

CONTOURS OF RACE: THE CHINESE IN ASTORIA, OREGON

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Like most whites living on the Pacific Coast during the late nineteenth century, white residents of Astoria, Oregon supported the notion that the Chinese, as a race, were culturally and economically depraved and certainly worthy of exclusion. Nonetheless, Chinese immigrants had a significant presence in Astoria, and while the anti-Chinese attitudes of local whites appeared straightforward, probing on-the-ground race relations reveals that they were actually quite complex. This thesis shows that white Astorians struggled to reconcile a principled stance against the Chinese with the pragmatism of accepting at least a temporary place for them in the community. The variegated roles that the Chinese played in Astoria and their tangible presence in different spheres of town life were recognized, even if only begrudgingly, by white Astorians. Overall, the contradictions that characterized race language and race relations demonstrate that the contours of race in late-nineteenth-century Astoria were multiple, undefined, and constantly negotiated.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Driving to Astoria, Oregon, on a foggy January day, I'm only about twenty-five miles north of Eugene on the I-5 when I notice that I'm passing a sign for the Halsey/Brownsville exit in Linn County. My mind flashes to the newspaper article I read not too long ago about how, in the mid-1880s, Halsey's white citizens drove out all the town's Chinese residents. The expulsion took place in the midst of a surge of anti-Chinese riots and removals happening all along the Pacific coast throughout 1885 and 1886. However, after being ousted from the town, a dozen or so of Halsey's Chinese decided to make their way to Astoria, a burgeoning port town near the mouth of the Columbia River.¹ Why?

Racial and cultural slurs against the Chinese were prevalent throughout the West in the late nineteenth century, and Astoria was no exception. Whether derided as "celestial brutes from the Flowery Kingdom," "pig-tailed garlic eating, opium smoking heathn[s]," or "white-haired descendant[s] of Confucius," the Chinese were considered by many white Astorians to be filthy, smelly, and religiously and culturally backward.² Yet, this overtly racist rhetoric translated into action against the Chinese only to a certain extent. In general, racism in Astoria had its limits, and Chinese immigrants constituted an important part of Astoria's community. Although a majority of white Astorians supported

¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 3, 1885:3.

² These specific descriptions come from the *Weekly Astorian*, January 15, 1876:3 and the *Daily Astorian*, May 16, 1876:1 and June 12, 1876:1, but the same sorts of characterizations can be found throughout Astoria's newspapers during this time period.

the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States, as well as the attitude underpinning it—that the Chinese were, as a race, undesirable—there is also evidence that some residents recognized how the Chinese filled particular local needs. This may have been only a begrudging or tacit acknowledgement of Chinese roles in the community. Nevertheless, it complicated and obstructed the strength of anti-Chinese sentiment and action in Astoria.

This thesis explores the inconsistencies that pervaded race thought and behavior in Astoria in the late nineteenth century. It demonstrates that white Astorians generally struggled to reconcile a principled stance against the Chinese with the pragmatism of accepting at least a temporary place for them in the community. The 1870s through the 1890s comprised a period of nationwide economic hardship, which significantly contributed to a rise in labor activism. On the Pacific Coast, the working class directed its angst towards the region's seemingly most foreign element, the Chinese, who had found work in mines, canneries, railroad construction, agriculture, and other burgeoning regional industries. Although the working class formed the backbone of the anti-Chinese movement, politicians, city leaders, and members of the merchant class who sought to cultivate alliances with the laboring majority allowed a sort of anti-Chinese creed, to which almost all adhered, to develop along the Pacific Coast. Despite the actual diversity of European immigrants in the American West, they united under a superficial banner of white supremacy that worked to define America as not for Chinese but for whites. As one Astorian stated simply in 1893, "I would not be a good citizen if I didn't believe in getting rid of the Chinamen," demonstrating this impression of consensus behind an anti-

Chinese doctrine.³ However, a close look at race relations in Astoria during this time period reveals that this wall of opposition to the Chinese was rather permeable and unstable. Racial animosities in Astoria swelled at rather predictable moments, while an overall commitment to removing or displacing the Chinese proved to be lacking in both force and consistency. Complications and contradictions can be seen within the Sinophobic rhetoric itself and between anti-Chinese discourse and on-the-ground realities. Astoria in the late nineteenth century was indeed rife with examples of how racial antagonism often mixed with curiosity, and of how hostility mingled with acceptance.

Negotiating these conflicting attitudes on the local level fell mostly into the hands of Astoria's city leaders and upper class, those who employed the Chinese or in other ways had a stake in their presence. These more prominent locals maintained an investment in the overall economic prosperity of Astoria, which relied on a large Chinese workforce and on the preservation, at least in appearance, of law and order. Thus, the mitigating of racial tensions in Astoria also exposes the intersecting nature of class and race in the industrializing West.

This thesis additionally examines the variegated roles that Chinese played in Astoria and the broader Clatsop County. The vast majority of Chinese who came to northwest Oregon in the late nineteenth century did so to work in the salmon canneries. The ties between the canneries and the Chinese were significant, and, in a sense, the two rose and fell in prominence together. The salmon canning industry flourished on the lower Columbia through the 1870s and early 1880s, and Chinese flooded into Astoria every season to process and pack the fish. But both the industry and the numbers of

³ *Astoria Daily Budget*, September 22, 1893:1.

Chinese in Astoria had begun their gradual decline by the late 1880s. The Chinese also developed a place in Astoria that extended beyond the salmon canneries. They had an array of economic roles in the region, as a multifaceted laboring workforce, as merchants and store-owners, and as consumers and tenants. They were plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses, interpreters, and observers in Astoria's legal system. The area where Chinatown developed, on the northwest corner of the commercial district, became a sort of manifestation of their mediated presence in the community. Local Chinese also engaged in their own recreational, subsistence, and cultural practices about the town, which elicited a mixture of fascination, respect, and derision from whites. Some of these activities both resulted from and reinforced a cultural separation between whites and Chinese, yet they also provided opportunities for interracial contact and observation. The tangible presence of Chinese in different spheres of town life most likely both contributed to and benefited from the fairly restrained state of racial animosity in Astoria.

Using a binary framework, that of "white" and "Chinese," to survey race relations in Astoria in the late nineteenth century requires some clarification. In December 1885, Astoria's local newspaper reprinted an article from the *San Francisco Bulletin*. The author of the article had recently visited Astoria and been astounded at the incredible range of nationalities represented in this northwest Oregon town. He wrote that the city was "the most polyglot collection of humanity on the American continent."⁴ In the township of Astoria in 1880, the Irish topped the list of European-born, numbering 182 and comprising 4.5% of the population. They were followed by Finns, Swedish, Germans, Norwegians, English, Greek, Italians, Canadians, French, Scottish, Danish, Austrians, and Russians. This diversity appears quite impressive; yet, the Chinese

⁴ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 29, 1885:3.

numbered 1233 and comprised thirty percent of the township's population.⁵ Most of these Chinese probably came from Guangdong province in southeastern China, as the majority of Chinese who immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century were from this area near the Pearl River delta. While the census reveals the ethnic and linguistic diversity of late-nineteenth-century Astoria, it also shows clearly that the Chinese constituted the largest ethnic minority in Astoria at this time. Although the census was taken in the middle of the fishing season, when the number of Chinese would have been higher than at other times of the year, this points to the prodigious Chinese presence in Astoria and the potentially high level of tensions during a time of concentrated, regional antagonism against the Chinese. Despite the various European nationalities in the city, the racial categorization scheme used by census enumerators lumped Europeans together as "white," while Chinese were listed with a "C" for "Chinese."⁶ This provides an especially illustrative, localized example of what scholars Michael Omi and Howard Winant have described as "the institutionalization of a racial order that drew the color line *around* rather than *within*, Europe," as "whites" in America sought to separate themselves from and elevate themselves above those considered "non-white."⁷ Although such a construction muddles the true diversity of Astoria, I use this binary setup throughout this study, as it effectively exhibits social understandings of race during this period.

⁵ 1880 United States Manuscript Census, Township of Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 65. Also see Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

The nature of sources available for probing localized race relations offers another consideration for this study. Uncovering things that happened on the ground in a small, nineteenth-century community poses a considerable challenge, especially when one group being studied is, on the surface, an estranged minority. Much of this analysis is based on Astoria's main newspaper during this time, the *Astorian*, which has remained the city's chief local newspaper to this day. Printer DeWitt Clinton Ireland founded the *Astorian* in 1873 with the encouragement and patronage of prominent men in Astoria, who hoped a newspaper would help the town grow.⁸ With the establishment of the first salmon cannery the following year, the city did increase significantly in size through the next two decades. Journalist Roger Tetlow has argued that "the gradual development of the Astorian matched the growth and maturity of the town."⁹ Although other newspapers operated in this period, they tended to be less successful and short-lived. However, an influential newspaper which emerged in the early 1890s and grew quickly to compete with the *Astorian* will be discussed in Chapter IV. According to George Turnbull, who wrote a history of Oregon's newspapers, the *Astoria Daily Budget*, founded by Oregon native Oliver Dunbar, adequately represented "the 'Oregon style' of personal journalism, lively with invective."¹⁰ Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *Astorian* aligned itself more closely with an upper-class, Republican viewpoint, while the *Budget* explicitly sought to convey the sentiments of the Democratic working class. Despite their animated rivalry in the late nineteenth century, the *Budget* eventually

⁸ Roger Tetlow, "DeWitt Clinton Ireland and the Astorian" (Master's Thesis, University of Oregon, 1972), 27-30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁰ George S. Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers* (Portland, Ore.: Binford & Mort, 1939), 308.

merged with the *Astorian* in the 1930s. Both of these papers' longevity speaks to their resonance with the local community, and they have become considered "the two most important" of Astoria's newspapers.¹¹

In general, newspapers can be viewed as sources that both directed and reflected local sentiments. For studying how the anti-Chinese creed accorded with or diverged from on-the-ground realities, Astoria's newspapers are informative, for they contain both the various layers of argument used by so many contemporary westerners against the Chinese presence in the United States as well as indications of how Chinese and whites on the local level actually saw each other and interacted. While scholar Herman Chiu has sought to spotlight the ways in which the *Astorian* and three other Oregon newspapers "erased" Oregon's Chinese presence in the late nineteenth century by omitting them or only occasionally covering them through an overtly racist lens, I find that looking closely reveals a much more complex story.¹² Moving beyond the language and taking stock of what short quips on daily happenings about the town actually relate show how the contours of race in Astoria were rather multi-sided. While one must be cautious about the bias and skewed representations that can filter through newspapers, this source offers significant insight into both what was happening on the ground in Astoria and what information and ideas infused local discourse.

Studies of the Chinese and Chinese-American experiences in the United States are relatively new, but the field has nonetheless been growing and developing as scholars continue to approach it from different angles and with new questions. Surveys of Asian-

¹¹ George S. Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers* (Portland, Ore.: Binford & Mort, 1939), 307.

¹² Herman B. Chiu, "Power of the Press: How Newspapers in Four Communities Erased Thousands of Chinese from Oregon History," *American Journalism* 16:1 (1999), 59-78.

