

Ghosts of Gold Mountain – Critique by John Knox

If you have ever worked with John Knox, you know he doesn't care for sloppy historical research work. Working with him on a book and a couple of brochures, I can assure you that saying "it's close, let's just use it" does not go over well! So, it is no surprise that the errors and assumptions in the *Ghosts of Gold Mountain* book did not sit well with him. The essay below has been vastly edited from the original, longer document that contains many more specific references from primary sources.

One thing this might teach us is to read with more questions and more skepticism. Even a noted scholar like Gordon Chang makes assumptions and puts things together that are just incorrect. One reason we think may be the cause of some of the errors, is that Chang never came to Placer County, to our Archives, to do his own research. He peppered Bry with questions which she spent a lot of time and effort to answer but without being here to do his own research, he missed the connections that you find when they are not even what you started looking for. Sometimes he took specific information Bry provided and just disregarded the information if it didn't fit his scenario.

Certainly, this book adds to the knowledge of the immense contribution of the Chinese in building the transcontinental railroad and for people with little or no idea of the importance of recognizing the Chinese involvement, this book is a great asset. I have added some explanatory comments here and there in the text. Editor Comments

Editor Comments

Comments on Gordon H. Change's *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*
By John Knox
2020

Several friends have asked me to comment on the book *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*. Because of the author's reputation and reviews of this book, I purchased a copy from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) several months ago.

Perhaps my expectations were unreasonable as *Ghosts of Gold Mountain* was a great disappointment. Unfortunately, it didn't help that book reviews (Examples: Princeton Alumni Weekly, Douglas Corzine, 9 April 2019, The New York Times, Andrew Graybill, 10 May 2019) were misleading. Reviewers' statements that Dr. Chang's research was both "meticulous" and "intrepid" were discovered to be anything but in a number of instances. In the end I was reminded of the controversies surrounding the publication of Stephen Ambrose's *Nothing like it in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad*. You might remember that not long after it was published a lengthy list of more than sixty instances of significant errors, misstatements, and other

inaccuracies appeared in the Sacramento Bee on January 1, 2001 (Wikipedia). My critique is centered around “Hung Wah”, a main character in this book, in addition to bits and pieces of the history of Auburn and Placer County. I cannot comment on other aspects of the book but I am familiar with the early history of the area in and around Auburn and wish to point out some errors, inaccuracies, and conflation in *Ghosts of Gold Mountain* regarding this area and its inhabitants.

The concerns I wish to address are:

- Was there a “Hung Wah” at the Ceremony at the Promontory Summit?
- How many “Hung Wahs” were there in Auburn and the surrounding foothills?
- What was the labor contractor system?
- Was the “Auburn Hung Wah No. 1” a labor contractor?
- Who were Egbert & Co.?
- Was there an upsurge of anti-Chinese violence in Auburn?
- Was “Auburn Hung Wah No. 1” a person of importance and standing?
- Did “Auburn Hung Wah No. 1” suffer misfortunes described in the book?
- Other comments

Was there a “Hung Wah” at the Ceremony at the Promontory Summit?

“Hung Wah” figures quite prominently in the first 5 pages of *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*. It’s an interesting story and obviously meant to gain the reader’s attention. My concern - the references to him in these pages are, for the most part, all imaginary. Which is OK for a novel, but not so much for a history book. In the Notes section on page 249 you will find the statement that “Hung Wah was a real person. Newspaper accounts of this moment do not provide his name, but evidence points to him.”

The “newspaper accounts” he refers to are copies of the same article appearing in various newspapers on May 12 1869 regarding the Ceremony at the Promontory Summit. It was reported that “When other guests arose from the table, Mr. Strobridge introduced his Chinese foreman and leader who had been with him so long, and took the head of the table.”

The belief that the “Chinese foreman” was Hung Wah is not original to Chang, but rather appears to have been borrowed without attribution from William Chew’s book, *Nameless Builders of the Transcontinental*, 2004, where you can find on pg 90. “ This writer believes that Hung Wah is the worker whose longevity and leadership gained a personal invitation from Strobridge to participate ...” Neither of these authors provide any evidence for their assertions, although Chang implies in his statement, “evidence points to him” that it exists but does not provide it.

