, for example, gangs of "irresponsible toughs," as they were called in the *Spokane Review*, began stoning the windows of every Chinese home in Pullman and ordering the residents to leave.

The fate of Chinese laundries gives us clear evidence of the slow, but unrelenting pressure on Chinese to leave Whitman County. The first issue of Colfax's *Palouse Gazette*, published September 29, 1877, carries the notice "Sing Yune—Washing and Ironing" and we know that Chinese laundries thrived for many years in that city. At least one, Jan Lee's Laundry on Main, was operating well into the 1920's. In 1893, however, there was considerable sentiment that Chinese laundries might be taking business away from white laborers, even though there was very little white competition for such work. In Spokane labor organizations and white restaurant owners organized a boycott of Chinese laundries and restaurants. Although it is difficult to tell if a similar boycott actually occurred in Colfax, the *Commoner* on November 17, 1893 hinted that it would be welcome:

There is no better way of settling this vexed question [of the Chinese presence in America] than by a united boycott against these pig-tailed heathens in every city and community on the coast. With such a boycott in force it would not be long until a large majority of these obnoxious residents could be compelled, by sheer necessity, to return to their native land, or emigrate into eastern states and cities where the evil of their presence are not now understood.



—Courtesy of the Eastern Washington Historical Society

“The urban Chinese in the Palouse Country were . . . the target of a generalized harassment which grew in intensity and ventured well beyond legal boundaries. Consequently a majority of Chinese left the region as frustrated out-of-work whites, often of German, Irish, or Italian extraction, and small business interests became increasingly intolerant of the oriental presence in what they considered their communities.”

As a result of such sentiment the number of Chinese laundries prosperous enough to merit mention in *R. L. Polk & Co. Directory of Whitman County*, a semi-annual business directory, consistently drops after 1904. By 1910 only one laundry is mentioned, Wa Lee's on 17 Main Street.

In 1892 Congress passed the Geary Act and thereby sanctioned even more harassment of resident Chinese. This act extended for 10 more years the ban on the immigration of Chinese laborers initiated by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and, much to the dismay of the Six Companies, required all Chinese to carry a residence certificate with a photograph on penalty of deportation, while revoking habeas corpus bail procedure for Chinese. The Six Companies immediately began fighting this measure in the courts and advised Chinese to resist registration on the grounds that the law made no distinction between aliens and Chinese who were American citizens by birth. In addition, the Chinese ambassador in Washington, D.C. protested against the act to the State Department.

In Colfax the Geary Act was greeted with great fanfare and considered by many as the proper way to deal with the Yellow Peril. The *Commoner* rather gleefully announced that "every Chinese laborer must appear before the revenue collector of the district in which he resides and present sufficient proof that he resided in the country prior to the passage of the act." Laborers were defined to include "those who are employed by all kinds of labor, also laundrymen, hucksters, shoemakers, matchmakers, butchers, and those engaged in like operations. The wives and children of such persons are also subject to the law." In other words, the paper concluded, "the Geary Act effects nearly every mother's son of them—for if there are any females in Chinatown they are loth to show themselves in public; but the law will find the woman as surely as it will discover the unregistered men." The penalty for failing to register was not more than one year in prison or an equal time of hard labor and deportation to China at the expiration of the sentence.

It soon became apparent, however, that the Geary Act could not be strictly enforced. Most Chinese followed the advice of the Six Companies and did not voluntarily register, thus making nearly 85,000 Chinese in America subject to arrest and deportation at an estimated cost of \$7 million to put deportation into effect. The law became effective on May 6, 1893 and 13 days later the *Commoner* reluctantly admitted that registration was not working. Nevertheless the paper made an appeal that "the law must be enforced" and called for a special session of Congress to decide the issue. It was not until March of 1894 that government officials began arriving in eastern Washington to register Chinese. It was then that Internal Revenue Collector John Nestor established that there were 105 Chinese in Colfax and 20 in Pullman. Chinese were also registered in Winona, Garfield, Palouse City, and Oakesdale. By then there was no longer a real threat of deportation, but the Geary Act had accomplished a major intention of the western politicians who had secured its passage. Anti-Chinese sentiment was stirred to a fever pitch; more and more whites were convinced that the Chinese must go.

