



Volume 29, No. 1 2006

GUM SAAN JOURNAL

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Chinese Grocers Edition 2006



CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

GUM SAAN JOURNAL

Volume 29, No. 1 2006



CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

415 Bernard Street,
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Web: www.chssc.org

Gum Saan Journal

Volume 29 Number 1

2006

**Chinese American
Grocers of Southern California**

By Susie Ling

**Wong Ah Gow:
The Life of a Chinese Merchant
in Ventura County,**

1853-1929

By Will Gow

Published by



The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

Copyright © 2006 by the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

Publisher

Chinese Historical Society of Southern California
415 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.
Phone: 323-222-0856 Fax: 323-221-4162.
Email: chssc@earthlink.net Website: www.chssc.org

2005 – 2006 Board of Directors

Kenneth L. Chan, President
Dr. Wing Mar, Vice President
JW Wong, Vice President, Programs
Ben Nakayama, Treasurer
Peter Liang, Membership Secretary
Marlynn Ma, Financial Secretary
Dr. Donald Loo, Secretary
Dr. Albert Chang
Susan Dickson
Dr. Betty Gaw
Dr. Munson Kwok
Irvin Lai
Jeannie Liu
Eugene Moy
Jack Ong
Mary Yee Kwok

Gum Saan Journal

Editors: Susie Ling, Icy Smith
Editorial Committee: Gilbert Hom, Susie Ling, Icy Smith
Design and Production: Albert Lin, Apococo Visual Image
Production Manager: Icy Smith

Article Submission

Gum Saan Journal is an annual publication. It solicits manuscripts that explore the historical, cultural, and humanistic aspects of Chinese American experiences, particularly relating to Southern California, as well as contemporary issues of relevance to the Chinese American community. Manuscripts should be approximately 3000 words in length. If your manuscript is accepted for publication, you will be responsible for obtaining permission to reproduce any copyrighted materials used in your article.

Submissions should be addressed to:
Editorial Committee, Gum Saan Journal, CHSSC,
415 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, translated or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without the permission in writing from the publisher. Printed in the United States of America.

Table of Contents

Gum Saan Journal

Volume 29 Number 1

2006

Chinese American Grocers of Southern California

By Susie Ling

1

Wong Ah Gow: The Life of a Chinese Merchant in Ventura County, 1853-1929

By Will Gow

21

Chinese American Grocers of Southern California

By Susie Ling

Since the 19th century, Chinese American groceries have been part of the California landscape. Like their laundrymen counterparts, Chinese grocers depended on self-labor and long hours to build their economic success. Like restaurants, groceries were divided into two overlapping subcategories: those that serviced the Chinese community and those that serviced the mainstream community.

Ronald Takaki, in his seminal *Strangers from a Different Shore*, wrote that “the store was a center of life in the Chinese community.”¹ Here, the pioneers gathered to buy ethnic foods and herbs, drink tea, exchange gossip, and perhaps challenge each other to a game of chess or checkers. The store was a “community post office” in mining, rural, suburban, and urban settings.

Chinese vegetable peddlers and truck farmers paved the way for grocery stores and butcheries that catered to all ethnicities. After World War II, Chinese Americans built neighborhood groceries and larger market chains.²

Markets were partially buffered from economic instability and racial discrimination as people always have to eat. Vegetable peddlers and one-room stores have evolved to innovative supermarket chains in the 21st century. And they are still a center of life in the Chinese community. Southern California’s generations of Chinese American grocers and butchers—including Kenneth Ong, Jack Lee, and Robert Jung—should be commended for their great contributions.

Kenneth Ong: Capitol Market³

Born in Hoiping, Canton, in 1918, Kenneth came with his uncle to San Francisco in the 1920s by his grandfather’s orders. But the Depression caused the family to return to China.

The Filipinos were taking away Chinese jobs. My uncle was a head cook at a hotel for \$150/month and the Filipinos were working for \$90/month. But life in China was worse. My brother and I were forced to plant rice, yam, peanuts. We didn’t know how to handle the water buffalo to plow the fields.

In 1934, Kenneth returned to America to work for another uncle at a grocery store in Mesa, Arizona.

My aunt had been a maid in Hong Kong who was sold by her poor parents. My aunt was about twenty years younger than my uncle; she couldn’t even write her name. They had six children; the youngest was only five months old when I came.

My uncle paid me \$15/month and I slept on a canvas cot outside. I’d get up at 5 a.m. to boil water on the wood stove for washing and coffee. I would cut meat, stock goods, and work until 9 p.m.

Kenneth had hopes of returning to school but his aunt decided it was unnecessary as he could already read words like “peaches” and “corn” on the cans the store stocked. Kenneth would educate himself by memorizing the dictionary each night.

I was supposed to transfer to Tang’s Market in Tucson. They would pay me \$50/month. But my uncle got very sick and I stayed in Mesa until he recovered. The partner’s son came from China to help out. He got \$25/month and he didn’t even speak English. After that, I left. I worked real hard for Joe Tang.

When the war started, Kenneth joined the Navy. Of the 375 second-class cooks who took the test for first-class cooks, Kenneth came in as number one. A priest was sent to investigate if he might have cheated. Kenneth answered, "If I cheated, how could I be number one? Shouldn't I be number two?"

After World War II, Kenneth married and brought his war bride, Emma, back to Arizona. In 1951, the couple brought \$7,000 and their first two babies to Los Angeles. They bought a store on Main and Central from a Japanese American. It was a rough start, as they made only \$25 per day. But fortune turned when some suppliers extended the Ongs credit, and the Safeway market down the street went on strike. Now, the Ongs were taking in \$7,000 to \$8,000 a month—but still living in a garage.

In the 1960s, the Ongs built a 5,000 square-foot Capitol Market on Monterey Road and Huntington Boulevard in El Sereno, a predominantly Latino community.

Even in that small store, I sold 500 cases of MD toilet paper in half a day—a real record. I bought straight from the paper company in Oregon. I had helped out the nearby Guadalupe Church and they provided Mexican music. Even my competitors came to buy cases of toilet paper because it was cheaper than wholesale. That made my name.

C&H Sugar had a contest for top sales in all of California. I won that prize—an all-paid vacation to Hawaii. My bookkeeper had told me that I would make about \$900,000 per year, but I eventually brought in \$3.75 million per year. That was four times the estimate. We were the biggest Chinese-owned market in Los Angeles County.

Eventually, the Capitol Market expanded to 20,000 square feet.

I had seen a fortune teller once in Kowloon. He told me, "No matter what you do, they think you're crazy. But if people say you can't make it, you'll just work harder."

I had gone to thirty banks to look for loans for my expansion. But I wouldn't give up. They all said, "Look at that crazy Chinaman." They showed me these charts where my area was red. I had good credit but my location was zoned in the red. My wife, my four children, and I put in 15 hours per day, seven days per week. Today, my children don't want to work seven days a week; they prefer salaries and social security. With the level of education I had, I went up \$11 million in assets. Not too many people can say that.

Kenneth Ong served as Chairman of the Board of United Pacific Bank and volunteered in organizations such as the Chinese Groceries Association, Hoypin Association, and Chinese American Citizens Alliance. In 2003, he received the Citizenship Award from the Northeast El Sereno Association (NESA), partly for Capitol Market's willingness to hire troubled youth in the community.

