

In the series

Asian American History and Culture,
edited by Sucheng Chan

Organizing ASIAN AMERICAN LABOR

*The Pacific Coast
Canned-Salmon Industry,
1870–1942*

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Cannery Communities, Cannery Lives

DURING THE winter of 1909–1910, the owners of the Columbia River Packers Association (CRPA) investigated the possibility of establishing a cannery at Chignik, Alaska, because, in the words of part-owner Samuel Elmore, “Columbia River fish are practically fading away. Competition is growing stronger, profits less.”¹ Elmore cited the consistently plentiful supply of high-quality salmon that ran for a comparatively long period as Chignik’s foremost advantage over the Columbia River as well as other Alaska locations. To that line of argument he added: Companies used traps extensively in the area, which put the cost of salmon lower than that bought from fishermen; the cannery site was “on the Pacific side” of the Alaska Peninsula and was “free from extreme cold and ice”; it had “direct communication once each month by steamer and [had a] telegraph station near at hand”; fresh water was in plentiful supply; and the proposed site was situated on a “bay and harbor easily navigated,” making possible “discharging and loading direct in the cannery [and] to and from ship[s].”² Other partners in the firm concurred that Chignik “has advantages which no other point in Alaska has.”³ In early spring 1910, the CRPA erected a cannery at Chignik.⁴

The CRPA’s deliberation was typical. Beginning with the first salmon-canning venture of 1864 on the Sacramento River, eager exploiters of Pacific salmon built canneries where the salmon ran from the Monterey peninsula to the Alaska coast along the Bering Sea. Their prime concerns were plentiful salmon, navigable waters, a long canning season (determined by fish runs and weather), and ample fresh water.⁵ The practice of drawing on a floating, ready supply of labor in the American West that included European American and Native American fishermen and Chinese cannery hands allowed owners to give little thought about building next to population centers that might supply workers. A great many salmon canneries stood in the most remote and isolated locales, giving rise to seasonal bunkhouse communities. Some operations were near to population clusters, however, and as the industry grew in the last quarter of the nineteenth

century, several large cannery towns emerged on the coast. Cannery built still other plants near existing small towns that had at the center of their economies timber, mine, or agricultural enterprises or transportation and communication, not canning.

Chinese lived and worked in the three settings—bunkhouse village, cannery town, and small-town cannery. There they experienced a relatively consistent pattern of labor recruitment and management by coethnics and of work routines inside the canneries. They lived and worked in a truncated society made up of seasonally contracted immigrant “bachelor” workers locked into particular positions in the industry by virtue of their ethnicity. Those factors, limiting as they may have been, gave the workers an opportunity to create common patterns of interaction. Yet because the cannery settings varied tremendously, Chinese faced very different circumstances outside the plant. Their efforts to shape their experiences within each community speaks to their ability to manipulate the constraints placed on them as international labor migrants in the U.S. West.⁶

Bunkhouse Villages

Within the bunkhouse villages, Chinese developed patterns of behavior to cope with the physical hardships of that environment. Outside observers often drew rosy pictures of these villages. One local editor in the 1870s romantically portrayed isolated Columbia River canneries as “invariably built out over the water on piles. Back of these on the banks of the river are clustered a few dwellings, with generally a pretty cottage, where the proprietor, or foreman resides. Back of these are high bluffs, covered with evergreen trees, mostly spruce, hemlock and fir.”⁷ Ironically, the editor neglected to mention the rough bunkhouse that probably stood between the “pretty cottage” and the plant. From the editor’s distance, the buildings may have looked pretty, but closer inspection of any cannery would have revealed structures made of rough-cut lumber with large gaps between the planks to facilitate cleaning and reduce construction costs. The “China house” at the Tyonek cannery on Cook Inlet, Alaska, was, according to the superintendent, “just like a barn, with up-and-down boards and a wood floor.”⁸ The only source of heat in these large, one- and two-room structures was a single wood- or coal-burning stove. Workers pasted paper over the cracks to cut down on drafts and make the quarters more livable.⁹ Owners adjusted their buildings to suit the particular environment, not to accommodate workers. At the CRPA cannery at Chignik, Alaska, vertical space was limited. The plant stood on a ten-foot-high

gravel spit for protection from high tides, but strong winds kept the height of the structures at one low story.¹⁰

The quarters were spartan at best, and Chinese were left to supply what comforts they might want or need. All in the industry referred to the living quarters as "bunkhouses," but some had no bunks, only sawhorses with boards placed on top. Chinese had to provide their own bedding and furnishings. A three-gallon bucket—often the most versatile, functional, and only furnishing available—served as a suitcase, bathtub, and stool.¹¹ Owners did make some provisions for workers. The CRPA cannery at Chignik, for example, had a bathhouse with tubs and showers and a laundry with six tubs, but the superintendent consented only to supply hot water and steam. Chinese workers were responsible for its upkeep. Owners had function in mind when they built privies over small creeks so that the water carried away waste. Latrines placed on bridges must have been difficult and uncomfortable to use at night, especially in cold and windy weather, and no amount of paper pasting would help.¹²

For privacy in the one- and two-room enclosures, Chinese might make partitions. At Chignik, each worker "built himself a kennel out of the bunks" in the twenty-by-fifty-foot bunkhouse.¹³ In a few plants, owners constructed eight-by-ten compartments that held four to eight men. Privacy in such rooms was difficult, for they were "like rabbit hutches."¹⁴ Few bunkhouses had separate rooms until the 1920s when many of the original bunkhouses fell into such disrepair that new ones had to be built. Regardless of location, the bunkhouses always seemed crowded.¹⁵

Even though workers had no vested interest in the cannery structures, they kept their quarters as livable as possible. The National Cannery Association's sanitary surveys, conducted in voluntary cooperation with cannery owners in the 1910s and 1920s, generally listed Chinese living spaces as "exceptionally clean" in spite of the failure of owners to provide janitorial services. No evidence suggests that such was not also the case in the nineteenth century.¹⁶

These young "bachelors," while able and perhaps even willing to tolerate such living conditions as an unfortunate by-product of their position as immigrant laborers, immediately recognized that the bunkhouse communities lacked the social complexity of their home villages or even U.S. Chinatowns. First among the shortcomings was the virtual absence of Chinese women and families. Men predominated in Chinese immigration, but the male-to-female ratio at the canneries was even more lopsided than in other Chinese settlements. The 1880 census listed nearly 31 percent of the Chinese cannery workers on the

lower Columbia as married, but none had wives with them.¹⁷ Even into the twentieth century, only a few small-scale contractors/foremen lived with their wives at remote canneries.¹⁸ Owners discouraged the presence of families and only reluctantly accommodated contractors and foremen, who lived separately from the crews.¹⁹

In the absence of Chinese women, bachelors attempted to interact with women of other groups, especially those hired as extras. Few European American women were at the plants, and because the majority population was intolerant of miscegenation, they rarely entered long-term relationships with Chinese men. Chinese workers more frequently established ties with Native American women.²⁰

The location of the cannery was a key element in creating the opportunity for such alliances. Years before canning began on the Columbia River, European American diseases had decimated the Native American population so that Chinese men encountered Native American women at canneries most distant from European American settlements. In the Puget Sound and British Columbia, such relationships developed frequently, but even those were dampened by the intense competition between Chinese and Native Americans in agricultural labor, particularly in the hop harvests, where violence among pickers made social interaction difficult.²¹ The large-scale employment of Native Americans in southeastern Alaska did not create direct competition for the Chinese crews but provided relief labor during heavy runs. Census records suggest that setting determined the frequency of interracial unions.²² Settlements at remote plants were seasonal, though, and Chinese–Native American couples and their children who remained in the territory lived in small towns, not at the remote cannery sites.²³

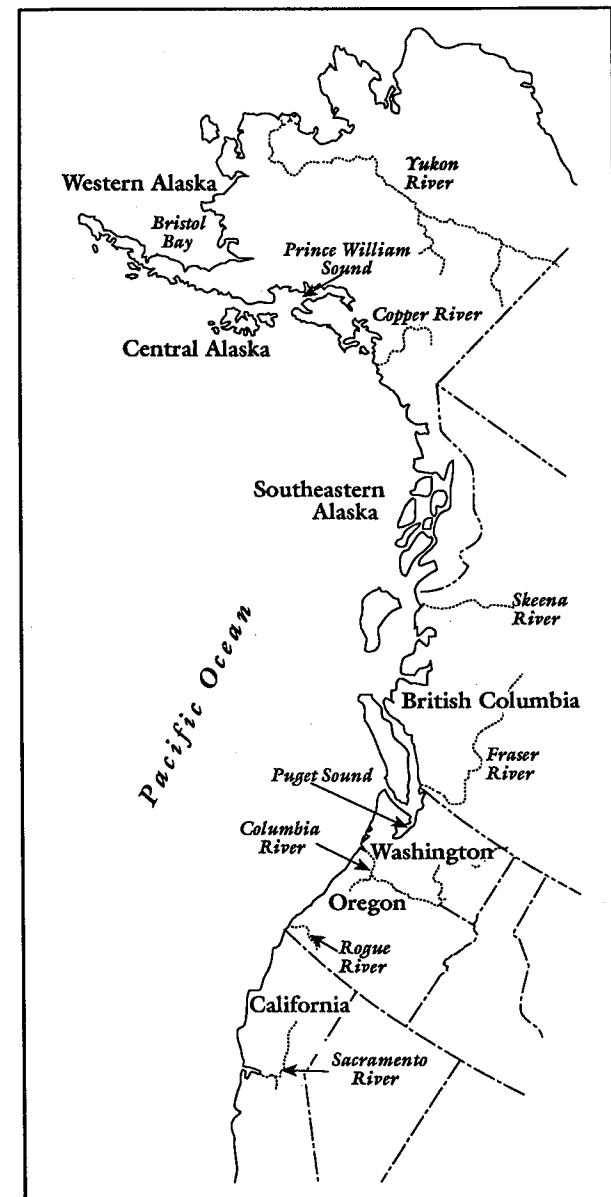
Deprived of families, many Chinese bachelors drew on the real or fictive kin networks that had aided them in their immigration to the United States. In their settlements they often formed groupings around common surnames and sometimes more formal clan associations. At the canneries, surname groupings occurred as well, but to a lesser degree. The manuscript population census reveals that before exclusion, surname groupings figured significantly in the smaller plants, though none had a crew in which all members possessed the same surname.²⁴ The scarcity of surviving lists of nineteenth-century crews makes it difficult to determine the extent to which Chinese utilized kinship networks.²⁵

In addition to these networks, Chinese drew on an established practice from the villages of south China to improve their bunkhouse experiences. There, many villages had bachelor houses, sometimes

