

THE AH YEN FAMILY

Early Spokane Pioneers:
1872-1920

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MEET THE AH YEN FAMILY



Sue
Ah Yen
b.1853
China



Tom Que
Ah Yen
b.1865
Placer County, CA



Chew Gum (Nina)
Ah Yen
b. 1893
Spokane, WA



Meho (Ruby)
Ah Yen
b. 1895
Spokane WA



SUE AH YEN

Family History

Sue Ah Yen, Husband and Father

Born 11/2/1853 in Canton, China

Immigrated to America from China in September 1872 through the Port of San Francisco.

Moved to Rathdrum, Idaho in 1872 and then Spokane in 1878.

Married Tom Que Ah Yen who was from California. They honeymooned in China and then returned to Spokane, WA.

Opened Import Market on Front Street selling Chinese and Japanese goods, specifically silk.

He was described in the Spokesman-Review in 1902 as “one of the most conspicuous Chinese merchants in Spokane.”

Spokane Pioneer: He participated in a 1904 city-wide parade riding in a carriage with fellow Spokane pioneers James Glover and others.

Form 431
 Reproduced at the National Archives at Seattle
 APPLICATION OF LAWFULLY DOMICILED CHINESE MERCHANT, TEACHER, OR STUDENT, FOR PREINVESTIGATION OF STATUS (ORIGINAL)
 Department of Commerce and Labor
 IMMIGRATION SERVICE
 Office of Immigrant Inspector,
 Port of Spokane, Washington
 July 15, 1918, 191

To A. F. Richardson,
 Chinese and Immigrant Inspector
 Spokane, Washington.

Sir: It being my intention to leave the United States on a temporary visit abroad, and to depart and return through the Chinese port of entry of Seattle, Washington, I hereby apply, under the provisions of Rule 15 of the Regulations of the Department of Commerce and Labor, for preinvestigation of my claimed status as a lawfully domiciled Merchant.

I submit herewith the names of two (or more) "credible witnesses other than Chinese" who can testify of their own knowledge that for at least one year immediately preceding the date of this application I have been engaged in the occupation of a merchant, and have not performed any manual labor except such as was necessary in the conduct of my said occupation. I am prepared to appear personally and to produce before you at such time and place as you may designate the said witnesses and (if a merchant) the partnership or other books of the firm in which I claim membership.

The names and addresses of my witnesses are:
 A. H. Canyon, 323 Old National Bank Bldg.
 W. H. Ziegler, 413 Ziegler Bldg.
 TO BE FILLED OUT IF MERCHANT

The firm in which I claim membership is known as G. S. Fong
 Address No. 211 Trent Ave. Spokane, State Washington
 My partners in said business are as set forth in the partnership list of our firm filed at this time.
 (Previously ran the Sing Fat Co., for many years)

My interest therein amounts to \$500.00 and was acquired in January, 1918.
 It is not my intention to dispose of such interest while absent from the United States. During the entire year last past I have performed no manual labor other than that necessary to the conduct of the said mercantile business.
 TO BE FILLED OUT IF TEACHER OR STUDENT

I have been engaged during the entire year last past in the occupation of teaching or studying (name branches taught or studied) _____

at the following place or places _____
 and during the said time have not engaged in the performance of manual labor.

Signature in Chinese 蘇亞燕 Sue Ah Yen
 Signature in English _____
 Address 211 Trent Ave., Spokane, Wash.
 Height five feet four inches
 Physical marks or peculiarities Pit on left cheek bone;
 brown spots on right side face.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 15th day of July, 1918.
 A. F. Richardson
 Chinese and Immigrant Inspector.

Respectfully forwarded to _____
 COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRATION or INSPECTOR IN CHARGE, Port of Seattle, Washington
 accompanied by triplicate hereof, transcripts of testimony and report, in accordance with Rule 15.
 NO. 23100/773
 SEATTLE, WASH.
 AUG 2 1918
 John H. Sargent
 Commissioner of Investigation or Inspector



TOM QUE AH YEN



Family History:

Tom Que Ah Yen, Wife and Mother

Born 1865 in Placer County, California

Citizenship Since Tom Que was born in Placer County, CA, she was an American citizen. She lost her citizenship when she married Sue Ah Yen.

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 meant that neither Tom Que nor Sue were eligible to become United States naturalized citizens.

Much of what we know about Tom Que comes from a Spokesman-Review article titled *Are the Women of China Happier Than Their American Cousins?* written on October 7, 1905, in the Spokane Chronicle.

Settled in Spokane after her marriage to Sue Ah Yen and spending three years in China. She had four children.

