Deadwood's Chinatown

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In 1874 General George A. Custer's confirmation that gold existed in Dakota's Black Hills touched off the last great gold rush in the continental United States. The region, once reserved for the Sioux Indians, was quickly overrun by prospectors seeking their fortunes in this newest Eldorado.¹ The discovery of gold along Whitewood Creek made Deadwood the metropolis of the Black Hills. Almost overnight, it matured from a hastily constructed mining camp to a permanent center of the gold mining industry. During the mining bonanza of the 1870s and 1880s Deadwood boasted more saloons than churches, claimed Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane as residents, and contained the largest Chinatown of any city east of San Francisco. Although largely ignored by historians, the Chinese were among early Deadwood's most colorful inhabitants.

The Orientals arrived on the trans-Mississippi West mining frontier during the California gold rush of the 1850s. Their unusual customs and traditions, coupled with their low standard of living, caused them to be looked upon as inferior by the white miners. Unable to understand their economic system or clannish ways, white miners developed a prejudice that

Watson Parker, Gold in the Black Hills (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), pp. 38-53; Herbert S. Schell, History of South Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 125-30.

excluded Orientals from mining in most gold camps until after the boom period passed.² This feeling persisted although the number of Chinese was never large-one writer estimates that eight hundred lived in the Montana camps in 1869.3

The patience and industry of the Chinese miners enabled them to make seemingly worthless claims pay. It has been estimated that white miners, using sluice boxes and cradles, extracted only about 65 percent of the available gold ore before abandoning their claim as worn out. The frugal Chinese, who could live on a quarter's worth of rice, bread, and skunk cabbage daily, then moved in.4 By reworking the tailings and refuse they were able to profit. This ability to make a profit where others failed led white miners to suspect the Chinese of increasing their income by claim and sluice box thievery.5

Freight lines operating between Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory, and the Black Hills in late 1875 recorded the transporting of "rice and 'other necessities of life" " for the "so-called 'Celestial chuckleheads from the Flowery Kingdom.'" Late in 1875, Al Hong and Hong Lee were reported as Hills bound passengers, carrying with them full laundry outfits. On 6 January 1876 A.C. Abney left Cheyenne, Deadwood bound. Three Chinese were listed as passengers for the purpose of establishing a "washee house." 6

Newspaper articles indicate that there was a continual flow of Chinese to the area during 1876-77. The Cheyenne Daily

Leader commented "John Chinamen still continues to arrive

3. Suey, Mountain of Gold, pp. 189-90; Briggs, Frontiers of the Northwest, p. 73.

 Briggs, Frontiers of the Northwest, p. 73.
 Parker, Gold in the Black Hills, p. 73; Charles H. Shinn, Mining Camps: A Study in American Frontier Government (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 213.

^{2.} Harold E. Briggs, Frontiers of the Northwest: A History of the Upper Missouri Valley (New York: D. Appleton Century Co., 1940), p. 73. Other references to racial prejudice may be found in Duane A. Smith, Rocky Mountain Mining Camps (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967); and Betty Lee Suey, Mountain of Gold: The Story of the Chinese in America (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967).

^{6.} Agnes W. Spring, The Cheyenne and Black Hills Stage and Express Routes (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clarke Co., 1949), pp. 77, 79, 159. Other Orientals came to work as laborers. "South Bend boasts the boss Chinaman in the Hills. The other day, on a bet of six dollars, he carried a distance of nearly six hundred feet, twelve five-gallon cans, each of them filled with water, and all of them suspended on a pole, and never came to a halt or spilt any of the water. How is that for high? Sixty gallons of water, 480 pounds" (Black Hills Daily Times, 1 Aug. 1878).

and depart for the Hills as quietly as the Arabs." ⁷ This observation was borne out several days later when Deadwood's *Black Hills Daily Times* informed its readers that a "party of 50 Chinamen are between Denver and here." ⁸

As the number of new arrivals increased, the clannish Orientals banded together, beginning in 1876, to form their own camp between Deadwood and Elizabethtown. Along their one twisting street the Chinese haphazardly constructed frame buildings. A description of Chinatown pictured: "on one side of their principal thoroughfare are their numerous dens and on the opposite side a row of pig pens and between the two the fever of breeding stench is so thick as to be almost visible. Chinatown smells like a bouquet of slaughterhouses." 9

This peculiar aroma prompted "1 of the Afflicted" to write a letter to the editor. "The male portion of what is known as Chinatown, are in the habit of gathering the intestines of the freshly slaughtered animals from slaughter houses...carrying the nasty mess to their homes and cleaning them and scattering the offal promiscously in that neighborhood." The letter cited the health hazards involved and ended, "We of Elizabethtown pay our taxes and object to placing the health of our wives, children and selves at the mercy of the almond-eyed sons (and daughters) of the Flowery Kingdom." ¹⁰

Amid such conditions the Orientals sought their fortunes in Deadwood. A few came to try their luck at placer mining, but it was only a small percentage that were actively engaged in it. Most new arrivals were merchants, laborers, or operators of restaurants and laundries. In such occupations, they found little

^{7.} Cheyenne Daily Leader, 23 Apr. 1877, reprinted in Briggs, Frontiers of the Northwest, p. 74.

