

**Fort Benton River Press Weekly, Fort Benton, MT. 1880-1923**  
Compiled by Ken Robison July 2007, additions by C. Merritt Sept. 2007

December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1880

**A Little-Footed Wife**

Gem Kee, a Chinese merchant of Deer Lodge, recently went to California and married a “little-footed” woman. It is said that among the Chinese no women except those with little feet are chosen in marriage. Gem Kee and his bride have returned to Deer Lodge, and the *New North-West* of the 26<sup>th</sup> inst. gives the following interesting particulars concerning them: “On Sunday last Gem gave a wedding reception and dinner, issuing 400 invitations, and nearly 100 of his countrymen were present. Some of the presents were quite valuable. A gold watch, four pairs of bracelets, two of them costing \$140 each, were among the number. Just as a matter of interest to Montana ladies who pride themselves on their little feet, we will state that a party of ladies were permitted as a special privilege to see Mrs. Gem Kee a few days ago and to obtain the measure of the foot with the shoe on. The shoe from heel to toe measures 3 ½ inches, and is 1 ¼ inches across at the instep—the widest part. She walks tolerably well, but has a serving maid to attend her, and dresses with an elaborate splendor of silk and gold. Gem appears ‘just as happy as a big sun flower’ and considers he has become a respectable citizen.”

January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1881

Sassanach says (and who is Sassanach?) that the Sheriff has had an eye out on those opium dens all the while, waiting like an eagle searching food for her eaglets, to pounce down on and raid the hapless outfit. We are glad that the Sheriff keeps his eye out, and believe that his eternal vigilance is the price of peace and good will to men. But don’t anybody believe that the opium dens are any better than we represented them. They are worse.

January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1881

**Sassanach!**

And who is Sassanach? He noticed an editorial in the *River Press*, and deemed it just that some reply should be made to its big headed writer.

He has also been aware of the existence of these hellish places of resort, “the opium dens,” and to his certain knowledge they have been under the surveillance of the Sheriff, who is powerless to squelch them.

Well, who said he hadn’t? We are not making a fight with the Sheriff, but on the opium habit and the dens where it is practiced; and to get so angry about it arouses a faint suspicion as to who is Sassanach.

He asks: “Who are our best citizens?” This question we are not prepared to answer, and think it is considerably mixed.

He says, “the worst opium fiends in our city are the sporting men and disreputable women of the place.” He must know or he would not be so positive.

He does not hesitate to affirm that the allegation that boys frequent these houses is entirely false. He either knows too little about them, or he knows too much; if too little, his assertion is worthless; if too much, we have probably tread on his bunion.

Finally, we will state for the benefit of the anonymous rooster in the *Pictorial*, that we have the names of some parties who are considered among our best citizens, and who are of more than ordinary cultivation, who do indulge in the damnable practice of opium smoking, but whom, out of respect for them we will not expose, even for the benefit of that egotistical “Sassanach,” who should have kept quiet.

February/March, 1881

**Ah Sing,  
Benton Wash House,  
Cor. Main and St. John Streets.  
Washing and Ironing  
Done with neatness and dispatch  
Family Washing Solicited**

June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1881

The funeral ceremonies over the Chinaman who died here last week attracted a number of people to the cemetery. We are told that his countrymen would not touch the dead body, and were with difficulty persuaded to handle the coffin. At the grave side a number of articles which may have been supposed to be a necessary outfit for the deceased on his journey to the Celestial heaven, such as blankets, clothing, dishes, rice, an umbrella, tea, etc., were thrown in a heap and burned, while inside the coffin were placed four decks of playing cards and a lot of silver, perhaps as a stake and the necessary implements to euvre the Chinese St. Peter out of admission fee.

January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1882

There are 8,000 Chinamen employed on the western division of the Northern Pacific R.R. and yet Villard is not happy. He contemplates sending a ship to China for more.

February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1882

A Chinese row at Bozeman on Saturday night a week ago resulted in the death of one of the participants.