American history such as Ronald Takaki's and Sucheng Chan's have sought most simply to include Asians in the history of the United States. They also intended to complicate the notion of a homogenous Asian-American experience by showing that the broad swath of Asians who have come to the United States since the nineteenth century have done so from many different countries and for varying reasons, causing them to lead varied lives abroad. Takaki and Chan have both presented narratives of Asian experiences in America as fraught with prejudice and marginalization. Yet these authors also show Asians and Asian Americans as important subjects of history, people who made decisions and shaped their own lives within and despite this atmosphere of intolerance.¹³ Charles McClain followed this trend of balancing a victimization narrative with a strong emphasis on Chinese agency. His study focuses on the willingness, fortitude, and competence with which Chinese immigrants used the American court system to challenge local and state discrimination against them in California. While he sheds light on the numerous ways in which the Chinese in California were victims of racial discrimination, his analysis also shows, like Takaki and Chan's, that being a victim does not necessarily denote a loss of agency.¹⁴ While these have all made important contributions to the study of the Chinese in America, they do still tend to set up a rather rigid dichotomy between white bigotry and Chinese victimization on the Pacific Coast.

Many scholars have been occupied with attempting to understand and explain the roots of the general movement against Chinese in the late nineteenth century. Some have focused particularly on white, working-class culture, arguing that the Chinese essentially

¹³ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1989); Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991).

¹⁴ Charles McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

became effective pawns in political and class struggles between whites. Tomás Almaguer, for example, describes how the racialization of social, economic, and political issues, particularly in California, emerged out of the context of the rapidly industrializing West, as different groups jockeyed for positions in a newly developing class order. In this setting, the ideologies of Manifest Destiny and free labor functioned importantly to unite white, working-class Americans and European immigrants around assertions of white supremacy and the relegation of California's non-white groups to the bottom of that evolving class structure.¹⁵ Similarly, Alexander Saxton's influential study examines in chronological detail the politicization and ideological underpinnings of the anti-Chinese movement led by California's urban working class, which popularized and rallied powerfully behind the mantra "the Chinese must go." He demonstrates the political utility of the anti-Chinese movement and its ability to unify skilled and unskilled laborers who had carried principles of Jacksonian democracy, anti-monopolism, free labor, and nativism from the East to San Francisco. The analyses of both Saxton and Almaguer effectively demonstrate how Sinophobia on the West Coast was largely lodged in the broader political, ideological, and class struggles of self-proclaimed producers against profiting capitalists, revealing how "racial identification cut at right angles to class consciousness."¹⁶

Many scholars have also observed and noted the relationship between racial discourse about southern African Americans and the ascendance of racism against

¹⁵ Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*. See particularly the introduction and chapter six. Almaguer does distinguish between the rural anti-Chinese movement and the urban one, as small farmers also often joined the rural movement against what they viewed as land monopolists who employed cheap, Chinese labor.

¹⁶ Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1971). The quotation is taken from page 1 of Saxton, but Almaguer makes very similar analogies of how race and class met at right angles.

Chinese in the West, particularly in regard to labor. Most working-class followers of the anti-Chinese movement supported the ideals of free soil/free labor, but this was not typically an abolitionist doctrine, as white laborers in the northeast viewed free blacks as economic competition. After the Civil War, condemnations of slave labor were transferred West and applied to the Chinese, who were seen as unfree and degraded “coolies.” The label of “slave” thus remained relegated to non-whites.¹⁷ Najia Aarim-Heriot takes this discussion a step further by arguing that the policies against the Chinese, particularly exclusion, cannot really be attributed to concerns over the economic threat the Chinese ostensibly posed through their cheap labor. Rather, Reconstruction-era congressional debates revealed the true limits to the principles of racial equality espoused by Republicans, as the party’s large conservative element worked hard to integrate African-American civil rights into the Constitution and U.S. legal framework without extending those rights to the Chinese, who they regarded as unassimilable and too threatening to the racial order of America. Thus, the “Negroization” of the Chinese was really more a cultural than an economic-based phenomenon that served to secure a racially defined environment for America even after the Civil War.¹⁸

Other scholars have offered different suggestions for what contributed to the rather expansive anti-Chinese movement in America. In her survey of the history of Chinese in America, Iris Chang proposes that the changing relations between the United States and China have also consistently influenced the Chinese experience in America

¹⁷ Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*; Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*; Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007). See also David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

¹⁸ Najia Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States, 1848-82* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

through the last century and a half.¹⁹ Stuart Creighton Miller offers his unequivocal answer to this question by tracing the origins of anti-Chinese sentiment to the period prior to Chinese immigration into America. He analyzes the impact that traders, missionaries, and diplomats to China in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had on developing and disseminating negative perspectives of the Chinese. He persuasively argues, then, that Sinophobia began pre-immigration, that it was not restricted to California or the West Coast but established itself firmly in the East as well, and that it was the most crucial factor in the widespread appeal and success of the anti-Chinese movement.²⁰

While so many have been led by the question of why so much antipathy became leveled at the Chinese in the late nineteenth century, some scholars have made an effort to step outside an oppression narrative and find other angles through which to view the Chinese experience in America. Liping Zhu and Judy Yung, for example, tell relatively positive stories of the experiences of Chinese in the Boise Basin mining towns of Idaho and in middle-class female circles of San Francisco's Chinatown, respectively.²¹ Sucheng Chan's incredibly well-researched account of Chinese in California agriculture sheds light on the pivotal roles they played in fashioning the overall structure of the state's agricultural production. She highlights the ways in which their embedded and variegated economic roles in rural California—from clearing land and providing labor to building houses and leasing property—created much higher degrees of interaction between

¹⁹ Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

²⁰ Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

²¹ Liping Zhu, *A Chinaman's Chance: Chinese on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1997); Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Chinese and whites in the countryside than in urban spaces. Associations between white landowners and Chinese tenant farmers, labor contractors, and rural merchants influenced the ability of Chinese to persevere in California agriculture despite widespread racial violence in the late nineteenth century.²² Similarly, Marie Rose Wong explores Chinese society in Portland during the same time period. She gives particular focus to how federal exclusion gave rise to the development of a black market for “manufactured identities” in Portland and to spatial analysis of Portland’s Chinatowns, which she describes as “non-claves” because, in her account, external forces to confine the Chinese were lacking in the city.²³ Her study, like Chan’s, reveals a rather unsolidified barrier between white and Chinese societies. My examination of Astoria aligns closely with the perspectives of these authors, as it looks for points of contact between two groups that have been traditionally depicted as relegated to their own well-defined spheres.

Interestingly, however, Wong describes a lack of diversity in regard to economic opportunities for Chinese in Astoria, and, although she sees that white Astorians, like white Portlanders, tended to take “a more benign view” of their Chinese neighbors, her brief mentioning of Astoria tends to simplify the racial situation there and fails to recognize the ways that race relations in the town resembled those in Portland. She characterizes Portland as uniquely different from other towns and cities in the West because of the “symbiotic relationship” that developed between its Chinese and white communities.²⁴ I see a similar phenomenon in Astoria, though, and one just as complex.

²² Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

²³ Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7, 155-157.

And while my study reveals distinguishing features of Astoria that likely influenced its particular experience with the Chinese community, I hope that my findings also move us towards a broader understanding of how race relations on the local level often diverged from the prevailing racial ideologies of the time, which emphasized difference, separation, and hostility. I suspect, for example, that racial contact zones between whites and Chinese, perhaps similar to the ones I have found in Astoria, could be uncovered in other late-nineteenth-century communities as well.

Unlike Wong, who portrays Astoria as offering little to Chinese outside the canneries, Chris Friday, in his investigation of the role of Asians in the salmon canning industry on the Pacific Coast, categorizes Astoria as a “cannery town,” a place that held more social and recreational opportunities for Chinese cannery workers than the other two types of cannery settings on the Pacific Coast: bunkhouse villages and small-town canneries.²⁵ I also perceive vitality in Astoria’s Chinese community, and I move this discussion further to show how these recreational and cultural venues sometimes provided points of interaction or observation between white and Chinese residents in Astoria. Friday and Wong view Astoria from two distinct angles—Friday through a focus on resource extractive-based industrial sites and Wong from the perspective of a regional metropole. I approach Astoria, on the other hand, as its own emerging community, one grappling with rapid industrial development and the dynamic population growth that accompanied this economic progress. Examining the way that an interracial community emerged, evolved, and navigated through the many changes in the American West during

²⁵ Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian-American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 55-75.

this period can illuminate dimensions of race and racial understanding that are less often noticed.

All of these scholars have informed my thinking, angle, and approach to the study of the Chinese in Astoria. While it is somewhat elusive to try to “explain” racism, looking at how racial attitudes were exhibited on a local level helps frame the discussion in new and important ways. It allows us to better understand how ordinary people and communities worked to reconcile dominant racial ideologies with their own lived experiences. The story of the Chinese in Astoria in the late nineteenth century reveals the general mutability of race. The meeting points and lines of association between whites and Chinese in Astoria show that, despite whatever seemingly unambiguous rhetoric may be espoused, the contours of race are multiple, undefined, and constantly negotiated.

The layout of this thesis is roughly chronological. Chapter II describes the emergence of Astoria as a bustling town in the 1870s and early 1880s, when the salmon canning industry and Astoria’s population grew quickly. The attractiveness of Chinese laborers to salmon cannery owners quickly generated a large Chinese presence in the burgeoning community. Astorians’ responses to this influx provide early indications of how they would straddle the line between resistance and acquiescence in regard to the Chinese, and how they would tend to subsume their anti-Chinese principles to the necessities of the moment. Chapter III relates how the Astorian community carefully navigated through the particularly tense period of the mid-1880s, when anti-Chinese violence and expulsions cut a broad swath through the West. Although the town managed to avoid a riot, the chapter discusses how heightened racial hostility did find some expression in Astoria. It also shows how Astoria’s Chinese continued to be a rather

conspicuous presence in different spheres of town life during the period. Chapter IV looks at the period of the late 1880s and early 1890s, when Chinese exclusion began to take its visible toll on the Chinese presence on the Pacific Coast and in Astoria. The topics discussed in this chapter reveal again that, although an anti-Chinese standpoint was basically assumed among whites, white Astorians did not generally consent to overt or unlawful discrimination against the Chinese. And as the number of Chinese and the number of canneries declined in Astoria, the Chinese also developed a more settled presence in the town. Although this reveals that slightly different conditions characterized each period, the findings in each chapter point back to the more enduring stability, despite wind and waves, of race relations in Astoria.

CHAPTER II

TESTING THE WATERS:

THE BURGEONING OF AN INTERRACIAL COMMUNITY

Nearly one hundred thirty years ago, in the early 1880s, a maze of plank bridges and platforms, winding and bending with the banks of the Columbia River, demonstrated the productivity of Astoria's canning industry. The docks and piers that extended over the now exposed pilings connected dozens of two- and three-story wooden-frame packinghouses to clusters of bunkhouses, mess halls, and cold storage facilities. On a typical day, the hum of busy cannery workers and the stench of Chinook and Sockeye salmon on drying docks filled the air. Elmore, Schmitz, Kinney, and Lindenberger, all company names on cannery row, were just a few of the close neighbors and competitors in this prosperous business.¹ A 1973 centennial supplement to the *Daily Astorian* stated that "Astoria was once the salmon cannery capital of the United States, if not of the world." By the time it reached its heyday in the early 1880s, the salmon canning industry in Astoria provided an annual salmon pack totaling over a quarter million cases at forty-eight pounds per case.² The boom of the canning industry had spawned considerable commercial growth for the city, as merchandise stores, barbershops, saloons, hotels, restaurants, and a variety of other businesses lined the blocks near the water and catered to a thriving population. Yet, before the start of the canning industry in the 1870s, Astoria

¹ Information about the physical layout of Astoria's canneries can be found in Sarah L. Steen, "Expanding Context: A Look at the Industrial Landscapes of Astoria, Oregon, 1880-1933" (Master's Thesis, University of Oregon, 2009).