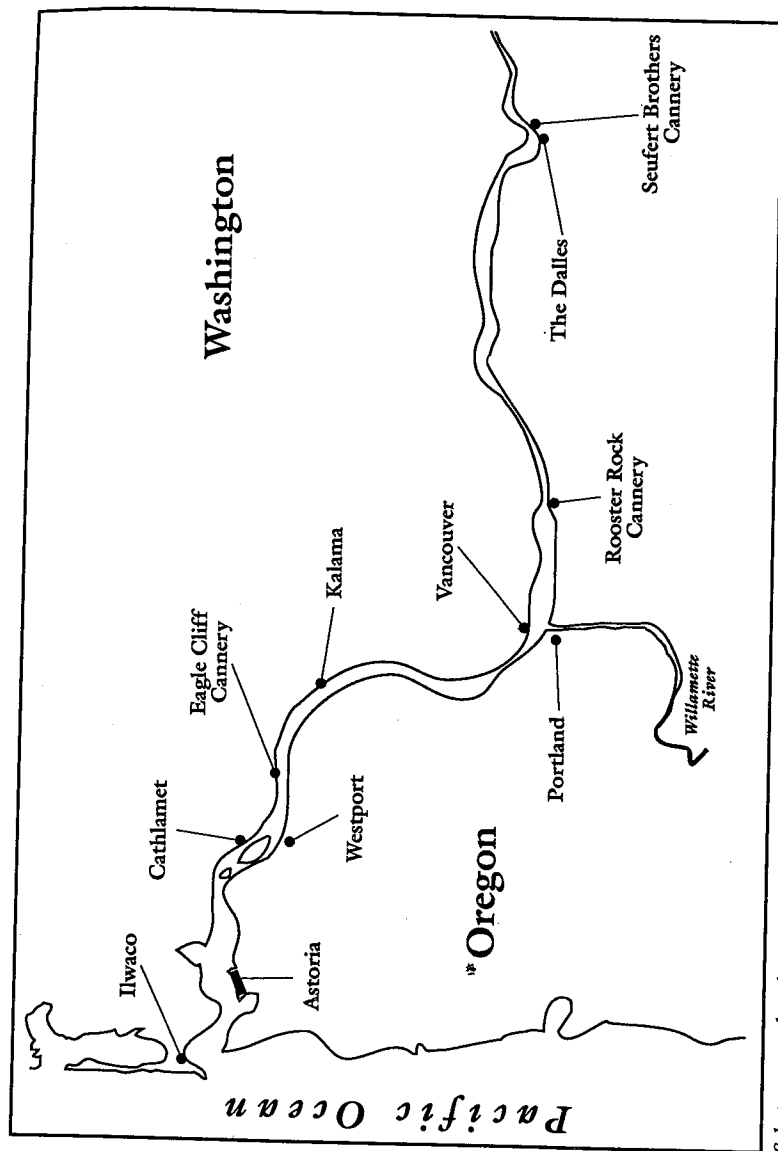
attached to ancestral or clan halls, in which an average of forty to fifty young men resided. They went there to relieve crowding in their family dwellings and to remove themselves from families with girls coming "of age." Entrance into the bachelor house served to mark one's passage into manhood and ended only with marriage or departure from the village.²⁶

Boys enthusiastically anticipated the communal life of the bachelor house. It provided them with an opportunity to spend what leisure time they had away from the family's work routine, in male social activities like gambling, drinking, talking, and going on swimming and fishing outings. They also engaged in ordinarily taboo discussions of sexual matters. Youths at the houses also came into contact with adults; guests on temporary stays from other villages and the "confirmed gamblers, drunkards, opium addicts, and the like" who continued to reside in the bachelor quarters as long as they did not fall "into such disgrace as to be barred from the village." Bachelor houses also sheltered men whose wives were "in confinement" during and after pregnancy and men on vacation from their normal duties. In the mixing of men and boys, the youths learned from their elders' experiences about how to deal with future challenges.²⁷ Cannery owners, of course, had no intention of facilitating passage into adulthood or communal life among their employees, but the workers very likely recognized in the bunkhouse an opportunity to re-create the experiences of village life in the homeland.

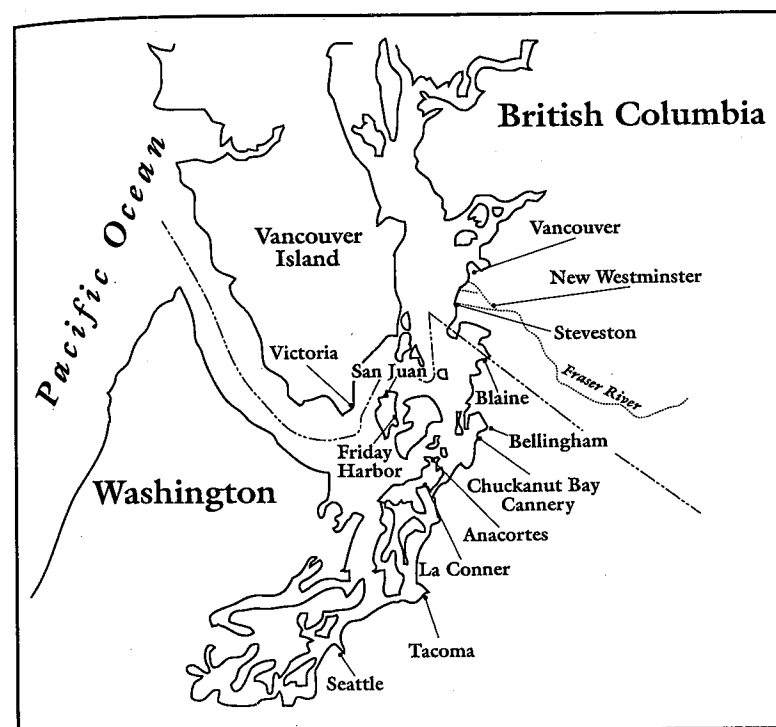
The 1882 Exclusion Act dramatically altered the bunkhouse communities. Instead of housing young men in their mid-twenties, they became home to workers who, by 1900, averaged nearly forty-five years of age.²⁸ The bunkhouses served less as a socializing institution than as a reminder of the lack of social mobility for Chinese in the United States. They had achieved a high status within the cannery ranks, but they had also remained locked into a two-tiered, ethnically segmented internal labor market with white workers occupying positions that held relatively greater potential for advancement than Chinese, who were essentially limited to jobs on the cannery line.²⁹ Their discussions must have centered on a life past, not one to come. By the turn of the century, then, the bunkhouse community no longer served as a rite of passage, though it did continue to provide an opportunity for sharing common concerns. Nonetheless, both before exclusion and after, the predominant characteristic of the bunkhouse was that it was built for the advantage of the cannery owner, not the social well-being of the workers.³⁰



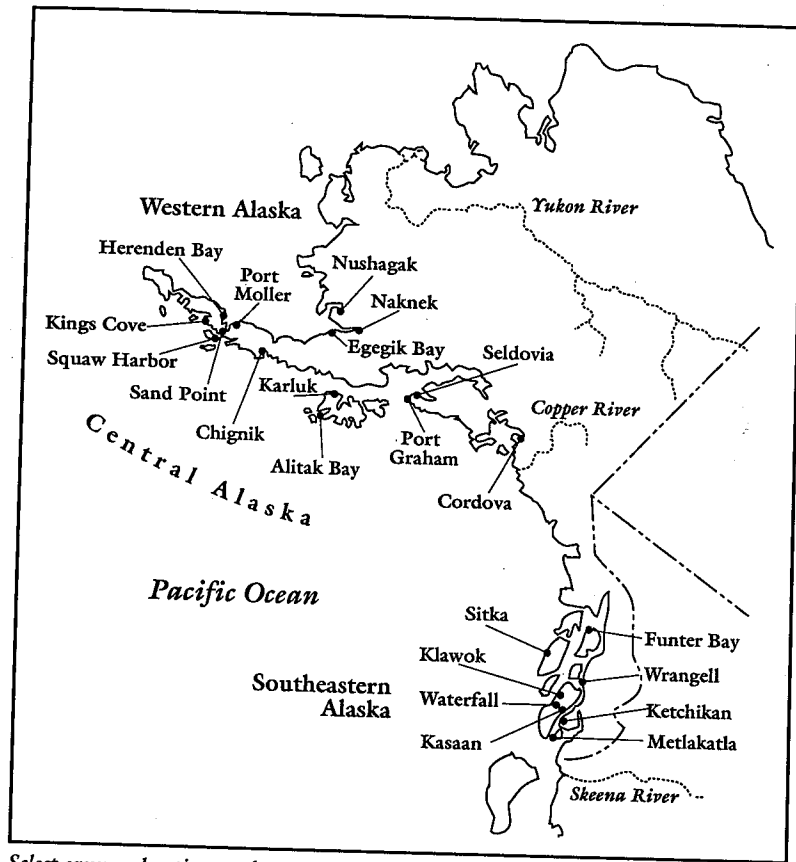
Salmon canning regions of the Pacific Coast



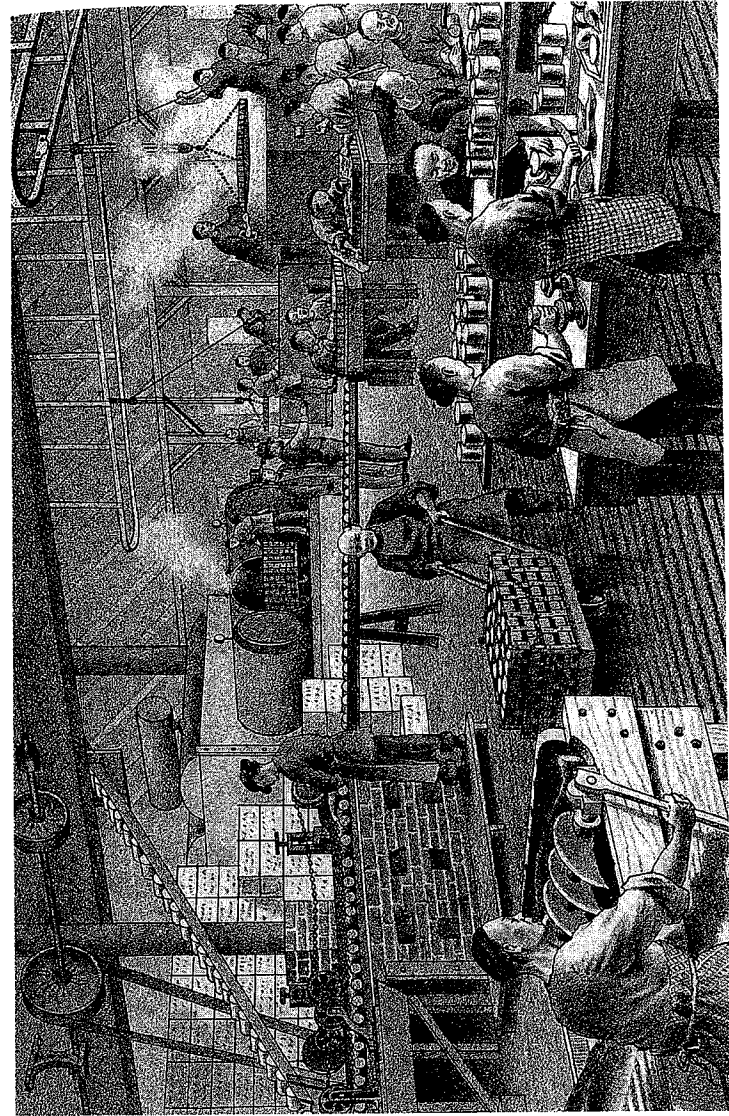
Select cannery locations and towns on the Columbia River



Select cannery locations and towns in northern Puget Sound and southern British Columbia