Jack Lee: Yee Sing Chong⁴ 裕成昌

Jack's great-grandfather came to America as a railroad worker and opened a cigar business, Cerro Hower and Company, on 227 Clay Street in San Francisco. Jack's grandfather eventually came to take over the business and married his grandmother, born in Truckee, California. Jack's father was born in America in 1901 but returned to China when he was a toddler. In 1947, after one year of college in China, Jack—the son of an American citizen—was able to obtain an American passport. He had hopes of continuing his education in the United States.

While I was still in China, I met one of my mother's distant relatives, B. S. Fong, a prominent leader in the San Francisco community who promised to look after me when I arrived in the United States. Upon arrival on October 17, 1947, the immigration officers questioned the authenticity of my passport. They decided I was to be detained at the Mission Street immigration center until someone could identify me. I told the immigration officers that I knew B. S. Fong and that he would be able to verify my identity. The immigration officer knew of B. S. Fong but told me that he had passed away just seven days prior to my arrival. With no one to confirm my identity, I was resigned to packing and being sent back to China.

After two months in detention, Jack was fortunate that a schoolmate was able to arrange for his release. But he was 22 years old and alone. He started working at Fong Fong Bakery on Grant Avenue, serving as a waiter during the day and a bookkeeper at night. In 1948, he heard that a grocery store in Los Angeles was searching for a manager. That was Yee Sing Chong.

The history of Yee Sing Chong is a bit sketchy. From what I understand, the company was started in the early 1900s, about 50

years before I took over the business in 1952. The first store was located on Marchessault Street. Frank Lee (Lee Wah Shew) was active in the Chinese community and one of the founders of New Chinatown in the 1930s. Frank and his business partners decided to move the grocery store to the corner of Hill Street and Ginling Way—near the Gateway and where the current-day Hong Kong Gift Shop is located.

Yee Sing Chong was one of many markets in Chinatown. It was a small store—approximately 1,500 square feet—with a butcher shop, produce, and Chinese dried goods. There were about five or six full-time employees and the business catered primarily to the small local restaurants in the Chinatown area.

Jack remembers that other markets in Chinatown included Hong San Lung (Chungking Road), Kwan Lee Lung (Alpine/Hill), Ling's Market (Hill), Kwong Dak Wo, International Market, Fong On Lung, and Los Angeles Grocery (all on Spring Street).

In 1957, the store's lease was scheduled to expire so we moved to the ground floor of the Lee Association building just a few hundred feet away from the previous location. Although the location was twice as large—approximately 3,000 square feet—I believed that with the continued growth of the Chinese community, an even larger market would be needed in the future.

I acquired a parcel of land at Bamboo Lane and Hill Street in 1962. In 1964, a new building was built on this site resulting in a 15,000 square-foot grocery store along with a parking lot for 200 cars. At this time, this was unheard of and I can still remember people saying, "Jack, you're crazy." But I knew the demand was there and our business was evolving on several fronts: (1) We no longer served just the local community, as customers came from as far north as Santa Barbara and as far south as San Diego; (2) this was

no longer a Chinese grocery store, but a specialty market serving a multitude of Asian ethnic communities; and (3) by creating a "self-service supermarket" (although relatively commonplace in the "mainstream," this was a new concept to our clientele), we could offer a significantly broader range of products in a more innovative and cost-efficient manner. At that time, we may have been the largest Asian grocery store in the United States.

We learned from our own personal experiences and that of our customers as to what to put on the shelves. For example, when I was a young adult living in Hong Kong, I remember how people enjoyed such gourmet items as Jacob's Biscuits from London. For the most part, many items were simply unavailable so we began directly importing various items. We offered a wide selection of "impossible to find" items including Maggi Sauce from Switzerland, Indonesian food items, and curry.

Yee Sing Chong employed 40 to 50 full-time workers and ran four checkout registers. Jack Lee also modernized employee relations.

There were three employees—Steven Chen, David Kwan, and Paul Lai—that spent nearly all, if not their entire careers, working at Yee Sing Chong. Although it is perhaps commonplace now, as a token of my appreciation for their contributions to the company, I initiated employee practices and benefits that were generally unheard of at the time in the Chinese community. For example, we observed national holidays as I felt strongly about the importance of everyone spending time with their families. We offered an employee profit-sharing plan and were the first to provide healthcare benefits for employees and their dependents. When we closed the business in 1986, all employees were given a severance package as well as continued health benefits.

Around 1962, Jack Lee began expanding his business interests.

He became a pioneer in importing canned mushrooms from Taiwan. In four short years, Yee Sing Chong provided about 50 percent of the mushrooms used by Italian food manufacturers in California. Yee Sing Chong also distributed canned water chestnuts, mandarin oranges, bamboo shoots, asparagus, and other items. This import business was building the Asian section of mainstream supermarkets.

By 1972, with his partners, Robert Gee and Dan Jeng, Jack Lee completed the development of Mandarin Plaza in Los Angeles' Chinatown. He also started Legend Enterprise, an instant-noodle manufacturing company in Montebello in 1975. In 1977, Jack co-founded and chaired First Public Savings Bank—the first savings charter given by California to a Chinese American institution.

I am particularly proud of our success at First Public Savings Bank. Not only was it a successful investment for its shareholders, but it also provided much needed capital to our community, which was terribly underserved and under-banked. I like to think that First Public helped many of our customers experience the American dream of owning one's own home.

With the help of his two sons, Jack Lee developed the 977 North Broadway office building in 1984 and Bamboo Plaza in 1989. Jack Lee has served on the State of California's Economic Development Advisory Council, Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Mayor Bradley's Blue Ribbon Committee.

Just as Yee Sing Chong was a veritable Chinese American community icon, Empress Pavilion Restaurant in Bamboo Plaza witnesses countless weddings, banquets, and community events. Every single day, many families, co-workers, and friends share dim sum (a little heart) in this Jack Lee institution.

America is truly the land of opportunity. At the risk of sounding

immodest, I was fortunate to have good timing and vision.... But there's no question that the world has changed for the better. Today, [the Chinese] community has the opportunity to participate in the mainstream and our young people have the talent, knowledge, and education to pursue whatever their hearts' desire. But it was not too long ago when things were quite different. I can still remember in 1950 when I was a GI in Fort Benning, Georgia. Everyone would stare at me and wonder what an Asian was doing in an U.S. Army uniform.... [F]or me, that was not so long ago. My roots will always be in the Chinese community. I'm confident my children and grandchildren will always consider themselves Chinese American and remain connected to our community no matter where they go or what they do.