I will discuss some other reasons later that cast doubt in my eyes that the “Chinese foreman” was “Hung Wah.” Before we can do that we need to look at the many “Hung Wahs” in Auburn and the surrounding foothills.

How many “Hung Wahs” were there in Auburn and the surrounding foothills?

It is true that Hung Wah was a real person, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say persons as there were a number of Hung Wahs and Dr. Chang’s “Hung Wah” is a composite of a number of these individuals. This curious amalgam begins on page 68 and continues on other pages including 69, 238 and 239. Certainly four, and perhaps even five, separate individuals are thrown into the author’s mix. First, we have:

El Dorado County Hung Wah - Died April 1931 (Chang: 68, 238, 239)

1931, Apr 14 Chinese Pioneer of El Dorado Dies

Hung Wah, 96, Chinese pioneer ... born in China in 1835 ... spent three quarters of a century (since 1856) in El Dorado County.

Appeal - Democrat, Marysville.

1931, Apr 14 Early-Day Chinese Mining Character of El Dorado Dies

Hung Wah Rock, picturesque Chinaman, for seventy one years (since 1860) a resident of this county, died early to-day at the county hospital. ... For many years he mined in Rock Canyon near Georgetown and ... he was also engaged in logging in the Georgetown section ... *The Sacramento Bee*

Tax lists and census sources from ancestry.com are consistent with the information in these articles about a man who spent his entire adult life in El Dorado County. Definitely not Auburn’s Hung Wah.

Foresthill Hung Wah - 1860 (Chang: 69)

Next the author appears to believe that a twenty - nine year old Hung Wah listed as a miner in the 1860 census was in Auburn. However, the record he cites is for Foresthill (ancestry.com). Thus, a Foresthill Hung Wah.

Auburn Hung Wah No. 1 - Merchant ca. 1857 - 1866 (Chang: 8, 71)

Auburn’s Hung Wah made his first appearance in this *Placer Herald* notice.

1858, Jan 2 Dissolution of Co-Partnership - Auburn

The Co-partnership heretofore existing between the undersigned, in the business of merchandising, under the style of Hung Wah & Ah Keen (Ah Keen, known as the China teamster) was this day dissolved by mutual consent. The business of merchandising will be continued by Hung Wah, who is empowered to settle all business of the firm that has accrued to this date. HUNG WAH, AH KEEN, Teamster. *Placer Herald*

The January date suggests a business established prior to 1858. (And continuing until his last county assessment in 1866). The next source is an Assessment record for 1859 and then a Sheriff’s Sale Notice on 26 Jan 1861 (*Placer Herald*) in which “Hung Wah’s buildings” are mentioned and located on the east side of Sacramento Street. The author appears unaware of this early history and for him the

story of this man begins (after excluding the Foresthill source) in 1862 (on page 69) with an implied reference to one of several court cases.

1862, Dec 3 District Court Cases No. 1762 and 1763.

Hung Wah and his partners in the Hung Wah Store, namely Ah Hee, Ah Yen and Fee Chung were party to two suits both of which were rendered in their favor in February of 1863. Information in the suits included an inventory of the Hung Wah & Co store, names of the partners, location ("bounded on the north by McDaniel's buildings") and description of the store (40 x 50 ft), inconsistent information on Hung Wah's literacy, an agreement selling a 1/4 interest in his store for \$200 to Ah Hee, and a contract labor agreement.

The assertion on page 8 that "a remarkable number (of Railroad Chinese), like Hung Wah himself, did read and write in their own language ... Many, including Hung Wah, also spoke some English" may be only partially correct. While it seems likely that the merchant from Auburn spoke some English, sources are conflicted on whether he was literate. In a document from the file for District Court Case No. 1762 Auburn's Hung Wah's name appears in Chinese on an agreement from June of 1862. In District Court Case No. 1763 filed on the same date as Case No. 1762 and involving many of the same individuals there is a sales agreement where Hung Wah marked an x for his name dated 28 Nov 1862. So was he literate or not?

Auburn Hung Wah No. 2 - Miner and Wash House (Chang: 239, 240)

Indeed, there was a Hung Wah in Auburn in 1880. While there is no evidence that he was a labor contractor and ran a grocery business or was "one of the most prominent Chinese in town," he did lease acreage and did have a wash house that was blown up. Unless he was running a grocery business in Auburn in 1857 when he was eleven years old this was a different Hung Wah. These are the records for this Hung Wah.