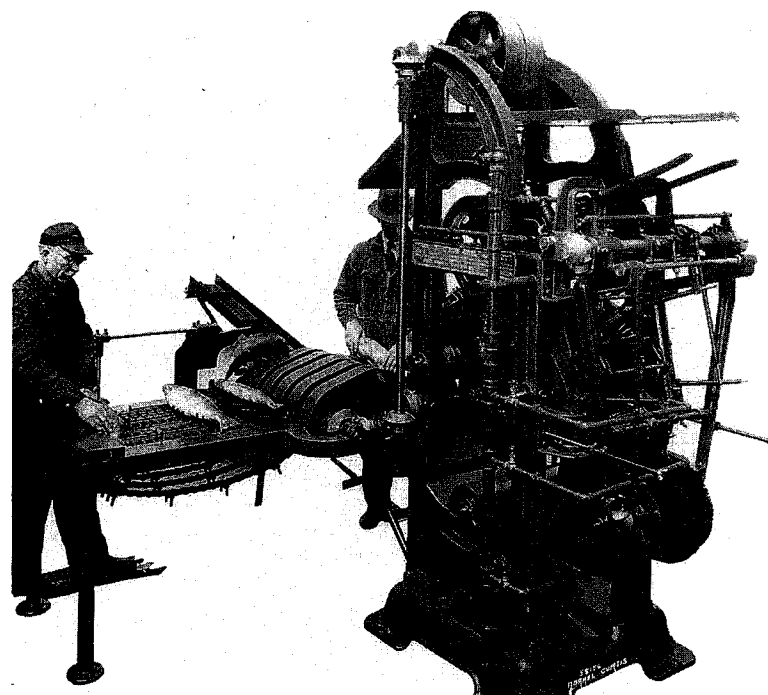
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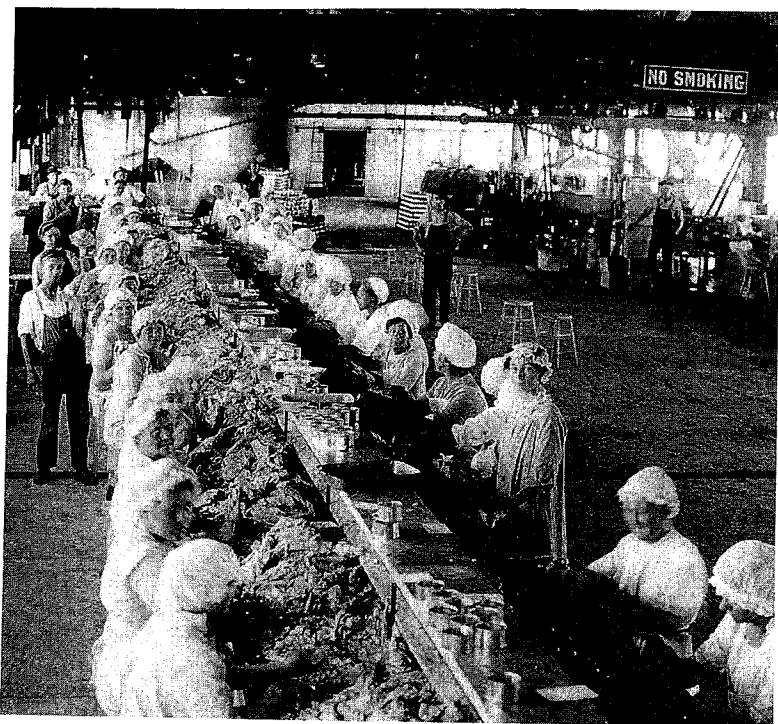
Astoria, Oregon, in the mid-1880s; Chinese worked at every stage of the canning process (West Shore, June 1887, Special Collections, University of Washington, negative no. 14788)



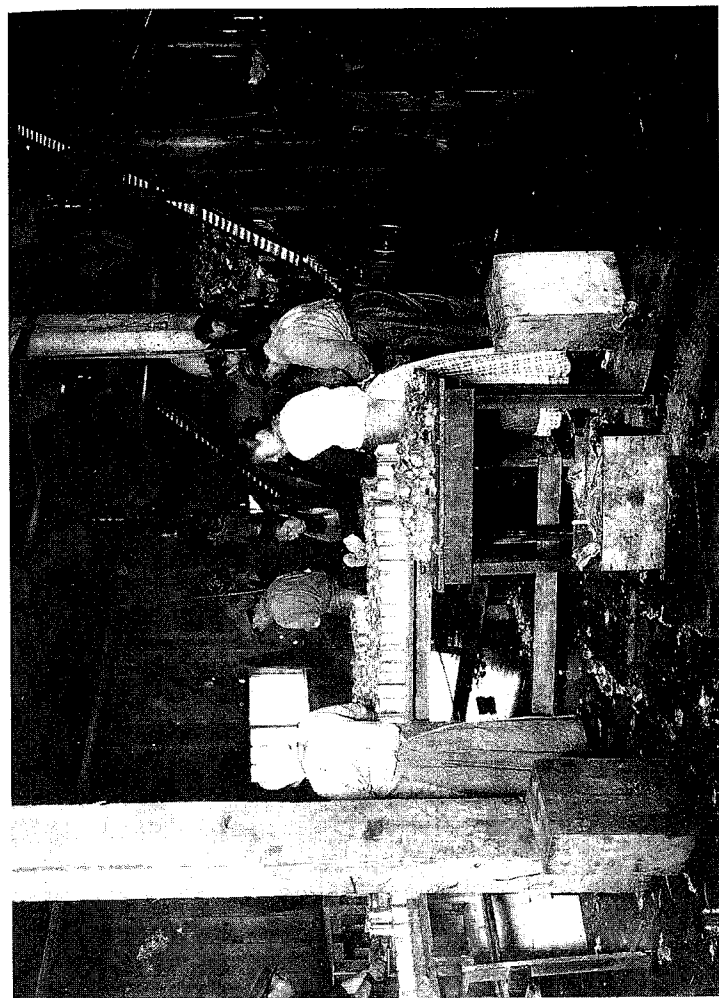
Early version of the "Iron Chink" of the 1910s staffed by Chinese workers, with a Chinese "fish pitcher" at right (Special Collections, University of Washington, negative no. 9422)



The "Iron Chink" of the late 1910s slowly made its way into the canneries despite the claims of its manufacturer that it replaced many workers (Curtis Photo, Special Collections, University of Washington, negative no. 58156)



*Filling cans was one of the few tasks open to women in early twentieth-century plants
(Special Collections, University of Washington, negative no. 221)*



While Asians and Asian Americans worked on the canning line, in the twentieth century, Native Alaskan women worked primarily as can handlers and fillers, and their children sometimes handled cans as well (Special Collections, University of Washington, negative no. 14787)



Union organizers for the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union Local 7 drew upon their diverse ethnic backgrounds to build a strong union (Unidentified men, Box 40, Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union Local 7 Records, Manuscripts Division, University of Washington)

This was true of other aspects of cannery life as well. Food was served in a common mess hall provided by the owner, rather than in the family setting as in south China. Contractors supplied the fare and hired the cook. In return, they received a daily per capita sum from the cannery owners for provisions. This arrangement allowed contractors an avenue to control workers and gain profits from owners. In one fairly typical arrangement, during 1908 Seid Chuck received approximately 20 cents a day for each worker's board (nearly \$2,000 for the season) at the small Seufert Brothers Cannery near The Dalles, Oregon.³¹ Since contractors served relatively inexpensive rice, tea, and salmon or "scrap" fish from the cannery, they kept significant proportions of that money. In addition, some contractors bought the supplies through their own import-export businesses, which generated even larger profits for them.³²

Workers perennially complained about their food. Contractors responded by selling extra supplies to crews, promoting gardens kept by workers, and encouraging them to gather plants and shellfish in their spare time. Many contractors stocked "slop chests" with special items and had the foremen at the plants sell the goods to workers at high prices on credit.³³ In the 1910s and 1920s, and presumably during the nineteenth century as well, though the record is unclear, contractors deducted large proportions of workers' wages for purchases from the chests. In 1902, at least one company, rather than the contractor, controlled sales of extra food.³⁴

With the Chinese crews of the nineteenth century, contractors depended more on workers' initiative in keeping small gardens and gathering food to keep down complaints about food rather than on sales from slop chests. At the beginning of the season, contractors would send two or three men to prepare a small plot near the cannery. They worked for several days and then left it in the care of the Chinese cook. The contractor controlled the garden through the cook but relied on volunteers from the crew to plant, water, and weed. Usually five or six men kept the garden "just like a big farm." Charlie Koe, a former cannery worker and contractor, remembered his as a "kind of a community garden, everybody work on it and we all eat on it, it's just like a big family in those days."³⁵ Not only did the efforts of the cannery hands supplement their diet, but for some it recalled experiences of their homeland.

Live hogs and occasionally chickens kept at the canneries also provided sustenance, as well as a distraction. Contractors supplied hogs and chickens for the crews, and cooks fed them discarded fish and table scraps. The butchering of hogs every several weeks was preceded by a

festive occasion of pig chasing that was followed by careful dressing of the meat under the watchful eyes of the crew and a few days of fresh pork at meals. The cook then salted down the remainder and doled it out sparingly for several weeks until the next butchering day. The chickens provided eggs and occasional holiday meals. Still, most of the cannery workers' protein came from fish. They regularly ate the perch, flounder, sole, and low-grade salmon caught by fishermen or themselves. In addition to being a social diversion and dietary supplement for workers, hogs, chicken, and fish lowered contractors' provisioning costs and crew tensions.³⁶

Contractors seldom provided more than a basic subsistence. As a result, an important part of workers' activities at the bunkhouse villages involved gathering additional food. Wapato, *Sagittaria latifolia*, and a bulbous root long used as a staple by Native Americans grew in great quantities along the tidal flats of the lower Columbia River. Throughout much of the year, Native American women dug the roots out of the mud, loaded them in baskets, and carried them back to their villages. There they dried the wapato for several weeks and then boiled or roasted them. The cooked plant resembled a potato or turnip in consistency. The Chinese harvested and processed wapato in a similar fashion, loading them into baskets suspended from shoulder poles and bringing them back to the cannery where they steamed the root. Wapato is related to the *Sagittaria sagittifolia*, or swallow's tail (*yanwei cao*), cultivated in the shallow-water ponds and irrigated fields of China. Wapato certainly must have reminded the workers of familiar foodstuffs, but it is just as likely that they became "very fond" of wapato because gathering it provided an opportunity to socialize with the area's few Native American women.³⁷

Although not as socially stimulating as the wapato harvests, the collection of seaweed from coastal waters was another familiar task. Chinese use dried seaweed in soups for its flavor and medicinal qualities. Near the mouth of the Columbia River, they ventured out to get seaweed so frequently that one favorite spot became known as "China Beach" among the local European American residents.³⁸ Depending on cannery location, Chinese also gathered freshwater mussels and salt-water clams. Food and its preparation carry much cultural importance for all Chinese, and each dish supposedly has its own special medicinal qualities.³⁹ In the canneries, where the food varied little and was often inadequate, it is no wonder that workers went to great lengths to keep gardens, harvest wapato, or collect seaweed and shellfish to supplement meager diets.

Chinese also developed a variety of coping mechanisms, including gambling, smoking opium, drinking homemade gin, and homosexual

relations.⁴⁰ Gambling allowed the men to while away the time and gave them an opportunity to make money quickly. While informal, friendly games took place, quite often contractors or their foremen ran the games or hired professional gamblers on percentages.⁴¹ Until 1909, the use of opium was legal; some Chinese workers appear to have been casual smokers, but others were heavily addicted: Long days of standing in the damp conditions probably led a number of workers to lean on opium to ease their aches and pains. Actual levels of usage are, however, impossible to determine.⁴²

It is probable that among so many men at the isolated cannery communities, the incidence of homosexual relationships would be higher than in the society from which the men emigrated and perhaps even higher than in urban centers in the West. Reports from the 1920s and 1930s indicate that some contractors and foremen sent male prostitutes to the canneries and took a percentage of the money they earned.⁴³ By those decades, however, owners and superintendents frowned on pimping and male prostitution, largely for fear that the spread of venereal disease might affect the quality of fish packed and the productivity of the crews.⁴⁴ Evidence on homosexual relationships or male prostitution is very sketchy. Workers seldom discussed it with outside observers, and present-day informants avoid the topic or take great pains to distance themselves from it.⁴⁵

Drug use and male prostitution, in particular, have been cited as evidence alternately to explain the depravity of Chinese laborers or their extreme exploitation by contractors and owners,⁴⁶ but such activities occurred among all workers at the canneries—fishermen, managers, and workers. The Chinese found additional ways to relieve tensions. Building and flying kites in the steady winds at Pacific Coast plants was a favorite, and the Chinese constructed all types of kites. Among them were some that emitted musical notes and others so large that they took a dozen or more men to handle the lines.⁴⁷ Chinese also tried to celebrate accustomed holidays, but the demanding cannery schedule only occasionally allowed them time off. Most often, they got a break during U.S. (or Canadian) holidays.⁴⁸ On their single day off during the week, they celebrated holidays, flew kites, and engaged in activities that must have been all the more enjoyable because they were outside the direct control of contractors, foremen, and cannery owners.