When asked in the Spokane Chronicle 1905 article if she and other Chinese women were as happy as American women, with her daughter Chew Gum interpreting, she answered, “Yes-and happier”. She commented that the Chinese clothing was more comfortable than what American women wear.

and slender, about three inches long and two wide, and exactly matching the belt colors. ... games. They play that they are birds going south for the winter, that they do something. "The kindergarten is very necessary. ... is by far the largest in the history of the school, and an excess of 50 pupils

ARE THE WOMEN OF CHINA HAPPIER THAN THEIR AMERICAN COUSINS?

Are Chinese women of today as happy as American women?
"Yes—and happier."
That's the startling answer of a Spokane woman who ought to know—Mrs. Ah Yen, wife of Sue Ah Yen, who for years has been one of the most prominent and most respected merchants of Spokane's Chinatown.
Nor is Mrs. Ah Yen an ultra conservative who would cling to the traditions of the past, right or wrong. On the contrary she asserts that many of the customs in China which have been looked down upon by other nations for a long time, are being rapidly changed and that China is fast becoming more and more modernized. She says that many reforms are continually taking place and that China will within a few years seem like a different country.

She Was Born in America.

Mrs. Ah Yen, who was Miss Tom Que before she married the Spokane pioneer Chinaman, was born in Placer county, California. When she was about 20 years old, she became the bride of Sue Ah Yen and the two went to China for their honeymoon. Mr. Ah Yen had to return to his business in Spokane and Mrs. Ah Yen remained at his home in Canton for about three years before joining her husband here.

During these three years, Mrs. Ah Yen had opportunity to learn the customs of the land where her ancestors lived and when she returned to the land of her birth, and came to her new home in Spokane, she was able to make comparisons between the Americans and Chinese.

A Chronicle reporter called at the store on Front avenue where Mr. and Mrs. Ah Yen and their two bright and happy daughters, Chew Gum and Meho, live and wished to have an interview with the lady of the house; but Mrs. Ah Yen declined to be questioned directly and it was through the efforts of Chew Gum, that he was able to have a talk with her.

Little Chew Gum is about 12 years old and attends the public schools here. She is now in the fifth grade and is as bright or brighter than the ordinary American girl of her age. The American girls might not like to hear that,



MRS. AH YEN
A Pioneer of Spokane

but there are few girls who know as much about the management of a store, such as the one owned by Mr. Ah Yen, as does Chew Gum. She is bright and quick and knows the details of managing a successful business, and she has learned this at the same time she has been learning to read and write the English language in an American school.

Hint for American Women.

She was an admirable interpreter. Mrs. Ah Yen was asked if the Chinese women of today are as happy in their life as American women are in theirs.

"Yes, and happier," was Chew Gum's reply after she had repeated the question to her mother.

"What customs do the Chinese women have which would be of benefit for the Americans to follow?" was asked.

Chew Gum spoke to her mother and then repeated the answer.

"They do not lace—they gain more comfort in the way they dress."

It is possible some American women are in position to realize the truth of the answer.

Mrs. Ah Yen was asked if the Chinese customs would be changing rapidly in the future.

"They are changing now," was the reply. She said the women there have stopped the custom of binding the feet and that many others of the old customs had vanished. She said that within 50 years the Chinese women will enjoy the same privileges as the American women enjoy today. She added that the women across the sea are anxious to learn better ways of living and desire better educational opportunities.

Wife of a Pioneer.

Ah Yen is a pioneer here. He came to Rathdrum, Idaho, in 1872 and settled in Spokane in '78 after his return from China at the time of his wedding. He conducts a Chinese and Japanese bazar and likes Spokane, the town where he has made his home for so many years. He is proud of his two daughters, as well he may be, for they are the kind that bring happiness and pleasure to a home.

TOM QUE AH YEN CERTIFICATE OF RESIDENCE

No. 55323

ORIGINAL.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. Certificate of Residence.

20/6
1892

Issued to Chinese Person other than laborer., under the Provisions of the Act of May 5, 1892.

This is to Certify THAT Mrs Su Yew, a Chinese Person other than laborer., now residing at Spokane Wash. has made application No. 9223 to me for a Certificate of Residence, under the provisions of the Act of Congress approved May 5, 1892, and I certify that it appears from the affidavits of witnesses submitted with said application that said Mrs Su Yew was within the limits of the United States at the time of the passage of said Act, and was then residing at Spokane Wash. and that he was at that time lawfully entitled to remain in the United States, and that the following is a descriptive list of said Chinese Person other than laborer.

