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Sweet Grass County Has Only Chinese War Savings Organization in the State

The war savings and thrift stamp administration of Montana is very proud of a unique thrift society which was organized last April in Big Timber. The Chinese residents of the town constitute its membership. It is the only organization of its kind in the state, but James R. Spencer, vice state director, expects to organize similar societies among the Chinese of the state, in the near future.

The head of the Big Timber society is Tom Kue, the wealthiest and most influential man of Chinese blood in the Sweet Grass metropolis. Years ago, Tom Kue opened a restaurant in Big Timber. His habits of thrift and industry have had their usual effect and he is on speaking terms with every bank director in the town. Tom Kue has no vote, because he cannot become a citizen of the United States, but he is just as patriotic as though he enjoyed all the privileges of a sovereign elector. He has been in Montana 35 years and has seen the state develop during the past three and one-half decades and has grown with it.

T.J. Edwards, whose Chinese name is forgotten, and who in Anglicizing himself made himself the namesake of the first citizen of the county, Senator John E. Edwards, is also a loyal American, although outside the pale of suffrage. He tried to enlist as a volunteer in the army when war was declared on Germany, but was rejected because of physical disability.

Tom Hang, who appears in uniform in the picture, has served 18 months in the army, and is a member of the society.

The Big Timber Chinese have shown themselves to be as public spirited as any other nationality. Any subscription lists passed for any purpose have always a good proportion of Chinese subscriptions. Of the 15 Chinese members, six are citizens of the United States.

The membership of the society has the following roll: Tom Kue, Han Kay, Quong Louie, Tin H, Edwards, Yu Toy, Toy Park, Lon Quong, Wo Long, Lee Ling Ying, Lee Gock Gong, Qwong Hang, Tom Hang, Gock Mon, Joe Thank and Charlie Kuwn. In addition to those 15 there are three white members, who are employees of Mr. Kue's restaurant and who joined at his request so that each one of his employees would be represented.

"This is just a sample of the excellent work of Mr. Veblen as county director," said Mr. Spencer. "He has been indefatigable in his efforts as is clearly shown in the organization of the Chinese colony. No section of Sweetgrass county is being overlooked."

It might be mentioned as a matter of interest for those interested in Montana that the national organization at Washington has requested pictures of the members of the society. It is quite a tribute to the work being done in thrift in Montana that the national body considers the organization of the Chinese society a matter for notice. Pictures of the society, similar to those given above will be sent broadcast over the country as an inspiration to workers in other states.

March 16th, 1922

Cedar Creek John Dead

Cedar Creek John, the only welcome Chinamen in Mineral county, died Monday morning at the Ordean Hotel. He was an early settler of this county, spending years placer mining on Cedar Creek. According to papers found in his possession he was about 90 years of age. For many years he has been a county charge.

March 30th, 1922

Alder Gulch, which has produced gold for half century, is passing

...Then came the era of the Chinese miner who can work at a profit where a white man would starve to death. At one time, after most of the white miners had left, there were upwards of 800 Chinese miners working over the ground for the second time, and in time even the Chinese departed.

January 21st, 1937

Too Many Foreigners in U.S. Placer Chinaman's Complaint

One of Montana's most famous early-day Chinamen was Jimmy July. To the time of his death in Butte 30 years ago, he claimed to be the only naturalized Chinaman in the state. Unfortunately, he lacked proof of his naturalization, his papers having been swept away, so he said, with his pack, when, in 1866, he was fording Rock creek during high water. He also lost his guns and other equipment at that time.

Jimmy July died a pauper. For years prior to his death he lived on a pittance granted him by Silver Bow county authorities. But in 1865 he was a prominent citizen of Last Chance gulch, where Helena now stands. He was running an eating house at Green Horn, a camp near the site of Helena, and while doing so it is said that he frequently fed, free of charge, miners who had 'gone broke' and who later became millionaires.

He claimed to have taken out his naturalization papers in California in 1862 and to have voted several times while he was in possession of them. He at one time was a successful placer miner, but said that white men had sheared him out of his money and property, which he once owned in both Helena and Butte.

Impartial Voter

Jimmy claimed that upon the occasions when he voted he divided his support equally between the republicans and democrats. He favored the Chinese exclusion act, disliked his own countrymen, and thought there were too many foreigners in the United States. His age was uncertain, but in 1901 he thought that he was about 90 years old.

The career of Billy Kee, another widely known Chinaman who lived in Montana for many years, was much different.

Billy Kee ran the hotel at Lombard, where the old "jawbone" railroad built by Richard Harlow, after whom the city of Harlowton was named, touched the Northern Pacific. Billy Kee was especially well known to the commercial travelers of that day. His hotel was a favorite stopping place, and robbed the trip into the Lewistown country over the "jawbone" of much of its hardship. His beds were clean and good and his table was excellent.