^{8.} Black Hills Daily Times, 14 Apr. 1877. The article further stated that "they are coming fully equipped for the mining business."

^{9.} Black Hills Daily Times, 21 May 1878. Similar comments were expressed in Parker, Gold in the Black Hills, p. 142; Robert J. Casey, The Black Hills and Their Incredible Characters (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1949), pp. 348-49; Mildred Fielder, ed., Lawrence County for the Dakota Territory Centennial: 1861-1961 (Lead: Seaton Publishing Co., 1960), p. 28; Black Hills Daily Times, 21 Aug. 1877 and 4 May 1878. Concerning a pig raising operation in Chinatown, "This establishment is run on a large scale and the pagens evidently intended to make something of it" (Black Hills Daily Times, 13 Feb. 1882).

^{10.} Black Hills Daily Times, 9 July 1877. "A Chinaman by any other name would smell as sweet" (Black Hills Daily Times, 19 Sept. 1878).



The Wong family. Left to right in back row are King Que Wong, daughter; King Shiu Wong, daughter; Hal Shek Wong, mother; Shu Lin Lau, maid; Fee Lee Wong or Wing Tsue, father; Hong Quong Wong, son; first row are Fay Juck Wong, daughter; Fay King Wong, daughter; and Som Quong Wong, son.

resentment from Deadwood citizens who considered these jobs beneath their dignity and looked upon the Chinese with curiosity.

Fee Lee Wong, better known as Wing Tsue, was among the first Orientals to arrive in the Black Hills, coming in 1876. "A big, husky Chinese," he opened a shop in Deadwood specializing in goods imported from the Far East. Although "rather forbidding looking" on the outside, the shop contained many beautiful luxury items. "I Wing Tsue became the most prominent Oriental around Deadwood as his shop was frequented by many whites. He built a fine home that was "heavily draped, thickly carpeted, and filled with teak and enameled goods." "I When all was ready, he brought his wife directly from China to

^{11.} William S. Greever, *The Bonanza West: The Story of the Western Mining Rushes, 1848-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1963), p. 321; Estelline Bennett, *Old Deadwood Days* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 20; A. H. Shostrom, ed., "The Chinese: Story of Early Days in Deadwood," roundtable discussion held in the Deadwood Public Library, 22 Apr. 1967, p. 1 (hereafter cited as Roundtable); "Field and Stream Magazine," *Denver Post*, 19 Nov. 1912. As business prospered, Wing Tsue expanded his operations by opening stores in Aberdeen and Watertown.

^{12.} Greever, Bonanza West, p. 321.

join him. It is said she was the only Oriental female around Deadwood that was not a resident of the red light district. Mrs. Wing Tsue was described as "painted and mascared. . .the effect was charming. Her black hair was built in a high pyramid with gorgeous pins and combs." Although residing in Deadwood for a number of years, she spoke no English. Their children attended Deadwood public schools and the entire family accepted the western ways and the Christian faith. 13

Other Chinese merchants, such as Hi Kee, also opened shops along Chinatown's Main Street. Their stores had no windows facing the street, but were lit from windows at the rear of the building. Huge quantities of tea, Oriental silk, embroideries, egg-shell chings, sandals, teak, and carved ivory were sold at

these business places. 14

A handful of Orientals capitalized on the miners' hungry appetites by operating restaurants. Ban Wong, known as Benny, managed the OK Cafe and the Philadelphia Cafe was operated by another Chinese remembered simply as the "Philadelphia Kid." Susie, as the white miners called Wong Kee, owned and operated the Bodega Cafe. When a customer entered the establishment, Susie took the order and filled it personally. He never wrote down any names or asked what a customer ordered. He simply brought the food and set it down. For dessert Wong Kee asked the customer what kind of pie he wanted and then stated that he had apple. In such establishments Deadwood residents could fill themselves with Oriental dishes like chicken rice soup or if they preferred more common fare, roast beef and pie—all for twenty-five cents. Home-brewed rice whiskey was also abundant and flowed freely. 15

In the midst of the gold rush numerous Oriental women sought riches by engaging in prostitution. The Chinese red light

13. Ibid.; Bennett, Old Deadwood Days, p. 29.

^{14.} Greever, Bonanza West, p. 321; Bennett, Old Deadwood Days, p. 28. "The numerous bulbs in the stores, offices and residences bought from the Chinamen have at last finished sprouting and are now in bloom. Their flowers look like cheap onion blossom and have a very aesthetic yaller color" (Black Hills Daily Times, 14 Feb. 1882). The business sense of the Oriental was typified by the following, "The Chinaman will not trust a citizen, and prefers to weigh the dust (gold) himself before putting it in his bag" (Don C. Clowser, Deadwood. . .the Historic City [Deadwood: Fenwyn Press Books, 1969], p. 34).

