

# Kam Wah Chung

TAKE IT IN

KAM WAH CHUNG & CO. STATE HERITAGE SITE



## History of Kam Wah Chung & Co.

Once it was a general store, a doctor's office, a post office, a library and a center of Chinese social and religious life.

The museum is, "one of the most unusual you will find anywhere."

Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site and Kam Wah Chung & Co. Museum is cooperatively preserved and operated by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, the Friends of Kam Wah Chung & Co. Museum and the City of John Day. It is open from May 1 to Oct. 31, seven days a week. Hours are 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free.

To contact the Kam Wah Chung visitor Center, call 541-575-2800.

Old, tiny and unglamorous to the casual observer, the building that once housed Kam Wah Chung (which loosely translates as "Golden Flower of Prosperity") & Co. is a one-of-a-kind property in the National Register of Historic Places.

The walls of the bottom story, built around 1870, are made out of locally quarried volcanic tuff. The rest of the structure consists of pine wood planking. The upper level portion with exterior access was added in the 1890s. The building underwent major rehabilitation in the mid 1970s when it became a state park property. The building's earliest customers were primarily Chinese residents of Canyon City and the John Day area who were attracted by work generated by Eastern Oregon's gold strikes of the period. Some chronicles suggest it served travelers as a trading post.

Its "golden flower" era began when young immigrants Ing "Doc" Hay and Lung On bought the building's lease in 1888.

It then became a successful place of business, a frequently visited herbal medical office, a haven from social persecution for Chinese residents and even a temple, or "joss house."

To Doc Hay and Lung On, the building was also a home they shared with relatives, friends and itinerates into the 1940s. Its seven rooms included two bedrooms, a bunkroom and a kitchen as well as its general store, stockroom, herb room and medical office.

In today's John Day, the building is a memorial as well as a museum commemorating an important era in Oregon history and recalling the lives of two men who eventually earned their community's respect as two of its most prominent citizens.



Kam Wah Chung & Co. State Heritage Site is an informative and well-kept museum and interpretive center in John Day. It preserves the culture of the early-day Chinese workforce in Oregon, and shares displays and artifacts of everyday life for Chinese immigrants.

Originally built in the 1860s as a wagon road trading post after gold was found in nearby Canyon Creek, Kam Wah Chung was run as a local general store and apothecary operated by a doctor and a businessman, Ing "Doc" Hay and Lung On, in the late 1800s-1940s. It was also their home, as well as a boarding house, religious temple, community center and social mecca. Doc Hay provided Eastern medical cures up until the late 1940s to locals, whose children and grandchildren still recall the stories. The building was donated to the city after Doc Hay's death, to serve as a tool in the interpretation of local Chinese history, and sat undisturbed for nearly twenty years before being restored and reopened.

Now operated by Oregon State Parks, the site contains extensive collections of materials and documents from the arrival, settlement and life of Chinese immigrants in the American West. Kam Wah Chung is a distinctive resource for the research of herbal remedies and medicinal practices, due to the Chinese herbs and surviving medical texts. The museum

### Kam Wah Chung & Co.

At the John Day City Park on NW Canton St.  
541-575-2800 • [www.oregonstateparks.org](http://www.oregonstateparks.org)

**Open:** Daily, May 1 - October 31,  
9 a.m. - Noon, 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.

**Admission:** Free

Guided tours only. Tours start at the top of each hour at the Interpretive Center and last about 45 minutes (last tour at 4 p.m.). Free tickets for the tour can be picked up at the Interpretive Center.

has also been collaborating with the local national forest archaeological unit to connect some of the mining cabins and camps in the area with Kam Wah Chung.

Thanks to the foresight of the two men who ran it, Kam Wah Chung now offers priceless insight on the life and times of those who were there during its prime and left their legacy inside its walls.