Living With Exclusion:
Chinese Merchants in Baker City, Oregon, 1899-1915

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Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

- First time immigration to the United States was restricted based on race and class.
- Prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the country for period of ten years but allowed certain classes to enter.
- Renewed several times until its repeal in 1943, the Act put merchants at constant risk of deportation.

Oregon's peculiar history

- Portrayed as progressive
  - "Oregon System" of direct democracy
  - Women's rights
  - Environment
- Yet has anti-progressive past
  - KKK bastion in the 1920s
  - Chinese Exclusion

Chinese Exclusion in Baker City

- Reworked historian, Erika Lee's, concept of studying "*law at its bottom fringes*" to the enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Act in Baker City
- Utilized Immigration and Naturalization Service Chinese Exclusion case files held by the National Archives and Records Administration Pacific-Alaska Region in Seattle

What's in a case file?

- The files "*document every single Chinese immigrant who applied for admission or re-admission into the country or was deported from the United States during the exclusion era*."

-- Erika Lee, At America's Gates, p. 14

Research Objectives

- Illuminate attitudes held by White newspapermen about Chinese residents
- Examine administration of Chinese Exclusion at the local level

Wing Hing Yuen

The Wing Hing Yuen store is seen in the middle of the photograph, partially obscured by the Standard Station garage, ca. 1930. Standard Station at the corner of Auburn Avenue and Main (formerly Front) Street looking east. Source: Baker County Library, Baker City, Oregon.

The Partners of Wing Hing Yuen

circa 1900

Leong Dod, ca. 1908. Source: Records of the INS, RG 85, Box RS056, Case No. RS2222, Leong Tai Yow. U. S. NARA-PAR.

Leong Tai Yow, ca. 1908. Source: Records of the INS, RG 85, Box RS056, Case No. RS2222, Leong Tai Yow. U. S. NARA-PAR.

Ah Yee, ca. 1899. Source: Records of the INS, RG 85, Box RS 104, Case No. RS17052, Ah Yee. U. S. NARA-PAR.

Leong Bue, ca. 1902. Records of the INS, RG 85, Box RS116, Case No. RS17964, Leong Bue. U.S. NARA-PAR.

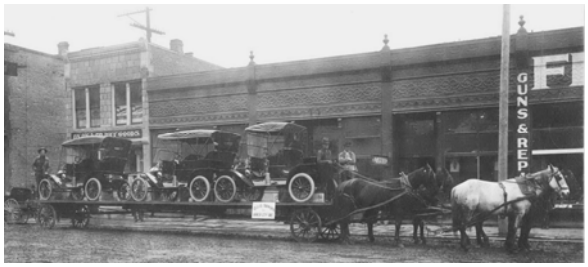
Not pictured:

Leong Boon, Source: Records of the INS, RG 85, Case No. 4858, Leong Boon, U. S. NARA-PAR.

Long Guoy, Source: Records of the INS, RG 85, Case No. 1009/2, Long Guoy, U.S. NARA-PAR.

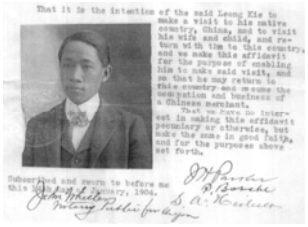
Leong Beon, ca. 1901. Source: Records of the INS, RG 85, Box RS117, Case No. RS18016, Leong Beon. U. S. NARA-PAR.

On On Co.



On On Co. Dry Goods store at left, its sign partially obscured by the automobile, ca. 1910.
South side of Court Avenue between Main (formerly Front) Street and 1st Street.
Source: Baker County Library, Baker City, Oregon..

The Partners of On On Co.


That it is the intention of the said Leong Kie to make a visit to his native country, China, and to visit his wife and child, and return with him to this country, and we make this affidavit for the purpose of enabling him to make said visit, and so that he may return to this country and resume the occupation and business of a Chinese merchant.
That we have no interest in making this affidavit pecuniary or otherwise, but make the same in good faith, and for the purposes above set forth.
Subscribed and sworn to before me this [illegible] January, 1904.
J. H. Parker
P. Basche
S. A. Kiebler
John Whiteley
Notary Public for Oregon

Leong Kie of On On Company, ca. 1904.
Source: U.S. Customs Service, *Affidavit*, 14 January 1904. Records of the INS, RG 85, Box S010, Case No. 159, Leong Kie. U. S. NARA-PAR.

Not pictured:

Leong Wa, ca. 1903.
Referenced in U. S. Customs Service, *Letter of D. L. Moorman*, 12 February 1903. Records of the INS, RG 85, Box RS116, Case No. RS17964, Leong Bue. NARA-PAR.

Those Who Witnessed: One example

Basche & Company Store advertisement, ca. Basche & Company advertisement, 1897. Source: Baker County Library, Baker City, Oregon.

County Judge Peter Basche, ca. 1912.
Source: Judy Boguski, e-mail message to author, December 14, 2007.

Leong Dod: The Cultivation of a Western Appearance

Leong Dod of the Wing Hing Yuen Company in traditional Chinese attire, ca. 1899. Source: U. S. Customs Service, *Affidavit*, 22 December 1899. Records of the INS, RG 85, Box RS098, Case No. RS16338, Leong Dod. NARA-PAR

Leong Dod of the Wing Hing Yuen Company shown in western garb for the first time, ca. 1905. Source: U. S. Customs Service, *Affidavit*, 15 January 1905. Case No. 704, Leong Dod. NARA-PAR.

- Adopted just after the turn-of-the-century
- Why the change?
- Significant consolidation of Chinese Exclusion at the federal level between 1902 and 1905

Conclusion

- White community attitudes about Chinese may have improved by early 1900s.
- Greater acceptance by Baker City's population may have aided the Chinese merchants to obtain testimony they needed to secure their position in the merchant class.
- Adaptive acculturation and networking allowed Chinese merchants to maintain their position in the merchant class and to avoid deportation.

The Potential of Chinese Exclusion Case Files

- History of the Chinese in Oregon
- The study of Oregon's anti-progressive past
- Broaden local history

The files:

- Name individuals
- Name towns and villages in China
- Source for family histories

Holdings of NARA Pacific Alaska Region

- NARA-PAR has to date catalogued an estimated 10-15% of all Chinese Exclusion case files accessioned from the INS. (Estimate based on cubic foot.)
- >20,000 case files representing Pacific Northwest ports of entry + Vancouver, BC catalogued ***thus far***.
- >3,000 case files for Chinese in Oregon (but most files do not indicate city of residence—there may be more).
- Represent Chinese residents of >40 Oregon town and cities
- Contact: seattle.archives@nara.gov

Oregon towns and cities represented in the case files

Contact: seattle.archives@nara.gov

Albany
Astoria
Bailer
Baker City/Baker
Bly
Brownsville
Burns
Canyon City
Champoeg
Corvallis
Dallas
The Dalles
Eugene
Fairfield
Galina
Gervais
Hot Springs
Hubbard
Huntington
La Grande
Lakeview
Leland
Marion Co.
Marshfield
McMinnville
Monument
Mormon
Basin
Ontario
Oregon City
Pendleton
Portland
Rainier
Roseburg
Salem
Sherwood
Silverton
St. Helens
St. Johns
Umatilla
Vale-Malheur
Witford