1879, 16 June Lease Agreement

Five and a half year lease agreement between Peter Maher and Hung Wah. Includes lot of land and water right not to exceed 50 inches. Lot is south of Auburn and will be mined. Filed at request of Kee Chin

1880 Census - Auburn (*ancestry.com* has it indexed as Lincoln)
Hung Wah born 1846 (age 34) Wash House

1880, 24 Jul Exploding New Chinese Wash House. Also in Placer Herald, 24 Jul 1880

"In the morning it was ascertained that a newly-erected wooden building intended for use as a Chinese wash house had been blown up. ... The site is part of the lot running through from Railroad to High Street (Cleveland Ave.) which

the Chinaman, Hung Wah and his "cousin" Doo Wah, had rented from Dr. Crandall at \$5 per month." *The Argus*

Sacramento Hung Wah - Merchant

There was also a merchant by the name of Hung Wah that appeared in the Sacramento census of 1860. He was still doing business there ten years later. (ancestry.com) Considering the location and occupation and the fact that James H. Strobbridge and Ah Toy were both from Rio Linda it seems reasonable to ask if this man might have become the C.P.R.R. labor contractor?

CPRR Hung Wah - Labor Contractor (Chang: 72, 84, 173)

"The Central Pacific Payroll Sheets No. 26 and No. 34 dated January and February 1864, are the documents that record the first Chinese railroad workers, Hung Wah and Ah Toy ... Ah Toy was paid as a railroad foreman, and Hung Wah was the headman" who supplied 24 laborers. (Wm. F. Chew: 37) By the summer of 1866 Hung Wah was the largest Chinese labor contractor and/or sub-contractor and his crews worked for the longest period of time. His crews are said to have worked 17 of the 19 months for which records are available. (Chew: 48) There is no record that this Hung Wah was ever a foreman. There appears to be some disagreement about when Hung Wah disappeared from the payroll record. Dr. Chang writes that it was after September of 1866. (Chang: 173) However, he is in both pay roll records no. 331 for November and no. 348 for December which appear in the Stanford Chinese Railroad Workers Collection. William Chew states he appeared in a December record for 1867, the only one for that year. Then he disappears from all records. The assertion of a miraculous reappearance at Promontory Summit as a "foreman" is deserving of an explanation.

What was the labor contractor system?

The C.P. R. R. adopted a system in which a contractor hired Chinese labor to work for them under the direction of the Charles Crocker & Company. The contractor acquired the workers, paid the wages and had the right to furnish all supplies to his employees. They were, in fact, and in practice merchants. This segment from pay roll no. 158 for May of 1865 will serve as an example of how the system worked.

Ah Coon	Wm	W.R. Sampson	1348 3/4
R. A. Procto			1171
D. J. Sullivan			203 1/2
W.P. Cole			45 1/2
J.S. Frasher			110 1/2
J.E. Washer			250 1/4
			3162 3/4

3770.92 ✓ Paid Kohn + Kind

In this example Henry Kohn and Henry Kind, of Auburn and San Francisco, were the

contractors with C. Crocker. They would have paid the wages and furnished all supplies. We know, for example, from court case invoices that Kohn and Kind supplied to Ah Coon in a five months period 72,000 pounds of rice at a price that varied from 10 to 13 cents a pound. Ah Coon would have been a sub-contractor, head man or gang boss whose job it was “account for the work performed, ... distribute pay,” supply required number of men, pay bills, distribute food, and perhaps more. The six Euro-American names are site foremen or supervisors. And finally the unnamed and mostly Chinese laborers. The figure 3162 3/4 represents total man days of work. Divide that number by 26 and you get the number of workers, in this case, about 122. That number 3162 3/4 again times \$1.19 and you get total wages for this month of \$3,770.92. The CPRR Hung Wah would have filled a position similar to Kohn and Kind in acquiring workers, but would not have supervised construction.

Was the “Auburn Hung Wah No. 1” a labor contractor?

“Auburn Hung Wah No. 1” was certainly a merchant, but did he also become a labor contractor? Auburn’s population in 1860 was 1488 and of that number 344 were Chinese. Merchandising was a popular occupation at the time and there were twenty seven Chinese merchants here. Hung Wah was just one among the many and his house and store next to William McDaniel’s store on Sacramento Street placed him in the heart of Chinatown. The competition must have been fierce.