Robert Jung: Bob's Meat Market and Chinese Grocers Association⁵

My parents were immigrants from Kow Kong [九江Jiujiang, Jiangxi] in China. My father, Jung Sick-on, came in 1883 when he was about 15 years old. He still had his long pigtail or queue. A merchant guaranteed him a job and he went to work at the meat market on Grant Avenue. He was a butcher all his life. He did well enough to invest in several meat markets. He was a partner of three meat markets on the same block on Grant Avenue in San Francisco, one in Stockton, and was co-owner of United Market in



> Chinese Grocers Association with gubernatorial candidate, Jerry Brown

Los Angeles. Most of the immigrants didn't have enough financial means to open a market by themselves, so they were usually in partnership. These were retail and wholesale fresh meat markets—pork, beef, lamb—catering mostly to Caucasians, restaurants, and some Chinese. They would buy from San Francisco packing houses. There were about 12 employees per shop, all men. Chinese from Kow Kong village were especially prominent in the meat business. The Chinese worked long hours, from 6 a.m. to 8 or 9 p.m., every day except Sundays.

Robert Jung was one of Jung Sick-on's seven sons and one daughter. Bob lost his father in 1927 when he was but five years old. His widowed mother took the whole family back to China in 1932, hoping the exchange rate would economically sustain the family during the Depression. But as conditions in China deteriorated with the onslaught of Japanese, Bob's mother sent the boys back to the U.S. two at a time. Bob returned in 1938. Six of the Jung brothers would serve in World War II.

I was a schoolboy. At 15 years old, I worked for a Caucasian couple and went to school. When my employers moved to Atherton, near Redwood City, I went with them and attended Sequoia Union High. I was probably the only Chinese at Sequoia Union High. Exactly a year after Pearl Harbor, I was drafted into the Army on December 8, 1942. Fortunately, I did real well on the IQ test during the induction, so they placed me in the Personnel Office. During training in Texas, they wanted me to teach English to the other Chinese inductees for about a year.

When I got out of the service, I joined my oldest brother, George, to start a meat business in Los Angeles. He had been in the Air Corps and during weekends, he got a job at a butcher shop in Los Angeles to earn some extra money and experience. They say first- and second-generation Kow Kong immigrants are in meat; Sze

Yup people—like my wife's family—concentrate in restaurants and groceries. Our meat market was on the corner of Hill and Alpine and serviced Italians, Chinese, and others. We had to survive, so we worked the same hard hours as my father. The other brothers stayed in San Francisco. My second brother, who had joined the Merchant Marines, was missing in the war. We never knew what happened to him and that's been hard.

I stayed with my brother for a little over a year. The whole grocery was sold by the Italian owners to a Chinese grocer. At that time, grocery stores had meat departments that were rented or leased



> Scholarship winners of the Chinese Grocers Association

out to butchers. My brother wanted to go into wholesale, so I went out on my own. I found a place at 1031 East First Street. It was an Armenian grocery looking for a butcher. They had a Chinese woman butcher, but she couldn't make it go. I took over the meat counter at Moses Market. I stayed there for 10 years, from 1946 to 1955!

In 1948, Bob married Edith Quon, and by 1949, the first of four children joined the couple. Unlike families in the grocery business, Bob's family seldom helped at the meat market, as the knives made it a dangerous place for children. With the responsibility of supporting a growing family, Bob sought expansion. His first effort at a bigger market was a disappointing failure. But in 1957, he found a new location on 39th Street in Crenshaw, a predominantly African American community.

I took over the meat department and my business really improved. It was never a big place, just a community store. Meat would be delivered; sometimes I went to the packing houses like Farmer John's, Armour, and Swift near First Street. Eventually, I employed three butchers and did wholesale on the side to hamburger stands and little restaurants in the surrounding community. Only one of the other butchers was from Kow Kong; the others were Caucasian. I hired a Black driver. I stayed there 'til 1987! Today, I rent it out to some Mexicans and it is still doing very well.

In the 1950s, more and more Chinese grocers went into Southcentral LA to service the growing African American neighborhood. In an era of formal and informal zoning and segregation, mainstream markets did not venture into certain neighborhoods, and post-war Chinese filled the niches of need. Chinese grocers branched into other neighborhoods including Santa Monica, Long Beach, and Glendale. Most of these were mom-and-pop grocery stores. Of note, Harry Nim in Orange County and Fred Lau of Santa Ana Food Market managed

larger operations. Buddha Markets, a chain founded by Wayne S. Der in the 1950s, had several partners and locations. Chinese Americans maintained active businesses in the City Market community and in poultry shops including G. S. Market and Superior Poultry.⁶

The racial tension of the 1960s impacted Chinese American grocers and butchers, especially in Southcentral LA.

During the 1965 Watts Riot, my neighbor and customer called me at home and said, "Bob, don't come down here; we'll take care of your place." And they did. They stood in front of my store and guarded it. They were so nice to me. I had helped my neighbors over the years. If they needed some food, I gave them some meat on credit. I'd give some lunchmeat and bread to people who were hungry. It was appreciated. The big Chinese grocery store across the street was burned down and they never came back. There was another Chinese store down the street and that was burned down. During the second riot, they did break my glass. But my customers looked after me. I stayed in the neighborhood until I retired in 1987.

Ironically, it wasn't the Watts Riot that directly triggered Bob Jung's need to organize. It was not until 1970 that he felt compelled to form the Chinese Grocers Association (also called the Chinese American Foods Association of Southern California and Chinese Retail Food Markets Association).

We are Chinese; a minority. The City and the Health Department were picking on us. It is a fact. We knew we had to get together to form the Chinese Grocers Association; we needed a unified voice. They forced us all to buy a little plastic machine to test the amount of fat in our meat products. But when you are making ground meat, you know you don't have that much fat. Those cheaply-made machines were sold for \$200 to 300. The big chain grocers like

Vons wanted to get rid of the Chinese groceries. We worked longer hours and offered cheaper prices.

The Health Department harassed us in another example. Butchers used sawdust on the floor. The officials said it wasn't healthy and made us clean it up. But if you don't use sawdust, the fat makes the floor extremely slippery. So they changed the rules and allowed us to use sawdust again. They kept changing guidelines with no reason. At the same time, the big chain stores were really hurting the small Chinese stores with their advertising, coupons, and big promotions. Many Chinese eventually sold to Koreans.

Taking time out of their busy schedules, a small group of owners met steadily for months, laying the foundation for the Chinese Grocers Association. The organization was incorporated as a nonprofit association on February 2, 1971. Eventually, the idea spread and in the 1989 handbook, there were 79 members listed plus 40 "associate members" including Laura Scudders and Cathay Bank. The Chinese Grocers Association elected Harry Nim to be the first president in 1972-73, as Nim was a director on the Board of Certified Grocers of California. Robert Jung served as president from 1974 to 1975, followed by Ben K. Lui (1976-77), Don Quon (1978), Kenneth Ong (1979-80), and Joe Chiu (1981). The early chairmen of the board included Harmon Toy (1971-76), Fred Lau (1977), Ben K. Lui (1978-79, 1981), and Sam Chan (1980).

The Chinese Grocers Association is perhaps best known for its Elysian Park picnics, a community event they sponsored in their first years. So many suppliers donated food that the Grocers Association fed thousands.

We had so much that we didn't know what to do. Workers' families and friends came, senior citizens came, the whole Chinatown came. There was fried chicken, soda, chips, and chow mein. We also

invited dignitaries from City Hall. We were trying to become more politically aware. We wanted to show people we were serving the community. [The picnics] were a lot of work; we had great support from our Ladies' Auxiliary.

