

Royal Cafe:

50 YEARS ON MAIN STREET **PART 3 OF 6**



By GARY DIELMAN

For the Baker City Herald

Editor's Note: This is the third in a six-part series of articles written by Gary Dielman, a longtime Baker County historian, that explores the vital role that Chinese immigrants played in the county's history. The series, which started in the Nov. 6 issue, focuses on the families who owned the Royal Cafe on Main Street in Baker City from 1936 to 1990. The series will continue over the next three weeks, publishing in Saturday issues.

National Origin of Royal Café Owners

All five of the original Royal Café owners — Allan, born in 1900, Harry in 1900, Gan in 1902, Jack in 1904, and Jimmy in 1906 — were born during a seven-year period in the small village of Tung Sing Lai, population 200 to 300, part of the larger village of Har Peung about three miles south of today's Taishan City, the capital of Taishan County, Guangdong (formerly Canton) Province, China.

Har Peung is 45 miles west of Macao and 60 miles west of Hong Kong in the area of the Pearl River Delta. The 1,500-mile-long Pearl River drains a huge area of south-eastern China. The river's mouth is bracketed by the cities Macao and Hong Kong, where the river empties into the South China Sea.

The California gold rush of 1849 lured a flood of Chinese laborers from poverty-stricken southeastern China. They broke into the U.S. labor market by working for less pay than white laborers. Chinese working for less pay provoked a backlash among U.S. miners and railroad workers, who complained bitterly that the practice brought down wages for all laborers. Eventually complaints were loud enough to be heard across the continent in Washington, D.C., resulting in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Effects of the Chinese exclusion acts on the Eng's

The Chinese exclusion acts had consequences for the Eng's long before they came to Baker City. I've chosen Royal Café co-owner Harry Eng's family history to illustrate the effects on one branch of the Eng family. The story begins with Harry's father, Wah Eng, who was born in China in 1868, the youngest of five boys of the Eng family.

The second oldest son of the family, Ah Kim, came to the U.S. in the 1860s or 1870s. In 1878, while working in gold mining near John Day, Ah Kim received word that his father had died. Follow-



Baker County Library Historic Photo Collection

Photo in the living room of Henry and Annie Wong's (left) Baker City home. Jack Eng in chair, next to him Ken Eng. Henry and Ken are Jack's sons.



Baker County Library Historic Photo Collection

Lily Eng tries to interest her son, Michael (born in 1958 in Baker City) in his first birthday cake, but he's more interested in the toys. If you look closely, you can see that the candle is lit. Location is Royal Café.

ing Chinese custom, Ah Kim returned to China sometime between 1878 to 1881 to pay respects to his deceased father. When Ah Kim was planning his return to the U.S. in 1881, his mother asked him to take the family's youngest son, 13-year-old Wah, with him. Ah Kim, who was at least 15 years older than Wah, acceded to his mother's request.

After arriving in San Francisco, Ah Kim and Wah went north to Washington state, where they lived for seven years in Port Townsend at the north entrance of Puget Sound near Seattle, followed by two years in Seattle. At the time, Port Townsend was a major port for clipper ships traveling between Asia and the Northwest. Later, Seattle became a major port, when larger steam ships were the main form of transportation across the ocean.

In 1891, when Wah was 19 years old, the brothers moved to Walla Walla, Washington, where they lived in Walla Walla's Chinatown. The Eng brothers and Ah Kim's son, Ah Quong, along with several other Chinese businessmen, formed a partnership in a Chinese import-export business called Zee Tai Lung Company. By 1913 the number of partners had grown to 10.

One reason for forming company partnerships was financial. If Chinese businessmen did not individually have enough money to start a business, they pooled their money. Another reason for such partnerships was for Chinese to establish themselves as businessmen, as opposed to laborers, since the latter class was not allowed to enter the U.S. after passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

Immigration authorities

occasionally interviewed local businessmen and bank managers to confirm that Chinese residents in Walla Walla were actually engaged in business. Another immigration regulation affected Chinese businessmen wishing to visit China and then return to the U.S. They had to acquire in advance of leaving a permit from immigration authorities that would allow their reentry. Wah Eng's first return trip to China was in 1895 to get married. Wah Eng's second trip resulted in Harry's birth in 1900. A third trip resulted in the birth of Jimmy Eng in 1906.

In 1914 Wah Eng sponsored his son Harry Eng, age 14, to come to the U.S. as a student. Harry Eng and Allan Eng, age 14, the oldest of the original Royal Café owners, came to the U.S. on the steamship S.S. Ixion. Allan

and Harry came as students to join their fathers in Walla Walla. Allan's father was involved there in a restaurant business.

During their teenage years Allan and Harry attended school, but when not in school they worked as laborers in Chinese laundries and restaurants, which was not allowed under the Chinese exclusion rules. Immigration authorities closely enforced adherence to the rules. While visiting Walla Walla, they discovered that young Harry was working as a laborer in a laundry. His father, Wah Eng, received a warning for allowing Harry to engage in work as a laborer.

In 1917 Wah Eng established a new import-export business in Pendleton and put Harry in charge of management. That was the same year Harry registered for the U.S. draft and the year the U.S. started sending troops to fight in Europe during WWI. Harry was not called to serve.

Two more of the co-owners of the Royal Café, first cousins Gan Ong and Jack Eng, arrived in the U.S. a couple of years apart. Gan Ong, who was born in China in 1902 with surname Eng, came to the U.S. in 1920 to join his father, Gue Ong, in Pendleton.