The labor agreement in District Court Case No. 1762 (mentioned earlier) appears to be the basis for the exaggeration on page 69 that Hung Wah in 1862 “became a major supplier of Chinese labor to projects in Auburn.” That’s quite a claim for a rather insignificant agreement of very short duration at a single location on the middle fork of the American River. Similar agreements had been commonplace since 1850 involving more men, for longer periods of time, on larger projects, and usually related to fluming, mining and digging ditches. For example, William Gwynn, in *The People vs The Gold Run Ditch and Mining Company*, 1882, described partnering with 500 Chinese in a mining operation on the American River below Auburn in 1851, 1852 and 1853. Despite the scale of Gwynn’s operation he - like countless others - did not become a Chinese labor contractor. In the end, the agreement in District Court Case No. 1762 is the only source supporting the assertion that Hung Wah “became a major supplier of Chinese labor.” The claim is unjustified. There is a more likely interpretation.

One of the occupational characteristics in early Auburn is that many men held a variety of jobs. For example Bernhard Bernhard was primarily a fruit farmer, but was also a vintner. He also filed a number of mining claims. This was a common practice. Many men had a primary occupation, several (or more) secondary occupations, and dabbled in mining (or something else) on the side. An extreme example is John Crandall, who partnered in the following: the Bear River ditch, a sawmill, two toll roads, a toll bridge, a copper mine, a vineyard, a railroad, and more, while maintaining a farm in central Auburn. The Chinese did this as well. Kee Chin, merchant and labor contractor, comes to mind. Hung Wah’s mining agreement on the Middle Fork of the

American River and the following notice are perfect examples of “dabbles” meant to augment, but not replace his primary income as a merchant.

1863, Aug 29 Notice to Rail Road, Turnpike and Mining Companies

I will furnish any number of Chinese laborers to work on Rail Roads, Wagon Roads, or Mining claims, at the lowest cash rates. Having experience in the business, I have facilities for obtaining any required number of men. Reference, Wm. McDaniel, Auburn

HUNG WAH, Auburn *Placer Herald*

Dr. Chang assumes it was this Hung Wah that became a C.P.R.R. labor contractor in 1864, but provides no definitive proof beyond an imaginary meeting with James Strobridge. (Chang: 68) Several extant records appear at odds with this idea. The C.P.R.R. pay roll records point to a very successful Hung Wah. According to William Chew, in *Nameless Builders of the Transcontinental*, these records indicate Hung Wah was one of the first Chinese to be hired, often had the largest crews and worked them the most months. His new found wealth, and it should have been considerable, is not reflected in the Auburn merchant’s assessment record. Dr. Chang provides neither discussion nor explanation for this apparent discrepancy.

For the purpose of comparison and relative to this observation I’m including assessment records for two other merchant/contractors. The business of Henry Kohn and Henry Kind were located down the street from Hung Wah’s store. Kohn and Kind were a local firm and compared to Hung Wah were just minor actors in the contracting and merchandising business. The other extreme, and located at Illinoistown and Colfax, Egbert and Co. were perhaps one the largest and most successful of the contracting firms. The assessment records for these two companies appears consistent with information contained in railroad pay roll records. Therefore, it was surprising to find that the value of Hung Wah’s 1866 assets were not greater and did not exceed nor even come close to equaling those of Kohn & Kind. And this was “After enjoying a hot hand in the first half of 1866.” (G. Chang, pg 173)

1866 Assessment Roll District 2, Auburn

	Hung Wo	House and Lot on Sacramento St.	
\$200		Adjoining McDonald’s Store	
		Merchandise at Dutch Flat	\$2,000
		4 Horses	\$200
		6 Mules	\$400
		<u>Total</u>	<u>\$2,800</u>

1866 Assessment Roll District 2, Auburn

	Henry Kohn and Henry Kind	
	House and Lot on East St.	\$400

\$150

House and Lot on Sacramento St.