² *The Daily Astorian*, April 26, 1973, Astoria Oregon Centennial, 1873-1973 Edition: 18B.

did not attract much attention. While the population of Clatsop County amounted to only 498 in 1860, by 1880, 7,222 people were living in the county, and at least a third of them were Chinese.³

Between 1870 and 1880, Clatsop County experienced significant growth. Its population increased five-fold, and the number of its Chinese grew from 13 to 2,317.⁴ This growth was primarily due to the establishment and rapid success of salmon canneries in the area. Through the 1870s, the canneries, the county's chief city of Astoria, and Astoria's Chinese essentially evolved together. Such a situation developing in the cultural contact zone of the American West and in a national context of increasing labor strife and intensified non-white immigration certainly inspired racist rhetoric to emerge from Astoria's white populace. But, although whites in Astoria expressed immediate concerns about the growing Chinese population, a more complicated story was already budding underneath the overtly discriminatory language. Rhetoric used against Chinese comprised different angles and contours, not the least of which were arguments that the Chinese were virtual slaves and that they were unwilling to assimilate to America's culture and institutions. Yet, discourse that displayed a total distaste for the Chinese did not prevent their expansion in Astoria. Most noticeably, they came to dominate the workforce of the salmon canneries, the industry which brought them to the town. They quickly found other sources of work and livelihood too and effectively established both a physical and abstract presence in the city which Astorians struggled to reconcile.

³ Department of the Interior, *Eighth Census of the United States—Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 402; Department of the Interior, *Tenth Census of the United States—Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 405.

⁴ Department of the Interior, *Ninth Census of the United States—Population* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 241; Department of the Interior, *Tenth Census of the United States—Population* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 405.

Resistance to the Chinese surely made itself known, both in word and in action. But efforts at intolerance lacked sufficient strength to keep away the Chinese. During this period of their great influx, dilemmas emerged between the arguments delivered against the Chinese and the city's practical needs, as the Chinese in several different ways made inroads into this burgeoning community.

Before the early 1870s, there was little to distinguish Astoria as a particularly appealing place to take up residence. Since its pioneer days in the 1840s, the broader Clatsop County had become home to mostly farmers and their families. Fishermen, river pilots, and a scattering of laborers and professionals also inhabited the county and its largest city, Astoria.⁵ In the 1860s, a mill built in Astoria and a tannery constructed in upper Astoria, a small settlement about a mile upriver, sparked some limited growth. Astoria also enjoyed being an important stopping place for steamers running between Portland and San Francisco.⁶ However, these industries remained small. An 1868 U.S. Coast Survey map shows a small bay over which Astoria's downtown area would eventually be built. But in 1868, the lumber mill's pier extended over the bay, and the construction of Astoria's commercial district, including its Chinatown, would have to await an industry that would bring attention back to the city after the decline of the fur trade that made it famous.⁷

⁵ 1870 United States Manuscript Census, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com.

⁶ William F. Willingham, *Historical Overview of the Lower Columbia River and Astoria, Oregon, 1792-1940* (Portland, Ore.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1988), 7; Alfred A. Cleveland, "Social and Economic History of Astoria," *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 4:2 (June 1903), 137-8.

⁷ Cleveland Rockwell, "U.S. Coast Survey, Columbia River from Young's Bay to John Day's River, Sec. XI:OGN. Surveyed in 1868," *Columbia's Gateway Narrative and Map Set*, by Columbia River Estuary Data Development Program, Clatsop County Historical Society Archives, Astoria, Ore.

Indeed, a visitor to Astoria in 1874 expressed disappointment with the town he had idealized as a boy, commenting that “anything less romantic than Astoria is today you can scarcely imagine.”⁸ He was disgusted with the muddiness of the streets and the claustrophobia of a town so “densely enclosed by forests . . . I had scarcely room enough to draw a breath.”⁹ Overall, he found the city “to be dreary and monotonous in the extreme in reality.”¹⁰ Both Astoria’s economic and physical landscape appeared relatively bleak, at least for the moment. But although the town did not outwardly evoke prosperity in the early 1870s, it did suggest promise. Even the disenchanted writer above moderated his sentiments somewhat by saying that “Astoria, however, means to grow.”¹¹ The creation of the town’s first newspaper since the *Astoria Marine Gazette*’s short run in the 1860s constituted at least one indicator of such forward movement. As a visitor remarked in a letter to the *Tri-Weekly Astorian* in 1873, its first year of publication, “There is manifest among [Astoria’s] few but public spirited people, the presence of an energy before which impediments are melted, and obstacles removed from out the pathway of progress and reform.”¹² In the air, there was a certain feeling of optimism, a sense of growth and good fortune soon to come.

In fact, prospects improved in 1866 when Andrew Hapgood and the Hume brothers (William, John, George, and Robert) prompted the economic development of the lower Columbia by moving their salmon canning operations there from the Sacramento

⁸ Charles Nordhoff, “The Columbia River and Puget Sound,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 48:285 (February 1874), 338-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 339.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, August 19, 1873:2.

River. The Columbia's large salmon runs soon inspired other entrepreneurs to set up shop, and the first salmon cannery in Astoria was opened by Badollet & Co. in 1874. The years from 1874 to 1876 then became "the period of Astoria's greatest growth. From a small shipping station in the sixties it had grown to be a town of about two thousand people, controlling the most important industry on the lower Columbia and holding a large trade," boasted a writer for the Oregon Historical Society in 1903.¹³ On October 7, 1876, the *Astorian* stated that "it is very apparent that the town is fast on the increase," while an article from October 21, with the headline "More Canneries at Astoria!", predicted with excitement and anticipation "a transient population of above three thousand . . . and about one thousand permanents."¹⁴ The industry that would bring prosperity, growth, and the Chinese to Astoria had arrived.

The decision to recruit Chinese laborers for cannery work came about for the specific reasons of availability and dependability. Chinese men had been migrating to the United States for employment in the mines and railroads since the 1840s and 1850s. The growth of the canning industry along the Columbia benefited from the decline of mining and the completion of the transcontinental railroad, both of which made available a significant number of unemployed Chinese laborers to fill the workforce of the rapidly growing canning industry. Some of the companies that emerged along the Columbia had initially employed white men as both fishermen and cannery workers. However, as the November 29, 1873, *Astorian* revealed, "troubles incident to that kind of labor have

¹³ Cleveland, "Social and Economic History of Astoria," 140.

¹⁴ *Weekly Astorian*, October 7, 1876:2 and October 21, 1876:3.

caused one or two establishments to employ chinamen to do the indoor work.”¹⁵ Where salmon canning relied so much on the ability of the workers to keep up with the fish caught in order to prevent spoilage, some companies had experienced losses by their white workers “getting liquor and disqualifying themselves for labor for several days and suspending work.”¹⁶ In comparison, the Chinese were known to be “fast workers” and “to ply their several vocations skillfully, with limited instruction.”¹⁷ The industriousness and availability of Chinese workers, in contrast to the unreliability and at times indolence of white workers, therefore, inspired an increasing number of cannery owners along the Columbia to employ Chinese rather than white men.

Chinese laborers quickly and conspicuously came to dominate the workforce of the Columbia River canneries. A drawing in the June 1887 issue of *West Shore* magazine illustrates Chinese cannery workers at every stage of the salmon canning process in an Astoria packinghouse, demonstrating their ubiquity in the canneries (Figure 1). By freezing the captivating process in motion, the drawing evokes the efficiency that comes from a division of labor, with all workers—aprons tied around their waists, hair (or the reviled queues) pulled up into buns—busy at their respective tasks.¹⁸ Rudyard Kipling, in his visit to the Columbia River canneries in the late nineteenth century, expressed curiosity and amazement at the “blood-besmeared yellow devils” at work: “A Chinaman jerked up the twenty-pounder, beheaded and detailed it with two swift strokes of a knife,

¹⁵ *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, November 29, 1873:2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Courtland L. Smith, *Salmon Fishers of the Columbia* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1979), 23. *Weekly Astorian*, May 14, 1874:3.

¹⁸ Queues refer to the long, ponytail hairstyle of Chinese men. It became a cultural focus of anti-Chinese discrimination and laws in the 19th century.

flicked out its internal arrangements with a third, and cast it into a bloody-dyed tank.”¹⁹ The drawing shows much more of the process: machine and hand-cutting the raw fish, filling cans, soldering lids, boiling cans to remove excess air, and dumping them into cooking vats. Two white supervisors—not foremen as they are not engaged in labor—appear toward the back of the room, discussing and evaluating the work being done by the can testers. Can testers, butchers, and tinsmiths constituted some of the highest paid

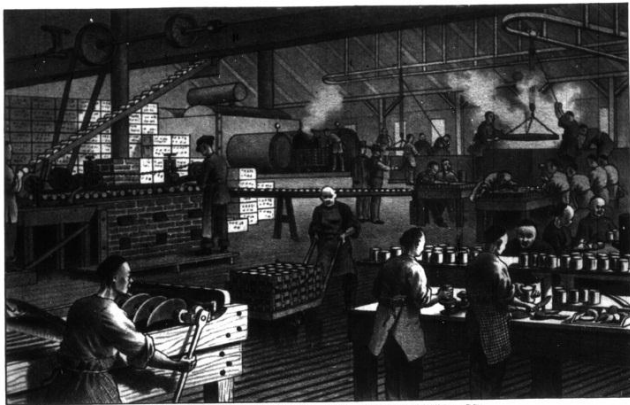


Figure 1: Illustration of Chinese workers in Astoria salmon cannery. Source: *West Shore*, June 1887.

and most supervised workers as their specific tasks significantly affected the quality of the canned salmon.²⁰ The billowing steam, the chutes and moving belts, the calm, concentrated faces of the Chinese workers, and the assembly line quality and cleanliness of the packinghouse

all reveal the highly developed efficiency of Astoria’s canning industry. And it never seemed to go unnoticed that “the labor in the canneries is done almost entirely by Chinamen, who become exceedingly expert at the business.”²¹ The drawing and visitor accounts both exude the sort of exotic spectacle of this highly efficient canning process and its ethnically homogenous labor force.

¹⁹ Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1923), 24.

²⁰ Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian-American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 30.

²¹ “The Salmon Fisheries of Oregon,” *Forest and Stream* 2:19 (June 18, 1874), 290.

Cannery owners valued their Chinese employees' reliability and disciplined work ethic, but the adoption of the contract labor system made the process of Chinese recruitment even more efficient and affordable. In this system, the canners typically supplied a Chinese work crew with bunkhouse housing, fuel, water, salt, and transportation to the canneries from the recruitment site. The contractor provided the workers and a Chinese "boss," who supervised and furnished the Chinese with food and other provisions.²² The system greatly benefited the cannery owners, as they could give attention to sales, English-speaking employees, and other operations while Chinese "bosses," who also often served as foremen, supervised and relayed orders to the Chinese cannery workers. Canners and contractors initially utilized a day-rate system, in which canners paid contractors set daily wages for skilled and semi-skilled workers and one dollar per day for unskilled workers. However, by the late 1870s, most canneries had moved to a piece-rate system, in which owners paid contractors for each case packed.²³ Many of the contracting firms were based in Portland and sent agents out to negotiate contracts. Hundreds of Chinese came into Astoria each year from Portland or other places to work in the canneries during the season, which ran from April 1 until August 1. Only a small proportion of these managed to stay in Astoria during the off season, finding work such as knitting fishing nets or making cans. The majority of these seasonal contract workers went to live in boardinghouses in Portland to await their next job.²⁴ On the

²² John Cobb, *The Salmon Fisheries of the Pacific Coast*, U.S. Bureau of Fisheries Document No. 751 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 36.