Cannery Towns

Of the three kinds of communities, bunkhouse villages were the most isolated. Crews were cut off from outside contact and confined to the cannery locale, but not all Chinese were burdened by such conditions.

Those who worked and lived in cannery towns led less monotonous existences. Two cannery towns—Astoria, Oregon, and New Westminster, British Columbia—provided some social, political, and economic opportunities. By the 1880s, Astoria had earned a reputation as “the Gloucester of the West,” sustaining a large seasonal population of Chinese workers and a smaller, more stable core of entrepreneurs. Before the canning boom of the mid-1870s, however, only a handful of Chinese lived in the town. Between 1870 and 1874, they found employment as cooks and dishwashers in the local resort hotel, as servants in European American families, or as wood choppers and levee builders.⁴⁹ Astoria had fewer than a thousand residents, and its economy supported few domestic and day-labor jobs.⁵⁰ The potential growth of any sizable Chinese community seemed unlikely, but after 1874 the canneries provided the catalyst for the formation of an Astoria “Chinatown.”

Caught in a competitive struggle over how to exploit the salmon runs most effectively, owners moved their plants to Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River to gain first access to salmon and shipping facilities. Early canners on the river had believed that salmon congregated in the greatest numbers twenty to fifty miles from the river's mouth. As competition among the canners grew, they found that the canner who could first catch, can, and market the fish gained a small but significant edge over the others. The location of plants at Astoria allowed company fishermen to catch salmon just as they entered the river and to transport the fish quickly to the cannery. By locating their plants at Astoria, owners also saved shipping time to consumer markets. Portland, ninety miles upriver from Astoria, had been the original shipping point, but with the absence of rail connections between most lower Columbia River plants and Portland, owners found that shipments from Astoria reached important foreign markets first. The mill at Astoria, from which canners bought box shooks for casing the salmon, made it an even more logical spot for new canneries.⁵¹

The first Astoria cannery opened in 1874 and the second the next year. After the 1875 season, the *Weekly Astorian* proudly announced that the “success of the Astoria canneries establishes the fact that Astoria is the place for fish canneries.”⁵² By 1876, the town had five canneries, a total of eight in 1877, and fourteen in 1880.⁵² Owners of the new plants followed George Hume's practice and hired Chinese labor. Between 1874 and the mid-1880s, the Chinese settlement in Astoria grew in direct proportion to the number of canneries. By 1880, census enumerators listed 2,122 in Astoria and registered more than three-fourths of them as cannery hands.⁵³ Since owners built their

plants side by side on the waterfront with the Chinese bunkhouses in a row behind the canneries, the living quarters were crowded into a very small section of the town. Several hundred Chinese entrepreneurs—merchants, restaurateurs, saloonkeepers, tailors, pawnbrokers, barbers, clothiers, gardeners, and laundry operators—hoped to benefit from transactions with the workers and settled nearby (see Appendix, Table 1).⁵⁴

A second concentration formed around a smaller core of canneries that opened a mile upriver from the first Astorian plants. Although this section of town, known as Upper Astoria, housed 712 Chinese workers in 1880, no ethnic service economy served it. Only fifteen other Chinese lived in Upper Astoria: a woman with an unspecified occupation, four cooks, three laundrymen, six shoe-factory workers, and one merchant. Upper Astoria was little more than a satellite community of cannery workers.⁵⁵

The prejudice of European American residents, added to the canners' placement of the bunkhouses, severely restricted Chinese settlement patterns. In 1879, the editor of the *Weekly Astorian* declared that “we cannot possibly colonize the Chinese in any one place in the city, but it should be done if possible; allowing that this is *such* a free country.”⁵⁶ The desire to “colonize” the immigrants in a particular location reflected the informal boundaries imposed by European Americans on Chinese communities and epitomized an “internal colony” of reserve labor on which owners drew. Owners forced contractors to keep workers nearby, ready to respond to calls for work. By keeping crews small for as long as possible, canners lowered their labor costs and found themselves relieved from supporting workers. While Chinese awaited cannery jobs, they had to rely on their own savings, some contractor's largess, or noncannery employment.⁵⁷

The Astoria Chinese community depended on the canneries for its economic base. In 1880 some 1,639, or 78.1 percent, of Astoria's Chinese worked in the plants.⁵⁸ Exclusion policies ultimately curtailed the possibility of sustaining high levels of Chinese employment in the canneries, but news of the pending legislation prompted a sudden emigration from China to the United States. A temporary surplus of Chinese labor delayed the act's impact. Many recently immigrated Chinese found their way to Astoria, where 40 percent of them reported to federal census enumerators in 1900 that they had immigrated during the two years before the Exclusion Act.⁵⁹

Many of the American West's European Americans read the apparent abundance of Chinese immigrants as a failure of the Exclusion Act. In the mid-1880s, frustrated by a slow economy, they renewed their

anti-Chinese activities. The 28 Chinese coal miners killed September 2, 1885, at Rock Springs, Wyoming, along with the 15 wounded and approximately 550 expelled, provided the first spark. Within two weeks, whites directed violence at Chinese in north-central Washington. From late September to early November, Puget Sound Chinese suffered at the hands of rioters.⁶⁰ Chinese left those troubled spots in large numbers; some returned to China, while others headed for safe havens in large California Chinatowns and Astoria.⁶¹ In 1886, the *Weekly Astorian* reported that "probably" three thousand Chinese had crowded into Astoria seeking shelter. The town was "a sort of jumping-off place . . . and they congregate here in the same fashion and for about the same reason that they cluster in San Francisco—because they are driven off elsewhere and have no place else to go."⁶² Many Astorians refrained from anti-Chinese activities because they believed the laborers might abandon the canneries, thereby causing the collapse of the local economy.⁶³

Still, the town had some incidents of anti-Chinese activities. A small but vocal minority formed societies and in an occasional public speech or newspaper editorial urged the Chinese to leave, but they took no direct action against the Chinese. The only major anti-Chinese incident took place outside the auspices of the anti-Chinese societies. In 1885, the *Weekly Astorian* lamented the "race war" in the streets.

Last Tuesday morning two drunken men on the roadway near [the canneries] upset two Chinamen. The Chinamen got some of their crowd together and made it equally unpleasant for the two men. The Chinamen then took refuge in their headquarters. Their assailants increased in numbers, made another assault upon the Mongolian stronghold. The descendants of Zengis Khan [*sic*] sallied forth with knives and clubs; their opponents mustered for the fray when Messrs. Tallant and Smith [both cannery owners] got between the belligerents and succeeded in calming their angry passions. The fire still smolders and may yet be quenched in gore.⁶⁴

Open race war never ignited in Astoria as it did in other western locales. Instead, the town served as a relatively safe haven and attracted those who might not otherwise have come. Their presence only added to the number of workers available for the canneries.

After the mid-1880s, neither the number of Chinese nor canneries in Astoria continued their meteoric ascent. Exclusion discontinued immigration and reduced the labor supply just as canners on the Columbia felt the crunch of destructive competition among themselves and with operators in other canning regions. Whereas up to 1887 several thousand Chinese worked in the town's nearly two dozen canneries,

between 1889 and 1892, only five hundred to six hundred labored in eight canneries.⁶⁵ By 1900, several more canneries had closed, with the remaining plants employing only 332 Chinese, or 59.2 percent of the workforce total.⁶⁶ A temporary increase in the number of canneries in the town around 1910 failed to stop the downward spiral in Chinese cannery employment; in that year, only ninety-one, or 50.2 percent, directly depended on cannery incomes.⁶⁷ Even that number dropped by half over the next two decades. Cannery work always remained important to Astoria's Chinese but never regained the position it had occupied before the late 1880s.⁶⁸

Inside the Astoria plants, Chinese faced conditions similar to those at the bunkhouse villages, and they transplanted many of their behavior patterns. They took what fish they needed from the canning line or fished from the cannery wharf. The potential markets, however, were much greater in Astoria than at an isolated cannery. One Chinese worker recalled earning more on his breaks by selling the fish he caught with a net from the dock than he did for a full day of cannery work. Still, he continued both "jobs."⁶⁹ Others moved beyond individual activities to small partnerships. In the 1880s several enterprising Chinese tried to set up fish-drying operations atop their living quarters. Their efforts were short-lived because the other residents of Astoria complained vociferously about the "stench" until local officials shut down the business.⁷⁰ The tons of waste dumped by canneries, which sat on the mud flats at low tide or washed up at high tide and then rotted on the banks, generated only mild complaints from European American residents dependent on the canneries for the survival of their town.⁷¹ Ethnic enterprise, especially that of the Chinese, garnered little support outside the ethnic community.

Although there were similarities between the bunkhouse villages and the cannery towns, the lives of cannery hands were qualitatively different in the two locations. In the towns, Chinese supplemented their food with vegetables and meat bought from Chinese truck gardeners and merchants. The gardeners at first maintained small plots in Astoria, but as real estate values increased, European American residents objected to the night soil that gardeners used to fertilize their crops and the free-roaming hogs they kept, and they forced gardeners to the outskirts of town.⁷² The move made it less convenient, though still possible, for cannery employees to buy from them. While workers could purchase food and goods from merchants, contractors withheld cash payments and extended credit to them at local businesses in which they had an interest.⁷³ As a result of such practices, contractors needed no "slop chests" to maintain their hold on laborers' purse strings.

Workers in cannery towns had more opportunities for social activities than those at bunkhouse villages. One difference was the presence of many more Chinese women. In 1880, twelve of the twenty Chinese women in Astoria lived in households of two to four adult women without any spouses present. They averaged twenty-nine years of age, ranging from twenty-one to thirty-five with the exception of a thirty-nine year old and a sixty-four year old. Based on similar data for Chinese prostitutes elsewhere in the West, the former were of a "prime" age to be prostitutes in a small town dominated by industrial wage earners, while the latter two may have been madams or maids.⁷⁴

Chinese female prostitutes in the West drew on three distinct clienteles. The healthiest and prettiest women often lived in isolation from all but their wealthy masters within the confines of the Chinese community; whether or not some were concubines, rather than prostitutes, is not revealed in census records. Others, whose masters catered to Chinese only, lived in poorer conditions. The least healthy and fortunate served all comers in the "cribs," or street-side brothels.⁷⁵ In Astoria, with its community of wage laborers, prostitutes of many ethnic backgrounds came specifically for the canning season. In all likelihood the Chinese prostitutes during the 1870s and 1880s worked in the cribs or sought patrons among bachelor Chinese. The *Weekly Astorian* noted in 1879 that one Chinese woman "stood in the doorway of a den on Chenamus street soliciting patronage."⁷⁶ A long-time resident remembered in his boyhood seeing women who "sat bare-naked from their stomachs up waiting for loggers, fishermen, and sailors" in the cribs of the waterfront district adjacent to Chinatown.⁷⁷ Local police only occasionally bothered to arrest or fine the town's prostitutes. Portland newspapers looked askance at Astoria's social atmosphere, commenting that the town "affords every opportunity and allurements of vice in its lowest forms. . . . During the fishing season it is perhaps the most wicked place on earth for its population."⁷⁸

Not every Chinese woman in Astoria was, or remained, a prostitute. In 1877 Ah Bock, a "slave girl" held for "nefarious purposes," was transported from San Francisco and sold into prostitution in Astoria. Lim Sam, her lover, filed in local court for her freedom, and won, but he failed to stop her former owner from kidnapping her. Lim Sam freed her again by unknown means, and the two married in Astoria. In a rare moment of toleration, the local paper commented that the wedded Lim Sam and Ah Bock were truly "Chinese with a Christian heart."⁷⁹ Possibilities for romance and even marriage to another Chinese, though remote and difficult, made life in the cannery town much different from in the bunkhouse villages.