15. Roundtable, pp. 5, 6, 12-13.

district was portrayed as "plush but for anyone belonging to it." Along that portion of Deadwood's Main Street that ran through Chinatown, a number of cribs were established. Many of these cribs were operated in conjunction with a laundry business. 16 A traveler noted that Gayville contained "about 20 Chinese laundries, each of which has a female partner who sits in the door evenings, and smiles sweetly to the passerby."17 Miners wishing to partake of their services merely entered one of the booths and pulled a curtain. No attempt at secrecy was made as such operations were condoned in the 1870s and 1880s. An example of this permissiveness was written by editor Porter Warner. "Miss Chinaman, a sister to Heathens, has arrived in this city. She was escorted from the trail by Mr. John, with a brass band, (around his hat). She was attired in corral britches, with a coat cut ranch style, she will locate at the "Washee" between the dump pile and the cider mill." 18 The absence of women on the mining frontier guaranteed the Oriental "soiled doves" a warm reception.

A familiar scene along Chinatown's business district was the laundry or "washee house." Long associated with such operations, Chinese laundries vied with each other in keeping Deadwood citizens in clean clothes. Hop Kees, Yuenwas, Coon Sing, and several other so-called "Knights of the Wash Tub" mined their gold from soiled garments and soap suds. This proved profitable since water was free and wood could be had for the cutting. 19

With several thousand unwashed miners roaming around the Black Hills, business boomed at the "washee house." From early morning to late evening the Chinese launderer could be found at work in his shop. The dirty garments were washed in tubs filled with water heated in large boilers. This operation could be dangerous and occasionally an accident occurred: "While Hing Gun, a Chinaman, was removing a boiler of

Roundtable, p. 5; Bennett, Old Deadwood Days, p. 30; Black Hills Daily Times, 11 Apr. 1878.

^{17.} Sioux City Weekly Journal, 28 June 1877. The Weekly Journal maintained a correspondent in the Black Hills who filed numerous reports on happenings around Deadwood.

^{18.} Black Hills Daily Times, 20 Apr. 1877.

^{19.} Ibid., 14 July 1877, 28 May 1878; Suey, Mountain of Gold, p. 190; Black Hills Daily Pioneer, 18 Feb. 1888.

washing from the stove in his washee on Lee Street Monday last, he slipped, and scalded himself fearfully around the thies and knees. Dr. Fing Kee was called, and he used about a rod of plaster to stick the son of a gun together again." ²⁰

After laundering, the clothes were ironed and returned. When ironing, the Chinese craftsmen sprinkled the clothes by taking a mouthful of water and blowing it over the garment. When finished, the laundered garment was returned to its owner by the Oriental bearing a wicker basket on his back. The cost of such services was "25¢ a piece for...shirts, drawers and such heavy pieces; boiled shirts, 35¢." ²¹

Such prices led one reporter to moan "people of moderate means are unable to experience the luxuries of a clean shirt even one a week." Anti-Chinese sentiment prompted Porter Warner of the *Daily Times* to suggest, "would it not be a good investment for some energetic white person to start a laundry here and run it with white labor?" He noted the number of white women seeking work around Deadwood and suggested they employ boys to collect and deliver the laundry. However, miners continued entrusting their washing to Chinatown's monopoly. And the properties of the service of the service

So long as they engaged in these menial occupations the Chinese were accepted by Deadwood residents. Changes in mining methods, however, drew the Chinese into mining jobs. By late 1877 and early 1878, the days of placer mining were drawing to a close. The independent prospector, working his individual claim, was being replaced by corporate-owned hard rock lode mining. The prospector now found himself working for wages in someone else's tunnel. Rumors began circulating during January 1878 that the California companies owning mines around Deadwood were planning to import Chinese coolies as laborers. The *Black Hills Daily Times* statement that "500 Chinese are daily expected to arrive at Cheyenne enroute to the Hills" ²⁵ stirred racist sentiments among area residents.

^{20.} Black Hills Daily Times, 15 May 1877.

^{21.} Sioux City Weekly Journal, 24 May 1877.

^{22.} Black Hills Daily Times, 14 July 1877.

^{23.} Ibid., 1 Feb. 1878.

^{24.} Ibid., 30 Sept. 1878.