²³ Friday, *Organizing Asian-American Labor*, 38-40.

²⁴ Friday, *Organizing Asian-American Labor*, 74; Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 52-53, 170-171; 1880 United States Manuscript Census, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image,

outside, contract labor, especially during high salmon run seasons, seemed to keep everyone generally satisfied. As one visitor to the canneries in 1878 remarked, the Chinese “work well, if they have a good overseer, and are very expeditious.”²⁵

The system did not always work the same way for every cannery, however, and an 1877 court case reveals how a scrupulous Chinese “boss” could manipulate the workers’ exclusion from the contract negotiation process or lack of understanding about the system’s intricate details. The bookkeeper at Kinney’s cannery testified that a timekeeper made the rounds at the cannery and recorded the hours for each Chinese worker in two books, one kept by the worker and one kept by the timekeeper. At the end of the month, for the sake of convenience, one designated worker came to the bookkeeper to collect the wages of all the men that lived in his mess house, sometimes called a “company.” Each worker’s time book was checked with the timekeeper’s, and then the bookkeeper handed over the wages. Monthly wages varied according to skill. The bookkeeper affirmed his understanding that the cannery owner, Kinney, had made contracts with each Chinese worker for that season, not with Chong Hong. Chong Hong, who the bookkeeper called a “boss” and the collector of wages for his mess house, was a fish butcher in the cannery, and he worked “under the supervision of the foreman the same as the others,” according to the bookkeeper. However, the Chinese workers demonstrated some lack of clarity, or perhaps lack of necessary interest, in who their employer was. Chong Hong kept one of the Chinese mess houses and obtained provisions for the workers there, charging each worker between \$1.50 and \$1.75 per week for board.

Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com. See particularly the census enumeration of Township of Astoria, District 24, for large groups of Chinese cannery workers.

²⁵ *Weekly Astorian*, March 23, 1878:2.

We Yuck, or Chinese worker No. 29, as he was identified by the canning company, testified that his wages for washing fish in Kinney's cannery were \$28 per month. Chong Hong collected and distributed his wages. We Yuck stated, "I don't know who had to pay I only ask Chong Hong to pay me." Although somewhat uncertain of who was ultimately responsible for paying him, We Yuck appeared generally satisfied with Chong Hong's intermediary role, as We Yuck had so far been paid on time.²⁶

Another Chinese worker, however, expressed dissatisfaction with the system of payment. Chong Hong placed a stamp on each of his workers' time books to designate that they lived in his mess house and only he could collect their wages. See Do, worker No. 352, said that Chong Hong had asked him to go to work for Kinney, who agreed to pay See Do \$26 a month. See Do said he "looked to Chong Hong to pay me my money. I have not been paid anything." He related that Chong Hong collected his money "because he could talk English." When asked why he did not go to the bookkeeper himself to collect his wages after Chong Hong failed to produce them, See Do replied that "Chong Hong had a stamp on my book of his Company and I could not get the money myself. I never told Chong Hong to put that stamp there, but he did it himself. I did not like Chong Hong putting that stamp there but I cannot help it now." The actual case being tried here had to do with a disagreement about whether Chong Hong owed money to a merchant in Portland who had shipped provisions for Chong Hong's mess house.²⁷ But the testimony given by these different men reveals how intermediaries in the contract labor system could potentially extort workers and utilize the system's complexity for their own profit.

²⁶ *Hop Chung Co. v. Chung Hong* (1877), Judgment Role 726, Circuit Court Case Files 672-767, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 8, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.

²⁷ *Ibid.* The court ultimately decided against Chong Hong in this case.

Chong Hong, for example, employed his English-language skills to do so. Identifying the Chinese workers by number rather than by name also indicates the tendency to depersonalize them. The case overall offers an illuminating glimpse into the inner workings of the contract labor system and suggests how Chinese workers could be subjected to the rather fluid power structures within it.

Nonetheless, the Chinese workforce in Astoria's canning industry grew rapidly, and this both surprised and alarmed its residents. By 1880, the Chinese comprised the largest, foreign-born, ethnic group in Astoria, and sixty percent of them worked in the canneries.²⁸ Although excitement abounded through the mid-1870s as more canneries sprung up, bringing fast growth to the town, some residents quickly began to worry that "the Chinese population of this city is increasing rather faster than desirable."²⁹ The migration of so many Chinese into Astoria made many white Astorians ambivalent about the city's source of growth. Prior to the fishing season of 1877, the *Astorian* expressed regret that "about 4,000 moon-eyed celestials will be added to the population of Astoria the next thirty days. What a pity 'tis that white men and boys could not be found to fill the places they are called upon to fill."³⁰ While Astoria's cannery owners, merchants, and citizens generally enjoyed the income that the canneries were bringing to Astoria, the culturally and linguistically foreign, ethnically homogenous, and substantially large minority sparked concern and discrimination.

²⁸ 1880 United States Manuscript Census, Township of Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com.

²⁹ *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, October 11, 1873:1.

³⁰ *Weekly Astorian*, March 10, 1877:3.

Yet, the canneries were not the only places in the area in which the Chinese found work. Wood sawing offered another opportunity for the Chinese to make a living in the county, as they benefited once again from their availability and willingness to work for lower pay. The *Astorian* conveyed regret when it reported that “we met a gentleman yesterday who has a job of winter wood sawing he wanted done, and he informed us that he could find nobody willing to do it unless it was a chinamen. Where are the idle boys and men?”³¹ One wood yard was pressured into hiring Chinese men to cut cord wood because white men would not do the work for \$1.25 per cord.³² The newspaper reported fifty Chinese men at work cutting wood and clearing land near Westport, in Clatsop County, in September of 1873, and by December, it wrote that “the chinese workmen employed in this vicinity at clearing, wood-chopping, etc., etc., have a town by themselves of considerable size, back of upper Astoria,” suggesting an area separate from the Chinese cannery workers.³³ It does not appear that the county’s sawmills regularly employed Chinese woodchoppers, but rather that locals most often individually contracted out Chinese to chop wood or clear land. The Chinese provided a casual but steady source of labor for these local whites, while wood-sawing offered the Chinese a viable source of alternative or supplemental income, outside of the canneries, through the late nineteenth century.

The Chinese who came to Astoria contributed extensively to various aspects of its physical growth. Their presence in the canneries provided the largest and most cited influence, but Chinese workers helped create the conditions for the town’s population and

³¹ *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, September 4, 1873:1.

³² *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, September 13, 1873:1.

³³ *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, September 16, 1873:1 and December 6, 1873:1.

spatial growth in other ways as well, including through wood sawing. In 1873, city residents recruited “a gang of forty Chinese” to travel from Portland to clear and chop wood on the peninsula behind Astoria, the first 500 cords of which were contracted for prominent Astorian Capt. George Flavel.³⁴ The need for cleared land and wood for construction allowed the Chinese to play an important part in the physical building up of the town, and they also aided in the building of roads. In 1878, the district supervisor of roads procured “mostly chinamen” for the construction of a road to Tongue Point and upper Astoria. A writer to the *Astorian* described the arrival of the road with an air of anticipation, saying “we are all jubilant over the progress of the roadway so fast being constructed toward this burg. . . By the 15th of July, Mr. Editor, you can hitch up your team and drive from Trullinger’s mill to Tongue Point.”³⁵ Eagerness for progress and the utility of the Chinese in enabling this progress accompanied and sometimes quieted the verbal outpour of frustrations over their flooding into Astoria.

Astoria’s early Chinese population engaged in other industries as well. Many made their living as laundrymen and cooks, but their occupations diversified through the decade. Of the thirteen Chinese listed in the 1870 census, three were listed as “washerman,” seven were listed as “cook,” two had “cook and wash” recorded as their occupation, and one had “wash dish” as his.³⁶ By 1880, however, the occupations of the county’s Chinese had expanded considerably. While close to three quarters of them worked in the “fisheries,” meaning inside the canneries, the census enumerator found

³⁴ *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, November 13, 1873:1.

³⁵ *Weekly Astorian*, June 29, 1878:1. Also see Roger Tetlow, *The Astorian: The Personal History of DeWitt Clinton Ireland, Pioneer Newspaperman, Printer, and Publisher* (Portland, Ore.: Binford & Mort, 1975), 94.

³⁶ 1870 United States Manuscript Census, Township of Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com.

Chinese men working as farmers, dishwashers, railroad workers (who congregated in Clifton and Westport precincts), laundrymen, shoe factory workers, general “laborers,” and cooks in various places, from hotels and private homes to fisheries and boardinghouses.³⁷ It was not uncommon to find cooks in hotels and homes also listed as servants in the homes of their white employers. Newspaper advertisements also reveal that Chinese physicians, Dr. Jim and Dr. Yuk, both set up practice in Astoria. The fact that these doctors took out advertisements in the city’s main English-language newspaper revealed that they did not seek a purely Chinese clientele.³⁸ In addition, some Chinese made their livings as pawnbrokers and store owners. This occupational diversity suggests both the usefulness of the Chinese as workers and laborers as well as a growing entrepreneurial spirit among Astoria’s Chinese population.

Some Astorians, however, proved quick to challenge the perception that Chinese workers were needed or favorable for filling certain positions. J.T. Borchers opened a steam laundry in the mid-1870s and advertised its merits by declaring that all work was “done at this Laundry by clean white labor” (although by early 1879, Borchers was advertising that his laundry was for sale).³⁹ T. Bramel, proprietor of the Altona Chop House, took out advertisements in the *Astorian* through May and June of 1876, being sure to inform his readers that there were “positively no Chinamen In My Employ.”⁴⁰ At a time when so many on the Pacific Coast denounced the Chinese as dirty and degraded

³⁷ 1880 United States Manuscript Census, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com.

³⁸ See ads for Dr. Jim and Dr. Yuk in the *Daily Astorian* through June 1878 and March and April of 1879, respectively.

³⁹ *Daily Astorian*, May 12, 1876:2; *Daily Astorian*, February 18, 1879:1. Court records also show that he later had to foreclose on property he owned on the same block as Chinatown.

⁴⁰ *Daily Astorian*, May 1, 1876:3 and in various other issues, generally page 3 or 4.

and espoused the elevation of white labor and the importance of principles over profit, local business owners promoted their active adherence to this rhetoric as a worthy reason for Astorians to patronize their businesses.

The most organized attempt to oust Chinese from a particular occupation appears to have occurred in the domain of wood-cutting. A few men in Astoria formed a white Carpenter's Brigade in 1877 to contest the "Chinese monopolizing this business" and directed those needing their wood cut and split to leave orders on the bulletin board at A. G. White's cigar store.⁴¹ Not even a month later, the *Astorian* was boasting that the men involved in the Carpenter's Brigade had "driven the chinese entirely from that field of labor in our city," while further encouraging patrons to post jobs on White's bulletin board.⁴² The rivalry that editor D.C. Ireland consistently promulgated between Astoria and Portland is evident when he compared the success of Astoria's "hardy sons of toil [who] have completely routed the Chinese wood-sawyers" with Portland's white men who, as the *Portland Standard* had apparently reported, "tire too soon and throw up the sponge."⁴³ Publicizing the ability of Astoria's white male workers to gain access to jobs formerly occupied by Chinese contributed to Ireland's more general efforts to promote the merits and virtues of Astoria. More importantly, the formation and professed successes of these associations revealed a resolve among their members and patrons to challenge the economic standing and value of Chinese laborers.