Lim Sam and Ah Bock did not appear in the 1880 census, but three of the twenty Chinese women who did appear lived with their husbands but without children present. A Mrs. Ah Kow was married to one of the major nineteenth-century contractors for the canneries. Mrs. Ming Ching and Mrs. Seid Lin were both listed as married to cannery workers. Their husbands may have been cannery foremen or skilled laborers able to afford to maintain a wife or concubine in Astoria, but it is also possible that the two held the women in prostitution. In Astoria during 1880, only a major cannery contractor could support a wife. Most contractors and merchants viewed early Astoria as a hinterland to be occupied seasonally and kept their main residences in Portland or San Francisco, perhaps with wives and families or mistresses. The remaining Chinese women in Astoria, though outnumbered by men at a ratio of over a hundred to one, provided Chinese cannery hands with a more favorable ratio than at the remote plants.⁸⁰

The data on women for 1900 illustrate the tremendous change under way in the community. Thirteen of the eighteen adult women resided with their husbands or children. Among those outside nuclear or extended families, one fifty-six-year-old woman lived without her husband and gave her occupation as merchant. The four remaining women appear to have been directly or indirectly involved in prostitution because of their living arrangements and ages. These included a sixty year old and a thirty-eight year old, who appear in the census as "laborers." They may have been madams or servants in the brothels. Thirty-year-old Le Mo was the head of her household, living with two other women servants aged thirty-six and thirty-nine. Le Mo's retinue of servants suggests that she may have been a mistress or was in a more exclusive brothel than her counterparts in 1880. Other Chinese women may still have worked in the cribs, but census takers enumerated none.⁸¹

Of the married women, six had married the elite of Astoria's Chinatown and had their children present. Their husbands included a contractor, four merchants, and a tailor. Typical was Mrs. Lop Wy, who married a merchant and had five children, all of whom were born in Oregon. In these marriages a great discrepancy in age separated many husbands and wives. Hong Sing was twenty years younger than her forty-nine-year-old merchant husband. They had been married only two years and had one child born in Oregon.⁸² So few Chinese women were in America that most frequently only the most wealthy and powerful men gained access to marriage partners. The discrepancy in ages came about because it took men years to become well enough established to get married; even then, they went into debt.⁸³ The high cost

of marriages ruled out such opportunities for a great many cannery employees.

Surprisingly, in view of the costs of maintaining a nuclear family, four women married men specified in the 1900 census as "laborers." Servant Chun Linn and her laborer-husband boarded with the family of merchant Lum Dong in a household of six people. The remaining three married women lived alone with men, whom enumerators recorded as husbands, and had no children. Whether the men were pimps or husbands cannot be determined.⁸⁴

The 1910 census listed only ten adult women, eight of whom were married to contractors or merchants and only one to a laborer. The remaining woman, Mrs. Go Sing, was married and had no husband present but boarded with a merchant and seven other lodgers in an extended family all with the surname Go. Similar to the practice a decade earlier, unions between Chinese in Astoria tended to be between younger women and older men. Lules Q. Wong's marriage represents the greatest age discrepancy. She had married a tugboat worker twenty-six years her elder. Mrs. Ju Sam was twenty years younger than her merchant husband and was apparently his second wife. Two of the adult women were born in Oregon and mark the long-time settlement of Chinese and the arrival of a second generation. Quon T. Sing had been in Astoria raising her family since 1891, when she married a tailor, Sing Wah. By 1910 Quon had given birth to seven children.⁸⁵

The formation of nuclear families represented a shift in the character of the community from one of many young migrant bachelors catered to by a few prostitutes to a smaller community with nuclear families. The powerful and economically prominent members of the Astoria Chinese community who established families were primarily contractors who, by the turn of the century, had become more numerous in Astoria and had lived there long enough to build an economic base.⁸⁶

Chinese in Astoria had more opportunities for a range of social activities than workers at isolated plants. During the canning season, they celebrated holidays and festivals with "great pomp and ceremony" and demanded and received "one-half day off each for . . . sports, ceremonies, feasts, etc."⁸⁷ Even though the Chinese (Lunar) New Year occurred before canning started, seasonal cannery hands and year-round resident Chinese made extensive "preparations for a big time" they expected at the festival, especially with their "detonation of bombs and firecrackers."⁸⁸

Beyond "traditional" holidays, Chinese took advantage of all occasions that offered a respite from the plants. As in the remote canneries,

they flew kites, but in Astoria they often flew them as part of such American celebrations as the Fourth of July. In the late 1890s, when Astoria began to celebrate its regatta, the town's annual event marking the importance of the canning industry, Chinese took part in the festivities. Chinese merchants in the town donated to the regatta fund, and in 1910 Chinese residents borrowed a dragon from Portland for the parade. Even cannery employees received the day off to enjoy the activities. At remote plants, these holidays passed with only minimum disruptions in the daily schedule.⁸⁹

The concentration of Chinese in Astoria also attracted a Chinese theater troupe. As early as 1881, Chinese operas ran "full blast every night to big audiences . . . for two weeks" during the canning season in a rented hall.⁹⁰ By 1883, Astoria's Chinese had built a theater of their own. The settlement supported this venture only a few years after the larger Portland Chinese community had established its year-round theater for Cantonese opera and San Francisco's Chinese had opened a Cantonese opera school.⁹¹ When the theater closed because of the declining population after the 1880s, Chinese in Astoria found other entertainment. With no theater of their own, they attended shows in the big opera house, though they sat in "China Heaven . . . way up above" the European American crowd.⁹²

Deaths also reveal the differences between the lifestyles of Astoria's Chinese workers and those at remote canneries. When Chinese died at outside plants, their bodies were shipped to Portland or Astoria with dispatch. The prospects of dying at such locations troubled workers because it reminded them of their own fragility and the great distances to either their immigrant communities or their homeland. In Astoria, Chinese seemed better able to handle such crises. When one laborer died there of blood poisoning during the 1888 season, a very elaborate ceremony ensued. "His friends," reported the local paper, "scattered the usual assortment of tissue paper on the route of the defunct, and the remains go to Portland for temporary internment [*sic*]."⁹³ Chinese traditionally offered paper money to spirits in places frequented by the deceased to help in the afterworld. In Astoria such ceremonies were "usual."

Overseas Chinese commonly buried the dead for five or six years and then exhumed the bones and shipped them to China to be interred in the family grave. Men like Hong Too, the "general bone gatherer for the Sam Yup Co.," traveled on a regular circuit through the West. In 1886 he passed through Astoria, Portland, and The Dalles, collecting bodies of "his gang" for shipment back to China.⁹⁴ Another "Chinese company" sent its representative to Astoria and other key points

in the Pacific Northwest later that same year.⁹⁵ As early as 1882, the remains of 225 Chinese lay in Astoria cemeteries awaiting shipment home. The town's service as a regional center for temporary burial pays tribute to its importance to these immigrants.⁹⁶

Life for cannery workers in Astoria held a much more immediate connection to Chinese American social and cultural activities than those at the bunkhouse villages. The availability of options for Astoria's Chinese, in spite of the preeminence of contractors, made possible the building of power bases from which they might exert an influence on contractors. The formation of tongs, political parties, and religious organizations in Astoria created some chances to voice dissent.

"Tongs" included a vast array of social, political, and cultural associations among Chinese immigrants. Most often these organizations have been viewed by scholars alternately as protective protoclass organizations or as managers of the vice industry and exploiters of common Chinese immigrants.⁹⁷ Astoria reflected that variety, with at least one family association and several other social-political organizations. It also had tongs that depended heavily on the vice industry for income. Keeping Chinese laborers in a perpetual state of indebtedness through gambling, drug trafficking, and prostitution assured those who controlled these activities of their revenues. Nonetheless, the tongs could also act in workers' interests.⁹⁸

Tong activity began quite early in Astoria. By 1876, both the Hip Sing and Bing Kung tongs had established branches there, and over the years as many as four to six more followed. The Hip Sing, Bing Kung-Bow Leong, and Suey Sing tongs formed the three largest. They also dominated and sometimes fought one another for control of the local vice business. In 1888, for example, violent confrontations among the Suey Sing, Hip Sing, and Bing Kung tongs in the West manifested themselves locally in the competition for gambling in Astoria. The struggle wracked the town until the Chung Wa, forerunner of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, helped to mediate a truce. During the remainder of the nineteenth century, no more significant intertong antagonisms erupted in Astoria.⁹⁹

The highly visible vice industry and open conflicts among the tongs received much more attention from the Astoria press than the tongs' labor guild activities. In order to recruit and retain members, the tongs in Astoria attempted to control cannery hiring by coercing or encouraging contractors to become members and then pressuring them to hire from within the tong membership. Tong control over cannery labor was neither immediate nor complete. In 1880, observers noted that in most canneries "each [Chinese] is employed directly

without the intervention of the six companies or any other persons."¹⁰⁰ After the mid-1880s, when contractors monopolized the labor market, the tongs began to move in; by the twentieth century, contractors commonly secured laborers through the tongs. In Astoria, the Bing Kung-Bow Leong Tong was strong enough to force the major contractor for the Columbia River Packers Association (CRPA) to join. Wong Kee Brown, another contractor in Astoria, held membership in two such organizations.¹⁰¹ Contractors in Astoria were not alone in this relationship to the tongs. In Seattle, for example, Goon Dip was forced to join several tongs because of his contracting for Alaska and Puget Sound salmon canneries.¹⁰² The tongs were less effective in preventing contractors from assigning family members and friends the best cannery jobs, thus revealing their incomplete influence over the labor market.¹⁰³

The power of the tongs weakened in the first decades of the twentieth century, and they shifted their orientation to more social activities. During this time contractors regained positions of power. Scholars have noted a similar decline in the influence of San Francisco's tongs, especially in the vice industries, but have debated why. Some hold that the balancing of the sex ratio pushed residents to want a more settled and stable lifestyle.¹⁰⁴ Others point to the recognition by merchant and tong leaders that crime cut into tourism—the new economic base of the San Francisco Chinatown.¹⁰⁵ These do not serve to explain the situation in Astoria, for the gender ratio there remained heavily skewed, and tourism never supported the community's elite. Yet, except for one brief eruption in 1922, organized crime and violence diminished.¹⁰⁶

Astoria's shrinking population of transient salmon fishery employees, not limited to Chinese, did not promise much revenue for those involved in organized crime, so the tongs had no reason to retain their old ways in the town. Just as important, the Chinese community relied to such a great extent on the salmon canneries for its economic base that contractors and workers feared continued crime might result in the loss of their jobs. The impetus toward less-violent tong activities in Astoria grew out of the contractors' attempts to court cannery owners.