^{25.} Ibid., 18 Feb. 1878.

The working men of the gold camp considered the Chinese a direct threat to their livelihood. From past experience the miners knew that Chinese were willing to work for a cheaper wage than the \$4 to \$7 daily being paid experienced miners. Jobs were scarce and any outside competition was resented. ²⁶ Organized resistance to the importation of Chinese laborers began in Lead City during early March 1878. A large gathering, headed by J.O. Reed, formed the first Caucasian League in the Black Hills. Within a week, similar meetings were held in Elizabethtown and Central City. ²⁷

Deadwood's Caucasian League, supported by the Miners Union, went on record as opposing the entrance of any Chinese into the Black Hills. In the words of a reporter, "speeches were made. . .giving our triangle eyed brethern particular fits." Another article summed up the mood of most Black Hills residents by saying, "bills have been presented in Congress to regulate the immigration of Chinese to this country, and for the benefit of our working classes, we hope they will pass." ²⁸

In an attempt to reassure miners, Kuong Wing explained in the *Daily Times*: "I have undertaken to stop such influx of my people as shall tend to interfere with the labor of white men in the mines of this country, and engage that no immigration of my people shall visit the Hills, except to engage in the lighter occupations of washing, cooking and house servants. I am authorized to make the above statement public by all the Chinese inhabitants of this city who will co-operate with me in this matter." ²⁹ With this, the white residents adopted a wait and see attitude.

However, in August 1878 the miners took more drastic action. Committees were sent to inform Chinese miners and their employers that they must halt operation by ten o'clock on 7 August. This ultimatum was met as the 7 August Daily Times reported that Oriental mining labor around Montana City had

^{26.} Parker, Gold in the Black Hills, pp. 149, 184-89; Black Hills Daily Times, 30 Jan. 1878, 25 Apr. 1878. In a column entitled "It's a Fact" the following appeared, "that the almond-eyed celestials, on the principle of cheap labor and over production, have a corner on the market" (Black Hills Weekly Times, 2 Aug. 1879).

^{27.} Black Hills Daily Times, 26 Feb. 1878, 3 Mar. 1878, 7 Mar. 1878.

^{28.} Black Hills Weekly Times, 1 Feb. 1878, 5 Mar. 1878.

^{29. &}quot;Chinese Not to Engage in Mining," Black Hills Weekly Times, 3 Mar. 1878.

ceased.³⁰ However, Chinese were still employed around Crook City on the lower Whitewood and the local press reported, "Nothing is said about it in that neck of the woods." Several bands of Chinese workers did arrive in the Black Hills by mid-1878, but the great migration that was feared failed to materialize. Most new arrivals reworked abandoned claims or sought employment in the "lighter occupations" mentioned by Kuong Wing. By the end of the year racial tension had subsided.

A decade later wood sawyers around Deadwood voiced opposition to the Chinese. About twenty white men were dependent on cutting and supplying cordwood for their livelihood. When residents began having Orientals perform these tasks, the sawyers faced starvation. "They refuse to encroach on the laundry business and, thusly, justly urge that the Chinamen should be prevented from sawing wood," cried a local editor. ³² An agreement to this effect was reached and life returned to normal in and around Chinatown.

Though in a new country, the Chinese did not discard their old-world customs and traditions, which added an interesting flavor to frontier Deadwood and caused suspicion among the whites. As one pioneer observed, "they were really Chinese in those days too, wearing queues wound round their heads and loose dull-blue trousers and long shirts." 33 As the years passed, the Orientals adopted western dress, but clung religiously to wearing their hair braided in the queue. The back hair or tail, as the miners referred to the queue, led to many incidents. Unfortunate Orientals were waylaid and lost their queues to pleasure-seeking miners. 34

The funeral ritual of the Chinese was one of the most colorful events in their culture. Unlike their white neighbors, the celestials looked upon a funeral as a gay occasion. The death of Yung Set in September 1878 provided the Black Hills with

^{30.} Black Hills Daily Times, 6 Aug. 1878, 7 Aug. 1878.

^{31.} Ibid., 31 Aug. 1878. "It is thought that all the claims in this district will hold out another year and then be good Chinese diggings for a year or two longer" (*Black Hills Daily Times*, 17 Sept. 1878).

^{32.} Black Hills Daily Pioneer, 19 Feb. 1888.

^{33.} Bennett, Old Deadwood Days, p. 28; Greever, Bonanza West, p. 321.