Merchandise (Dry Goods)	\$4,500
Money	\$100
Solvent Debts	\$150
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$5,300</u>

1866 Assessment Roll District 2, Colfax

Egbert & Co. (Robert Egbert, Albert Sisson, Wm. Wallace)

Brick House & Lot in Colfax	\$4,000
Known as Egbert's Store	
House on Canon Creek	\$100
Store and pack House	\$100
Cape Horn Saw Mill	\$2,500
Pacific Saw Mill	\$2,000
Merchandise at Colfax	\$13,000
Money on Hand	\$2,000
Solvent Debts	\$1,000
8 Horses & 3 Waggon	\$1,200
7 Mules	\$350
Waggon & Teams at Saw Mill	\$1,500
Lumber on Hand	\$1,500
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$29, 250</u>

Partner Wm. H. Wallace is listed separately \$8,330
His assets included 35 pack and
saddle mules with a value of \$2,500

Whatever the situation for Hung Wah, it didn't improve. "His numbers appear to have dropped precipitously in the late summer and fall of that year" (1866) and then disappear. (Chang: 173) Exactly when is a matter of some disagreement. There is no assessment record for Hung Wah in 1867 or any year there after. That Auburn's Hung Wah and the CPRR Hung Wah both disappear at the same time may be the only reasonable argument that they were one and the same.

Dr. Chang, without providing any evidence, suggests "the drop off in Hung Wah's business may have been temporary, but another explanation could be that he faced increasing competition from the Euro-American owned companies that were taking over ... like Egbert, Booth and most import Sisson, Wallace" (Chang: 173) There are several major errors in this statement which need addressing.

Who were Egbert & Co.?

Firstly, the comments on this page and pages 114 and 150, indicate Dr. Chang is unaware that Egbert, Sisson and Wallace were the partners in Egbert & Co., a company

established in Illinoistown (a 1/2 mile south of Colfax) in 1849 (*Sacramento Union*, 27 August 1911, *Thompson and West*, Pg 357). Secondly, there are related errors on page 114 which appear to be a repetition of misinformation found on page 42 of Professor Sue Chung's *Chinese in the Woods*. Specifically, the statements that Sisson, Wallace Company "had been founded in Sacramento in 1857 ... and in 1866 began to recruit workers in China for the CPRR" are incorrect. Finally, Egbert & Co. were hardly late comers to the contracting business and had always been significant and early players in the history of the transcontinental railroad. Given the author's misstatements regarding Egbert & Co. and their major (undisclosed) role in the Chinese labor contracting stories told in *Ghosts of Gold Mountain* it seems appropriate to provide additional background information.

Egbert and Brothers may have begun as "general merchants," but the history of their business is one of steady expansion. By 1854 their business included a hotel in Illinoistown. (*Sacramento Daily Union*, 24 Aug 1854) Then a Stage Co. office was added. (*Placer Herald*, 29 Sep 1855.) Followed by another retail outlet in Iowa Hill. (*Thompson and West*, Pg 391) This was in addition to a ten-mule freight team used to supply merchandise to inaccessible places (in the early days) such as Yankee Jim's, Foresthill and You Bet. (*Colfax Record*, 22 Apr 1927, Walter Egbert) Sometime after 1853 William Henry Wallace sold his half share in a 320 acre farm and hotel near Weimar and joined Egbert & Co. (*Placer Herald* 23 July 1853) In the 1860 census he is Robert S. Egbert's next door neighbor in Illinoistown and Robert was then the only remaining Egbert in Egbert & Co. The following appeared in the *Placer County Directory* of 1861, Pg 65:

R. S. EGBERT WM. H. WALLACE JNO. CRAIG
Wholesale and Retail Dealers in Groceries,
Provisions, Wines and Liquors, Mining
Tools, &c., &c.
ILLINOISTOWN, CAL.

Illinoistown at this time had an unusually large Chinese population. Of a total population of 692 in the 1860 census, 535 or 78% were Chinese.

As the county's population grew, the business of Egbert & Co. continued to expand. "When the Sacramento, Placer and Nevada Railroad had been completed to Auburn Station on September 20, 1862 Johnston & Co., Egbert and Co., W. L. Perkins, and George Wilment established forwarding and warehouses, and stage and team lines." (*Thompson and West*, Pg 275)

It was in 1862 or 1863 that Albert W. Sisson, a grocer from Taylorsville, south of Auburn, replaced partner John Craig. Until Robert Egbert withdrew from the business in June of 1869, the company was known as either Egbert & Co. or Sisson, Egbert & Co. After June of 1869 the business was to be conducted "under the name of Sisson, Wallace & Co." (*Sacramento Daily Union*, 8 June 1869) It was Sisson and his family who apparently moved with the railroad crews as they

progressed eastward. His wife gave birth to a son at Clipper Gap in May of 1865. Their other son, Franklin, died at Blue Canyon in August of 1868.