In the nineteenth century, owners had been concerned only when drug use or addiction or other vices lessened their laborers' productivity. When in 1893 the *Astoria Budget* claimed that Chinese were "sweet-scented hogs" with "opium-scented hands and long-nailed fingers," owners did not respond directly to the charges.¹⁰⁷ In the first decade of the twentieth century, as the public grew increasingly intolerant of the conditions exposed by Upton Sinclair in the meatpacking

industry, cannery workers felt compelled to demonstrate that their plants, and their products, were sanitary. Ordered by owners to supply "clean" workers, contractors countered by playing a visible role in eliminating the vice industry and changing the local image of Astoria's Chinese settlement. In 1916 Chan Ah Dogg, the most prominent Astoria cannery contractor, joined others in a campaign to "rebuild" Chinatown and assured European American residents that he and his fellow Chinese were "eager to serve and become of value to the community."¹⁰⁸ Their efforts were rewarded when the editor of the *Astoria Budget* announced that the Chinese "understand the human race, love their children, are painstaking in their work, clean in their homes, and proud of their ancestors," a far cry from the paper's stance in the previous century.¹⁰⁹

The opening in 1904 of a branch of the Bow On Tong for American-born Chinese in Astoria, like those in Portland, Fresno, Santa Clara, and Los Angeles, reflected the change from tongs as controllers of the vice industry to tongs as social organizations. Similar to the Native Sons of the Golden West in California, an organization that argued against the intermixing of ethnic groups, the Bow On Tong had as its purpose the representation of American-born Chinese interests, not necessarily those of immigrants. It no more sought control of the vice industry than it did the recruitment of cannery labor. Its programs catered to a broad class coalition among the American-born who were seeking a place in the larger Astoria community.¹¹⁰

The waning of tongs and their influence on contractors marked the end of one avenue of resistance that had served workers' interests, but others were emerging. As the Qing Dynasty crumbled and reformers and revolutionaries proposed alternative governments in China, the Chinese in the United States took stands of their own. In Astoria, the debate over imperial reform or the establishment of a republican government framed the discussion and provided cannery hands with a chance to oppose contractors, at least in politics. In the summer of 1900 a branch of the Chinese Reform Society formed in Astoria with the ultimate goal of restoring Kwang Hsu to the throne. "Hundreds" of flag-waving Chinese attended the opening speeches, noted the *Daily Astorian*. Those "in favor of the emperor are wearing photo buttons of him and seem to be very proud of them." They include "some very ardent reformers among the better class here in Chinatown," contractors and merchants among them.¹¹¹

At the other end of the political spectrum were the Chinese who supported Sun Yat Sen. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Sun "secretly" went to Astoria while on tour in the United States to

raise money for the establishment of a Chinese republic. He discovered that not all followed the political line of the "better class" in the Chinese community, for a number of its residents threw their support to his organization. The community split was brief, however, and in 1913 Astoria's only political organization was a branch of the Kuomintang (*Guomindang*), or Chung Hwa National Club, as it was known in Astoria, that represented Sun's new republican government. The "ardent reformers" who had supported the emperor formed no countering organization and dropped from the public eye. The political debates had touched Astoria only for a short time and gave limited opportunities for dissenting. Still, in the bunkhouse villages, political agitation other than that espoused by the contractor would have been next to impossible given the tight rein held by his representatives, the foremen.¹¹²

In addition to tong and political organizations, religious institutions in Astoria gave Chinese opportunities not available at remote canneries. The town's European American residents mistook the small shrines to patron deities in the tong headquarters for "joss houses" or temples. While some Chinese communities had Buddhist and Daoist priests and temples, there is no evidence that Astoria had anything but small shrines.¹¹³ As early as 1880, though, individual Chinese Christians sought to save the souls of their countrymen through street-corner preaching. They appear to have had little effect.¹¹⁴ Not until the proponents of the Social Gospel reached Astoria in their attempts to reform immigrants through home missions did Christianity begin to make headway in the Chinese community. In 1888 a "Chinese missionary," who was "the latest in the matter of saving souls," set up a Salvation Army barracks in the residence of a deceased contractor.¹¹⁵ The missionary's progress is unknown, but by the early 1890s the Presbyterian and Baptist missions were teaching English in night schools that were "numerously attended."¹¹⁶ The schools' popularity among workers may have grown out of the belief that the acquisition of English might help them find a way out of the canneries and helps explain why attendance at the night school did not automatically result in conversion to Christianity. As the Chinese community in Astoria shifted from one primarily of immigrants to one of settled families, the churches switched their focus. By the 1920s, the Christian churches in Astoria, especially the First Baptist Church, had their most significant impact on the American-born Chinese. Children of many ethnic backgrounds participated in its programs, and that brought their parents into contact with each other.¹¹⁷ Such intermingling broke down some of the racial barriers in Astoria. The nineteenth-century mission schools and

the twentieth-century congregations expanded the range of institutions that lay outside direct contractor control.

For as much as Astoria offered to Chinese workers, it also meant contending on an ongoing basis with a substantial European American population that became hostile whenever the two groups competed for jobs within the industry. The earliest contention emerged over fishing for salmon. A "Chinaman dare not fish in the Columbia," federal fisheries investigator George Brown Goode observed, "it being an understood thing that he would die for his sport."¹¹⁸ David Starr Jordan and Charles H. Gilbert, who worked with Goode, concurred. "There is no law regulating the matter," they wrote for Goode's report, "but public opinion is so strong in relation to it, and there is such a prejudice against the Chinamen, that any attempt on their part to engage in salmon fishing would meet with a summary and probably fatal retaliation."¹¹⁹ In the next decade, though, prejudice and discrimination did not prevent Chinese entry into commercial salmon fishing.

During the 1880s, a few Chinese found employment as "helpers" on Columbia River gill-net boats, on fish wheels, and on fish traps. Owners often ran their own fishing boats, wheels, and traps and felt that Chinese, hired out of Astoria for less than others, might reduce the cost of salmon at the dock. Independent fishermen, too, sought to lower their operating expenses and in a few cases hired Chinese assistants to help row the two-person boats and pull in the nets. Their efforts meshed with Chinese aspirations to expand their employment opportunities. As early as 1884, cannery began staffing their boats with Chinese, and by 1888, Chinese in the boats numbered ten.¹²⁰ In that same year, three others found jobs on traps or fish wheels.¹²¹ Chinese employment outside the canneries might have increased had it not been for the establishment of the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union (CRFPU). From the founding of the organization in 1886, CRFPU members accepted Chinese employment only in the plants, not on the boats. Owners obliged the CRFPU because the cost of salmon was always the greatest expense in canning and they feared that organization might drive the price of fish too high. To assuage the CRFPU, after the late 1880s the companies ceased to give positions on the boats to Chinese.¹²²

Inspired by the same general conditions in the industry that prompted owners and independent fishermen to hire Chinese as fishermen's assistants in the 1880s, cannery looked to Astoria's Chinese to knit gill nets during the off-season as a means to shave costs. Each year companies "let out" thousands of fathoms of twine to the fishermen and Chinese on credit. The knitters then sold the nets back to the

canneries as they finished the task. Knitting gill nets, which on the Columbia River ran up to 250 fathoms (1,500 feet) in length, was a tedious and laborious task but required the outlay of little cash because no heavy machinery was necessary. Chinese, neither housed nor fed by the cannery companies during the winters, had to maintain themselves through advances meted out by the cannery to Chinese labor contractors in Astoria. For them, knitting provided additional income and relief from indebtedness to contractors.¹²³

As early as 1880 and through the decade, Chinese knit nets for less than half the price white fishermen charged.¹²⁴ In spite of lower labor costs, Chinese did not monopolize the task because cannery also let out twine to European American fishermen in order to trap them into a cycle of indebtedness that bound them to the company. With each advance of twine or cash against their knitting, they became obliged to fish for the cannery in the spring. If they resisted company orders during the fishing season, owners might privately chastise and publicly embarrass fishermen for the failure to repay debts incurred in knitting the nets. If moral suasion failed, owners did not hesitate to blacklist fishermen or to press law officers and courts to pursue those who absconded without paying debts incurred knitting nets.¹²⁵

The formation of fishermen's unions made the cannery more cautious about hiring Chinese to knit, but did not end the practice. In 1909 CRPA secretary George H. George wrote to the Rooster Rock cannery superintendent, "in your entry of knitting . . . you say [a net was] knit by Ah Chow, which is all right but . . . we don't want these men [non-Chinese fishermen] to know that it was knit by a chinaman [*sic*], consequently cut the reference to this out of their account." The cannery was located nearly a hundred miles up the Columbia River in territory where the organization of fishermen in unions was not yet firm. Still, the employment of Chinese had to be kept secret to avoid repercussions from the potentially contentious fishermen.¹²⁶

Chinese fishermen and knitters tried to push beyond the usual boundaries of their cannery employment, but that was possible only in Astoria where Chinese had a sizable presence. At the cannery villages, Chinese worked only in processing. Yet even in Astoria, the inability of Chinese to maintain fishing positions and the necessity of keeping their role in knitting hidden stands as testimony to the power of European American prejudice and their determination to set employment boundaries.

The Chinese were not completely at the mercy of those who might act against them; the labeling process stands as a case in point. Once the Chinese were employed regularly in canneries, they labeled and

wrapped all the cans. In 1876 a Columbia River canner began using a machine to apply glue to the labels, which led to a reduction in his Chinese labeling crew. In a backhanded compliment laced with the racial stereotypes of the time, a local reporter noted: "Apropos of the imitative genius of the Chinaman, it was curious to note how readily a heathen mastered the intricacies of this really complicated machine."¹²⁷ The growth of Astoria's European American population, more than mechanization, led cannery owners to replace Chinese labelers with "the deserving class" of local residents—the wives and daughters of fishermen and other European American residents. According to the *Daily Astorian* in 1878, these women and girls performed their duties to the "full satisfaction of their employers."¹²⁸

In the era of open immigration and a plentiful supply of Chinese, the owners had no reason to fear that denying Chinese labeling jobs would bring about any labor boycott of the plants. Consequently, throughout the 1880s and into the early 1890s they continued to hire "little girls" who "speedily and neatly place[d] upon [the cans] the proper labels, handling from 2,000 to 4,000 each per day."¹²⁹ A decade after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, however, cannery owners faced a labor scarcity in spite of the contraction of industry on the Columbia. Chinese contractors and workers took advantage of that scarcity to demand the return of labeling positions. In 1893, cannery owners responded by discharging the girls, despite the protests of some of Astoria's European Americans, and rehiring Chinese.¹³⁰ By the end of the decade, local papers reported that the Chinese again "monopolize[d]" labeling and left "very few women so engaged."¹³¹ In labeling, as in fishing and net knitting, owners at first dictated the terms of employment, but changes in the availability of Chinese enabled workers to reshape some aspects of cannery employment to their advantage.

In spite of the influence the owners exerted, the most visible source of power in laborers' lives was the contractor, whose control varied with the influence of the exclusion legislation and the particular canning locale. During the highly fluid labor market of open immigration, contractors for Astoria's relatively large canneries could not rely solely on surname or district association ties for the recruitment and control of workers, as they did in smaller, remote canneries. In Astoria, though the surnames Wong and Lum frequently appeared on lists of cannery workers, no single surname was dominant. The heavy flow of new Chinese immigrants and the reputation of cannery employment as a reasonable alternative to other jobs in the 1870s and early 1880s drew a diverse group of Chinese to Astoria. At one local cannery, a census enumerator found that 160 Chinese in one bunkhouse spoke "three

different and distinct Chinese dialects," which nearly "paralyzed the enumerator and interpreter."¹³² Each emigrant district in south China had its own dialect, and the presence of three in a single cannery indicated that contractors did not rely on surname ties in their recruitment.