^{34.} Black Hills Daily Times, 4 Feb. 1878, 12 July 1878.



its first of many public Chinese funerals. As one source explained, "curiosity to the peculiar ceremonies ran high." 35 The funeral procession made its way up the Ingleside route to Mount Moriah cemetery. An Oriental, sitting beside the hearse driver, scattered tiny pieces of colored paper along the route. These pieces of paper, each with a hole punched in it, were intended to divert the Devil's attention from the deceased. The Chinese believed Satan must pass through each and every hole before reaching the soul of the dead person. "Following the corpse were four men each bearing a lighted taper about two feet in length, then came two each carrying a staff four feet long and wound with alternate strips of black and white cloth, following these were two white banners with inscriptions in Chinese." Other mourners and curious onlookers followed the banners. 36 During the elaborate gravesite rite incense was burned, sugar cakes passed around, and a small pig sacrificed. The Chinese section of Mount Moriah included a special oven constructed to roast the pig or an occasional Peking duck. The ceremony ended with the placing of some food on the grave. 37

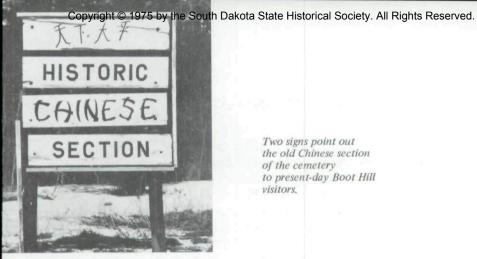
To the fun-loving Chinese 9 February was the most important day on the calendar, for this was the beginning of the Chinese New Year. In Deadwood the holiday was observed as in China. The washee houses were closed and no celestial performed any labor during the three-day festival. Oriental flags could be seen flying throughout Chinatown and the sound of exploding fireworks filled the air. All participants donned clean clothes and shoes as open houses were the order of the day.

^{35.} Ibid., 2 Sept. 1878. Yung Set was a member of the Chinese Free Masons. It was estimated that sixty or seventy Chinese Masons lived at Deadwood during this period. Because Yung Set was poor, the masons paid for his burial. The *Black Hills Daily Pioneer*, 5 Nov. 1879, commenting on the death of E. Chung, stated, "the dead Chinaman will be buried today with all the splendor and pomp usually accorded a Chinese mason, of which organization he was one of the leading officers."

^{36.} Black Hills Daily Times, 2 Sept. 1878. Dr. von Wedelstaedt, a physician in Deadwood, always marched in the Chinese funerals. So far as can be determined he was the only white member of the Chinese Masons in Deadwood (Bennett, Old Deadwood Days, pp. 30-31).

^{37.} Roundtable, pp. 15-16; Bennett, Old Deadwood Days, pp. 30-31. The Chinese believed in the transmigration of the soul and left food for the soul of the deceased to eat on his journey to a new existence (Black Hills Daily Times, 2 Sept. 1878).

^{38.} Black Hills Daily Times, 3 Feb. 1878.



Two signs point out the old Chinese section of the cemetery to present-day Boot Hill visitors.

CHINESE WERE IMPORTED FOR CHEAP LABOR WITH THE PROMISE THAT WHEN THEY DIED THEIR BODIES WOULD BE SHIPPED BACK TO CHINA. NOT MORE THAN TWO BODIES REMAIN IN THE CHINESE SECTION



Scene of the Chinese section showing graves that are no longer on Boot Hill. The building in the right foreground is the oven used to prepare the pigs or Peking ducks.

White visitors could frequently be observed helping celebrate what the "followers of Confucius" considered to be everyone's birthday. ³⁹ In addition, the Chinese spent the time taking care of all financial obligations. The *Daily Pioneer* explained that the Orientals must "be at peace with his fellow countrymen, otherwise he is imperatively forbidden any enjoyments of the season. . . . This is a feature to which it would not harm his whiter and more civilized human brother to devote some thought." ⁴⁰ As one source stated, "the Celestials never do things by halves," and this was certainly true of their New Year's celebration. Great quantities of rice whiskey were consumed and numerous games of chance were played. ⁴¹

The Chinese were extremely fond of gambling and various games could be found in the back rooms of many Oriental businesses. Typical of these sporting events was the daily lottery operated by Wing Tsue. Upon paying a fee, from fifty cents to five dollars, the customer selected a piece of paper bearing several Chinese characters. Since most white residents of Deadwood could not read these characters, they were dependent on the operator's honesty. At night a drawing was held and the winner returned the following morning to collect his prize and pay the next day's fee. 42

Another popular game was dominoes. Porter Warner observed a game in progress and reported, "it required the handling of at least a dozen of the blocks to make a simple play, and each block is slammed down upon the table with all the might and main of the player. It takes a couple of hours to play a game and the stakes will average one half cent of our money." ⁴³

Chinatown, like other Black Hills camps, supported a hose team. These teams provided protection against dreaded fires and also provided entertainment on holidays. Chinatown's two teams were similar to those of South Deadwood and the Homestake Mine, but with a dash of color added. The basic unit

^{39.} Ibid., 17 Feb. 1882.