NAME: Mrs Su Yew viz.: AGE: 29 Years
LOCAL RESIDENCE: 107 Howard St
OCCUPATION: Wife of Merchant HEIGHT: 4 feet 10 in COLOR OF EYES: Brown
COMPLEXION: Light PHYSICAL MARKS OR PECULIARITIES FOR IDENTIFICATION: Face poorly marked



And as a further means of identification, I have affixed hereto a photographic likeness of said Mrs Su Yew

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND AND SEAL this 3rd day of May, 1892, at Portland, State of Oregon.

Andrew Jackson
Collector of Internal Revenue,
District of Oregon.

2-1498

THREE DAUGHTERS AND ONE SON

Gum Sing (Lena) Ah Yen born in Rathdrum, ID in 1883

Hong Loi Ah Yen born in Spokane, WA 1891

Chew Gum (Nina) Ah Yen born in Spokane, WA 1893

Meho (Ruby) Ah Yen born in Spokane, WA 1895

- Went to public school.
- Fluent Chinese and English speakers. They often translated for their parents.
- Featured in Spokane newspapers, both positively, but also in derogatory, un-kind terms.

Why do you think they had both a Chinese name and an American name?



Chew Gum (Nina)



Meho (Ruby)

AH YEN DENIES.

The Woman's Protective Association
Accuses a Chinaman.

A startling communication from the secretary of the Woman's Protective association was received by Mayor Belt this morning. It calls attention to a number of children who, it is claimed, are not attending school this year and did not attend more than three months last year. The mayor is urged to see that the school law is enforced.

Attention is called especially to the little 11-year-old daughter of Ah Yen, a prosperous Chinese merchant living on Howard street. The complaint declares that she does not attend school, and also makes the startling charge that her father has offered to sell her to another Chinaman for \$400.

Ah Yen was seen by a CHRONICLE reporter and said:

"The ladies have mixed up the wrong parties. There was a case a short time ago where one of my countrymen married a Chinese woman according to American laws and paid \$600 to her former guardian for her release. It is a Chinese custom for the groom to pay a bounty to the parents of his bride. The statement that I have offered my child to anyone is not true. She isn't old enough to be married yet."

"How about sending her to school?"

"She never wanted to go to school, being afraid of the rough boys. We have taught her at home, both in Chinese and English, and intend to hire an American teacher for her before long."

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE FAMILY

- Ah Yen and other Asian immigrants could not legally own property.
- International travel was arduous because of the application process that arose from the 1882 Chinese Exclusion act. Sue and Tom Que had to apply for permission to leave or re-enter the United States, which involved interviews and attestations.
- The family members were seen as a curiosity within the community. Chinese customs were misunderstood. Ah Yen had to clarify and explain Chinese customs.
- Derogatory, un-kind, and prejudiced language was often used to describe the family and other Asian residents in the Spokane newspapers.
- They were targeted for criminal acts such as allegations that their daughter did not show up to school. There were accusations that they were planning on selling their daughter.

Spokane Chronicle
Saturday, October 6, 1894

AH YEN FAMILY SUCCESSES

- Sue Ah Yen was a successful businessman. His oldest daughter took over the business.
- Ah Yen appeared to have friends and acquaintances in law enforcement, finance, and the legal profession. Those community leaders saw Sue Ah Yen as a leader in the Asian community of Spokane and would consult with him when they wanted to understand or know more about his community's perspectives. Ah Yen often had to inform these city leaders about Chinese customs.
- The opportunities that the Ah Yen family did have were rooted within social realms in which Chinese Americans were allowed to operate such as imports and exports. Unfortunately, many other Asian community members, such as common laborers were not given these same respect or opportunities as businessmen such as Ah Yen.






Tea Tin c1890 imported from China.

Joel E. Ferris Research Archives, Lotus Block on Front Street and Howard, 1908, L87-1.439, Ah Yen's Market was also located on Front Street in Spokane





HOW DO MUSEUMS AND HISTORIANS KNOW WHAT WE KNOW?

- Primary Sources: Photos, Documents, Oral Histories, Diaries, and Objects
 - Secondary Sources: Books and Articles
 - Take a look at these objects, photos, and documents from over 100 years ago. What can we learn from them?
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THANK YOU

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HISTORIANS STUDY OBJECTS, THE MATERIAL CULTURE THAT PEOPLE FROM THE PAST LEFT BEHIND, IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND HISTORY. OBJECTS ARE THE PRODUCTS OF HUMAN WORKMANSHIP - OF HUMAN THOUGHT AND EFFORT - OBJECTS TELL SOMETHING ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO DESIGNED, MADE, AND USED THEM.

WHAT QUESTIONS DO HISTORIANS ASK THEMSELVES WHEN THEY ANALYZE OBJECTS?