The Grocers Association tried other projects. They gave scholarships to high school students. They had long but futile discussions about group insurance. They celebrated weddings and birthdays together. They had spring dinners. And it was at these spring dinners that the Association inadvertently helped Chinese Americans move into a more active phase of mainstream politics.

One of our members was a distant cousin of March Fong Eu, candidate for Secretary of State. So we gave her an honorary membership in 1974. We helped her come into the Chinese community in Los Angeles. March Fong Eu didn't know Los Angeles and didn't speak Chinese at all. But we were proud that she was Chinese. Later, we had Jerry Brown join us when he ran for governor. We also got involved in Cranston's campaign. Grocers and butchers are very busy people, but we did a lot.

Officially, the Chinese Grocers Association is still in existence and they still have their annual spring dinners. But most members are now retired. Some sold their community stores to Koreans in the 1980s.

The change in times has allowed the market chains to dominate. Today, Edith and I shop at 99 Ranch, Ralphs, and Albertsons [laughs]. My children and some of my grandchildren have graduated from college. None of them ever worked in groceries. We want them to do what they like. We provided them with an education and they chose what is best for them.

In the late 1970s, Robert Jung joined the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, later serving a term as president. Edith's father was

a founding member of C.A.C.A. and helped build the existing Los Angeles Lodge. Edith is a founding member and board member of the Chinese American Museum; Bob served as vice president. Bob served eight years as president of Kow Kong Benevolent Association and is currently president of the Los Angeles Chinatown Corporation.



> President of Chinese Grocers Association, Robert Jung, with March Fong Eu, candidate for Secretary of State in 1974

Toward Diho Market and Tawa 99 Ranch

In the 1970s and 1980s, as this batch of Chinese grocers began to retire and sell their mom-and-pop operations, a new dynasty was in the making. The post-1965 surge of Mandarin-speaking immigrants made Monterey Park the Little Taipei. Diho Market on Atlantic Boulevard serviced this large concentration of Chinese Americans. In turn, Diho would see plenty of competition from a plethora of Chinese and Vietnamese supermarkets.

In 1984, Taiwan immigrant Roger H. Chen⁷ started Tawa 99 Ranch market in Westminster which has grown into a chain of 30 stores in Southern California, eight stores in Northern California, two in Washington, and a few licensed stores in Hawaii, Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Atlanta. 99 Ranch has some 3,000 employees. In Chen's stores, the speaker system announces promotions not only in Chinese dialects, but also in Spanish, Vietnamese, and Tagalog. Although 99 Ranch began because Chen wanted to buy Chinese food stuff without driving to Chinatown, it now considers itself a "specialty store" that doesn't just cater to Asians. Buyers are systematic and experienced at findings goods that are of good quality and at good prices.

Mainstream markets including Ralphs, Albertsons, and Costco have their own Asian aisles and products. Chinese grocers—then and now—are an indispensable part of the community landscape.

1. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 127.
2. See Alfred Yee, *Shopping at Giant Foods, Chinese American Supermarkets in Northern California* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).
3. Interview with Kenneth Ong (a.k.a. Kenneth Wong) in El Sereno, Los Angeles, California, on 23 August 2005.
4. Interview with Jack Lee at Empress Pavilion, Los Angeles, California, on 25

August 2005. Thanks to Scott Lee for his help.

5. Interview with Robert and Edith (Quon) Jung at Chinese American Citizens Alliance Lodge in Los Angeles, California, on 3 September 2005. Many thanks to Kenneth Chan, President of CHSSC, for arranging all three interviews.
6. Information from Eugene Moy of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California and the son of a small grocer, 29 August 2005. Moy describes V Market and Moy's Market in "Growing Up Chinese in Los Angeles: Eugene Moy" in *Bridging the Centuries* (Los Angeles: CHSSC, 2001), 125-128.
7. Interview with Jenny Tsao, Public Relations, Tawa Markets on 28 October 2005 by Monica Merritt-Kwon.

Wong Ah Gow: The Life of a Chinese Merchant in Ventura County, 1853-1929

By Will Gow

In the winter of 1929, Wong Ah Gow died at his home in Oxnard, California, a wealthy man.¹ While his death at the age of 76 from cancer was in itself unremarkable, the manner in which he died was rather unique. Gow died on the second floor of his family-owned home, surrounded by his children, with his American-born Chinese wife at his side. While it was rare for a Chinese immigrant to die with family, land, and relative fortune during this period of heightened xenophobia, Gow's success did not reflect the overall health of the town's Chinese community. In the decade that followed, the younger members of the Gow family watched as the remaining Chinese laborers who made up their community died one by one of old age, their numbers unreplenished by decades of forced immigration exclusion.

Overshadowed in local histories by the accomplishments of their Japanese and Mexican counterparts, Chinese immigrants like Wong Ah Gow played a small but vital role in the growth of Ventura County. Dubbed "the king of Chinatown" in 1901 by local newspaper, the *Ventura Signal*, Gow was a successful landowner, beet farmer, and merchant whose life experiences were intricately tied to those of other Chinese in the county. Using Wong Ah Gow's life as a lens through which to view Ventura County's Chinese community, this essay will show how even the most successful Chinese of this era were affected by the massive demographic shifts brought on by the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Farming the Oxnard Plain

When Wong Ah Gow arrived in Ventura County around 1886, he

was already in his early 30s. He had come to California in 1868 at the age of 15 from a small village in Toisan.² In the prior decade, Gow had struggled to support his wife and young son back in China by working as a cook in San Francisco's powder works.³ Ventura, in the 1880s, was inhabited by a handful of farmers growing mostly barley and lima beans. The newly formed county had only three townships: Ventura, Hueneme, and Saticoy. Its 5,000 residents spread over 2,000 square miles.

In 1886, Gow was one of only about 100 Chinese living in Ventura County.⁴ Most Chinese lived clustered in the township of Ventura, the site of the county's largest Chinatown. Ventura's Chinatown was limited by city ordinance to four square blocks. The economic panic of 1873 had sparked a statewide wave of anti-Chinese violence and Ventura's Chinatown had been a target for white antagonists ever since. In 1876, whites in town had imposed a punitive tax on the Chinese laundries and washhouses. Denis Kearny brought his fiery



> Wong Ah Gow, 1910

Sinophobic oratory to town in 1879.⁵ By the time Gow arrived in the county in the mid-1880s, the Anti-Chinese League of Ventura was holding its general meetings in the town's Spear Hall. Seeking to avoid the growing animosity in town, Gow decided to try his luck on a small plot of land just four miles to the south of Ventura Township, just outside Hueneme.⁶

Chinese Occupations in Ventura County, 1880

	VENTURA TOWNSHIP	HUENEME TOWNSHIP	SATICOY AND UNINCORPORATED AREAS	TOTAL
Laborers	36	2	4	42
Servants	1	7	9	17
Laundrymen	12	1	0	13
Farm workers	0	0	9	9
Cooks	2	2	4	8
Gardeners	2	4	0	6
Merchants	6	0	0	6
Fishermen	0	5	0	5
Other	0	0	5	5
Women who decline to state	3	0	0	3
Farmers	0	2	0	2
Contractor	1	0	0	1
Physician	1	0	0	1
Housewife	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	64	24	31	119

Based on the 1880 U.S. Census (Manuscript)

A small coastal port town built around a mammoth wharf, Hueneme had a Chinese population that was comparatively small. Local banker F.L. Fairbanks recalls the Hueneme Chinese: "There were always quite a number of Chinese men in and around Hueneme. There was always at least one as a cook on a threshing machine. The Bard Family always had three, usually of the Soo Hoo family. D.T. Perkins always had one, and so did Major Greg and Tom Rice."⁷ Unlike Ventura's Chinese population, which was mostly composed of farm laborers and laundrymen crammed into a four-block area, Hueneme's Chinese were spread out among the community working as cooks and servants.