^{40.} Black Hills Daily Pioneer, 11 Feb. 1888.

^{41.} Ibid., 9 Feb. 1883, 18 Feb. 1883, 17 Feb. 1888.

^{42.} Roundtable, pp. 10-11.

^{43.} Black Hills Daily Times, 19 Mar. 1878. A Daily Times article of 3 Feb. 1882 claimed the Chinese were also fond of billards.



The Champion Chinese Hose Team of America who won the Hub-and-Hub race at Deadwood on 4 July 1888.

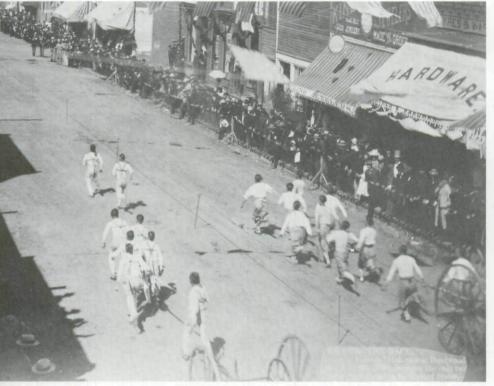
was a cart, pulled by twelve men, on which several hundred feet of fire hose was wound. Unlike their American counterparts, the Orientals wore elaborate uniforms or running suits consisting of fancy uniforms complete with long stockings.⁴⁴

The Fourth of July offered an opportunity for the teams from the Deadwood region to compete in hose team racing. These contests covered a 300-yard course, the winner being the first team to couple its hose and pump water. The celebration in 1888 provided something unique—"the first hub-and-hub race by exclusively Chinese teams held in the world." ⁴⁵ Festivities of the day began with a parade down Deadwood's Main Street. Included in the parade were the hose teams captained by Wing Tsue, the Stewart of Chinatown, and Hi Kee. The latter unit was accompanied by a band "capable of discordant sounds to a degree never thought possible—they played from start to finish with determination seemingly born of desperation." ⁴⁶

^{44.} Roundtable, pp. 3-4; Mildred Fielder, "Wong Family of Deadwood," Wi-Iyohi 13, no. 11 (1 Feb. 1960):1.

^{45.} Black Hills Daily Times, 6 July 1888.

^{46.} Ibid.



The 4 July 1888 Hub-and-Hub race between the only two Chinese hose teams in the United States.

A round of applause greeted the teams as they approached the starting line. Sideline betting made Wing Tsue's team the favorite. A first-hand description of the action stated:

Like a shot from a gun each team sprang from the start, Tsue's team taking and steadily increasing a lead for the first 150 yards. When one of the tongue men dropped out and his companions, unable to hold the cart, fell to the ground. Thence on, wildest excitement prevailed. Hi Kee's team quickly recovered lost ground and was hub-and-hub with the gyrating cart only a few feet from the outcome, but its apparatus was well in hand and passed over the score mark a winner by 20 feet. Time: 30¼ seconds. 47

Participation in affairs such as hose team racing aided the Chinese in gaining acceptance around Deadwood.

47. Ibid.

In their business ventures the Orientals found a command of the English language desirable and Congregational and Baptist churches in Deadwood provided such education. In the mid-1880s Reverend Arthur C. Dill of the Congregational Church started evening classes in the church basement. Young women of the parish were urged to spend one evening a week helping an Oriental learn his ABCs. A multitude of Chinese attended, learned their lessons well, and rewarded their teachers' patience with gifts of china, teak, and ivory. 48

Although the Chinese were generally peaceful citizens, newspaper accounts testify to the fact that they had their scraps with the law. Most cases stemmed from opium smoking, mining claims, or financial matters. A few were of a more humorous nature. The *Daily Times* reported the case of Sam Lee versus Ly Dog in which Ly Dog was accused of assault and battery. Lee was "accompanied by Miss Kie Yie, Wee Lie, and Doctor Dong Gong," according to the *Times*, which portrayed the courtroom as utter chaos. 49 "After considerable pow-wow and confusion among the Celestials, Kie Yie refused to continue to prosecute Ly Dog, it being the day on which the great Kee Wee's feast takes place, and the cost was taxed up to Sam Lee, the complainant, and case discharged." 50

Less than a month later, a correspondent for the Sioux City Weekly Journal filed a story regarding another Oriental's day in court. Sam Ming, with Coon Sing acting as interpreter, appeared to charge "another heathen Chinese (sic) with larceny of \$1,000." Ming claimed to own a woman and considered her valuable property as "the chances for hiring her out was good and frequent and the pay always in advance." The woman had been stolen by another Chinese who took her to Crook City and married her. "The room was soon filled with Chinamen," explained the correspondent, "and a lively time was had of it

^{48.} Roundtable, pp. 2-3; Bennett, Old Deadwood Days, pp. 175-76; Briggs, Frontiers of the Northwest, p. 105.