⁴¹ *Daily Astorian*, November 24, 1877:1.

⁴² *Weekly Astorian*, December 15, 1877:3.

⁴³ *Weekly Astorian*, January 19, 1878:3. See Roger Tetlow, "DeWitt Clinton Ireland and the Astorian" (Master's Thesis, University of Oregon, 1972), 42, for a discussion of the rivalry Ireland promoted with Portland.

The white wood-sawing association also suggests a problem that Astorians believed to be hindering some of their white residents. During this period of American industrialization, beliefs in personal responsibility and efforts to uplift the American laborer by promoting industriousness and a hard work ethic had their place in Astoria as they did among the broader national public.⁴⁴ In Astoria, cultivating strong work habits among white laborers was seen both as a goal in itself and as a solution to the large Chinese presence there. The *Astorian*, for example, promoted a new “white man’s wood sawing association” that began in early 1878 as one that would serve “as an example to idle men.”⁴⁵ Idleness indeed constituted a particularly unfavorable trait, as it starkly contrasted with all of those qualities that characterized the self-made man. An article from December of the same year lamented the fact that local women who were demonstrating their aptitude for “swing[ing] an axe in the woods” were “put[ting] to shame some of the husky males whose greatest prerogative appears to be to stand around the corners and talk about chinese ruination.”⁴⁶ Such sentiments suggest a local, class-based division of opinion on the prevalence of Chinese laborers, as some put forth the view that whites who were unable to obtain gainful employment simply utilized the Chinese as scapegoats for their own indolence. And the idleness of some of these men was not only viewed as the reason for their own troubles but was also often seen as directly correlated to the predominance of Chinese in the region. The context of the 1870s depression and the attractiveness of Astoria’s seasonal fishing industry to

⁴⁴ These were ideas widely disseminated for example through the works of Horatio Alger. See Kyoko Amano, “Bret Harte’s ‘The Heathen Chinese’ in Horatio Alger, Jr.’s Pacific Series,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 42:2 (April 2009), 219-238, for a discussion of how Alger even tended to negatively portray Chinese in his Pacific Series books, published in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

⁴⁵ *Weekly Astorian*, February 23, 1878:3; *Weekly Astorian*, February 16, 1878:3.

⁴⁶ *Weekly Astorian*, December 14, 1878:3.

transients likely compelled the employer class to pinpoint white idleness as an explanation and justification for employing Chinese while whites remained unemployed.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this alleged apathy of white men and the resultant abundance of Chinese posed problems to the creation of a productive, white Astoria. At this point, in the 1870s, the answer espoused for “rid[ding] the State of the cursed presence of the heathen chinese [is] for every laboring man to practice habits of frugality. Thrifty and enterprising workingmen are never without a job.”⁴⁸ Therefore, the *Astorian* expresses how working-class failures to fulfill the broader, racialized ideals of working hard to achieve the American Dream intertwined with perceptions of why Astoria was coming to be inhabited by non-Americanized but diligent and employable Chinese.

As newspapers, popular culture, and the employer class encouraged white men to practice thriftiness and an ethic of hard work, stereotypes of the Chinese as hard-working by nature ironically fomented white antipathy. One issue of the *Astorian* sought to demonstrate that the Chinese had “practiced economy” for centuries, so that now “to toil is their normal condition.”⁴⁹ The belief that Chinese immigrants even inherently enjoyed working served as convenient fuel for much of the indignation that Astorians felt towards them. An article in the *Astorian* expressed both sarcasm and resentment when it asserted

⁴⁷ Karen Leedom, *Astoria: An Oregon History* (Pittsburgh: The Local History Company, 2008), 78, 80.

⁴⁸ *Weekly Astorian*, April 14, 1877:3. This seems to align with historian Najia Aarim-Heriot’s argument that Chinese labor often actually promoted white labor, as Chinese tended to fill the lowest industry positions, making room for whites to be placed in the more highly skilled and supervisory positions. She shows how some late-nineteenth-century contemporaries also used this observation to refute arguments that the Chinese displaced white laborers. See Najia Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States, 1848-82* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 67, 80, 168, 184.

⁴⁹ *Daily Astorian*, October 14, 1881:3.

that “you can always tell when a Chinaman is happy; that is when he is at work.”⁵⁰ Chinese laborers being truly “happy” while at work, and thus willing to work for low wages, increased economic fears and justified castigations of them for taking jobs that supposedly belonged to unskilled whites. The Chinese workers and their overall reliability, transmuted by whites into overzealousness, provided luring and satisfying scapegoats for those white Astorians struggling more broadly with economic insecurity and cultural fears of non-white immigrants.

Indeed, connections that contemporaries often drew between the Chinese working on the West Coast and the slaves of the antebellum South gave justification, so recently solidified by the Civil War, that the alleged conditions of Chinese work merited government attention, not so much in order to help the Chinese themselves but to benefit the white workers who competed against them. Chinese workers in the United States were often collectively labeled as “coolies,” despite the fact that the circumstances under which they traveled to and worked in the United States was considerably better than those that characterized Chinese experiences in places like South and Central America, where the term “coolie” originated.⁵¹ Although the contract labor system did allow for potential disputes and exploitation in the canning industry, the *Astorian* rarely if ever pointed to its local Chinese cannery workers as direct evidence for the slavery argument utilized in its rhetoric.

⁵⁰ *Weekly Astorian*, November 6, 1875:3.

⁵¹ See Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 2-7; Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety*, 11, 134-135; Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 153-154.

In general, however, the depravity of bondage provided one of the more consistent arguments against Chinese labor, for in the eyes of white Americans, the willingness of the Chinese to work for low wages rendered them, in the words of the *Astorian*, “incapable of elevation to the dignity of free manhood.”⁵² One article compared the control that the Chinese Six Companies held over “coolies” and Chinese women to the exploitation of Italian children by padrones, labeling both as “two lingering forms of slavery” that “are in plain violation” of the U.S. Constitution, requiring legal action to eliminate them.⁵³ This rhetoric demonstrates how whites viewed such slavery as an enormous detriment to white labor and reveals the inextricable ties between race and labor during this time period. The association between slavery and blacks and between coolieism and Chinese was pervasive. During one rather long endorsement of an anti-Chinese bill then in Congress, the *Astorian* communicated that “the curse of the old slave states was, that white men would not hold the kinds of labor respectable which slaves performed. For similar reasons, white men everywhere will shrink from contract [sic] with a class of laborers whose conditions in life lower the character of their occupation.”⁵⁴ Although employers often argued that they hired Chinese because they were compliant, affordable, and willing to do arduous work that whites refused to do, the working class-led anti-Chinese movement could subvert charges of white indolence by arguing that Chinese laborers were instead degraded and exploited by capitalists. The mere association of Chinese with bondage and slavery and that of white with free and

⁵² *Weekly Astorian*, January 22, 1876:2.

⁵³ *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, September 25, 1873:2. The Chinese Six Companies, also called the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, was an organization made up of six district associations for Chinese immigrants from different districts in China. It provided a wide variety of economic, legal, and social services for Chinese immigrants.

⁵⁴ *Daily Astorian*, February 27, 1879:2.

decent working conditions, such as that shown in Astoria's newspapers, then proved useful in the larger debates between the white worker and employer classes.

Indeed, anti-Chinese discourse that focused on the employers and beneficiaries of Chinese labor on the Pacific coast exhibited the way that class tensions permeated discussion of the Chinese question. In a response to another newspaper's editorial, which indicated that the costs of freight and fare would be higher had not cheap Chinese laborers built the railroads, the *Astorian* sarcastically responded that if "honest white men" had built the railroads, "How much *less* would the Railroad Companies have received from the general government, in the matter of land grants and gold bearing interest bonds?"⁵⁵ Another editorial slammed the Pacific Mail Steamship Company for "deluging us with Asiatic degredation, vice and misery," calling it a "soulless corporation" that drew an immense profit from transporting Chinese coolies as early steamship companies had transported African slaves.⁵⁶ The parallels consistently drawn between the circumstances of Chinese labor on the Pacific coast and the story of the slave trade along the Atlantic provided powerful backing for anti-Chinese thought among Astoria's newspaper readers, but this generalized rhetoric echoed that being disseminated all through the Western region, and rarely were the Chinese residing in Astoria and Clatsop County given as direct evidence for these convictions. Furthermore, the *Astorian's* language occasionally hinted at an important issue that Chinese workers in America represented and that more broadly plagued American industry during the time: the conflict between labor and capital.

⁵⁵ *Daily Astorian*, May 3, 1876:2.

⁵⁶ *Daily Astorian*, May 24, 1876:2.

Actually, white Astorians seemed to recognize that Chinese Astorians might not always be happy and docile laborers, slavely and eager to work. At least two strikes of Chinese cannery workers occurred in the mid-1870s. The *Astorian* hoped to set the record straight on the first one and correct the *Oregonian*'s report that the workers had struck for better pay. Instead, the *Astorian* wrote, "Their Boss, at Portland, to whom Booth & Co. accounted for wages failed to come to time," meaning that the Chinese boss, who collected the wages of the Chinese laborers, had neglected to distribute their pay in a timely manner.⁵⁷ In May 1876, on the other hand, Chinese workers did strike for better pay. They "refused to go to work at Booth's and Badollett's, without two dollars per month increase of wages."⁵⁸ Although at least Badollett's employees returned to work by 11 a.m., the strikers seemed to make an impression on observers, as the *Astorian* commented that "when a gang of celestial brutes from the Flowery Kingdom go on a strike they make a buzzing like unto that of a swarm of bees."⁵⁹ Such expressions, though couched in ethnocentric imagery, suggest quite a different perspective of the Chinese than that they were slaves to their conditions. After all, they possessed the autonomy of the striking laborer, and this divulges that local situations might actually challenge the more generalized perceptions of Chinese then being utilized for support of restriction.

Opinions expressed in the *Astorian* indicate widespread approval of legislation to restrict further Chinese immigration; however, it is important to note that, at least prior to 1882, this discourse did not visibly favor pushing out the Chinese already in the United States. This distinction seemed to be the result of a potent fear that a Chinese invasion

⁵⁷ *Weekly Astorian*, June 12, 1875:3.

⁵⁸ *Daily Astorian*, May 4, 1876:1.

⁵⁹ *Daily Astorian*, May 16, 1876:1.

was likely to occur and that the Chinese even had plans to take over the western United States. The *Astorian*, for example, showed a certain amount of obsession with the population of China, frequently giving isolated lines or short articles to alert readers that China's population was somewhere between 250 and 400 million.⁶⁰ While the *Astorian* made certain to prove, then, that "China can spare the people," an article reprinted from the San Francisco *Call* spelled out the alleged Chinese plans, saying that "very naturally, a desire to possess the Pacific coast of America as an outlet for their own teeming population is entertained," even suggesting that China would be "very willing . . . to plant a colony" in the United States.⁶¹ Conspiratorial overtones sometimes accompanied this discussion of a future Chinese invasion. An article simply titled "John Chinaman" outlined a fictional scenario in which a company of 60,000 Chinese planned to travel to the United States as "one odorous mass" to take as much money as they could, live cheaply, maintain their own institutions and laws, "make no improvements," and finally return to China "dead or alive." It concluded by posing the question of whether this would "amount to anything more than doubling the curse?"⁶² Such stories, often tinged with sensationalism, appear clearly intended to induce dread about further Chinese immigration.