The Chinese became the victims of officially sanctioned mistreatment by local police and courts of law. Many whites held the prejudice that Chinese were naturally devious and prone to crime. As a result they were often accused of or charged with such crimes as robbery, assault, and attempted murder in the face of very little evidence. In September 1886, for example, the *Spokane Falls Review* reported that Ah Jim, a cook in Farmington, allegedly attacked his employers after having been accused of smoking opium and had to be restrained. He was arrested and put under \$300 bond,

Passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act

In 1868 the American government signed the Burlingame treaty, permitting Chinese immigration into the United States. Within twelve years the provisions of the treaty were repealed because of the anti-Chinese feeling in the western states and territories. By 1880, the number of Chinese in the State of California alone had grown to more than 75,000—more than nine per cent of the population. Alarmed by Chinese efficiency, the *New York Nation* decried their “disgusting habits of thrift, industry, and self-denial,” the government finally acted. On May 6, 1882 President Chester Arthur signed the *Chinese Exclusion Act*. This legislation was a departure from the hallowed American principle of allowing the oppressed of every race to seek a refuge in the New World and begin again. The *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* declared:

Whereas, in the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within the territory thereof: Therefore: *Be it enacted*, that from and after the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of ten years next after the passage of this act, the coming of Chinese laborers to the United States shall be, . . . suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborers to come, or, having so come after the expiration of said ninety days, to remain within the United States.

The Final sections of the act read as follows:

Section 14 That hereafter no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed.

Section 15 That the words “Chinese laborers,” whenever used in this act, shall be construed to mean both skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining.

but whether or not his case ever came to trial is not known. After the passage of the Geary Act local newspapers suddenly began reporting more and more criminal activity among the heretofore peaceful Chinese. The *Commoner* states on April 28, 1893 that Frank Clifton, a gambler staying in a lodging house in Colfax over Saxon’s saloon at the corner of Main and Upton, accused the Chinese house servant, Old Jake, of having stolen \$500 in jewels and \$25 in cash. Old Jake maintained his innocence but was arrested. The following month Chinese were charged with the most heinous of all crimes in the eyes of hysterical white supermacists—sexual assault. In Oakesdale a Chinese was accused of indecent exposure before young girls and there was talk of lynching. Just a few days later a servant in the home of a Moscow, Idaho family was suspected of having assaulted their seven-year-old child and the outraged citizens of the town called for swift and sure punishment.

When Chinese cases did come to court the trial was often conducted in comic opera-fashion. In Colfax the trial of Lee Doon, charged with assaulting with intent to murder Charlie Lee, is a good example. It was given full coverage in the *Commoner* in April and May of 1893 partly because it concerned the potentially serious problem of tong involvement. Chinese tongs and so-called tong wars received much sensational mention in the press in the latter decades of the 19th Century. Most tongs began simply as Chinese mutual aid societies to resist anti-Chinese activities, and, although some such secretive organizations did indeed engage in criminal activities, the overall power and influence of tongs was greatly exaggerated by journalists. When the people of Colfax were alerted to the possibility of a tong disturbance in their city the case of Lee Doon and Charlie Lee became the talk of the day.

Early on the trial ran into procedural difficulty over the problem of swearing in Chinese witnesses:

Everybody knows that the average Chinaman hasn't any great amount of reverence for the Christian religion, and very few of the heathen are burdened with love for Christian laws. When the jury had been finally accepted and sworn in Monday afternoon for the trial of Lee Doon, the prosecuting witness [Charlie Lee] was put on the stand and requested to take the customary oath.

Captain Hargrave, for the defense, objected to the common mode of giving the oath, and asked that the Chinese witnesses be sworn in the manner in vogue in their native country.

"Are you a Christian?" asked the Captain, addressing Charlie Lee.

"No," was the quick response.