^{49.} Black Hills Daily Times, 16 June 1877; Black Hills Daily Pioneer, 11 Feb. 1888. Denver Post, 9 Mar. 1907, tells the story of Chinese assistance in capturing three outlaws by Sheriff Seth Bullock.

^{50.} Black Hills Daily Times, 16 June 1877.

for awhile." The case was dismissed by the judge because the "theft" was not of cash. The reporter concluded, "so much for justice in Deadwood." ⁵¹

Chinatown was also the scene of one of Deadwood's most mysterious, unsolved crimes. A woman, known simply as "the Yellow Doll," arrived in Deadwood from San Francisco in 1876. She was described as "a beautiful high class girl, of whom the white girls of the Bella Union was extremely jealous of her beauty and lovely clothes." Judge Bennet said she was "of high rank and well-educated." On an October evening in 1877 a group of Orientals were seen running from the home of the Yellow Doll. Investigating authorities discovered that the woman had been brutally murdered with an ax. As the dwelling still contained valuable jewelry, robbery was ruled out as a motive. An extensive investigation was conducted and several suspects arrested. However, it was impossible to gain any information or discover a cause for the crime. One theory, advanced by Postmaster Adams, was that the Yellow Doll was murdered because of the opium question. She had discussed the effects of the drug with him and he contended that she was in Deadwood to close the opium dens. 52

The earliest Chinese immigrants arriving in the Black Hills brought their drug culture with them. In the 1870s smoking opium was nearly as common as smoking cigarettes today. Opium dens and tong houses were openly operated along Chinatown's Main Street. One reporter explained, "neither judicial nor public opinion was very strong about such things. If a Chinamen wanted to smoke opium, who cared?" 53

^{51.} Sioux City Weekly Journal, 12 July 1877. An interesting sidelight to Chinese law cases appeared in the Black Hills Daily Pioneer, 11 Oct. 1879. Entitled "Chinese Oaths," this article quoted the San Francisco Bulletin as saying if a chicken were killed in their presence and the dead bird held under their arm, the Chinese would tell the truth. If not they would be punished in the next world. The Pioneer added, "As we have many cases in our courts when it is necessary to take the testimony of Chinese witnesses, it would be seen that it will not do to rely upon their statement that they believe in our form of oaths, and in order to get at the exact truth, the superstitious custom may have to be resorted to."

^{52.} Jesse Brown and A.M. Willard, *The Black Hills Trails* (Rapid City: Rapid City Journal Company, 1924), p. 357; Roundtable, p. 13; Mrs. Pontius, Deadwood Public Library, to the author, 19 Apr. 1971. The Yellow Doll has also been the theme for floats appearing in various "Days of '76" parades in Deadwood.

^{53.} Bennett, Old Deadwood Days, p. 28.

A description of the "smoke house" operated by Lee and Ton pictured it as an underground dive. A committee from the grand jury of Lawrence County reported after visiting an opium den:

We found a young girl on a pallet with a young man reclining on either side. The cot is a rude structure made of boards covered with an oil cloth or in some instances a gray blanket, at the head, a board six inches wide and elevated about four inches, provided the pillows to rest the head upon, with a lighted lamp in the centre of the cot, a card of opium and a pipe from which each take their opium alternately. A wire is used, on the point of which is rolled a quantity of opiate sufficient to make or fill the pipe. This is cooked over the lamp and then ingeniously and dextrously manipulated preparatory to the smoking. The pipe has a long stem with an oval convex head, and a small tube or hole in the center around which is collected the opium. A vent is made by means of the wire passed through the opium into the tube. The pipe is then placed over the lamp. The smoker sucks or inhales all that can be taken in at one breath and then exhales the smoke. . . . The victims are reduced to a semi-unconcious state where all is placid, calm, serene, and no hilarity.

The visitors concluded, "we visited other dens and found (very unexpectedly) many of whom we meet in the better circles of society. Alas! that human nature should be so frail." 54

So long as only Chinese frequented such establishments they were tolerated. When white residents began to be listed among joss house customers, racial relations became strained. It was estimated by one newspaper that 90 percent of all opium was consumed by Orientals. "We would not object to them using it...it is food to them, but death to young America, and we do not want to see our young men indulge in any such habits."55 Such opinions prompted concerned miners to blow up opium dens in Lead City and Deadwood. 56 The scope of the

54. "A Dive Into the Opium Dens," Black Hills Daily Times, 17 July 1878. Another excellant description of Deadwood's opium houses appeared in the Black Hills Daily Times, 8 May 1878, entitled "Our Opium Dens."