Around 1886, Gow started out growing and selling vegetables on a small lot that locals referred to as a "vegetable garden." A common sight throughout the state, Chinese vegetable "gardens" could be as large as forty acres in some counties.⁸ In Ventura, most were lots about half an acre in size with the garden in the front and the house behind it. Small though it was, Gow's plot of land already made him better off than most of the county's Chinese residents, more than half of whom made their living as servants or laborers. Gow incorporated his business under the name Quong Mow & Company, and in 1890, he was able to obtain merchant papers to return home to China to visit his wife and son.

Gow returned to Ventura in 1892, and went into business with Wong Gong, his friend and distant relative from the village in Toisan. Together, they opened a Chinese drygoods store at the corner of Fourth and Broad Street on the edge of the town proper. One of two stores in Hueneme catering to Chinese, Jee Wo & Company sold everything from beans to Chinese imported tea. With four original partners including Gow and Wong, and an office in Hong Kong, the merchant firm was typical for the period.⁹

As the business grew, many whites began recognizing Gow as a

respectable member of the Chinese community. F.L Fairbanks, the local Hueneme banker, remembers Gow specifically. "Some of them [the Chinese] had accounts with us, but ordinarily, they carried it in cash. Wong Ah Gow was a farmer, and we sometimes loaned him \$2000 or \$3000 dollars on a crop mortgage. We never lost any money on any of them."¹⁰ Achilles Levy, the founder of Oxnard's Bank of A. Levy, also knew and respected Gow. "I consider him to be a reliable Chinaman [sic]. His word is always good... I often refer to him to know about other Chinamen with whom I have business dealings at the bank, as I have always found him reliable and trustworthy."¹¹

The relationship that Gow was able to cultivate with local white bankers such as Levy testifies to his standing in the community. Like many bankers of the period, Levy based his loans on his perception of that person's character. If Levy felt the applicant was of good character, a loan would be given and no collateral was necessary. On the other hand, if Levy found the person untrustworthy, no loan would be given no matter what the collateral. This "character loan" method ensured that the bank suffered few financial losses. Gow was one of two Chinese to whom Levy loaned money between 1894 and 1904—no small feat for a Chinese person of the period.¹² As testament to this relationship, Levy agreed in 1908 to serve as one of Gow's white witnesses in the immigration proceedings for Gow's oldest son.¹³

Between Jee Wo & Company and his farmland, Gow was doing quite well for himself. But it was the introduction of the sugar beet to the area that solidified his success. As the lima bean became less profitable in the waning years of the 19th century, a few prominent local farmers convinced the Oxnard Brothers to build a beet plant in Ventura County. In 1898, one year after work began on the American Beet Sugar Company, the town was surveyed and the Colonia Improvement Company acquired the deed to the subdivided area.

Gow invested early in the beet fields as this 1901 article in the

Ventura Star attests: "Gow, who is known in Hueneme as the king of Chinatown, is doing a land office business in the beet fields. He has in his employ many Chinamen [sic], Japanese and Mexicans. Nearly five hundred Japs [sic] have lately come into this part of the country. It is said that they do much better work in thinning beets than the Mexicans. The Japanese are certainly 'a great race of little people'."¹⁴

Gow Markets
 A ST. AT EIGHTH COL. RD. AT HAYES
 PHONE 267 FREE DELIVERY
SPECIALS-FRI-SAT-SUN.

Bisquick Pkg. 25c	Cantaloupé ea. 1c
Sunny Monday	
WASHING SOAP 5 Bars 11c	
Globe "A1"	
SESAME OIL Fine for salads Pt. 23c Qt. 44c	
Sardines 1 lb. can 5c	Very Dry
Sugar City	Gingerale Bottle 9c
Lime Rickey 2 Bottles 19c	Calif. Model
Tutti Frutti	Salad Dressing Qt. 25c
ICE CREAM Qt. 25c	
Fresh Shelled	
LIMA BEANS 1b. 15c	
Pears For Canning 1 1/2c lb. Luc	Porto Bean
Small Bananas	Red Yams 7 lbs. 25c
Apples 1b. 1c	Cucumbers 3 for 1c
MILK MAID BREAD 1 1/2c ea. 8c	
CHOW MEIN SPECIALS	
Noodles, Fresh Fried Pkg. 10c	Bamboo Shoots Can 28c
Bean Sprouts lb. 10c	Tea--Wo Hop Pkg. 10c
Soy Sauce Bottle 30c	Free Recipes For Delicious Chinese Dishes
MEAT SPECIALS	
Leg Mutton lb. 14c	
Mutton Chops lb. 14c	
Pork Chops lb. 16c	Steak 25c

> Gow Market Advertisement

Gow was watching the composition of his community change before his eyes. By 1901, anti-Chinese immigration policies and old age had severely shrunk the state's overall Chinese population. But Ventura's beet fields attracted a number of Chinese day laborers from elsewhere in the state. While Chinese farm workers were substantially outnumbered by Japanese and Mexicans, the influx in Chinese nonetheless more than doubled the number of Chinese living in the county, bringing the official tally to nearly 500.

To the disdain of many local whites, the new Chinese arrivals sought refuge with recent Japanese immigrants in the same area of Oxnard. An editorial in the *Oxnard Courier* reflected the contempt that many whites felt toward their new Asian neighbors. "With so much unoccupied land all about us, there is absolutely no necessity for 1000 to 1500 Japanese and Chinese cuddling themselves up in a half dozen dark ally's [sic] where murders can be committed in broad daylight without detection."¹⁵ The anti-Asian xenophobia expressed here would peak a few years later when a cabal of local business leaders, A. Levy among them, conspired to crush the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association.

Despite growing anti-Asian sentiments, Gow's success in the beet fields allowed him to purchase two lots in town in 1903. As many new property owners in Oxnard did, Gow decided to physically move some of his existing buildings from elsewhere to his newly purchased lot.¹⁶ Sticking buildings on log rollers pulled by mules, Gow began moving buildings from Hueneme to Oxnard. Despite Gow's growing investments in the town, he decided to keep his primary residence near Hueneme. This was in no doubt due to the pleasant upheaval that had recently affected his life. In 1903, shortly after receiving notice of the death of his first wife in China, Wong Ah Gow married for the second time.

Chinese in Ventura County					
Township	1870*	1880	1900	1910	1920
Ventura	N/A	64	56	44	21
Saticoy	N/A	18	18	13	4
Hueneme	N/A	24	328	21	13
Oxnard	N/A	N/A	N/A	90	76
Rest of Ventura County	13	13	64	38	20
Total Chinese Population in Ventura County	13	119	456	206	134
Total Ventura population	2,491	5,073	14,376	18,347	28,724
Chinese as a percent of the Ventura Population	0.005%	2.3%	3.2%	1.1%	0.4%

Data for 1870 are for San Buenaventura in Santa Barbara County; table based on the U.S. Census (Manuscript).