"What religion do you believe in?"

The witness pointed heavenward, said nothing.

"If you tell a lie here, where will you go to?" pursued the attorney.

"Hell," cried Charlie with a bland smile.

Then Captain Hargrave propounded a question that made the witness feel uneasy. "Will the oath administered to you here bind your conscience?"

Charlie Lee looked dazed for a moment. Then the interpreter, who is known as "Shoo Fly," explained what the Captain meant. No sooner had he translated the question into beautiful Chinese, than Charlie tossed back his head and declared that the oath would bind him in good shape.

But the white attorneys were not satisfied with this arrangement and insisted that Chinese witnesses be given a Chinese oath. As the *Commoner* tells it the courtroom was then turned into a temporary joss house containing all the paraphernalia thought proper to administering an oriental oath:

When the roosters and the fireworks were placed in front of the witness stand on the floor, the witness for the prosecution [Charlie Lee] and Lee Doon, the defendant, gathered around the pile. The candles and the punks were lit, and an odorous smoke curled up from the midst of the group. Then they all began to chant, and afterwards they joined in repeating the Chinese oath.

When the chant and incantations were over, each of the witnesses in turn was brought to the stand.

Each Chinaman grasped a handful of punks, lit them, and planted the ends in the large pan of ashes. Then he lit a red candle, and burned a fold of paper. Next he proceeded to the box that contained the roosters. The sheriff lifted the lid, and the Mongolian stooped, clutched a fowl by the legs with one hand, and grasped a hatchet with the other. One good stroke, and hatchet and headless rooster were thrown back into the box, and the lid slammed down to save the bystanders from a sprinkling of the blood of the fluttering fowl.

The act of the chopping done, the performer hurried back to the candles and punks, and lighting a roll of paper, wiped the blood stains from his hands as the folds burned. Then the oath was read to him individually.

One after the other repeated the operation till the half-dozen fowls were headless.

The swearing in finally completed, the trial became more serious. Lee Doon's lawyers complained that all the witnesses for the defense had "absconded," rendering Sheriff Osborne incapable of serving their subpoenas. Although the courtroom contained a large number of Chinese "deeply interested in the proceedings," none would speak for Lee Doon. Nearly everybody favored Charlie Lee, a cook working in the Baldwin Hotel and popular with whites and Chinese alike. Lee Doon was known to be a "highbinder," or tong member, and Charlie Lee, his "cousin," was not a member of this tong. Charlie was visited by tong representatives from Walla Walla and Spokane who asked him not to prosecute. He countered this pressure by asking Lee Fook Sing, a notable highbinder from a rival tong in Tekoa, for assistance. Sing arrived in Colfax and "caused Lee Doon's friends to leave town, even after they had been subpoenaed in the case." The *Commoner* nursed genuine fears that a tong war might occur:

This bloody association of Mongolians (rival tongs) has recently terrorized San Francisco with a series of horrible assassinations. As Charlie Lee has friends who will stand by him in trouble, it is feared that before Lee Doon's trial for assault and murder is concluded, there will be an attempt to slay Charlie Lee and there may be shooting and cutting in the alleys of Colfax's Chinatown before many days is past.



—Courtesy of the Eastern Washington Historical Society

“ . . . unfair treatment of the Chinese proved the rule. Official exploitation through exorbitant taxation encouraged the private sector to take further economic advantage of the Chinese. Landlords typically leased land to Orientals at higher rates than those charged white farmers. That the Chinese could pay such inflated costs and still make a livelihood for themselves . . . attests to their frugality and willingness to work hard.”

Lee Doon was found guilty and sentenced by Judge Sullivan to one year in the state penitentiary, the lowest sentence allowed by law. The judge regretted that he could not have given the accused only a one month sentence, suggesting that perhaps he considered the crime a minor disagreement not worthy of the press coverage it has received. There was no tong war in Colfax.