Given the strategic location of Egbert's primary business and residence in Illinoistown it is not surprising that he was early associated with a number of prominent railroad men. For example, "Mr. Egbert assisted T. D. Juda (Judah) in locating the route for the Central Pacific Railroad." (*History of the State of California and Biographical Record of Coast Counties, California*, J. M. Guinn, Chicago, 1904. Pg. 1304) Or later when "Upon arrival in San Francisco (1863), Charlotte and Wray Clement journeyed on to Sacramento by river steamer. With Lewis being away on a surveying trip, however, they were met in California's young capital city by his friend, a Mr. Egbert, who drove them on to Colfax (didn't exist yet - Illinoistown) where the family was finally reunited." *Lewis Metzler Clement: A Pioneer of the Central Pacific Railroad, Bruce Clement Cooper*. http://cpr.org/Museum/Lewis_Metzler_Clement.html

Egbert & Co. were among the earliest Chinese railroad labor contractors. According to testimony appearing in *Wallace et al. v. Sisson et al.*, 9 June 1893 In the Pacific Reporter, Vol 33, pg. 498, the company's "contracting dated back to 1864."

In almost no time at all, Egbert & Co., taking advantage of their contracting success, set to work further expanding their businesses. "Messrs. Egbert & Co., of Illinoistown, are erecting a large fire-proof brick on Front Street" (the present Colfax Market) in the new town of Colfax. (*Placer Herald*, 14 Oct 1865) And, at the same time and several miles above Colfax, they undertook the construction of the Cape Horn Saw Mill between 25 Sep and 15 Nov 1865. (*D. C. No. 2243, Goss et al. v. Hoskins et al.*) This was followed by the Pacific Mill further up the rail line. It is possible that these mills may have supplied the timbers for the Secret Town and Long Ravine trestles.

In 1869 Robert Egbert left the business to take up farming on his 2200 acres at Rio Vista. Three of his children returned to the Colfax area and settled across the Bear River in Nevada County in the early 1900s. The business of Sisson, Wallace (and later, Crocker) continued to expand and prosper.

Was there an upsurge of anti-Chinese violence in Auburn?

Dr. Chang makes the statement that Auburn "was a good place to live for both practical and symbolic reasons, and Chinese remained until they were driven out by the upsurge in the anti-Chinese violence of the late 1870s." (Chang: 69) Both these claims are without substance. There was no upsurge of anti-Chinese violence and the Chinese weren't driven out. In Auburn's census for 1880 the Chinese population was about 11 percent which is somewhat misleading. Since the Auburn census included many persons living outside the town proper, where the Chinese population was concentrated, the Chinese town percentage was actually greater than 11 percent. Among the Chinese residents were the former railroad labor contractors Kee Chin and the very prominent Ah Coon. While there was an increase of violence against Chinese

in towns like Lincoln, Roseville and Rocklin; in Auburn there was no hesitancy among many here in carrying on business as usual. For example, Bernhard Bernhard signed a 10 year lease agreement with a Chinese partnership for the 12 acre parcel across from his house in 1877. Ten years later the lease was renewed. Peter Maher, down the road several miles from Bernhard, signed a similar 5 1/2 year lease for 14 acres near his house.

The theme of violence toward the Chinese continues to be promoted on page 70. The various statements are unsourced and taken as a whole would appear to indicate that Dr. Chang is unfamiliar with the Chinese experience in Placer County. There is no basis for such remarks as "Violence against Chinese soared." and it is nonsense to state that "Chinese became easy targets for robbery and abuse." Dr. Chang would benefit from reviewing a few actual primary sources in Placer County such as the trial of *The People vs. Safford* (1859). In this case Mr. Safford and others (residents of Yankee Jim's) were indicted by the Grand Jury "for flogging several sluice-robbing Chinese thieves,..." (*Placer Herald*, 12 Mar 1859). As early as 1853 Charles Say was sentenced by the Court of Sessions (Case No. 76) to one year in state prison for stealing a horse from "John Doe, a Chinaman." A year later, in 1854, William Crawford was arrested for assault on a Chinese man with a bottle. In the same year, Morrisey and Winters were found guilty in the Court of Sessions (Case No. 106) for assault with a deadly weapon, a sling shot, on John Doe, a Chinese man, at Rattlesnake Bar and fined a \$1000 or 100 days in jail. In 1856, Henry Potts was sentenced to life imprisonment by the District Court (Case No. 570) for the murder of a Chinese man near Auburn. And the examples go on.