Lou Oy Gow

Lou Oy Gow was born in San Francisco's Chinatown in 1887. Despite her U.S. citizenship, Lou Oy grew up in a Chinese-speaking community, educated with other Chinese-speaking children. She married Wong Ah Gow at the age of 19, knowing only the most basic of English and completely illiterate in both the language of her parents and the country of her birth.¹⁷ This was hardly uncommon for Chinese women who lived in the city. In 1900, 606 of the city's 790 female Chinese residents (roughly 76 percent) were illiterate.¹⁸

The man that Lou Oy was to marry was not what would normally be considered handsome. At 5'3", Wong Ah Gow was short, even for



> Wong Ah Gow Family

a Chinese person of the era, with a slight build. His face was heavily pockmarked, and he had a dark complexion. In 1903, the year of his second marriage, Gow was 50 years old—more than twice the age of his teenage bride.

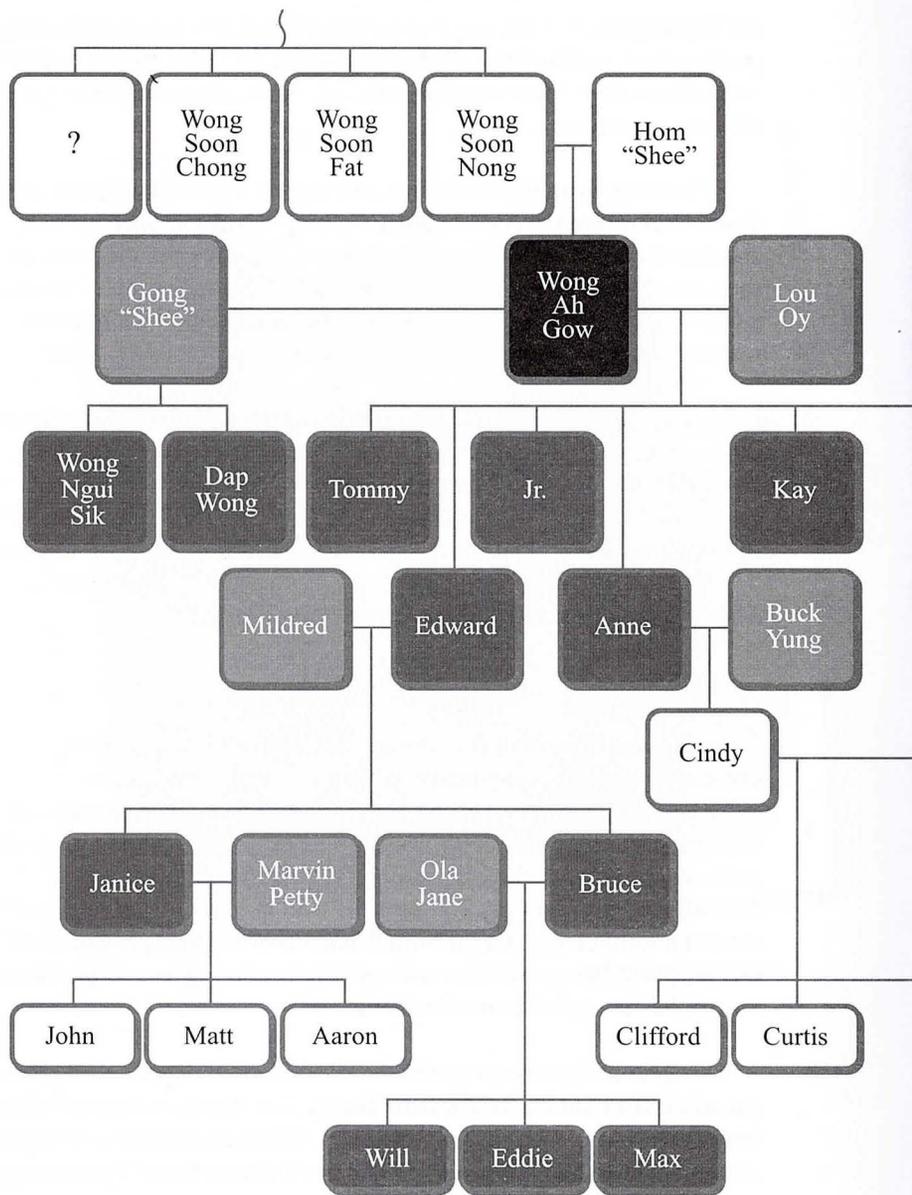
Relocating from San Francisco, the largest city on the West Coast, down to Hueneme in rural Ventura County must have been quite a shock to Lou Oy. While San Francisco's Chinese population was in the tens of thousands, the U.S. Census put Ventura County's Chinese population in 1900 at 456, almost all of whom were men. To make matters worse, her new husband was old enough to be her father.

Despite the many adjustments she had to make, Lou Oy survived these initial years of isolation. In 1907, the couple gave birth to their first child, a son whom they named Tommy. Another boy was born the following year, this one they named Edward. By 1910, Gow was able to bring over his second son, Dap, fostered on an earlier visit to China. The entire family was living inside the township of Hueneme in a home on Fourth Street next door to the family store.¹⁹

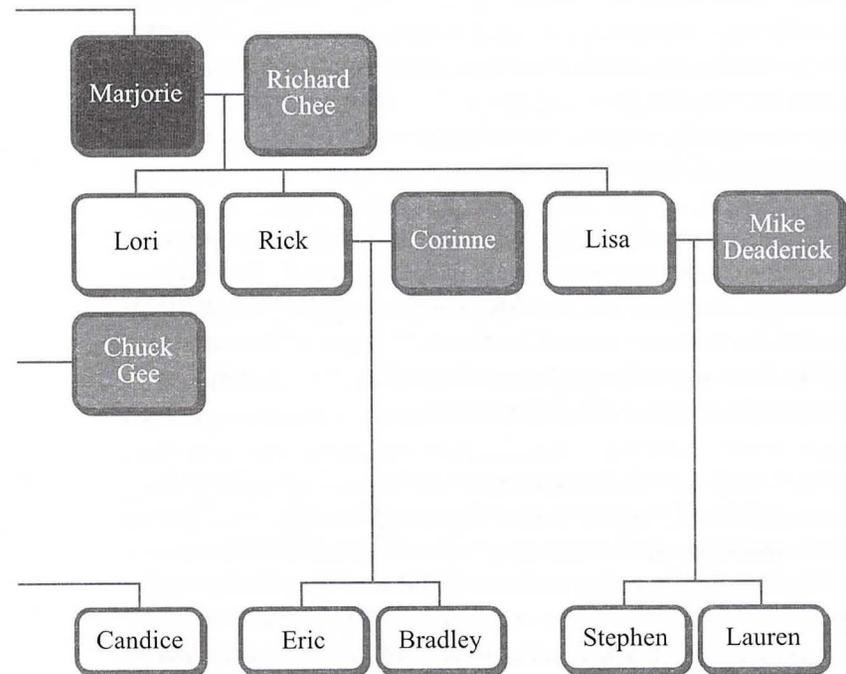
Making It

With the added support of a wife and family, Gow's success continued. In 1913, Gow described his assets in immigration testimony he gave for Soo Hoo How, another prominent member of Ventura County's Chinese community: "I have all of \$2500, in stock, and own the store house and lot here... I own houses and lots at Oxnard and I am farming 200 acres of land here joining Hueneme."²⁰ Over the following years, he would add a ranch outside of Somis to this property. Wong Ah Gow was quickly becoming as successful as any of the county's Chinese residents.