Beliefs in the imminent Chinese conquest of the Pacific coast contributed to the particular angle apparent in newspaper articles regarding restriction. Rather than

⁶⁰ See, for example, *Daily Astorian*, November 26, 1882:3 and September 18, 1884:4. There are many others. These numbers given in the *Astorian* were actually low for the population of China at this period. According to Judith Banister, a specialist in global demography and particularly Asian demography, the population of China increased from about 429.5 million in 1851 to about 582.6 million in 1953. See Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 3-4.

⁶¹ *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, October 30, 1873:1; *Weekly Astorian*, June 29, 1878:2.

⁶² *Weekly Astorian*, January 22, 1876:2.

advocating that the Chinese in the United States must be removed, the *Astorian* argued that “the menace lies not in the Chinese that are here, but in those who will come if the present agitation subsides without placing an obstacle in their way.”⁶³ In pushing for modification of the Burlingame Treaty to allow for suspension or restriction of immigration, the focus remained, at least through this period of the late 1870s, on the idea that further immigration was what must be legislatively checked. Even in terms of labor competition, the idea that too many Chinese had come to the United States and to Astoria often stood at the forefront of the argument against them. Responding for example to the question of whether Chinese labor was beneficial for the canneries, an editorialist for the *Astorian* gave an answer in the negative but used as his rationale the idea that cheap Chinese labor inspired more entrepreneurs to open canneries and thus increased competition amongst the canneries to a level at which none profited. Therefore, the author blamed the employers rather than the Chinese workers, for had not so many people set up canneries along the Columbia, then “those [Chinese] that were here would be doing well, white labor would be doing well, and the fishermen would be doing well.”⁶⁴ Scholars have focused mainly on the cultural and economic arguments used against the Chinese in the build-up to the Exclusion Act, without noting the subtle rhetorical difference between support for immigration *restriction* and the working-class mantra “The Chinese must go!” While Western support for exclusion was virtually unanimous and commonly involved the language of “invasion,” it seems generally unclear what ideas those advocating exclusion had for the Chinese population already in

⁶³ *Daily Astorian*, October 27, 1877:2.

⁶⁴ *Daily Astorian*, November 13, 1877:1.

the United States.⁶⁵ In Astoria, residents who thought in terms of the number of Chinese they were willing to handle qualifies the argument that none at all were welcome. A unity of sentiment behind this idea is even apparent in the assertion that “every thoughtful person agrees that we have as many Chinese in the state as is good for us at present.”⁶⁶

Such a distinction, however, did not prevent Astorians from producing some organized movements against the Chinese as early as 1873. A corresponding secretary for the People’s Protective Alliance, an anti-Chinese organization created in San Francisco in 1873, wrote to the editor of the *Astorian* to inform its readers that it hoped to establish a branch there, stating its main goal as “securing unity of action in protesting against the immigration of Chinese.”⁶⁷ The branch that developed in Astoria reorganized as the Anti-Chinese Society in 1876 and elected as its president A.H. Sales, Astoria’s road district supervisor who, only two years later, would employ Chinese men to build the road to Upper Astoria. On July 9, 1876, the Society met for what the newspaper variously called an “Anti-Chinese Rally” or an “Anti-coolie meeting,” which the *Astorian* boasted “was largely attended.”⁶⁸ It is notable that, according to the report, C.W. Fulton, who frequently acted as an attorney for Chinese in court, gave a speech at the meeting. Yet, this Anti-Chinese Society did not intend to make radical moves against the Chinese. A violent anti-Chinese episode in Carson, Nevada, inspired an editorialist for the *Astorian*

⁶⁵ Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 25-30; Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 223-225.

⁶⁶ *Daily Astorian*, September 25, 1877:2.

⁶⁷ *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, July 15, 1873:1. The People’s Protective Alliance was one of many anti-Chinese or anti-coolie organizations that developed on the Pacific Coast. It was formed when three different labor organizations in California came together and decided to try to unite the various anti-Chinese organizations across California and Oregon. See Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, Africans Americans, and Racial Anxiety*, 164, 166.

⁶⁸ *Daily Astorian*, June 7, 1876:2; June 10, 1876: 1.

to comment that Astoria's anti-Chinese club considered itself an "anti-hoodlum" club as well, that it "claim[s] some of our best citizens as members, and they wish to have it understood that the hoodlum element, such as existed in Carson, will not be tolerated here."⁶⁹ Leaders of the group took care to invite only current and prospective members to the meeting to be held in the courthouse the following Saturday. So in this early stage and even during the powerful rise of California's loudest anti-Chinese firebrand, Dennis Kearney, the composition and goals of the anti-Chinese movement in Astoria remained controlled and in the hands of Astoria's professional class, people who even employed or had business relationships with Astoria's Chinese.

Although the anti-Chinese club represented a structured effort to both appease and manage local anti-Chinese tensions, some in Astoria engaged in less organized activities directed against the Chinese. The *Astorian* reported a relatively nonthreatening example of this in May 1878, writing that, on the day previous, "an anti-Chinese spouter occupied the corner of Main and Chenamus,"⁷⁰ which was less than a block from the then rapidly developing Chinatown. Social marginalization of Astoria's Chinese community is evident in an advertisement for the town's 1876 centennial Fourth of July celebration. Under a detailed listing of the activities planned for the weekend and the processional layout for the parade, the advertisement extended its open welcome to "all Societies, all Lodges, Chapters, Creeds and Nationalities (excepting always the Chinamen)" to enjoy the festivities.⁷¹ Another case reveals the presence of Chinese prostitutes in Astoria at this

⁶⁹ *Daily Astorian*, June 14, 1876:2.

⁷⁰ *Weekly Astorian*, May 4, 1878:3. A "spouter" is an outdated word defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a fluent or voluble declaimer or speaker."

⁷¹ *Daily Astorian*, June 16, 1876:2.

time, even though census records list on twenty-nine Chinese women living in Astoria by 1880.⁷² These Chinese prostitutes appeared to attract the same kind of contempt from local whites—based on racial, social, and sexual stigmas—that many other Chinese women on the Pacific Coast did in the late nineteenth century.⁷³ On an October night in 1879, a “gentleman” passing through Chenamus street gave a Chinese woman “a lusty punch beneath the belt with an umbrella . . . as she stood in the doorway of a den.”⁷⁴ Rather than condemn the violent actions of the “gentleman,” an editorialist responded by encouraging “every person passing that way to perform the same feat,” as “it is a stain on the town to tolerate so abominable a nuisance on such a prominent thoroughfare.”⁷⁵ Although racist language infused D.C. Ireland’s *Astorian* newspapers throughout the period, this reaction to a physical outburst against a Chinese woman stands out as especially harsh. It also subtly suggests that the visibility of the woman and the vice she represented created much of the problem, as she stood on a “prominent thoroughfare.” These examples point to the fact that, although organized and nonviolent efforts were developed to thwart further Chinese immigration, individual, spontaneous, violent, and socially marginalizing acts expressed the more extreme distaste of some Astorians for these foreigners.

Similar to the *Astorian*’s infrequent support of extreme or violent outbursts, the occasional laudatory remarks of particular Chinese also punctuated Astoria’s press. The

⁷² 1880 United States Manuscript Census, Township of Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com.

⁷³ Lucie Cheng, “Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Labor Immigration under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II*, eds. Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 402-434.

⁷⁴ *Weekly Astorian*, October 17, 1879:4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

newspaper basically provided an “employment wanted” ad for a “celestial” named Ah Cheong, a former employee of either the writer or the *Astorian* printing office.⁷⁶ Newly returned from China, Ah Cheong hoped to find work as a cook in a hotel or on a steamboat, and the article assured those interested that “any person in want of an honest chinaman will find Ah Cheong one that can be trusted.”⁷⁷ Personal familiarity with particular Chinese residents did not curb virulent anti-Chinese ideologies, but it demonstrated that closer relationships could allow for an exception to the overall trend. Another newspaper quip showed admiration for “the way a Celestial manipulated the trowel” while building a chimney on one of Astoria’s tallest buildings. This Chinese bricklayer “proved that he was no amateur in masonic work of the 1st degree” and earned, in this sense, at least a modicum of respect from his observer.⁷⁸ In the way that extreme attitudes sometimes disrupted the newspaper’s generally non-radical racist outlook, admiration for particular Chinese also occasionally suspended the flow of discriminatory remarks.

In fact, there were certain cases in which a Chinese person could, through the race-tinted lenses of the nineteenth century, “rise above” his race, or at least move closer to being considered “white.” One possible avenue involved becoming financially secure or reputable in the business world. A Chinese merchant named Ah Kow, who purchased a ten-year lease of property in town in order to open his own cannery in 1877, earned respect through his financial standing and was considered a “leading spirit among the

⁷⁶ *Weekly Astorian*, December 25, 1875:3. The article read that Ah Cheong “was employed by us several years ago,” without specifying “us.”

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Weekly Astorian*, December 22, 1877:3.

Chinese element.”⁷⁹ However, those who recognized Ah Kow’s business acumen still viewed this assimilation process through a racialized framework. The business community, for example, considered him “as near a white man in all his transactions as any man we ever met.”⁸⁰ In the context of the time period, then, “successful Chinese” offered an anomaly to whites; because an individual’s abilities and characteristics remained race specific, a non-white person who somehow achieved financial security and earned respect in the community created a conception that they were really more white than, say, Asian or Chinese. And distinguishing such “exceptional” Chinese likely helped reinforce the notion that the vast majority of them were backwards and inferior.

Another notable example of a Chinese resident of Astoria who earned the respect and support of his white neighbors involved a legal case and substantial religious discourse. Considered a “pagan with a Christian heart in him,” Linn Sam created a stir in Astoria when he helped a Chinese prostitute achieve freedom from her owner, Hop Kee, in order to marry Linn Sam’s cousin in Astoria. Linn Sam and other white witnesses traveled to Portland to testify for the woman, who was described as “striving to retain the germ of virtue.” After she was allowed to return to Astoria with her husband, the November 14, 1877, *Astorian* claimed there were unified and conspiratorial plans by many “nefarious” Chinese to assassinate the “good Samaritan,” Linn Sam.⁸¹ The story continued on into December with the arrests of Linn Sam, the unnamed woman, and her husband Ah Bock—also a Christian convert, according to the story—for larceny. The Chinese accusers then secured the woman’s bail in Astoria and kidnapped her. The

⁷⁹ *Daily Astorian*, September 16, 1877:1.

⁸⁰ *Daily Astorian*, January 8, 1880:3.

⁸¹ *Daily Astorian*, November 14, 1877:1. “A Pagan with a Christian Heart in Him” was part of the headline.

excitement around the case produced much support for the Christian Chinese against their “idolatrous” counterparts, the “Chinese scoundrels”: “We believe that it is the duty of our citizens to see that chinamen who show a disposition to forsake their idolatry and embrace christianity, are protected.”⁸² A few months later, the case against the woman’s kidnappers proceeded in Portland, while she remained captive to them. Linn Sam resumed living back in Astoria with his own wife and managed, it appears, to make friendly acquaintances with the *Astorian*’s printing crew, as an article noted in early 1878 that Linn Sam “called upon us after duly introducing Mrs. Linn Sam. It was their happy new year.”⁸³

Linn Sam himself seemed to epitomize some Astorians’ view of an exceptional Chinese among a mass of “heathens,” one who interacted with white Astorians and benefited from their acquaintance. Police Judge Frank J. Taylor, who had married Ah Bock and the Chinese woman in the case above, came to Linn Sam’s aid by testifying for him in an assault and battery suit filed against him by a white man. Although originally fined for the act, Linn Sam was discharged and his bail exonerated upon appeal.⁸⁴ Linn Sam also served as surety for one of his fellow Chinese in 1879, swearing to pay the circuit court \$100 if the man did not appear when summoned. Significantly, Linn Sam signed his name on the surety document in English, rather than with his Chinese characters, even further demonstrating his assimilation to American customs and ideals.⁸⁵

⁸² *Weekly Astorian*, December 22, 1877:2.