The fact is that the history of the Chinese in Placer County is like all histories, a lot more complicated than it at first appears. It varied over time and often very much between different communities. On occasion a local issue arose demonstrating just how divided and contrary local public attitudes could be regarding the Chinese. Such an instance took place in 1868 when Auburn's District Court Judge Thomas McFarland allowed the testimony of Ah Wong in the murder trial of a white man, Robert Alderson (D. C. No. 2535). Alderson was ultimately found guilty 15 May 1869 and sentenced to thirty years in prison. The case was appealed to the California Supreme Court - the defense objecting to the inclusion of Chinese testimony against a white man. While the case was pending before the supreme court McFarland came up for reelection. Both the Grass Valley newspaper and the *Placer Herald* made particularly harsh and even ugly comments (*Placer Herald* 16 Oct 1869) about both McFarland and Chinese and thus the election might be seen as a referendum on both his judgeship and the question of allowing Chinese court testimony. Two counties made up the 14th District Court, Nevada and Placer. Given the history of the Chinese in Grass Valley it was no surprise the McFarland was handily defeated in Nevada County. However the outcome was different in Placer County where McFarland won by a slim margin.

The top of page 71 continues with the misapplication of Daniel Cleveland's 1868 sweeping generalizations about the Chinese condition in California. What he

actually wrote about murders was, "Your committee were furnished with a list of 88 Chinese who are known to have been murdered by white people" and that number is "probably a very small proportion." No specifics, that is, nothing about Placer County and certainly not Auburn, so once again the reader is misled. There was no "volatile environment" here as he implies. To the contrary, at nearly the same time as the rendering of the court case about to be described on this page, Ordinance No. 14 was passed by the city Board of Trustees. It stated, in part, "No person shall shoot off or explode Fire-Crackers in any of the streets of the town of Auburn," ... except "upon the 4th day of July of each year; or, upon the Anniversary of the first three days of Chinese New Year." (*Placer Herald*, 4 Apr 1863) Of a much more serious nature was District Court Case No. 1737.

The California State legislature had passed the discriminatory Chinese Police Tax Law in April of 1862 which levied a \$2.50 monthly fee on all Chinese living in the state, with few exceptions. In their July term the California Supreme Court in *Lin Sing v. Washburn* declared the law to be unconstitutional. District Court Case No. 1737 is of interest because it was in this case that local attorneys James Hale and James Anderson representing 85 Auburn Chinese men and women challenged the enforcement of this law.

Was "Auburn Hung Wah No. 1" a person of importance and standing?

Dr. Chang is of the belief that Hung Wah "managed to establish himself as a person of importance and standing" in the Auburn of 1862. (Chang: 71) There is nothing to be found in the cited court proceedings to justify this statement or that "Hung Wah enjoyed the respect of the involved parties as well as the court itself." The observations regarding the court's proceedings such as representation, summary in English, no mention of translator, etc. were of no special significance. In every way this trial transcript was like others at the time. The Hung Wah described here, as on other pages, appears to be largely the imaginings of the author. In addition the author appears to have excluded all mention of Hung Wah's three partners in order to enhance Hung Wah's imagined reputation. After all, it was Hung Wah & Co. that was party to the suit and not any particular individual. For purposes of comparison one has only to review the very next case D. C. No. 1763, *Ah Hee et al. vs (Sheriff) Henry Gooding*.