Chinese were often the victims of urban crime throughout the West, and although they customarily took their complaints to the police and the courts, they often met with little success. An illustration of this occurred in the Pullman-Moscow area in late April of 1896 and involved three rather colorful swindlers, one male and two females, who specialized in cheating Chinese. They travelled from town to town in the Inland Empire, the women offering to marry Chinese men only to fleece them of property and money. The *Spokesman-Review* printed this description of the con artists:

The leader of the party is a man about 50, six feet high, with mustache. He claims to be an old soldier and wears a Grand Army button. He claims to hail from Great Falls, Mont., and registered as W. Wildrick, though giving the name Perry in some cases. Mrs. "Chick" was a blond with short curly hair and rather small. She gave her age as 24 and residence as British Columbia. Her companion was a rather large brunette. They are traveling in a spring wagon drawn by a pair of small bay horses. A telephone message from Pullman yesterday stated that they were in the vicinity of that town.

"Chick," a Chinese living in Moscow, was cheated out of \$60 which he gave to his blonde fiancée with the idea that she intended to purchase household furniture. He wanted her arrested but the news correspondent from Moscow reported that this seemed "impossible."

The sport of robbing Chinese was widespread in the Northwest, but it was not condoned by all in the white community. In 1893 the Portland *Oregonian* defended the Chinese and condemned white hooligans with this pointed comment:

From the reports of the increasing number of Chinese who are "held up" or beaten and robbed of their earnings in Oregon and neighboring states, one may judge that money is becoming more plentiful in the pockets of a large class of our poor and oppressed fellow citizens. A couple of stalwart yeomen of the white race may rob a Chinaman in three minutes of more money than they are ever likely to earn. This labor-saving device is becoming very popular. It affords money and time moreover for refreshment at the beer-shops, and gives the ruling class opportunity to talk politics . . .

Decades of organized and random mistreatment of the Chinese caused many to leave the area. By 1910 there were only 20 Chinese left in Whitman County, most of them still working in laundries or as domestics. It would be many years before their numbers would significantly increase, and it was not until 1943 that the Magnuson Act, sponsored by Washington State Senator Warren G. Magnuson, repealed the Chinese Exclusion Acts, finally permitting naturalization for thousands of long-time Chinese residents, the great majority of whom had lived exemplary lives devoted to hard work, frugality, and obedience to civil authority. Today it is difficult to understand the fears that fostered the Yellow Peril. Negative Chinese stereotypes of not so many years ago, such as Sax Rohmer's still popular Fu Manchu, are now subjects for comedy, having nearly lost the serious edge they once had for readers and film-goers in the 1920's and 30's. What frightened white Americans most about the Chinese was not so much their racial and cultural differences; the greatest fear of all may have been that the supposedly inferior Chinese might actually be superior to whites. Judge James Wickersham, one of the principal supporters of the anti-Chinese activities in Tacoma in 1885, wrote in 1916, long after there was any penalty for being honest about the Chinese:

I never objected to the Chinese because of their criminal activities or their immorality but rather the reverse. They appeared to me to be a very hard-working, industrious and honest people. The fear I have always had was not that the Pacific Coast would be overrun by criminals and a foreign race of base and immoral character but that we would be confronted by millions of industrious hard-working sons and daughters of Confucius who, if given an equal chance with our people, would outdo them in the struggle for life and gain possession of the Pacific Coast of America; we cannot compete with them, not because of their baser qualities, but because of their better qualities.

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The author is also indebted to the Washington State University Libraries' collection of eastern Washington newspapers on microfilm; to Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections at WSU for assistance in establishing the approximate location of Colfax's Chinatown and for the photographs of Chinese railroad workers in Whitman County; and to the Eastern Washington Historical Society in Spokane, Washington for its collection of photographs of Chinese American pioneers in the Inland Empire.

Publications of Note

(Works reviewed in "Publications of Note" are not sold by the Editor of the *Bunchgrass Historian*. When possible mail order addresses are included for privately printed and locally produced items. We suggest you contact your local book store, or write to: Edith Erickson, Chairman of Publication Sales, Whitman County Historical Society, P.O. Box 67, Colfax, Washington 99111.)