- **FIRST IMPRESSIONS: WHAT ARE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THIS OBJECT? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS WHAT THE OBJECT MIGHT HAVE BEEN USED FOR?**
 - **A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PHYSICAL FEATURES: WHAT IS IT MADE OF? WHY WAS THIS MATERIAL CHOSEN? WHAT IS THE TEXTURE AND COLOR? WHAT DOES IT SMELL LIKE? CAN IT BE HELD? IS IT HEAVY OR LIGHT? IS IT INTACT, OR DOES IT LOOK LIKE PARTS ARE MISSING? DOES IT LOOK NEW OR OLD?**
 - **CONSTRUCTION: IS IT HANDMADE OR MADE BY MACHINE? WHERE WAS IT MADE? WHO MADE IT?**
 - **FUNCTION: HOW IS THIS OBJECT USED? DOES IT HAVE A PRACTICAL USE OR IS (WAS) IT USED FOR PLEASURE? HAS IT BEEN USED? IS IT STILL IN USE? HAS THE USE CHANGED? WHERE COULD IT HAVE BEEN FOUND? WHAT VALUE DOES IT HOLD TO YOU AND TO OTHERS?**
 - **DESIGN: IS IT DESIGNED WELL? IS IT DECORATED? HOW IS IT DECORATED? IS IT AESTHETICALLY PLEASING? WOULD IT MAKE A GOOD GIFT? DOES IT REMIND YOU OF ANYTHING ELSE?**
 - **WHO MAY BE CONNECTED WITH THE OBJECT? WHAT TYPE OF PERSON MIGHT HAVE USED THIS OBJECT? WHAT TYPE OF PERSON MIGHT HAVE MADE THIS OBJECT? WHAT DOES THIS OBJECT TELL US ABOUT THE MAKER AND USER?**
 - **THINKING FURTHER: IS THIS TYPE OF OBJECT STILL BEING MADE TODAY? IS IT STILL IN USE? IF NOT, WHY DO YOU THINK IT ISN'T USED TODAY? SHOULD THIS OBJECT BE IN A MUSEUM COLLECTION? WHY OR WHY NOT? WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE OBJECT THAT YOU CAN'T ANSWER FROM JUST LOOKING AT IT?**
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PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDE US WITH IMAGES OF PAST EVENTS. TODAY, HISTORIANS STUDY THE CONTENT AND MEANING OF THESE VISUAL IMAGES TO LOCATE INFORMATION ABOUT A PARTICULAR TOPIC, TIME, OR EVENT. PHOTOGRAPHS CAN CONVEY COUNTLESS DETAILS ABOUT LIFE. FOR HISTORIANS AND FOR US, “A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS.”

PHOTOGRAPHERS CAN MANIPULATE, INTENTIONALLY OR UNINTENTIONALLY, THE RECORD OF THE EVENT. IT IS THE PHOTOGRAPHER – AND THE CAMERA’S FRAME – THAT DEFINES THE PICTURE’S CONTENT. THUS, THE PHOTOGRAPHER CHOOSES WHAT WILL BE IN THE PICTURE, WHAT WILL BE LEFT OUT, AND WHAT THE EMPHASIS WILL BE. WHEN ANALYZING PHOTOGRAPHS, ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- **TAKE A CLOSER LOOK: MAKE SURE TO EXAMINE THE WHOLE PHOTOGRAPH. MAKE A LIST OF ANY PEOPLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH. WHAT IS HAPPENING?**
 - **LOOKING MORE CLOSELY: ARE THERE ANY CAPTIONS? A DATE? LOCATION? NAMES OF PEOPLE? WHAT KIND OF CLOTHING IS WORN? ARE THERE ANY WORDS ON SIGNS OR BUILDINGS?**
 - **THINKING FURTHER: IF PEOPLE ARE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH, WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ONE ANOTHER? CAN YOU SPECULATE ON A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PEOPLE PICTURED AND SOMEONE WHO IS NOT IN THE PICTURE?**
 - **WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED BEFORE AND AFTER THE PHOTO WAS TAKEN? WHO DO YOU THINK TOOK THE PHOTO AND WHY?**
 - **WHAT DOES THIS PHOTOGRAPH SUGGEST TO YOU? WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE PHOTO? HOW COULD YOU TRY TO ANSWER THEM?**
 - **WHAT IS THE ONE THING THAT YOU WOULD REMEMBER MOST ABOUT THIS PHOTOGRAPH AND WHY?**
 - **WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPH THAT YOU CANNOT ANSWER THROUGH ANALYZING IT? WHERE COULD YOU GO NEXT TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?**
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