The only thing "stunning" about the amount Hung Wah & Co. were offered for their part in the Brown's Bar claim was that a 60% share was found acceptable. (Chang: 71) The case testimony even includes statements by the partners expressing their reluctance to participate. And the reason? River mining had been abandoned for the most part by 1859. The exceptions being small numbers of Chinese reworking old claims like the one at Brown's Bar. This was particularly true in the year of this agreement, 1862. During the previous winter there had been a mighty flood in the American Rivers and it was thought that the scouring effect of the waters might make river mining productive again. There were many skeptics as

reported in the *Placer Herald* “River mining is rather limited among white miners this year.” At the time Hung Wah & Co.’s miners were at Brown’s Bar the newspaper was reporting, “We have not heard of a single good strike this season, and the the number of Chinese already wending their way from thence to dry diggings, we imagine the success but poor even with these people, ...” (*Placer Herald*, 15 Nov 1862) And, “it would seem that they have not found much pay in the rivers.” (*Placer Herald*, 22 Nov 1862) The Hung Wah & Co. agreement likely involved a large investment in labor and capital with little or no return. Given the prevailing attitudes about river mining at the time, we should consider the possibility that Hung Wah’s reputation may have actually been diminished by this agreement.

Did “Auburn Hung Wah No. 1 suffer misfortunes described in the book?

The narrative on the following pages contain a variety of misstatements.

On page 173, Dr. Chang writes in reference to Hung Wah, “Turmoil in his personal life may also have disrupted Hung Wah’s business. On the evening of January 9, 1867, his longtime Auburn business partner and friend William McDaniel was brutally murdered in the store he kept across the street from Hung Wah’s.”

William McDaniel was likely a friend, but there is no evidence that they were ever partners and in District Court Case 1762, appearing in the End Notes for page 71, it states that Hung Wah’s store was bounded “on the north by McDaniel’s buildings.” Further down the page is the statement that “Outraged local whites immediately raised \$3,000 as a reward for anyone who could identify the perpetrator. Hung Wah personally took the lead among Chinese to raise an additional \$1000, ...” This statement is inaccurate. Here is what was actually written:

1867, Jan 19 REWARD

To those who are fortunate to arrest and have convicted the murderer of Mr. McDaniel, a liberal reward will be paid by the citizens of Auburn. The sum of \$3,000 has already been raised by our citizens, and Hung Wa, and other prominent Chinamen offer to raise \$1,000 more.
Placer Herald

Arrest and convict is quite a bit different from identify. Hung Wah did not take the lead to raise reward money.

On page 174 the author makes the assertion that,

“Hung Wah suffered further misfortune. In July 1868 a huge fire destroyed the entire contents of his shuttered store in Auburn’s Chinatown. No one was present or injured. etc., etc.”

As you can read below, there was no longer a store here nor was the building shuttered. Furthermore, it's doubtful that Hung Wah suffered any misfortune. There are no records (Assessment) to indicate that Hung Wah lived or did business here (or anywhere in Placer County) in 1868. The last such record for Auburn was for 1866. One of the last appearances of the name is in the McDaniel article above.

1868, Jul 18 FIRE

On Thursday night last about half past 11 o'clock, the old store building of Hung Wah, at the upper end of China town, in Auburn, was discovered to be on fire. The walls of the building were fire proof but the shutters and the windows were not closed. The building was unoccupied and filled with old lumber and traps of every conceivable nature. ... The fire was undoubtedly the work of an incendiary.

Placer Herald

As the author nears the conclusion of his book he makes these final comments about Hung Wah on page 239, much of which is misinformation and concerns "Auburn Hung Wah No. 2."

"Here is the last we know. After the completion of the Transcontinental, labor contractor Hung Wah made his way back to Auburn, where he continued his business activities. He leased acres of land, again contracted out labor, and ran a grocery store carrying Chinese goods. As one of the most prominent Chinese in town, however, he also encountered direct violence in 1880 as the racial mood in the state turned ugly. In the dead of night in July, a "thunderous" explosion, according to the local newspaper, shook the entire town ... Unknown villains had used black powder to blow up Hung Wah's wash house."

See notes for "Auburn Hung Wah No 2."

Other comments

I've been asked why I didn't comment on Dr. Chang's version of the story of the Chinese and the hanging basket legend of Cape Horn (pages 91-92). The answer is easy, Dr. Chang adds nothing of substance to the myth. Nor does he provide any real challenge to the debunking of this story by Edson Strobbridge (*The Central Pacific Railroad and the Legend of Cape Horn, 2001*) and Jack Duncan (*A Study of Cape Horn Construction on the CPRR, 1865-1866, 2005*).

A great disappointment to an important and extremely interesting subject. My real concern is how much more of this book is misinformation.

John Knox
2020