Yellowfish

by *John Keeble*

Harper Colophon Books, 1980, 310 pp., \$5.25

The popular magazine *Pacific Northwest* recently published a list of books that it proclaimed the twenty-five best from the Northwest. While the list has proven controversial and far from definitive, it does illustrate the fact that literary critics have finally begun to recognize that the Pacific Northwest—like the South and New England—has its own rich and distinguished body of regional literature. And this body of literature is growing very quickly. One of the best recent novels from this region—although it didn't make *Pacific Northwest's* list—is *Yellowfish*, by John Keeble, a member of Eastern Washington University's faculty.

Yellowfish begins in San Francisco and has its climax there, but the greatest part of the action takes place in the Northwest. Wesley Erks, the protagonist, an eastern Washington machinist, crop duster, and farmer, has just turned from trafficking in cocaine to smuggling illegal Chinese aliens, or "yellowfish." On his second trip from Vancouver to San Francisco, via the inland Northwest, he finds that he and one of his passengers—a fugitive from a Chinese-American secret society—have been betrayed. The novel's plot is based on the ensuing pursuit, as Erks tries to safely deliver his illegal—and mysterious—passengers to San Francisco's Chinatown. Although the reasons for the chase remain murky until near the end of the book, the action is fast-paced, tense, and gripping.

Keeble demonstrates a formidable knowledge of the history and geography of the Northwest. In describing the country his characters pass through, he draws on the journals of earlier travelers, including Simon Fraser and Lewis and Clark. He explains the origins and paths of the chinook winds and the *Kuroshio*—the Japanese current—both on which figure significantly in the action. In a sense, geography defines the plot. Keeble's description is superb throughout. Spokane is the place "where property was the liveliest article of exchange, where a real estate or mortgage company could be found on every other block . . ." In Lewiston the buildings "still stood wall to wall like a western set, and they had—the brick and, even the new aluminum and plastic facades—the bright, blown-dry quality of the sagebrush country that surrounds the place." Eastern Washington Keeble characterizes as "a country of high desert, sagebrush, pine, rivers, and basalt extrusion," while northern Idaho in the early spring is "airy and translucent, filled with oxygen, and, everywhere, the sound of water, of the cold slowly bending."

Keeble's fine prose, tight chase plot, and superb eye for detail make *Yellowfish* one of the very best of recent additions to Northwest regional literature, and one of the finest novels I have read in years.

—Von V. Pittman

Colfax: 100 Plus

by Edith E. Erickson

[*Rosalia Citizen Journal*] 1981, 286 pp., \$12.00

Until the publication of *Colfax: 100 Plus*, there was no definitive history of Colfax generally available to local historians. Even W. H. Lever's *History of Whitman County, State of Washington*, with its dated and often inaccurate accounts of the "early days," was becoming hard to find. But local writer, Edith Erickson, after years of diligent research, personal interviews, and exhaustive readings, has resolved this problem. Making extensive use of local newspapers, in particular the *Colfax Commoner* and *Colfax Gazette*, she ambles through the history of the Colfax community, contrasting the early days (1870-1920) with events and accomplishments of the past twenty years. From the time before James Perkins's arrival to 1980, Mrs. Erickson provides the reader with a montage of names, dates, places, facts and figures broad enough to satisfy the most ardent local history buff. *Colfax: 100 Plus* will be, for many years to come, the definitive "history of Colfax." It will, in fact, become a source-book and reference work for those interested in the history of the county seat. The work has many illustrations, though credits are not given for photo sources. *Colfax: 100 Plus* is a valuable addition to the rapidly growing list of Whitman County publications. It is up to the usual high standard of quality set by the Citizen Journal Press in Rosalia and contains much factual information and colorful detail that, without its publication, might easily have been lost or overlooked. If you wish to order a copy of *Colfax: 100 Plus*, send \$12.00 (plus \$1.58 to cover the cost of tax and mailing) to: Edith E. Erickson, 317 East Thorn, Colfax, Washington 99111.