Wives Accumulate

After accumulating a fortune in the hotel business he went back to China and is now a successful merchant in the Chinese city of Hongkong. But Billy's American

divorce was not recognized by the Chinese authorities, according to word received by some of his Chinese friends here, and after his return to Hongkong, he had two wives, the one he left behind, and the one he annexed in this country. And by the law and customs of the country the first wife, the one whom he married in China, was boss of the household, and the second wife whom he married in this country became her slave. He had several children by the wife he married in America, and when he returned to China, took them all with him.

February 2nd, 1938

Tong War Held in Alder Gulch in 1879; Two Chinamen Killed After 2,000 Shots Were Fired

When Chinese tongs went to war in Alder gulch in 1879, the 200 natives of the Celestial empire who were placer mining, laundering and what not in that area split into two factions, fought a battle which lasted all one afternoon, in which at least 2,000 shots were fired and at the end of which at least two Chinamen were found dead—both killed by knife wounds. Those were the only two casualties, to the astonishment of officers who finally arrived on the scene and of more than 20 ranchmen who had been unable to pass through the field of battle because the Chinese war parties were ensconced on either side of the road which they were traveling to Virginia City. They were held for several hours because the fight blocked the highway.

Most of the Chinese who were in Alder gulch at that time were engaged in working the old placer dumps which had been left by the white placer miners when the ground was worked out. The Chinese, not so ambitious as the white men, but far more industrious, labored for years on this ground, many of them accumulating sufficient wealth as a result of their efforts to return to China and assume a position there which goes only with wealth and affluence. Chinese laundrymen came early to the gold diggings, but they took to mining in force after the white argonauts had skimmed the rich cream from the gravel of Alder Gulch.

For several years the road which leads from the railroad station at Alder to Virginia City was lined with cabins and shacks inhabited by these Chinese miners.

Battle Starts

It was during an afternoon in the fall that the residents of Virginia City though they heard gunfire in that direction, the crackle of rifles that seemed almost continuous. About 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the Paul Revere of the occasion, a resident of the Ruby valley, dashed into Virginia City on a foam-flecked horse and reported to the sheriff's office the Chinese down the valley had split into two armies and had been shooting at each other for hours—were murdering each other.

He had been among the men who were held up by the fight, but during a lull in the hostilities he had spurred his horse along the road which ran through the battlefield and come to report to the sheriff. He had seen two dead bodies by the roadside, he said, and could hear the groans of the wounded as he came by. Twenty ranchmen, he reported, were at the mouth of Alder canyon waiting for an opportunity to come to Virginia City.

Friends and Foes in Danger

The messenger described the battle, which he said he had watched for a considerable period. It was proceeding, he declared in an extremely haphazard manner. The participants seemed to have no particular objective in view, according to the

description. One of them would rush from cover, empty the magazine of his rifle in any direction, yell at the top of his voice and then seek cover again to reload and repeat the performance. His friends were in as much danger from his efforts as were his foes.

M.D. Plattner was the sheriff of Madison county at the time. He hurriedly organized a posse and rode for the scene of the trouble.

But by the time he and his men arrived the battle was over and the sheriff could obtain no information from any of the participants as to who was responsible for the death of the two men. The Chinese couldn't understand the sheriff's question, nor could they tell him anything he could understand, except that each side was blaming the other for the start of the war and its consequences.

The ringleaders in the disturbance were finally located, however, and several of them were arrested and jailed at Virginia City. The affair was finally sifted down to where it appeared that one particular faction had been the aggressor, and several members of this faction were held to the grand jury. Former Territorial Chief Justice H.N. Blake was counsel for the defense.

When the grand jury was convened the case of the accused Chinamen was brought before it, but no true bill was returned. E.J. Conger, later a resident of Dillon, was judge of the district court and would not accept the decisions of the jury. He said that the two men had been killed that it was the duty of the grand jury to find out who was responsible for the crime. The reporting grand jury was discharged and a new one impaneled. It indicted two of the Chinamen for murder and the other prisoners were discharged.

No Conscientious Scruples

When the case came to trial, prospective jurors who had no conscientious scruples against hanging a Chinaman were at a premium. The general sentiment of the community was expressed by one talesman who when asked if he had any such scruples, replied: "No, I would be willing to help hang every last one of them in the country." Of course, he was promptly excused.

Several hundred talesmen were examined before a jury was obtained and the case brought to trial. The verdict was murder in the first degree and the two prisoners were sentenced to hang. A man named Douglas, convicted of the murder of a woman named Alice Earp, was condemned to die by Judge Conger at the same time as the Chinamen.