⁸³ *Weekly Astorian*, March 30, 1878:3; *Weekly Astorian*, February 9, 1878:3.

⁸⁴ *State of Oregon v. Lin Sam* (1880), Judgment Role 772, Circuit Court Case Files 768-875, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 9, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.

⁸⁵ *State of Oregon v. Lee Chung* (1879), Judgment Role 716, Circuit Court Case Files 672-767, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 8, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.

Court records also show him serving as an interpreter for cases involving Chinese as plaintiffs, defendants, or witnesses. Linn Sam's appearances in the court records and the episode involving the Chinese prostitute all illustrate the special ability of Christian adherence, personal interactions with local whites, and familiarity with the American legal system to, like business acumen, allow Chinese to cross the threshold of race. While such Chinese became accepted, at least to a degree, within Astoria's white community, they also probably, and paradoxically, augmented the stereotypes of most Chinese as depraved and unassimilable.

The increasing Chinese presence in Astoria's legal and economic spheres was paralleled by the expansion of their spatial presence in Astoria through the 1870s and early 1880s. Chinese cannery workers typically lived in bunkhouses that were laid out in rows on the banks or wharfs behind the cannery piers.⁸⁶ Yet, the Chinese also came to inhabit a central part of the growing city. Sanborn maps for the area, the earliest of which show the town in 1884, reveal Chinese washhouses, "Chinese Stores and Dwellings," and buildings simply labeled "Chinese" interspersed amongst saloons, dwellings, sheds, a bowling alley, a variety store and general feed store (Figure 2).⁸⁷ Although a few Chinese washhouses are shown on other nearby blocks, most of the Chinese buildings were laid out on block ten and the west half of block nine, in the area directly across the street from a large general merchandise store, a clothing store, and the post office, an elaborate building that occupied a block of its own. Warehouses, a hotel, shops, sheds, and storage

⁸⁶ Steen, "Expanding Context," 53.

⁸⁷ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1884, Astoria, Oregon, Sheets 1-6, Sanborn Map Company, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, and Environmental Data Resources, 2001, *Digital Sanborn maps 1867-1970* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: ProQuest UMI), <http://sanborn.umi.com/>. Abbreviation information found at Environmental Data Resources, Inc., "Sanborn Map Abbreviations," Environmental Data Resources, 2013, accessed at www.edrnet.com/File%20Library/pdfs/Sanbornkey.pdf.

The newspaper followed this growth as Chinese leased ground and built structures to house themselves and their businesses in the downtown area. In April 1876, “work [began] on ‘a slashing old building’ for a Chinese company on the corner of Chenamus and Benton streets,” with the structure to measure a considerable “48 x 48 feet in size, five stories.”⁸⁸ A month later, the *Astorian* informed its readers that a new building on Concomley, the street lining the north of the two main blocks housing Chinese buildings, was intended for a Chinese boardinghouse.⁸⁹ Chinese who could afford to lease these lots from the property owners did not seem to be lacking. By 1882, the *Astorian* deplored that “the Mongolians are capturing the north side of Chenamus street.”⁹⁰ The construction of buildings for Chinese inhabitants sparked apparent vexation. After describing the “most offensive stench and opium smell” coming out of the Chinese houses along Chenamus, the crowded nature of the area “packed with china loungers so thick that it is most impossible to pass at all,” and the fire hazard that the wooden Chinese buildings created, an editorial in the *Astorian* issued a rallying cry to “fellow citizens” of Astoria. The writer asked, “Must we endanger ourselves and families to all kinds of sickness and disease by having that terrible filth and stench which must bring on such in the very heart of our city? Must we give up half the street to those filthy chinese coolies?” The writer urged the city’s board of health to investigate the buildings and even suggested giving the Chinese “a designated reservation as they now do in San Francisco.”⁹¹ Although

⁸⁸*Weekly Astorian*, April 8, 1876:3.

⁸⁹*Daily Astorian*, May 4, 1876:1.

⁹⁰*Daily Astorian*, November 9, 1882:3.

⁹¹*Weekly Astorian*, August 31, 1878:4. Spatial segregation of San Francisco’s Chinese was never legally enforced. They settled largely in what became the city’s commercial center, to the dismay of many San Franciscans. California’s 1879 constitution did include a provision that allowed cities and towns to prohibit

Astoria's Chinese were never formally restricted to a certain geographic area, these sentiments give stark evidence of the extreme disgruntlement some felt about the very conspicuous presence of Chinese "in the heart of our city." Indeed, the writer's signing off as "Nemesis" demonstrates the sort of racial face-off that some felt was taking place due to the infiltration of Chinese.

Frustrations vented in the newspapers focused not only on Chinese tenants but also on white property owners. Article XV Sec. 8 of Oregon's 1857 constitution prohibited the Chinese from owning real estate, forcing Chinese to lease property from whites. In late 1876, the *Astorian* lamented that "John Ching Gong . . . took the only vacant site on Main street this week" for fifteen dollars. The writer adopted racialized language to encourage property owners to "no letee him to any Chinaman, melican man hab him for \$16."⁹² Another source of white consternation involved the construction of buildings literally over the water, on planks that lay over the small bay that appeared in the 1868 survey map mentioned previously. The drainage and grading problems of constructing much of the city, including the non-Chinese portions, over the water saturated the newspapers all through the late nineteenth century. But as "a gang of celestials started the foundation of another house over the swamp" in September 1877, an *Astorian* editorialist complained of the "abominable stench" coming from that area of Concomley and Washington, remarking that "it is about time that the owners of the lots

Chinese from locating within their city limits and/or to require Chinese to only locate "within prescribed portions of those limits." San Francisco's board of health attempted more than once to implement this provision, but failed. In 1890, the city council passed a residential segregation ordinance, which prohibited Chinese from locating outside of prescribed city blocks. This ordinance was challenged and overturned in federal circuit court. See Charles McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 81-83, 223-233.

⁹² *Weekly Astorian*, November 25, 1876:3.

leased to them were compelled to do something of a purifying nature.”⁹³ While the Chinese were all generally considered smelly and filthy, these remarks demonstrate that, like employers of the Chinese, owners of property leased to Chinese were also held accountable for their presence and for the perceived problems they posed for the town.

Despite the fact that anti-Chinese sentiment ran high during this early time, especially as Astorians witnessed what they perceived as an invasion of Chinese into the city, the Chinese did engage in their own recreational activities in the community and find ways to adapt to the town and entertain themselves during time away from work. Although newspaper editorialists called one boat used by Chinese residents to get around town “the roughest looking piece of marine architecture that ever floated to the pebbly beach between Hamburger’s store and The Astorian office,” the Chinese frequently enjoyed using boats to “scoot about the harbor, and in and out here and there any where a chinaman wants to go.”⁹⁴ The Chinese also formed and participated in their own cultural organizations, establishing a Masonic Lodge in Astoria in June of 1876, which immediately attracted “great numbers” of initiates. A white invitee to the first meeting reported to the *Astorian* that their “work corresponds in a measure to our Masonic usages,” to which the *Astorian* responded, “and why not? Are we not informed that Masonry exists in every portion of the World?”⁹⁵ Settlement of the Chinese in Astoria, then, did not simply involve working and establishing a spatial presence in Astoria; social and recreational developments also intimate an increasingly settled presence, one that the *Astorian* represented as, to a certain extent, tolerated.

⁹³ *Daily Astorian*, September 16, 1877:1.

⁹⁴ *Weekly Astorian*, April 17, 1875:3; *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, October 28, 1873:1.

⁹⁵ *Daily Astorian*, June 12, 1876:1.

Indeed, the most celebrated Chinese annual event in Astoria through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries remained Chinese New Year, which typically took place in late January or early February. The newspapers consistently reported its approach and activities, but with varying degrees of interest and sarcasm through the years. For example, while the *Astorian* reminded its readers in early 1878 that soon “we may expect the usual cracker demonstrations and Fourth of July smell in the atmosphere,” the following year’s notice about the New Year’s celebrations by “the pagan descendants of Joss” employed mocking language to warn residents to “look out for bombs and China clackers—alle same Mellican man’s fourth July.”⁹⁶ A British sea captain witnessing the 1879 festivities caught Chinese giving some of their firecrackers to little boys in the town who were enjoying the general ruckus.⁹⁷ Through the years, Astorians would come to learn more about Chinese New Year, its customs, and background through the reporting of the *Astorian*. The newspaper increasingly carried explanatory articles about the food, paper decorations, traditional paying of debts, spice burning, music, and history of Chinese New Year traditions. The custom of distributing lily bulbs several weeks prior to New Year, with the belief that good luck would come to the owner if the lilies bloomed by the time of the celebration, seemed especially appealing to non-Chinese residents. In 1890, for example, the *Astorian* revealed that lilies sat “brightly in the windows of many happy Christian homes.” If the sayings of “the Mongolian manipulators of soiled clothes” were true then, said the writer, “a good many

⁹⁶ *Weekly Astorian*, February 2, 1878:2; *Daily Astorian*, January 21, 1879:3.

⁹⁷ *Daily Astorian*, January 22, 1879:3.

of us will have oodles of luck in 1890.”⁹⁸ Therefore, Chinese New Year often elicited a mixture of curiosity and amusement from white Astorians more than annoyance.

Newspapers also provide early indications of seemingly beneficial relationships the Chinese may have had with some prominent white members of the community. The *Astorian* revealed an interesting bit of gossip during the 1878 New Year’s festivities when it wrote, “it is said that Mayor [W.W.] Parker pungled the fine imposed upon celestials for firing crackers . . . in violation of the city statutes.”⁹⁹ Although motives for such aid to Astoria’s Chinese and even the veracity of the report are uncertain, the allegation and public reporting of it suggest the belief that certain leading figures of Astoria might have been concerned with mitigating measures that would be harmful or particularly obstructive to Astoria’s Chinese. The newspaper hints at other cooperative relations between whites and Chinese as well. A very significant figure in Astoria, Capt. George Flavel, loaned his warehouse to the Chinese Masonic Lodge for “an all-night session” during the summer of 1879.¹⁰⁰ And I.W. Case enjoyed a Chinese clientele at his mercantile business. During the winter of 1877, a Chinese customer who purchased a buck saw from Case’s store wanted it wrapped up, because “the paper was worth something to him.” Although the clerk “couldn’t see it, . . . he passed over a sheet of the straw to pacify John.”¹⁰¹ These examples demonstrate some accommodation for local Chinese. All three white men mentioned composed some of Astoria’s more long-term

⁹⁸ *Daily Astorian*, February 14, 1885:3 and January 10, 1890:3.

⁹⁹ *Weekly Astorian*, February 9, 1878:3. A “chiefly regional” colloquium, according to the OED, “pungled” means “to hand over or come up with (money); to ‘shell out’.” It is used at other times in the *Astorian* newspapers as well.

¹⁰⁰ *Weekly Astorian*, July 18, 1879:3.

¹⁰¹ *Weekly Astorian*, December 8, 1877:3.

residents and local elite. Perhaps their economic security contributed to their willingness to do business with and even aid the Chinese in pursuing a relatively comfortable living, beyond just a livelihood, in Astoria.