—Fred C. Bohm

One Hundred Years of Colton, 1881-1981

by Lorrie B. Nelson

[*Xeroxed by Author, Colton, Washington*] 1981, \$25.00

Lorrie B. Nelson, a resident of Colton, Washington since 1961 has assembled a vast amount of source material for her history of the town of Colton; to that collection she has added her own inimitable comments and sketches of people and events. The book will be useful to persons interested in reading about friends, relatives, and events, both of the early days and of more recent times. The author has included numerous photographs, too, but they are less useful since the mode of publishing, xerox, obscures important detail. The organization of *One Hundred Years of Colton* is highly personal, best suited to a reader wishing to read the work from cover to cover without seeking information on special subjects. There is no table of contents, pagination, or index. Those who wish to learn of the nature of immigration to the town and surrounding area, the ethnic groups involved, relations with the "twin city" of Uniontown, or of the economic, religious, and social basis for the community will find occasional help. The serious scholar wishing to write his own book may use this work, however, as a starting point for collecting sketches of persons, anecdotes, and the documents of political events and real estate transactions. [Copies of this limited edition publication may be obtained from Lorrie B. Nelson c/o The Wagon Wheel Tavern in Colton, Washington.]

—George C. Frykman

A Guide to Historical and Geneological Records in Latah County, Idaho

Compiled by Nancy Luebert, Bette Meyer, and Keith Petersen

Latah County Historical Society, 1981, 75 pp., \$5.00

The Latah County Historical Society is to be commended for this outstanding guide to primary sources available for the writing of Latah County history. The *Guide* is a model of the kind of high-quality professional finding aids that can be produced by local history organizations. But more important to the people of this area, the *Guide* will prove to be invaluable when they begin to investigate Palouse area history. In all, there are 300 entries, from Avon to Woodfell, from fire districts and church records to the corporate records of Latah County businesses. Typical entries include organizational names, addresses, telephone numbers, and persons in charge. In addition, brief descriptions of the kinds of records maintained by the organization are included. All of this information is cross-referenced and indexed to make *A Guide to Historical and Geneological Records of Latah County, Idaho* a usable research tool. The compilers have also included a three page bibliography of books and theses that relate to Latah County history. Anyone doing research in the Palouse area or northern Idaho history should own a copy of this work. The *Guide* may be obtained by sending \$5.00 (plus \$1.00 to cover postage and handling) to the Latah County Historical Society, 110 S. Adams, Moscow, Idaho 83843.

—Fred C. Bohm

Railroad Man: a conversation with W. J. Gamble, W. I. & M. Ry. Co.

Latah County Historical Society, 1981, 16 pp., \$2.75

This work, published by the Latah County Historical Society in 1981, is, for the most part, a transcription of an oral history interview with W. J. Gamble, General Manager of the Washington, Idaho and Montana (W. I. & M.) Railway from 1918 to 1951. Actually, it is not just one story, but four: 1) the professional history of W. J. Gamble; 2) a history of the W. I. & M. Railway; 3) the story of the origin and decline of Potlatch, Idaho; 4) a general history of lumbering in the area between Palouse, Washington and Elk River, Idaho. Reading Gamble's professional history is like re-reading Horatio Alger's *Facing the World, Sink or Swim, or Bound to Rise*, which were devoured by readers in the second decade of this century. Economic pressures and the Depression of 1907 were the stimuli which prompted Gamble to join the exodus from the Eastern United States to seek his fortune in the West. His willingness to learn all the facets of his trade, to go anywhere, anytime he was needed brought him the reward of top management in the W. I. & M. This position he appears to have thoroughly enjoyed.

As the son of a one-time railroad passenger agent/telegrapher, I found this story fascinating. The Latah County Historical Society is to be commended for publishing its oral history interviews in booklet form, rather than to leave them mouldering in some library file. The layout and printing of this fine work are of high quality. If you would like a copy of *Railroad Man*, send \$2.75 (plus \$1.00 for postage and handling) to: Latah County Historical Society, 110 South Adams, Moscow, Idaho 83843.

—Roy M. Chatters