Without a mutual identification based on common district origins, contractors used other means of control. Indebtedness and immigrant institutions, such as the tongs, provided two alternatives. One contractor, Ah Kow, attempted another: He tried to move into the ranks of cannery capitalists. In the late 1870s he was Astoria's only resident contractor and "the leading spirit among the Chinese." In 1878 he arranged for a ten-year lease on a waterfront lot and planned to build a wharf and cannery on the site. He postponed building the plant until after a visit to China. An inability to finance the cannery or his death in 1879 cut short his entrepreneurial aspirations.¹³³

Had Ah Kow succeeded, he might have had a greater influence over workers in his various roles as owner, contractor, and fellow countryman. Outside Astoria, only a few others attempted to take up the course of action Ah Kow had begun. In 1917 Chinese businessmen on the Monterey peninsula opened a cannery, but stiff competition and inconsistent salmon runs so far south forced them to close.¹³⁴ More frequently, Chinese with money to invest looked to prospects that required less capital than canneries, such as import-export businesses, truck gardens, laundries, or restaurants. Investments in such enterprises in cannery towns helped contractors recoup some of the wages they paid to workers and also acquire a measure of indirect control over them.¹³⁵

Ah Kow was exceptional, not only for his grand scheme, but also for his early residence in Astoria. At first, most contractors lived permanently in Portland or San Francisco and only temporarily in Astoria. Competition and mergers between the late 1880s and the early 1900s eliminated many Columbia River canneries and drove Chinese contractors out of business, encouraging those who remained to take up residence in the cannery towns in order to monitor the work more closely. CRPA records indicate a dozen or more active contractors on the lower Columbia during the 1890s, but only six survived the mergers at the turn of the century. In the smaller, postexclusion cannery town made up of families instead of seasonal laborers, contractors developed stronger ties to workers and cannery owners. Cannery owners increasingly relied on key individuals to supply crews and tried less often to play contractors one against another. Their goal was to maintain a steady source of labor. Residents of the Chinese settlement also relied more heavily on contractors to represent their interests to the Euro-

pean American community, which helped confirm the social leadership sought by the contractors.¹³⁶

Chan Ah Dogg, Astoria's premier contractor, supplied hundreds of laborers to the CRPA and other companies on the Columbia River and in Alaska.¹³⁷ Chan contracted with the CRPA for nearly four decades until the unionization of the canneries eliminated contracting just before World War II. Known to the European American community for his "honesty and reliance" and as Chinatown's unofficial "mayor" and "spirit of progress," he also possessed considerable influence in the Chinese community. He was at one point superintendent of the Chinese school in Astoria and remembered as "nearly a millionaire . . . by Chinese standards."¹³⁸

Chan and the other contractors enhanced their standing within the community by hiring family, friends, and community residents first for cannery jobs, especially off-season positions. Even the children of the Astoria Chinese families, though under age, found cannery employment through the contractors. Unlike rural California, where Chinese gardeners and tenant farmers formed the "social nuclei" of the community, in Astoria contractors stood at the center.¹³⁹

Astoria's mercantile partnerships demonstrate the networks through which contractors could exert influence. In 1924 the deputy commissioner of immigration in Seattle described these partnerships: "Perhaps twenty members pay in \$500 each. They do not work in the store, but when they want to bring in a son, they have a salary assigned to them, and they come to the store for a while to prove that they are merchants."¹⁴⁰ By the turn of the century, Chinese efforts to circumvent the exclusion policy, which allowed merchants but not laborers to enter the country, led to the establishment of so many partnerships that the *Astoria Herald*, tongue-in-cheek, opined that "there are in Astoria today about 800 Chinamen, 780 of whom claim to be merchants."¹⁴¹

U.S. Customs Service officers kept registers of the partnerships, including those in Astoria. Contributors to the Duck Lung Company partnership, three of whom were contractors, each paid in \$500 to the business. Seventeen of eighteen partners in the company shared a common surname. Thus, business and extended clan relations bound cannery laborers and contractors together, as this list of contributors reveals:¹⁴²

Wong Duck	Works in cannery at Coquille[, Oregon]
Wong Lung	In China; went last year, manager
Wong Kee	Contractor and foreman in cannery

Wong Hing	Runs employment agency
Wong Chew	Contractor and cannery boss occasionally
Wong Poon	Working in cannery at Astoria
Wong Hawk	Working in cannery at Astoria
Wong Hop	Working in cannery at Coquille
Wong Yit	Was canneryman laborer, now in Chicago
Wong She	Employed in store as porter
Wong Mo	In China—went this year—workman in cannery, Astoria
Wong Lum Lup	Gardener in Astoria
Wong Lew	Bookkeeper in store
Wong Yung Chin	Gardener in Astoria
Wong Hung Bun	Contractor and cannery boss at Astoria
Lew Ah Jun	Runs employment agency
Wong Sing	Workman in Coquille Cannery
Wong Lip	Cannery [worker], Saiuslaw[, Oregon]
S. H. Gain	Manager, Duck Lung Company [not a partner]

Chinese workers could exert pressure on contractors by invoking informal familial obligations or more formally by requesting assistance through the clan associations, but more likely such ties provided Chinese contractors with another means of control. In addition to Duck Lung Company's store, customs officials reported that the "firm owns building but leases ground. Operates the whole place—one room on ground floor devoted to fan tan game and one for lottery. Quite extensive facilities for washing and cooking. Rent rooms (about six) for about \$3.50 per month—about 15 or twenty men."¹⁴³

Duck Lung Company's combination store, casino, and boarding-house rented out rooms to cannery hands in the off-season or to young bachelors who might work only irregularly in the canneries. In spite of the more or less equal contributions to the partnerships, contractors' control of cannery employment helped them maintain an upper hand in the community. The availability of such partnerships also reveals how different the cannery towns were from bunkhouse villages.

Since the mid-1870s, Astoria consistently had offered a greater range of economic activities for workers than the remote cannery sites. Before exclusion, an ethnic economy (trade solely within the Chinese community) supported slightly less than 3 percent of the Chinese in Astoria—small businessmen, professionals, and skilled workers. Their activities in the ethnic economy also employed a small corps of clerks and helpers. The remaining Chinese enterprises in Astoria depended on European American customers for a substantial portion of their income. Laundrymen, gardeners, cooks, and domestics all relied on transactions with the larger Astoria community.¹⁴⁴

Open immigration and the canning boom did not engender stability in Astoria's ethnic and local economies. Only small Chinese crews stayed during the off-season to label and box cans, to make cans for the next season, or secretly to knit nets. Exact figures are unavailable, but local newspaper accounts suggest that Chinatown's population expanded and contracted dramatically with the canning season.¹⁴⁵ Only with great difficulty did Chinese entrepreneurs attain any year-round success in the ethnic economy. Even for those who traded with, or worked for, non-Chinese, Astoria held very little promise in the off-season. The same seasonal surges in population occurred among European Americans, making business opportunities scarce for all in the winters.¹⁴⁶

By the turn of the century, the ethnic and local economies had stabilized enough to support a core of small-scale entrepreneurs throughout the year. As a result, small businessmen, laundrymen, and gardeners survived the decline in Astoria's Chinese population far better than did any of the professional, skilled, or common-labor groups. Chinese merchants fared best between 1880 and 1910 and increased on both a numerical and proportional basis (see Appendix, Table 1). In 1880, twenty-seven merchants made up 1.3 percent of the population. By 1900, because of a larger permanent population and perhaps because of the provisions of the exclusion policies, merchants numbered thirty-one and in 1910 thirty-four, or 5.5 and 18.8 percent, respectively, of the Astoria Chinese population.¹⁴⁷

A smaller Chinese population limited growth opportunities for Chinese who catered to an ethnic economy, but the death knell to such businesses came in 1899 with the completion of the rail link between Astoria and Portland.¹⁴⁸ The rail line made the trip to Portland easy, brief, and inexpensive for Chinese in Astoria. It also made it nearly impossible for Chinese professionals and merchants to compete with those in Portland. Consequently, Astoria became a kind of satellite community of clients for Portland's Chinese. Barbers, for example, dropped in an almost direct proportion to the shrinking Chinese population in Astoria.¹⁴⁹ Skilled workers among the Chinese either moved on after 1880 or opted for employment in the canneries. Cooks and domestics nearly disappeared by 1910, in part because of a growing balance in the sex ratio in the town. In 1890 Astoria's men outnumbered its women by more than two to one (2.2 men for each woman).¹⁵⁰ In 1910 the ratio had dropped to 1.58 men for each woman.¹⁵¹ Over the same time span, Astoria's population increased dramatically from 2,803 in 1880 to 6,184 in 1890, some 8,381 in 1900, and 9,599 in 1910.¹⁵² Those increases came largely through an

influx of working-class families, a group unable to support many Chinese in service occupations.

Of the small businesses still open at the turn of the century, only truck gardening and laundries grew in proportion to the size of the community, these two occupations being supported and sustained by a larger European American population. Chinese in those occupations catering to the ethnic economy dropped from sight, with only those able to serve the larger local economy surviving.¹⁵³

As employment and business opportunities disappeared, the contractors' control of the Chinese community's capital allowed them to monopolize the surviving stores. Some they ran themselves; others they financed. They also maintained their positions, much like merchants in other urban centers, through easy access to the West's Chinese communities and even China. Contractor Jew Mock (Chew Mock) commuted between Astoria and San Francisco and later Oakland, to be near the canneries and workers with whom he contracted during the season, but during the remainder of the season he lived nearer his California enterprises.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, CRPA contractor Chan Ah Dogg traveled between Astoria and China, sometimes taking his family with him. His trips to China involved more than visiting relatives, for he was said to have business "interests" there. His ability to reinvest in China boosted his status among Chinese in Astoria, and his journeys gave him a special conduit to laborers' villages and families.¹⁵⁵ In spite of shrinking opportunities and the increasing power of contractors in the town, workers continued to prefer Astoria jobs to those in bunkhouse villages, for the cannery town offered them a much richer experience.

The Chinese settlement in New Westminster, British Columbia, closely rivaled Astoria in what it offered Chinese residents as a cannery town. It had become the center of Fraser River canning in much the same fashion as Astoria had become the key point on the Columbia: Early canners put their plants in an area they felt most conducive to fishing. New Westminster, in 1884, had British Columbia's second largest Chinese community. With 1,680 Chinese residents, only 87 fewer than Victoria, New Westminster came to be known as *Erbu*, or "second port," among Canada's Chinese. Victoria was *Dabu*, or "premier port."¹⁵⁶

New Westminster was a cannery town, but it had a much broader economic base than Astoria. Chinese employment patterns reflected that diversity. New Westminster's Chinese relied heavily, but not exclusively, on the canneries for employment. Cannery workers represented 31.4 percent of the unskilled, semiskilled, and service laborers within

the community and 23.2 percent of the town's entire Chinese population (see Appendix, Table 2). Farm workers accounted for 32.2 percent of laborers and 23.8 percent of the total; sawmill workers for 15.3 percent and 11.3 percent, respectively; and ditch diggers for 12.6 percent and 9.3 percent, respectively.¹⁵⁷

The nature of the Fraser River salmon runs also contributed to the town's relatively small proportion of cannery workers. The plants relied primarily on Sockeye salmon, which ran on a four-year cycle. The runs peaked in the fourth year, were smallest in the third, and were only slightly larger than the third in the other two years. Moreover, the runs were very brief, with the heaviest period lasting only several weeks. Chinese employment reflected that variability. For example, in the large 1897 run, one Fraser River cannery ran from April to June with forty-five Chinese. During these three months, they canned salmon for an average of seventeen days out of the twenty-six possible days each month. In July, 155 men worked an average of 16 days, and in August, 159 men averaged 23.25 days each. Presumably, the run began in the second week of July and continued through most of August. In September, the canner discharged 106 laborers, and the remaining 53 logged an average of 20 days each. That season, workers put up 39,131 cases of salmon, or 4.1 cases each per day.¹⁵⁸

In 1900, the smallest run in the four-year cycle, the same cannery employed only twelve Chinese in April for 2 days; thirty in May for 21.5 days; thirty in June for 9.5 days; sixty-three in July for 6 days; eighty-five in August for 16 days; and none in September. For 1900, the cannery produced only 6,105 cases, or 2.67 cases per person per day. Even with a smaller crew than in 1897, the contractor had overstaffed the plant. Such fluctuations occurred regularly on the Fraser River, but cannery workers could not predict the runs with any accuracy beyond the knowledge of a "big year" every fourth canning season.¹⁵⁹

Although the size of canning crews varied from month to month and year to year, a small core of Chinese "regulars" returned annually. Others came in only at peak times from Victoria or Vancouver, as well as New Westminster. Members of supplemental crews saw their jobs as short-term and relatively high paying. A great many others preferred more regular employment in the coal mines, sawmills, and agricultural fields.¹⁶⁰

By 1900, New Westminster still had canneries, but the locus of Chinese activities in the industry had shifted to Vancouver because the latter had surpassed Victoria as the province's major port, and it offered Chinese a relatively large range of job possibilities. As of 1902, the Vancouver community, with 2,053 Chinese, had outstripped that

of New Westminster, which had dwindled to 748.¹⁶¹ Despite the six canneries still operating in New Westminster, Vancouver became the major supplier of cannery labor. In 1902, Lee Cheong, president of the Victoria Chinese Benevolent Association, enumerated 551 Chinese cannery laborers in Vancouver, or 26.8 percent of the community—about the same proportion as in New Westminster during 1884.¹⁶² Cannery work never became as important a source of livelihood in New Westminster or Vancouver as it was in Astoria.