February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1882

### **A Murdered Chinaman**

The *Courier* gives the following account of the murder of a Chinaman at Bozeman on January 21<sup>st</sup>: A Chinaman named Sin Yee was murdered by one of his countryman on Saturday night last. The bloody deed was committed in one of the Chinese dens on lower Main street, and as there was no other witnesses of the crime than Chinamen, it is extremely difficult to ascertain anything reliable regarding the circumstances of the affair. Lee Moon was pointed out as the murderer, and he was immediately arrested by Sheriff McKenzie and lodged in jail. A post mortem examination revealed the fact that Sin Yee had been shot in the breast, and that from its effect he died almost instantaneously; and what evidence was adduced pointed directly to Lee Moon as the murderer. The verdict of the jury was, of course, in accordance with the facts.

Persistent inquiry into the probably cause of the killing reveals the usual stereotyped phases of Chinese social life and character—opium, gambling and “two

companies.” It appears that the dead Chinaman and all the living ones in town, except two, belong to one company, while Lee Moon and another Celestial belong to another company. Moon, of course, denies all knowledge of the crime, and insists that his is accused only because his accusers want to get him out of the way. As none but Chinese testimony will be available at the trial, it will be a difficult matter to arrive at the guilt or innocence of the party accused.

“For ways that are dark and tricks that are vain, The Heathen Chinese is peculiar.”

February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1882

The Chinese new year begins to-morrow, and we would suggest to some of our wicked Celestials the propriety of turning over a new leaf.

March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1882

Ah Wau, a Chinaman employed as a cook by one of the officers at Fort Assiniboin, suicided by the hanging process last Monday night. The remains will be brought to this city and prepared for shipment to China.

October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1882

### **A Cute Celestial**

In Butte, where Chinamen play faro a good deal, a mild-mannered heathen slid into a faro game, and after losing a few dollars, pulled out a little package of gold dust and laid it on the ace. The ace lost, and the dealer, picking up the package, unfolded it and weighed out the dust, which was \$50 worth. He was about to cast the paper aside when the Celestial motioned to him, and asked that it might be given back, as it had some washing accounts on it. The paper was returned, and the next night he was there again; betting \$50 in gold dust as before. He put his package carefully on the ace and won. The dealer handed out \$50, and the Chinaman shook his head.

“What’s the matter, John?”

“You payee alle I bet—and hundred and fifty dollars.”

The dealer laughed contemptuously, but the heathen, unrolling the package, showed a hundred dollar bill laid in between the double piece of paper which contained the dust.

The dealer looked very cheap but the Chinaman never moved a muscle. He acted as if it was a regular thing to keep a hundred dollar greenback folded up in his gold dust packages.

“Pay it,” said the lookout man, “he’s got us dead.”

The same bill was put in the paper the night before, but the dealer had handed it back, thinking it a wash-bill. But, of course, this wasn’t the Chinaman’s Fault.—

*Salt Lake Tribune*

October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1882

A Bozeman Chinaman was shot and killed by a woman last Saturday.

November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1882

A Chinaman in Missoula wanted to rent the sanctum of the local paper for a wash house, one day last week, but the other one refused to let him have it.

December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1882

The Chinaman, Ah Mon, who died in Butte recently from the effects of an accidental pistol wound, was buried with the usual Pagan rites of the heathen Chinese. A dressed suckling pig, fowl, fish and sweetmeats were offered as a propitiatory sacrifice, and little red and yellow sticks were burned about the grave to smoke the devil away.

February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1883

A raid was made by some rounders on a Chinese laundry, in Billings, recently, and several hundred dollars stolen from the unfortunate Celestials.

October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1883

In our almost fruitless search after something strange and startling yesterday we were shown one which from the stench it made we would prefer handling it with a long-handled pitchfork. It is in the rear of the China wash house on Front street, near the Masonic hall. The close-fisted Celestials, too penurious to have a sewer dug across the street to the river, have dug a cess pool and covered it up with boards and some dirt, to run their slops and offal into. This covering has caved in, leaving the hole open and with a stench bad enough to give the inhabitants of the whole town the full catalogue of all the malarial diseases flesh is heir to. It is to be hoped the city marshal will see to it that this nuisance is abated at once or that these almond-eyed offenders are made to feel the rigor of our city laws.