It seemed, however, that Judge Blake still had an ace in the hole. He appealed for the two Chinamen and obtained a new trial. At the second trial the weight of the evidence hinged on the location of the wounds on the body of one of the murdered men. The grave was opened for the purpose of making an examination of the body. But the coffin was empty. Someone had stolen exhibit A and as it was the main evidence of the prosecution and could not be produced the Chinamen were acquitted.

Twenty years later Bob Conway and William Vanderhook found a skeleton in a prospect hole at the head of Water gulch which was thought to be the remains of the body of the Chinaman victim of the war, which had been sought for evidence at the second trial. It was the skeleton of a Chinaman and marks on the bones indicated locations of wounds which corresponded to those which caused the death of the Chinaman whose body was stolen from its grave.

From the time of that tong war of 1879 the number of Chinese in Alder gulch began to diminish. The trial had cost the county thousands of dollars, a repetition of the

disturbance was feared, and the white men discouraged their presence and the coming of additional ones.

June 12th, 1941

Chinese Waged War at Virginia City Over Gold Lease; One Chinese Lopped Off Another's Head With Sharp Shovel.

The old Chinese Masonic temple Virginia City has long been down. It made history. Forty years ago it was the fraternity house, church, brothel and gambling hall of the Alder gulch colony of Chinese—the meeting place of 700 or Chinamen. It is reputed to have been, at one time, western headquarters of Chinese Masonry in the United States, but certainly dedicated to other uses.

Murder was said to have been done within its walls, but never were the officials able to fix crime upon the killers. Those who enjoyed its hospitality and protection may have been witnesses to tragedy, but their lips were sealed. Within the temple was hatched a tong war in which every member of the colony was arrayed either on one side or the other, and which caused the death in battle of two men and the murderers, although caught red-handed, and once sentenced to death, through oriental cunning walked out of the of the Virginia city jail under the yes of the jailer and escaped..

Promontory

The temple stood on a little promontory near the town's entrance—at right angles to where Wallace street of Virginia begins. It loomed high in the skyline, an oriental outpost on the borders of western barbarism. It filled the eye of the wayfarer as the stage driver gave his whip the final crack and dashed around the corner and up the main street on the last leg of his journey.

After the white placer miners had taken cream of the millions in gold which were washed from the bars of Alder gulch, came the Chinese miners. They were very clever in placer mining. They could make good wages where white miners would starve. The first working of the sands of Alder gulch was carelessly done, and rich pickings were left for the Chinese. So along in 1870, when the white miners were seeking other diggings, the gulch teemed with yellow men. For a quarter of a century they worked over the sands at a profit, until, the diggings exhausted, they, like the white men gone before them, took their departure. Its votaries gone, there are none left to kowtow before the great Joss. Budda, neglected, turned his face away and the old temple vanished.

The Chinese temple was the social center of all these yellow men, flush with money, and it was a little paradise to them. Outside its threshold they were alien. Inside they were back in old Cathay, where they counseled and fought, fraternized and gambled, or made love, after their fashion. In one spacious room they burned incense and said their prayers to the old gods of China; another large room was devoted to the service of the Chinese Bacchus. Here amid the fumes of the demon of the red poppy they dreamed dreams of the land of the cherry blossom and the lotus, and forgot their lonesomeness in a strange and almost hostile land.

How many murders were committed in the temple and covered up, no white man knows. There were a number of mysterious deaths and if they were killings the secret was always kept from the white officials and no murderer was ever brought to book. If a Chinamen

died the body was buried with much pomp and ceremony, his friends and enemies following the remains to the grave scattering bits of red paper on which were mystic characters designed to scare the devils away and give the soul that had just been freed writher through natural death, or the knife of an adversary a good start and a chance. If the deceased had been notoriously healthy qualities white men by the statement that he had choked to death on a chicken bone. There were many feasts at the temple.

Six Chinese Companies

Six Chinese companies operated in alder gulch, and every Chinese in the diggings was affiliated with one or the other of them whether the companies were connected with the six great Chinese tongs in control of the Chinese colony in san Francisco is not known, but the impression prevailed in Virginia City that the connection was direct. The head of each of these companies was martinet and his followers obeyed his orders implicitly. Their quarrels the head men settled among themselves. There were many differences over leases and gradually there grew up two factions in this Chinese fraternity house, four companies aligning themselves against two and among the white people these factions became known as the Four company and the Two company groups.

Surrender or Fight

Finally came a time when these feelings developed into intense hatred and it burst into open armed warfare when in burst into open armed warfare when the two company group secured control of a choice lease of rich ground which the Four companies had long been negotiating for. The heads of the Four companies held a conference and decided that the two companies should either surrender this lease or fight. The Two companies replied by entrenching themselves about the ground in dispute and defusing the stronger element. Every man in the Two companies was supplied with a rifle and plenty of ammunition. The Four companies armed their men and gave battle.