Small-Town Canneries

Astoria and New Westminster, in terms of Chinese labor, were the most significant nineteenth-century cannery towns on the Pacific Coast, yet other settlements also housed many Chinese cannery hands. Chinese workers at the small towns with canneries had economic and social opportunities more akin to those at bunkhouse village settings than those at cannery towns. Still, several canneries stood near sizable Chinese settlements, like that at The Dalles, Oregon. During the 1880s, up to four canneries operated near The Dalles, about 180 miles from the mouth of the Columbia River. In the 1890s, they were consolidated into a single cannery only three miles from the town. The town's location near the rapids of the Columbia, which prevented further navigation upstream, made it the major shipping point for rail and river traffic through the Columbia River gorge. Transportation, not canning, formed the base of the local economy.¹⁶³

The Dalles, in 1880, had 2,232 residents; by 1910, its population had nearly doubled to 4,880. The figures for Chinese in the town do not reflect that trend. In 1880, railroads employed about seven hundred Chinese, or 65 percent of those in Wasco County, where The Dalles is located.¹⁶⁴ The 1890 census identifies only 205 Chinese in the county.¹⁶⁵ The end of railroad construction, as well as the reduced size of the county after the state redrew its boundaries, accounted for some of the drop. In 1900 only 138 Chinese lived in the county, and by 1910, their number was down to 93.¹⁶⁶ While the Chinese population in the county declined steadily, in The Dalles it fluctuated. In 1880, for example, 116 Chinese lived in the town, but only 79 did so in 1890. As of 1900, the number had climbed to 109; then it fell to 77 in 1910 (see Appendix, Table 3). Although the timing of the census enumeration explains some of the swings, seasonal employment opportunities in eastern Oregon's mines and agriculture were also a factor.¹⁶⁷

In the nineteenth century, The Dalles's Chinese depended on jobs in the railroad-based economy, but the end of railroad construction

forced them to rely on employment that catered to the European American community. The completion of the railroads not only spelled unemployment for construction crews but also reduced jobs for laundrymen and cooks who had relied on those workers' patronage. Some jobs remained for section hands, and for a time, an economy less dependent solely on railroads prolonged the life of the Chinese settlement. The Dalles had a small Chinese community that provided greater opportunities than the bunkhouse villages but nothing approaching the social, political, and economic complexity of Astoria.¹⁶⁸

A decline in railroad work by Chinese contributed to the shrinkage in the Chinese population of The Dalles. The expansion of production in the Seufert Brothers Cannery, however, led to an increase in the number of Chinese employed there, from fifteen in 1900 to thirty-one in 1910. The 1910 crew represented 40 percent of the Chinese in the greater area of The Dalles.¹⁶⁹ The distance from the cannery to the town did not hinder workers' access to the community, for unlike the situation on the lower Columbia, road and rail connections between the cannery and town made transportation easy. Chinese found it possible to enter The Dalles and patronize Chinese businesses if they so desired.

Easy rail access from the cannery to Portland, as well as The Dalles, made it possible for the contractor to earn profits from activities usually intended for cannery hands. At the Seufert Brothers' plant, the Chinese foreman and several workers took control of the garden. Francis, the son of one Seufert brother, commented that

the Company never said anything about a China boss who kept one or two cannery Chinamen busy in the garden. . . . [F]rom about July on, the China boss would ship several hundred pounds of Chinese vegetables by express to Portland six days a week. Whatever the China boss received for these vegetables was none of the Company's business. This was just one of the sidelines the China cannery foreman had going for himself.¹⁷⁰

The cannery garden became the contractor's and foreman's truck garden, not a place for supplementing the workers' fare and evoking remembrances of home. Competition with the contractors' garden might also have accounted for the decline, from ten to two, in The Dalles's Chinese truck gardeners between 1900 and 1910.¹⁷¹

The "China boss" controlled other sales in the local market. Francis noted: "When the Indians wanted salmon heads they went to the China boss and bought as many as they wanted for 50 cents a sack."¹⁷² Extra income and gardening activities in the bunkhouse villages, in contrast, were too insignificant to attract contractors or foremen. In

cannery towns, they fell to specialists, but wherever possible, the contractor or foreman took over the enterprises if any sizable profits could be had.

At Ilwaco, Washington, across the Columbia River from Astoria, the establishment of a small cannery in the first decade of the twentieth century created employment for approximately two dozen Chinese. In the last decade of the nineteenth century the town had five hundred to six hundred residents, but no Chinese appeared in the census until 1900. In that year, ten Chinese immigrants lived in Ilwaco: a domestic servant for a farmer, a saloon worker, a cook for a boardinghouse, two laundrymen, and five gardeners.¹⁷³ As in many of the West's numerous small towns, they relied on the service sector for their employment. By 1910, thirty-one Chinese—including twenty cannery hands, a cannery foreman with his wife and four children, a laundryman, and four truck gardeners—lived in the town. The market for fresh vegetables kept several Chinese in business, but gardening did not attract the contractor's attention as it did in The Dalles.¹⁷⁴

Ilwaco cannery workers remained separate and had infrequent contact with other Chinese in the town. According to the contractor's son, the Chinese did not "go into town for a show," and only one of them went weekly to pick up the mail for the entire crew. For diversion they cared for the cannery garden, talked among themselves, read newspapers, played cards, and some took "a puff, couple puff of the opium pipe," or made "their own [whiskey,] but mostly for cooking or a little for themselves." On rare occasions, several workers rowed the four miles across the Columbia to the Astoria Chinatown.¹⁷⁵ Only the possibility of travel to Astoria set these Ilwaco cannery hands apart from those in bunkhouse villages.

In other plants near small towns where income from gardening did not prove great enough to attract contractors or truck gardeners, cannery workers occasionally profited. At Cathlamet, Washington, which had a permanent population of three hundred to five hundred and an average of two dozen Chinese at the cannery each season in the first decade of the twentieth century, one man, known only as "China Jim," worked in the local cannery and moonlighted as a gardener and day laborer. China Jim fertilized his garden with manure from the stables in town and, according to local accounts, brought his "produce to town . . . suspended from a yoke on his shoulders."¹⁷⁶ China Jim gained a degree of celebrity status among Cathlamet residents. He helped them with their own gardens in addition to selling his goods, but most of all, his generous supply of lichee nuts and candy and his passion for flying kites made him immensely popular with local chil-

dren. China Jim also made his mark by consistently interacting with local European American residents. Although he stayed in Cathlamet only a few years and locals are not certain where he went, China Jim remains in the town's historical annals as "ambitious, friendly, and polite," a far different collective memory of the Chinese immigrant than is to be found in most small towns with nearby canneries.¹⁷⁷

Despite the favorable memories that Cathlamet residents had for China Jim, the town's small European American population supported few Chinese outside the cannery. As of 1900, it had only a single truck gardener and five cooks in logging camps or private homes.¹⁷⁸ The population did not increase much in the first decade of the twentieth century, and in 1910, only 352 people resided in Cathlamet.¹⁷⁹

While Cathlamet's early twentieth-century residents accorded China Jim special status, during the nineteenth century they had tried hard to segregate the few Chinese in their community. Their efforts were reflected in the structure of the cannery bunkhouse. "There was a high board wall around what can only be described as [the] courtyard" of the bunkhouse, explained a long-time Cathlamet resident. "This protective wall was due to early violence on the Columbia River against the Chinese." The remainder of the bunkhouse was "almost windowless," another attempt to prevent harm to workers.¹⁸⁰ Cathlamet's physical barriers hemmed in Chinese residents, just as the clear, though informal, boundaries did in Astoria.

The development of southeast Alaska's fishery, mining, and timber industries contributed to the growth of small towns populated by European Americans. At the turn of the century, the village at Loring, Alaska, consisted of several hundred "permanent" residents. In addition to a cannery, the town also had a trading post, a sawmill, and two fish-oil processing plants. Loring's employees lived at the cannery but could go into the town.¹⁸¹

Contact between Chinese and Native American residents in Alaska was similar to such interactions in other regions. While Chinese at The Dalles sold fish heads to Native Americans, Chinese in Alaska sold *Sam Shu*, "Chinese gin," at inflated prices to Native Alaskans, other local residents, and the non-Chinese cannery laborers. The beverage, which in San Francisco cost 90 cents a gallon, sold for \$8 a gallon in Alaska, in part because it was illegal in the territory. Some of the gin trade was on a small scale and carried out by individuals. With a relative lack of enforcement of the prohibition statute, large-scale sales also took place, and just as in the states when an enterprise promised substantial gains, contractors probably took control of it.¹⁸²

Of the Alaska canneries, those in Ketchikan held the greatest opportunities for Chinese. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the town had more than a thousand residents and several sawmills and canneries. While Ketchikan bore a resemblance to the cannery towns, it had no Chinese community. Instead, by 1910, it had a small Asian population of three Chinese, nineteen Japanese, and two Filipinos. While the level of interaction among these Asians, who worked as cooks, laundrymen, and common laborers, remains unknown, chances for Chinese to meet other Asians existed at Ketchikan, something not available at places like Loring. Wrangell and Juneau also had small Asian populations. These clusters of Asians further reduced the relative isolation for Chinese at nearby southeast Alaska canneries. Those Asian populations were very small, usually only a handful of households, and had nothing akin to the complex Asian American social and cultural milieu available to Chinese in the cannery towns of Astoria and New Westminster.¹⁸³

Industrywide, Chinese formed social units that reflected the setting in which they toiled. At the bunkhouse villages, the isolation, the cannery structures, the owners' cost-cutting strategies, and workers' positions as "bachelor" laborers gave Chinese few materials with which to work. They fashioned relationships among themselves in those bunkhouses and gardens, or at the water's edge that reflected familiar patterns. In the several cannery towns along the coast, by contrast, their actions did not center so heavily on the cannery. They did have to contend with contractors who sought to establish themselves as the social nuclei of the communities, but on the whole they found fewer restrictions in their social and economic activities than they did at the bunkhouse villages. Life in the cannery towns was richer, but no less challenging, since Chinese also faced larger and often hostile European American populations. Between the two extremes were the canneries on the social and economic periphery of small towns. There, contractors' control and workers' opportunities varied. Of the three cannery settings, this was perhaps the most difficult. Workers had no real opportunities outside the control of the contractors or foremen, and they still came into contact with potentially hostile local populations. Yet a few, like China Jim, managed to survive. In the West's urban oases and in a seasonal, extractive industry, Chinese adapted and survived by fabricating communities out of their immigrant work experiences.