October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1883

The Chinamen are employing "Ways that are dark and tricks that are vain" to slip into our land of high wages, notwithstanding the enactment of congress to bar them out. Seventy-seven came over in one vessel and one hundred and eleven in another not long ago. These Celestials hold certificates from the Chinese government stating that they are traders or actors, and the boys and young men that they are coming here to attend school. As the restricting act applies only to laborers they have to be allowed to land, unless they give themselves away when examined by the officials.

August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1883

#### **A Celestial Candidate for the Gallows**

Esquire Toombs, of Reedsfort, was recently sent for from Maiden to hold an inquest upon the body of a murdered Chinaman found in a prospect hole at that place last week. The body had lain in the hole two or three days before it was discovered and was pretty well hacked with an axe or some similar instrument. Suspicion at once fell upon a brother Celestial (a rival in the laundry business) and sufficient evidence to warrant his arrest was soon found. There is, in fact, a clear case against him, and if a proper effort is made to convict him, the murderous Chinaman is likely to wind up his career at the end of a rope.

*June 2, 1883*

*Five Chinese arrived in Fort Benton to start a Chinese store in William Foster's [a black saloon owner] old building, Phoenix Exchange. Foster skipped town leaving lots of bill.*

January 16, 1884

Chinese Jim Lee bought restaurant from Lee Jim.

January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1884

One of our celestial citizens brought suit recently against another, on account, and the bill presented as evidence of the indebtedness was in the Chinese characters. The lawyer attending to the case has the document in his possession and thinks of taking a course of study in Chinese in order to master the situation and present his client's case intelligently.

February 11, 1885

A Chinaman and a squaw were married a few days ago at Missoula. The people of that burg will wait with interest for the result of the amalgamation.

Shooting scrape in Chinese saloon on Main Street, likely corner St. John & Main Streets.

December 15, 1885

### **The Chinese Must Go**

NEIHART, December 15, 1885 Editor of the River Press: An anti-Chinese meeting was held here on the 14th inst., and the following is a report of the proceedings: Mr. G. R. Choate was elected chairman of the meeting and Stephen Pierce secretary. The following resolutions were submitted: Resolved, That all Chinamen in this district be ordered to leave within ten days from this date, and that a committee be appointed to notify them. Resolved, That a permanent organization be formed and a committee be appointed to warn all the Chinese to leave; that a committee be also appointed to call mass meetings of the organization at any time they may deem necessary. Resolved, That the committee on publication be requested to send copies of the proceedings of the meeting to the *River Press*, *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* and *Butte Miner*. An amendment offered was to the effect that Tom Gong and Lee Sing be permitted to remain until May 1st, 1886, to enable them to dispose of their property. The resolutions were unanimously adopted with the amendment, and the chair appointed a committee of five to wait on the Chinese and give them warning to leave the camp, and a committee of three on publications. The meeting then adjourned. I send you the above proceedings by request of the committee. Another meeting was held last evening, at which the warning committee reported that all the Chinamen in the camp had been warned to leave. Many of our citizens think the action of the committee too radical, and at present petitions are in circulation to use all peaceable and lawful means to rid the town of the Mongolians. Another meeting is called for Saturday night. Your correspondent is informed that several Chinamen will leave tomorrow. P.P.

January 6, 1886

Lee Gee Enterprise House new brick hotel, Cummings building.

August 3, 1887

Great Falls policy of exclusion of Chinese.

November 16, 1887

Chinese Hong under bond \$500 for assault with two beer bottles & tack hammer.

Chinese New Year, 1888

New year Saturday and Sunday at Lee Gee restaurant, Sam Lee wash house, Sing Lee saloon

February 15, 1888

Mention of Sing Lee Saloon on Main Street. Lee Gee Restaurant. Sam Lee Wash House.

February 29, 1888

Hong was one of three Chinese arrested; also Wong Woo and Tong Fong.

September 25, 1889

Wong Quot bought Enterprise Restaurant from Sing Lee. Also, Sam Lun had White Elephant on Front Street.

May 21, 1890

FB hotel keepers resent Chinese restaurants.