For two days they fought desperately and the gulch resounded with the din of battle. There were probably 200 men engaged on the side of the Two companies and 400 men win the forces of the Four companies. People going to and from Virginia City made a long detour over the hills to keep away from the zone of conflict. Thousands of shots were exchanged, but singular to say not an individual was even powder-burned. Finally, when all the ammunition in Virginia City and the surrounding towns was exhausted, the Four companies decided to go back to the ancient methods of Chinese warfare. They prepared sink pots and sharpened pitchforks and made pikes. They put ugly masks on their warriors to give them a ferocious appearance.

Kill Two Defenders

When all was in readiness to the din of gongs beating and much yelling they took the redouble of the Two companies practically at the point of bayonet. The forces of the Two companies practically at the point of bayonet. The forces of the Two companies were not strong enough to resist them. Two of the defenders were killed and the rest fled. The battle ended with a small Two company man fleeing down the gulch, closely pursued by a tall Chinese armed with a sharpened shovel. Finally the small man stumbled and fell, and his adversary calmly cut his head off with the shovel and bore it back in triumph to his victorious comrades.

In the meantime, the sheriff of Madison county organized a strong posse and going to the battlefield, put 40 of the belligerents under arrest. The Virginia City jail filled with

chattering Chinese. Following the investigation two members of the Four company group Ah Wan and Ah Yen, were charged with murder.

Chicken for Sheriff

An interpreter represented each side at the preliminary hearing. The interpreters were agreed that the Chinese witnesses would disregard the sanctity of the oath and suggested that if the witnesses were sworn on the blood of a freshly killed rooster they would testify truthfully. There were over 100 witnesses, and the sheriff sent his deputies out to commandeer poultry. Before the hearing started the jail yard was filled with crates of roosters. As each witness was sworn he would be led out into the yard the head of a rooster chopped off and in the blood of the freshly killed fowl the witness would be sworn to tell the truth. As the trial proceeded the jail yard took on the appearance of a shambles and many constituents of the sheriff ate chicken pie during the days following. At the end of there hearing the magistrate bound Ah Way and Ah Yen over to the grand jury. The Grand Jury indicted them for murder and shortly afterwards they were tried in the district court. The accused were defended by such able lawyers as Col. Wilbur, Col. J.E. Callaway. At the trial the rooster oath was dispersed with, greatly to the chagrin of the chicken pie fanciers who ere known to be of the sheriffs political affiliation. During the trial Michael Hatfield a juror became so ill that he could not attend court. Against the protests of the two of the defendants counsel, the presiding judge decided to proceed with the trial, but with 11 jurors. Ay Wan and Ay Yen were found guilty of murder in the first degree and sentenced to death.

The case was appealed to the supreme court on the contention that the conviction of a capital offense by a jury of 11 persons was unconstitutional. The supreme court upheld the contention and ordered a new trial. Ah Wah and Ay Yen went back to the county jail to await the slow working of the jail. The full decision may be found in the report of the territory vs. Ah Wah and Ah Yen, 4 Montana 149.

About a year later the case again came up for trial. In the meantime an election had been held. Those of the Sheriff constituents who did not partake of chicken pie at the expense of Madison county voted against him and he was defeated. A new prosecuting attorney had assumed office and a new district judge was on the bench. Ath4e case was called and the sheriff brought into two Chinese prisoners.

The judge asked the prosecuting attorney if he was ready to proceed with the trial of Ah Wah and Ah Yen. He replied that he was ready. One of the attorneys for the defense arose and interposed an objection.

“Your Honor” he said. “This is a trial for murder. If the defendants are judged guilty they may suffer the extreme penalty of the law. The rule of the law is that when a man is on trial for his life he must be present. Otherwise the proceedings will not stand.”

“Are these prisoners not the defendants Ah Wah and Ah Yen who are charged with murder?” asked the astonished judge.

“They are not our clients, affirmed the several attorneys for the defense.

The prosecuting attorney who had had nothing to do with the previous trial admitted htat he did not know.

The Sheriff was called before the court. He admitted that he did not know positively that the prisoners were the defendants, Ah Wah and Ah Yen. “Your Honor” he said. “All Chinamen look alike to me.” If these men are not the defendants, I do not know who they are.

Defense Council Chuckles

Counsel for the defense say back chuckling. Chinese interpreters and head men of the six companies were brought in and all affirmed that the prisoners were not the men charged with murder.

“The prisoner were given their liberty. Afterward the story leaked out. The quarrelling companies had resolved their differences and resolved to save the men whose lives were in jeopardy. So they matched eastern guile with western carelessness and won.

The Chinese had been allowed much liberty in visiting the prisoners. Two Chinese were selected who were about the same size and general appearance of the prisoners. They were sent into the jail to visit them. Inside the cells the jailer was not watching them. They changed clothes with the murders, who walked out of the jail before the eyes of the unsuspecting jailer and escaped. They were never apprehended.