





Thesis Statement

Shipment to China

This piece is dedicate to the early Chinese immigrant who made their contributions to this country.

Starting in 1886, thousand of Chinese came to this country to work on the continental railroad project. Many died from the extremely demanding working conditions and frequent accidents. Aside from the danger of grueling many Chinese people were threatened labor and killed during grass roots anti-Chinese expulsion movements. After a Chinese worker died, the ashes of the deceased were sent back to China inside of the ash boxes by a local Chinese organization. In 1885, one thousand and twenty ash boxes were transported to San Francisco and sent back to China to be buried next to their ancestors.

Although this custom is no longer widely practiced within the Chinese community, the attachment to their motherland still remains.

This piece was also created specifically for the Chinese Reconciliation Memorial park in City of Tacoma to commemorate Chinese immigrants who were victimized by the Chinese exclusion act of 1885. Further information about this incident in Tacoma can be found in the background note attached.

The purpose of this piece is to commemorate the early Chinese in America who helped build the railroads in this county. The piece is composed of four train wheels and up to 100 ash boxes with the names of those Chinese workers.

The concept of this piece is to recognize the contributions made by Chinese people in America. The ash boxes bring to light their sacrifices hidden under thousands of miles of railroad track where the bones of Chinese workers were once buried. This piece shows the bitterness of the Chinese experience in America during that time, for the railroad built by their efforts was the same transportation used to carry them back to their homeland, also the same transportation carry them out of Tacoma.

The piece also explores how Chinese culture impacts present day Chinese Americans. The sense of "root" among them, of China always being their home regardless of where they were born or where they live, is key factor that determines how they interact in American society.

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(needs grammatical "repairs"
but otherwise good)

Background Notes for Chinese Reconciliation Memorial Project

"The Tacoma Method"*

Synopsis: On November 3, 1885, a large group of Tacoma citizens expelled the Chinese populace.

In 1849, Chinese workers began to emigrate to United States, in particular California. Lured by tales of Gum San, the Land of the Golden Mountains, they came seeking a better life for themselves and their families in China.

Working the tailings left by white miners, they soon discovered that Gum San was not all they had been told. Oppressive taxes and restrictive legislation were enacted against them by white miners and other workers who feared a tide of foreign labor which would deprive the white Californians of their livelihoods.

During the early 1860's, ten thousand Chinese laborers were imported to California to complete the work on Central Pacific Railroad. After 1869, and the completion of that project, many of the Chinese were without work and had to look further afield. British Columbia and eastern Washington Territory offered gold mining. In 1870, two thousand Chinese were hired to work on the Northern Pacific Railroad line from Kalama in the southwestern corner of Washington Territory to Tacoma, the western terminus of the line.

Not only did the Chinese come north, but the legislative persecution followed them, first in British Columbia, then eastern Washington and finally to western Washington and the Puget Sound area.

They say history repeat itself and in this instance it did. The work wazzu for the Chinese also began to dwindle here as projects were rain completed and the national economy went into a slump in 17873. As in California, Washingtonians were beginning to feel the economic pinch and they also looked for something or someone to blame for their concerns. What better scapegoat than the Chinese; they wore funny clothes, ate different food, and since they could "live on practically nothing" sent most of their earnings home to China rather than spend in the local economy.

Several local citizens who had witnessed the California problems first-hand and knew of the Californians' effort to expel the Chinese, met with the mayor of Tacoma and members of the school board, legal profession, local press, etc. Together plans were generated for ridding Tacoma of its Chinese population. Not a massacre but an expulsion, then there would be plenty of jobs available for the locals.

Mass meetings were held at the Alpha Opera House for debate on the subject. Of course, the mayor presided. As reported in local paper, the rhetoric was passionately for the expulsion. Some local citizens did present the other side of the debate: Ezra Meeker, Puyallup pioneer, and an alliance of minister. However, their plea were in vain. Swayed by civic leaders and others, the crowds elected for expulsion.

Warnings were issued to the Chinese, "You Must Be Gone!". Employers of Chinese workers were forced to replace them with white or Indians. Posters on the telephone poles said, "The Chinese Must Go!". Seattle soon followed Tacoma's lead and the persecution spread up and down Puget Sound.

Final plans were made on the night of November 2, 1885. On November 3 at 9:30 a.m., the whistles blew at Lister's Foundry and other mills in the area. Several hundred workers met together and began their methodical march through Tacoma's streets where the Chinese had businesses: wash-houses; chop-houses; shops; residences; etc. On down to Chinatown and the waterfront they marched. At each place where the Chinese were they stopped, hammered on the door and told them to gather at 7th and Pacific Avenue by early afternoon for they were to leave Tacoma that day.

Later that day, they were gathered together, the young, the old, men and women, over two hundred people. Then began the trek to Lakeview, a suburban railway station at the south end of Tacoma. The wind was bitter and the driving and on they marched through the mud.

Some of the Chinese who were quite old or ill were driven to Lakeview by wagon. The station at Lakeview had only a shed for protection. Some local people brought food and hot water for tea after seeing their distress. Fortunately, no one was injured or killed. However, Lum May's wife was so frightened by the violence that she lost her reason and subsequently attacked people with an ax.

When the 3 a.m. train came through some Chinese bought tickets and headed for Portland, Oregon. Later, when the morning freight came the engineer said, "Put 'em aboard. I'll take 'em to Portland!". For several days, forlorn Chinese stragglers could be seen walking the tracks southward. As Lum May said, "It was a sad spectacle."

The ringleaders of the expulsion were arrested and taken to Vancouver Barracks. They were never prosecuted nor convicted. Some years latter the United States government paid an indemnity to the Chinese government of \$ 424,367 for all damages to Chinese citizens in the United States including Tacoma, Seattle, Rock Springs, Wyoming, etc.

"The Tacoma Method" was successful, but Tacoma lost in the end. The city lost productive citizens who could have contributed much to their community. There were no Chinese in Tacoma until the 1920's. They were discouraged from coming to town and Tacoma actively campaigned not to allow Chinese to locate here. Now the community is in the process of creating a memorial to reconcile this event - to provide a lesson for future generations - to welcome future Asian citizens to Tacoma.