Immigration recorded Gan's surname as Ong, which is a common spelling variant of Eng. Jack Eng, who was born in 1904 in China, came to the U.S. in 1922 sponsored by his uncle Gue Ong. So Jack immigrated to the U.S. as Jack Ong. Jack later changed his surname back to Eng. In about 1926 Jack returned to China and married Sue Oye Lim. The first of their two children, Henry, was born in July 1927. After another trip to China, their son Ken was born in about 1935.

In 1921 Harry Eng went back to China to marry Ngoi Toy Lim. When he returned to the U.S., he brought his six-years-younger brother, Jimmy

Paper Names

An exception to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and later extensions, allowed Chinese businessmen in the U.S. to sponsor their sons to join them in the U.S. But if there was not a family member businessman already in the U.S., some Chinese parents devised an illegal way to send a son to the U.S.

They found a Chinese businessman already in the U.S. who would sponsor the person as his son, sometimes after being paid to do so, by filing the proper application with U.S. immigration authorities. If the application was accepted, then the person immigrated under the surname of the sponsor. Such names were referred to informally as a "paper names," as opposed to the surname of the birth father.

Eng, age 15, to join him and their father in Walla Walla. Later Jimmy would become the youngest of the original co-owners of the Royal Café.

Due to Chinese exclusion laws, Harry's wife, Ngoi Toy, did not come to the U.S. until 1967, six years after Harry's death in 1961. Although she was sponsored by her son, Goey Eng, she never lived in Baker City. In 1999, at age 97, Ngoi Toy Eng died in San Francisco, where she is buried.

In 1926 Wah Eng retired as manager of the Zee Tai Lung Company in Walla Walla and returned to China, where he died around 1943. Wah Eng was buried in hills behind his home village. Tung Sing Lai, Wah Eng's wife, is also buried there. She was never allowed to join her husband in the U.S. due to the Chinese exclusion laws. They lived virtually their whole married lives separated by 7,000 miles of Pacific Ocean.



Baker County Library Historic Photo Collection

Jimmy Eng, youngest of the owners of the Royal Café. His first wife died of starvation during WWII. In 1948 he traveled to China and brought to the U.S. his surviving three children and new wife, Lily. From left to right, daughter (name unknown), Lily, Jimmie, Gary, daughter (name unknown).

Lockdowns limited visitors, but not joy

Jehovah's Witnesses' Public Information

While she may be separated physically from others, Helen Dalton feels closer than ever to her friends. The 79-year-old resident of Prineville receives long-term care in a private home setting where she has lived in isolation with her caregiver throughout the past year and a half.

Despite the ongoing physical seclusion, she finds joy in attending virtual meetings for worship as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Early in the pandemic, Dalton's congregation in Prineville shifted their religious services from in-person to virtual.

This change means the world to her.

"I'm not depressed, I don't feel cooped up," Dalton said, referring to the Zoom

meetings she attends almost every day. "I think it has really benefited me a lot."

Dalton regularly participates in Bible study with her local congregation. She feels a part of their lives and she makes a special effort to talk with the youths on Zoom. "I'm so proud of the young ones," Dalton said. "They are wonderful."

Across the state, nearly 43,000 Oregonians reside in long-term care settings, according to the Oregon Health Care Association's 2020 Oregon Long Term Care State Report. While pandemic restrictions continue to challenge the perseverance of these older adults, many like Dalton have found new ways to thrive.

For the past 18 months, 75-year-old Paul Berggren has navigated through lockdowns at an assisted living

facility in Redmond. Coping with Parkinson's disease adds to his daily challenges. In spite of his declining health and the lingering isolation, he finds joy.

"I realized that I can do plenty," Berggren explained, after facing discouraging thoughts in the early days of lockdown. Shortly after the pandemic began, he was able to meet regularly with his local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses via Zoom on his computer. "I can worship my God and nothing can take that away from me," he said.

Berggren's family also appreciates the new arrangement for worship. "If he's having a day where he's feeling weak, he doesn't have to miss anything," said his daughter Rachel Tuller, of Bend. "He can still see our faces."

With the onset of the

pandemic, congregations like Berggren's in Central Oregon not only shifted their religious services; they adjusted their ministry from house-to-house visits to telephone calls and letter writing.

It is a change that Berggren appreciates, allowing him to continue his worship and share his positive hope with others. While Parkinson's disease makes it difficult for him to write, he composes letters and asks the staff at his assisted-living facility to type them. He adjusts his letters to reflect the featured topic on jw.org, and he finds encouragement knowing that someone is reading his positive message.

Berggren is not alone.

Isabel Oviedo takes the elevator to the lobby of her assisted living facility,

clutching her walker with two envelopes in her hand.

Mail drop-offs have become a part of her daily routine, as she dedicates a few hours each day writing letters to neighbors with an encouraging Bible verse. She's lost count of how many letters she's sent while under pandemic lockdown but estimates well over 300.

"I have never written so much in my life, not even when I was in school," the 86-year-old widow said with a laugh. "But I love it. It gives me joy and peace of mind."

Joining with her congregation in Naperville, Illinois, over Zoom for this ministry and other Christian meetings has kept Oviedo, and many like her in long-term care facilities, busy and connected despite the restrictions on outings and visits.

"I love spending time with my spiritual brothers and sisters through Zoom," she said. "I only wish we could stay on longer."

With the change from in-person to virtual worship, Oviedo now has more opportunities to volunteer as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Sitting comfortably at her dining room table, she can write to her neighbors without having to worry about her weak knee.

"My goal is to write two letters or spend three hours in the ministry each day," she said. "I don't have time to feel sad."

With the ability to continue his worship from his computer, Berggren has found renewed purpose in life. When asked how he describes his attitude about the future he said unhesitatingly, "Confidence."