September 10, 1890

Chinese opium joint raided Thursday. Three Chinese arrived. Chin Wong discharged. Quong Chung case held in abeyance.

July 20, 1892

Fire gutted Chinese laundry on St. John.

January 31, 1894

Chinese having photos taken to comply with law.

February 7, 1894

27 Chinese photos were taken.

February 14, 1894

Chinese leave laundry in Deletraz building after [bad luck] fire; moved to Houston brick, probably first part of Hagen block.

February 21, 1894

Another fire in new Chinese brick building

February 21, 1894

Chinese register with E. B. Largent, 29 in FB; about 50 in Chouteau [then Choteau] County.

February 28, 1894 [also under 21 Feb 1900]

FB photographer Dan Dutro has taken photos of 21 Chinese in FB, 18 at Fort Assiniboine, 14 in Havre, and 9 in Chinook. [This may explain the portrait photo that we have]

June 14, 1899

Wing Lung & Co. new laundry on Front Street next to Owl barber shop.

February 21, 1900

Two Chinese with a restaurant in the Magnolia Saloon building.

March 20, 1901

Jo Yu died Thursday in FB, age 50, cook here for ten years.

May 22, 1901

Lee Sam, an employee at Tong Chong laundry on Front Street was ordered deported.

October 16, 1901

Mar Joe, Fort Benton Chinese, ordered deported.

January 22, 1902

Ung Toy or Louis Kim, recent employee of Tong Chong restaurant found quarters in old Magnolia saloon building. Papers expired but kept from deportation order

February 5, 1902

Chinese laundry corner Main & St. John's was quarantined for smallpox until clothing is disinfected.

May 14, 1902

Funeral for Ah Fong Saturday in FB, where he lived most of 25 years. [Apparently in same issue: Lee Ong (Chicken) sanity hearing, account of feud of See Yup and Sam Yup societies.

March 2, 1904

Lee Sing in custody for Helena deportation hearing.

September 20, 1905

Fire destroyed a Chinese log house corner St. John & Main Streets.

August 14, 1907

Lee Sing, Chinese gardener, paid small fine for selling opium under threat.

December 30, 1908

Enterprise Restaurant still operated by Chinese. Listed Lee Gee in October; Lee Shong & Bro. in Nov; and Lee Hong & Co. in Dec.

September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1910, p. 5

**Attempted to Commit Murder**

A man who gives his name as John Smith, and who has been employed in the Grand Union hotel kitchen as dish washer, was arrested by the city marshal Sunday

morning on a charge of attempting to commit murder. The prisoner is alleged to have assaulted a Chinese cook, generally known by the name of Toy, apparently without provocation.

The victim of the assault was struck several times with a cleaver, one of the blows fracturing the skull and causing a wound that may have serious results. He is under the care of a physician, and in the event of death the prisoner will face a charge of murder.

November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1910

From Thursday's Daily. The jury term of the district court opened today, the first criminal case of the term being that of John Smith, the defendant being charged with assault with intent to kill. The alleged assault took place in this city about two months ago, the victim being a Chinese cook named Lee Chung. The following jury was secured to try the case.

November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1910

From Friday's Daily. The trial of John Smith, accused of a murderous assault upon a Chinese cook employed at the Grand Union hotel was in progress in the district court today, William Toy, of Helena, acting as interpreter during part of the testimony. The latter was to the effect that there had been no trouble between the men, and that the assault was without provocation. The defendant, in testifying on his own behalf, declared he had no knowledge of striking the Chinaman with a cleaver, his mind being a complete blank as to the incident. The case was given to the jury at a late hour this afternoon.

November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1910

From Saturday's Daily. The jury in the case of John Smith, charged with assault with intent to kill, returned a verdict of guilty before the adjournment of district court last evening, leaving sentence to be fixed by the court.

November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1910

John Smith, convicted of assault in the first degree, was given a sentence of eight years.

February 14, 21, 1923

Wong Ming, cook at Quon Café, hanged himself 11 Feb; Tom Mum here 8 years, promptly closed café and departed for Butte [there is speculation that Wong Ming was hanged to scare the remaining Chinese out of FB].