This economic success translated into a certain degree of respect in the white community for the Gow family. Lou Oy Gow became close friends with Mrs. Charles Gilmore. Mrs. Gilmore, an active member of the local Methodist church, helped her Chinese friend by tutoring



Wong Ah Gow Family Tree



Mrs. Gow in English and welcoming her into the church. A 1921 article on the society page of the *Oxnard Courier* reported, "Mrs. Gow presided over the mothers [sic] table at the church Easter party, supplying refreshments such as Chinese cookies and tea to the parties [sic] 60 or so guests."²¹

While it would be easy to dismiss Mrs. Gilmore's friendship as Christian proselytizing, Mrs. Gilmore and Mrs. Gow seem to have been genuine friends. Indeed, in 1914 the two women were among the 31 original members of the Women's Improvement Club of Hueneme.²² Composed of some of the most influential women in the area including the daughter of a former U.S. senator, Lou Oy Gow was the only non-white woman in this founding group. The club was exclusive, requiring a monthly membership fee. New members had to be voted into the club by a majority of the existing members. The activities of the group ranged from writing a cookbook to hosting lectures to "promoting public morals."

Mrs. Gilmore wasn't Lou Oy's only white friend. Lou Oy seems to have been close to other whites as well, including Mrs. G. F. Miller, Mrs. Whiteside, a local florist, and Mrs. Burfiend, whose husband was employed at the Ventura County Courthouse.²³ These white friends helped Mrs. Gow avoid the crushing isolation that so many rural Chinese American women felt during the period.

Lou Oy wasn't alone in being accepted by local whites. The Gow boys were well-liked at school and made many friends, as is evident from the *Oxnard Courier's* coverage of Edward's twelfth birthday party: "The Boy Scouts met at the home of Edward Gow Friday night, and gave him a surprise party, the occasion being his twelfth birthday. Games were played and a fine spread which Mrs. Gow, who had been let in on the scheme, had prepared."²⁴ The two sons seem to have taken an active part in school activities. Tom Gow gave a speech on George Washington in the second grade as part of a school assembly.

Both boys went on to play on sports teams at Oxnard High School. While it is not surprising that they sought out white friends, the extent to which the Gows seem to have been successful during this period of extreme xenophobia is. Yet despite the racial climate of the times, in many instances the Gows were able to become close friends with members of people outside their own ethnic community.

Oxnard

By 1920, the Chinese population of Ventura had plummeted from its height of nearly 500 at the turn of the century to less than 200. The Chinese Exclusion Act had begun to take its toll. In Ventura County, nearly the entire Chinese population had retreated to Oxnard's China Alley. Only 13 Chinese were left in Hueneme, six of whom were members of the Gow family. A few years earlier, Gow had begun selling off the equipment on his Somis ranch and moving the remainder of his property to Hueneme.²⁵ But with the declining population, there was little reason for Gow and his family to remain in Hueneme. In 1920, the family rented out their home in Hueneme to a white family and moved into a two-story wooden-frame house behind their store in Oxnard's China Alley.²⁶ Gow was 63.

Oxnard in 1920 was a vibrant factory town with a small but active Chinese community. China Alley, which ran behind A Street and Saviers Boulevard and between Seventh and Eighth Streets, supported grocery and drygoods stores, restaurants, an herb shop, and even a branch of the Bing Kong Tong. There were four other families in Oxnard besides the Gows: the Soo Hoos, the Jues, the Sems, and the Yees.

The Gow store was located at 748 A Street. The back entrance to the store led to the backdoor of the family's two-story home, which had two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a first-floor parlor containing a large piano. There was a small fishpond in back of the store next to

the house that the children liked to play around.²⁷ The store itself employed two butchers and two clerks, as well as the Gow boys who worked in the store as they came of age. Lou Oy Gow learned to drive an automobile and would drive the clerks around in the store's green pickup truck, waiting behind the wheel as they made their deliveries.²⁸

Between 1915 and 1927, Wong Ah Gow and Lou Oy Gow had four more children: Anne in 1915, Lawrence (a.k.a. "Jr.") in 1916, Catherine in 1923, and Marjorie in 1927. Dap, Wong Ah Gow's son from China, was also living with them. With Gow's financial success, the family hired a nanny by the name of Natividad Lopez to look after the young Catherine and Marjie. In addition to Nativi, as the children called her, Gow also hired a part-time Chinese cook to help the working Lou Oy. Catherine remembered him fondly. "The cook was called 'Uncle Tommy' out of respect for an elder person rather than because he was close to the family. He worked for us every, Tuesday and Thursday.... He was a short, rotund man whose baking was an exquisite thing to behold and taste."²⁹ With a working wife and part-time help, Gow had crossed over into a strata of society that few Chinese of the period were able to fathom, much less emulate.

Tied by Tradition

While Lou Oy Gow drove a car, helped at the family store, and was active in community social organizations, her husband in many ways still expected her to play the role of the traditional Chinese wife. Catherine Gow remembers the pressures her mother faced:

At dinner Father sat at the head of the table. He was invariably served first but he waited for the rest of us to be served by Mother before beginning the meal. Kind and gentle, he could also be quite stern and firm. One time Edward got up to get himself another bowl of rice, but my father reprimanded him, saying, "Sit down, your mother will get it for you." My brother, knowing my mother was

tired, was apologetic to her about it saying, "I'm sorry to disturb you, Mother, but I'd like another bowl of rice." Edward never tried to help himself like that again at least not while father was around.³⁰

This was the paradox faced by many women living in the United States during the period. Lou Oy was expected to play both the old role of traditional Chinese wife and the new role of modern woman, a profoundly unfair expectation.

Despite the difficulties, life in Oxnard afforded Lou Oy Gow a number of opportunities open to few Chinese American women of the time. As her English improved, Gow was called upon by Dr. Korts, the doctor who served the Chinese community, to translate for him on house calls. While working with Dr. Korts, Gow learned basic nursing skills.³¹ Her limited training would be put to use when in August of 1929 a terrible tragedy struck the Oxnard community.

Along with the Gows, the Sems were one of five Chinese families living in Oxnard. Both Sem Him and Tom Ah Toy had been born in China before immigrating to California and settling in Oxnard. By 1920, Tom Ah Toy was the lone caregiver for the family's five children. Late one summer, 23-year-old Charlie Sem was preparing for a hunting trip. While showing his mom and younger sister, Annie, his gun, the gun accidentally fired. The bullet pierced him in the chest. Lou Oy Gow, the nearest person with medical training, was the first person called. But as the *Oxnard Courier* reported, Charlie did not make it.