55. Black Hills Daily Times, 20 Jan. 1882. Other comments regarding whites frequenting opium dens are found in 23 Apr. 1878, and Spring, Cheyenne and Black Hills Stage and Express Routes, p. 225. The Daily Times, 23 Apr. 1878, suggested that "the best way in the world to shake off one's earth-born turbulence is to go to work, a fact some fail to recognize."

56. Black Hills Daily Times, 25 Feb. 1878, 3 Mar. 1878, 2 July 1878, 2 Sept. 1878, 12 Sept. 1878. The Daily Times of 2 July 1878 stated "we hope the Chinamon will conclude to move. There is a society in this town who are bent on rooting out

these dens."

problem was discussed by the *Daily Times*: "It is estimated that a thousand dollars a week is taken from circulation here by the Chinese smoke houses. Every dollar which drops into their coffers is salted. Something should be done to root out these institutions. . . . Opium smoking is a greater evil than whiskey drinking." ⁵⁷ The only action taken, however, during the 1870s was to license opium houses at the same rate as saloons—\$300 per year. ⁵⁸

By the mid-1880s the drug problem became so acute that action was taken to force the Chinese out of Deadwood. The Club Women were especially instrumental in closing the opium dens. Fearing their men would become addicted, the women requested federal authorities to assist them. However, before the federal agents arrived, a large portion of the Chinese departed from the Black Hills. Most moved on to other mining camps or found employment in such industries as railroad building. Although many Orientals fled to avoid prosecution for opium smoking, those who remained faced little discrimination.⁵⁹

There was not as much prejudice against the Chinese in Deadwood as in other western camps. Except for problems of mining and opium smoking, the Orientals were generally accepted. This was the exception among western mining camps. In Cripple Creek, Colorado, for example, Chinatown was completely destroyed and all the residents driven out by irate miners. But in the Black Hills, those Orientals who remained rose in status and gained the respect of white residents.⁶⁰

Today Deadwood's Chinatown exists only as a memory. Most of the Orientals left the Black Hills after the silver boom of the 1890s collapsed. The remaining few gradually slipped away during the 1920s and 1930s. Many of them, such as Wing Tsue and Ban Wong, returned to China. Few Orientals who came to Deadwood had any intentions of settling permanently. Rather, they viewed the Hills as a region of economic

^{57.} Black Hills Daily Times, 6 May 1878.

^{58.} Ibid., 6 July 1878.

^{59.} Roundtable, p. 7; Black Hills Daily Times, 9 Feb. 1882.

^{60.} Greever, The Bonanza West, p. 321; Casey, Black Hills and Their Incredible Characters, p. 348-49.

^{61.} Roundtable, pp. 2, 5, 6, 9-10, 12.

opportunity. Profits made here were converted to Hong Kong currency and sent directly to China. All Chinese longed for the day when they could return to their native land to live their remaining years in comparative ease. For some, like Wing Tsue, Deadwood made the dream come true. ⁶²

An interesting sidelight to the transitory nature of the Chinese appeared in the *Black Hills Daily Pioneer*. In the article "Why Chinamen Never Naturalize," the *Pioneer* explained that only a handful of Orientals became American citizens. It seemed that the penal code of China made it a capital offense for a person to denounce his citizenship. In addition, all members of the traitor's family would be banished.⁶³

Even the Chinese section of Mount Moriah cemetery is empty today. Each Oriental arrived in Deadwood carrying a tin or zinc lined box that was to return his remains to China. When a Chinese died, he was interred in Mount Moriah and his corpse allowed to decompose for a period of years. An undertaker would then disinter the body and place the bones in the various compartments of the lined box. From Deadwood the remains were shipped to San Francisco and then to the Orient for reburial. 64

Chinatown has vanished but should not be forgotten. An early Deadwood resident reminisced, "the Chinese people did have an influence on our community here in the early years; in the business world and also in our early day culture." The Chinaman, along with the miner and rancher, helped shape the

early history of the Black Hills.

62. Roundtable, p. 6.

^{63. &}quot;Why Chinamen Never Naturalize," Black Hills Daily Pioneer, 4 Feb. 1883. The Black Hills Daily Times, 31 Jan. 1882, claimed "Deadwood has perhaps one curiosity that but few other mining towns can boast of, and that is a naturalized Chinaman. This prodigy is none other than Coon Sing," The Times also noted Coon Sing always voted straight Republican in elections and complained about discrimination although he was an American citizen.

^{64.} Roundtable, p. 7. "Most of the Chinese came under contract which stipulated that their bodies be sent back to China." The zinc or tin lined boxes used to return deceased Orientals to the Far East measured 10x14x22 inches (Federal Writers' Project, South Dakota: A Guide to the State [Pierre: South Dakota Guide Commission, 1938], p. 106).

^{65.} Roundtable, p. 14.

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