"Gunshot wound through chest, accidentally incurred," was the verdict of the coroner's report in last night's inquest into the death of Charles Sem, 23 year old Oxnard youth.

Testimony from Dr. B.F. Korts showed that death was due to

infection from the bullet... Mrs. Gow, who first was notified that Sem had shot himself [and] sent for Dr. Korts, gave brief testimony that Sem was happy before the deed and was apparently in good spirits.³²

In a close-knit community like Oxnard's, the Sem and Gow families would have known each other well. One can only wonder what thoughts ran through Lou Oy Gow's mind as she arrived at the Sem home to find young Charlie dying from a gunshot wound to the chest. For Mrs. Gow, it would be only a matter of months before another tragedy would strike, this time a little closer to home.



> Wong Ah Gow Gravestone

The Beginning of the End

On December 3, 1929, Wong Ah Gow passed away on the second floor of the wooden-frame house his family owned. The family chose to have Gow buried at the Ivy Lawn Cemetery in an area where a few other Chinese had been buried. Wong Ah Gow's headstone was engraved in Chinese, listing not only his dates of birth and death but also the name of his hometown village in southern China. As was the case with so many Chinese, it seems Gow hoped his remains would one day be taken back to the country of his birth.

At first, the family business and the family itself carried on without him. The boys seemed to have inherited some of their father's business acumen. According to the *Ventura County Directory* in 1929, the family was able to open a second store at 234 Colonia Road in an area that was populated mostly with Mexican immigrants. Soon, the Depression was in full swing, and it became harder and harder for Lou Oy to manage the family finances. She had never been a healthy woman. As early as 1918, she had gone to rest in Los Angeles on account of her health, but her health worsened following her husband's death.³³ Then, in early October of 1932, she was rushed to the hospital after having problems with her kidneys. Catherine Gow recalls, "She was taken to the hospital too late for the operation. The morning I learned about it, I woke up to find my older sister weeping. She was sitting up in bed. My single bed was next to the double bed. Edward was standing by her bedside. They told me Mother had died."³⁴ Catherine was nine. Marjorie was five. Three short years later, Tommy, the eldest son and now head of the household, also passed away. Wong Ah Gow died in 1929. Lou Oy Gow died in 1932. Tommy Gow died in 1935. In later years, Anne Gow would look back on the period and dub this "the three-year curse."

As the Depression worsened, the banks foreclosed on the store and the home. The Gilmores and other friends of the family helped when



> Lou Oy Gow Gravestone

possible, but times were tough. Dap relocated to Los Angeles' City Market area. Edward ran off and joined the Merchant Marines, while Jr. enlisted in the Army. Anne, still in her early twenties, was left to provide for herself and her two school-age sisters. With no reason left to stay in Ventura, the three Gow sisters moved to Los Angeles, where they made out as best they could.

During one of the most vehemently anti-Chinese periods of this nation's history, Wong Ah Gow had achieved a level of financial and social success rare for a Chinese immigrant. He built his businesses by providing a rural Chinese community with needed staples from home. Yet despite his own personal success, his community could not survive the Chinese Exclusion Act. With few new immigrants, China

Alley slowly withered and died, leaving only a handful of families with children in what had once been a community bustling with young Chinese bachelors. The Gow family was gone from the area by the end of the 1930s. The remaining handful of families held on for a few more decades.

1. *Oxnard Courier*, December 3, 1929.
2. Gow's immigration date is listed in the 1910 Census. Gow's tombstone places his birth in Yeng Leh Village, Toisan County, Guangdong Province, China.
3. Wong Ngui Sick, 1908. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, 1894-1965, Record Group 85, File number 10244/8, Box 219. National Archives, San Bruno.
4. Margaret Jennings puts the number of Chinese living in Ventura Township in 1876 at around 200. My count of the 1880 Manuscript Census puts the number at 119. "The Chinese in Ventura County," *Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly*, 29:3 (1984), 7.
5. Yda Addis Storke, *A Memorial and Biographical History of the Counties of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Ventura, California: Illustrated* (Chicago: Lewis Pub. Co., 1891), 191.
6. Jennings, 7. According to Jennings, in 1906 almost all of the Chinese residents were forced to move their homes onto Main Street, causing most Chinese to leave the area.
7. Quoted in Jennings, 21.
8. Richard Steven Street, *Beasts of the Fields: A Narrative History of California Farm Workers* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 2004), 247.
9. Wong Gong, 1910. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, 1894-1965, Record Group 85, File number 4678, Box 95. National Archives, Laguna Nigel. Wong Quock Dap, 1910. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, 1894-1965, Record Group 85, File number 26160/126. National Archives, Laguna Nigel.
10. Jennings, 21.
11. Wong Ngui Sick, 1908. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files.
12. Eugene N White, "California Banking in the Nineteenth Century: The Art and Method of the Bank of A. Levy," (Working Paper, Department of

- Economics, Rutgers University, 1999), 8. Available at <ftp://ftp-snde.rutgers.edu/Rutgers/wp/1999-05.pdf> (August 6, 2005).
13. Wong Ngui Sik, 1908. Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files.
 14. *Ventura Star*, April 19, 1901.
 15. Quoted in Carol Bidwell, *Oxnard, An Illustrated History of a Coastal Sugar Town* (Carlsbad, California: Heritage Media, 2002), 58.
 16. Gow purchased Lot 18, Block W (*Oxnard Courier*, September 25, 1903) and Lot 21 Block V (*Oxnard Courier*, November 12, 1903). A short article on Gow moving his homes appeared in the *Oxnard Courier*, August 14, 1903.
 17. Lou Oy Gow's obituary mentions that she attended school in the city (*Oxnard Courier*, October 8, 1932).
 18. Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Press, 1995), 298.
 19. 1910 U.S. Census.
 20. Soo Hoo How. 1913 Chinese Exclusion Acts Case Files, 1894-1965, Record Group 85, File number 5523/106. National Archives, Laguna Nigel.
 21. *Oxnard Courier*, May 30, 1913.
 22. *Women's Improvement Club of Hueneme By-Laws*, 1914. Ventura Museum of History and Art.
 23. Catherine Gow, ... *is it alright to cry now...* (Unpublished memoir in author's possession).
 24. *Oxnard Courier*, November 23, 1920.
 25. *Oxnard Courier*, October 16, 1916.
 26. Gow put his house up for rent in May (*Oxnard Courier*, May 29, 1920). The house was eventually rented to Ralph Smith and his family (*Oxnard Courier*, January 19, 1921).
 27. The *Ventura County Directory* for 1921 lists, "Gow, W A gen mdse 748A." (*Ventura County Directory*, 1921-1922 (Oxnard Public Library, Special Collections Room).) The description of the home and store was given in an oral interview the author conducted with Anne Gow on March 5, 2005. Anne Gow's descriptions match the October 1929 *Sanborn Insurance Map*.
 28. Catherine Gow, 7.
 29. Catherine Gow, 12.
 30. Catherine Gow, 15-16.
 31. Catherine Gow, 28.
 32. *Oxnard Courier*, August 24, 1929.
 33. *Oxnard Courier*, August 9, 1918.

34. Catherine Gow, 30.