A letter printed in the *Astorian* in March of 1879 also suggests the existence of interpersonal associations between Chinese and whites in Astoria that were based on certain mutual benefits. William Ross issued a personal letter to Astorians to ensure them that he had no involvement in the recent charge against police chief W.J. Barry for taking money from Chinese gambling house proprietors in return for leaving the gambling houses unmolested. Barry had accused Ross of participating in the bribery scandal during the common council's investigations; therefore, Ross hoped to clear his name by having his sworn testimony to the council printed in the pages of the *Astorian*. The noted "Lim Sam" made his appearance in the case, having testified to the common council that he knew Ross and that Ross "never asked me for any money." Lim Sam made clear that "I never paid any policeman money but Mr. Barry," admitting his own complicity in the bribery scandal.¹⁰² The episode demonstrates how, while the alleged vices and degradation that the Chinese brought to Astoria were lamented and utilized as reasons for exclusion, the Chinese found some in Astoria who were ready to tap into the financial opportunities that the Chinese provided, in more ways than one.

The salmon canning industry brought the Chinese into Astoria in the 1870s, but evidence that they would serve as more than just a floating cannery workforce surfaced early. Chinese men who found jobs and employment outside of the canneries aroused the ire of some whites who looked to prosper in some of the same lines of work, and opinions quickly surfaced that Chinese encroachment into the commercial part of the city was a

¹⁰² *Daily Astorian*, March 7, 1879:3.

general nuisance. The overtly racist and derogatory language used in these early years might seem to reveal that social relations between whites and the Chinese were incredibly fraught, but there are indications that the Chinese began to establish a settled presence in Astoria. The early story of the Chinese in Astoria is, in some ways, similar to that of white migrants and immigrants to other towns in the West in the late nineteenth century. They found employment in a major industry that considered them especially useful and profitable. They opened businesses that hoped to cater both to their own ethnic group and to others in the community. They leased property, used the court system, and enjoyed recreational and cultural activities. Although racist dialogue was pungent upon their arrival in Astoria, it would be imprudent to ignore the ways in which the Chinese did quickly make inroads into this burgeoning community.

And their own impetus to create a place in the town was met with resistance that was mostly vocal. Themes emphasized to argue against the Chinese, such as their status as slaves whose presence only benefited the greedy capitalist, reveal some of the contours of anti-Chinese thought in Astoria. Whether the newspaper's derogatory language during this earlier period stemmed mostly from the outlook of its editor, D.C. Ireland, or from a negative or fearful reaction to the large and rapid influx of Chinese, this language did little to stem the tide of Chinese coming into Astoria. There is even evidence that, although some efforts were made to appease those who disfavored the Chinese, there were also efforts to mollify the effects of anti-Chinese activities and, in a sense, deal with the reality of a growing Chinese presence. However, for Astorians, accepting a Chinese presence and maintaining a semblance of interracial stability would become more

challenging, and even potentially violent, as dislike for the Chinese spiked considerably throughout the West in the mid-1880s.

CHAPTER III

NAVIGATING THROUGH TURBULENT SEAS: ASTORIA DURING THE PEAK OF REGIONAL ANTI-CHINESE ACTIVITY

During the height of the 1885 fishing season, two men idled about on a street near Union town. They were most likely Finns, as that western side of Astoria had mostly been settled by Finnish immigrants. The Finns enjoyed their status as fishermen for the canneries and strictly prohibited the Chinese from working on the boats. On this Tuesday morning, a lingering state of inebriation animated the men to shout verbal abuses at some Chinese men walking past, perhaps on their way to work. The difference in language was no barrier for the Chinese; they knew they were being insulted, as they had been before while walking along the street. On this day, the Chinese men decided to retaliate. A brawl quickly ensued, fists and elbows flying in the air, and the numbers on both sides increased as men rushed to fight for their respective countrymen in a “war of races,” according to the *Astorian*. Eventually, the Chinese men ran to their lodges for refuge, but, as a crowd of agitators gathered outside, they eventually reemerged. “The descendants of Zengis Khan [sic] sallied forth with knives and clubs,” reported the *Astorian*, and the escalating conflict was ended only when two local cannery owners “got between the belligerents and succeeded in calming their angry passions.” However, as the newspaper remarked with sensationalist flair, “the fire still smolders and may yet be quenched in gore.”¹

¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, June 26, 1885:3. “War of Races” was the headline.

This altercation represents the height of physical violence between whites and Chinese in Astoria during a period of especially intense anti-Chinese anxiety in the West.² The fact that the two men who broke up the fight were cannery owners and respectable “Messrs.” perhaps reveals the reason. Despite the relatively open atmosphere for anti-Chinese insults at the time, the employer classes of Astoria generally deterred unrestrained animosity and helped to manage tensions in the community, a situation that likely contributed to the town’s reputation as a “safe haven” during the turbulent period of the mid-1880s.³

The 1880s witnessed a flurry of anti-Chinese activity across the American West. The anxiety that led to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act continued and even intensified after the act’s passage. The persistence of illegal Chinese immigration into the United States, an economic slump, labor unrest, and journalistic provocation have all been identified as contributing factors in the anti-Chinese riots, expulsions, and violence that broke out across the western states in 1885 and 1886.⁴ In this regional context of unease, one might expect that Astoria’s proportionally large Chinese population would make the town ripe for local conflict. No one could be certain that disorder would not erupt in Astoria. But, analogous to the way that the large numbers of Japanese in Hawaii avoided internment after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Chinese avoided expulsion from

² Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 58.

³ Friday, *Organizing Asian-American Labor*, and Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: the Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004) both make this reference to Astoria as one of few “safe havens” for Chinese during the mid-1880s.

⁴ See Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007), for an in-depth look at the expulsions that took place in different cities along the Pacific Coast in the mid-1880s.

Astoria, and, despite amplified tensions, the situation in the town remained fairly stable.⁵ While Astorians engaged in the generalized anti-Chinese discourse of the period, actual measures taken against local Chinese remained nonviolent and relatively limited. The contours of racial discourse surrounding the 1882 Exclusion Act reveal how both central and ideological the “Chinese question” had become for Astorians and the broader Pacific coast. But on the ground, the ability of Astoria’s Chinese to get work, to continue to expand their presence in the legal and commercial spheres, to conduct their own cultural practices, and to weather the period relatively unscathed benefited from the sort of management of tensions that can be seen more clearly during the critical moment of late 1885 and early 1886. While anti-Chinese language and rhetoric by no means ceased in Astoria, the sentiments behind them did not translate into substantial actions against the local Chinese. Indeed, the 1880s proved to be rather anti-climactic in Astoria; although anti-Chinese rhetoric was abundant, it was tempered. During this period of regional Sinophobic turmoil, Astorians tended to recognize, even if only begrudgingly, that the Chinese had a place, even if only a provisional one, in Astoria.

By the early 1880s, the call for federal action to restrict Chinese immigration could be heard across the West. Whether or not restriction would abrogate the open immigration provisions of the Burlingame Treaty with China mattered less and less to politicians who recognized the widespread appeal of exclusion legislation and who sought to cultivate favor with Western voters.⁶ The issue took hold in smaller western

⁵ Jonathan Y. Okamura, “Race Relations in Hawai’i during World War II: The Non-internment of Japanese Americans,” *Amerasia Journal* 26:2 (2000), 117-141.

⁶ Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Gyory makes the argument that the national movement for the exclusion act was organized not by laborers but by politicians who “seized and manipulated the issue” of Chinese immigration in order to garner votes.

localities as well as in the larger state governments, and the high level of unity around exclusion was apparent as both Democratic and Republican parties backed it.⁷ Astoria's Chamber of Commerce in fact demonstrated its approval of exclusion when it sent a letter to President Rutherford Hayes in February of 1879 urging the passage of the restriction bill then in Congress. The group argued that exclusion would benefit "the true commercial interests, the prosperity and peace of the Pacific states."⁸ In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Astoria was just another western town supporting the restriction of Chinese immigration, and the different layers of argument exhibited in Astoria's newspapers resembled those found in the more regional discussion.

As outlined in the previous chapter, most Astorians viewed immigration restriction as a logical response to the perceived Chinese invasion taking place along America's western shores and as a way to combat the stigma that low-paid Chinese laborers ostensibly brought to certain working class occupations. However, the movement against Chinese immigration both nationally and locally comprised other layers as well. During the national debates over exclusion, the *Astorian* worked hard to refute the arguments it heard from "New England humanitarians" that the United States was an asylum for the world's oppressed. While acknowledging that this may have at one point been the case, it stridently advocated that America "pass out of the sucking-bottle

⁷ The State Democratic Platform was published in the *Daily Astorian*, April 8, 1882:3. The local, Clatsop County Republican party resolutions were printed in the *Daily Astorian* on April 13, 1882:3. Both expressed disapproval of President Arthur's veto of the Chinese Exclusion bill.

⁸ *Daily Astorian*, February 27, 1879:3. The bill then in Congress, called the Fifteen Passenger Bill, would have abrogated the Burlingame Treaty's stipulation regarding free movement of Chinese into the United States by restricting the number of passengers allowed aboard each ship to fifteen passengers.

and pap stage of nationhood” and become a place solely “for Americans.”⁹ Another lengthy editorial, however, argued that even if Americans submitted to this notion of their country as an asylum, it was only so for those who needed it. The Chinese fell outside this category, the writer argued, not because they were not politically or religiously oppressed but because they had not even a concept of political or religious freedom. If the Chinese man was oppressed, the editorialist declared, “he doesn’t know it.”¹⁰ This line of argument aligned well with the slave mentality many believed the Chinese to possess. It also brought an inherent contradiction of exclusionary rhetoric to the surface. In attempting to tie America’s immigration policies to its support of freedom and liberty, the argument suggested that a potential immigrant had to first know and embrace these “American” ideals in order to enjoy them. Nevertheless, Astorians and others along the Pacific Coast vehemently opposed the asylum argument on the grounds that it was obsolete, that it represented eastern “sentimentality,” and that, because the Chinese did not seek an asylum, it did not apply to them anyway.

On the flip side of refuting the asylum argument was conceptualizing who did constitute “the right kind of immigrant,” which the *Astorian* frequently, but not always, determined by race. The *Astorian* sought to lay out explicitly “the difference” between immigrants crossing the Atlantic and those crossing the Pacific. While the former allegedly aspired to own land, build homes, and participate in the social, cultural, economic, and political institutions of America, the latter only came to earn a few dollars

⁹ *Daily Astorian*, March 11, 1882:1. Descriptions of easterners and especially of eastern politicians opposed to exclusion often took the same form as “New England humanitarians.” “Sentimental gush” or “eastern philanthropists,” for example, were also descriptive terms used. See *Daily Astorian*, March 23, 1879:1 and March 25, 1881:1.

¹⁰ *Daily Astorian*, April 19, 1882:1. The title of this editorial was “Not an Asylum.”

while stubbornly maintaining their own backward laws and institutions.¹¹ In essence then, the newspaper promoted a perceptibly Jeffersonian standard for immigration policy, a standard that suitable immigrants must be willing and able to assimilate. While the broader discourse and much of the *Astorian's* rhetoric racialized this Jeffersonian ideal by associating the desire for land and freedom with whiteness, language occasionally used in the *Astorian* indicated a belief that not all “white” immigrants fit this mold either.¹²

While looking locally at recent immigrants to Clatsop County, a writer for the *Astorian* made a distinction between the favorable immigrant who “benefits the county” through having some money to spend, clearing land, and showing an inclination to settle, and the undesirable immigrant who seemed content with unemployment. Calling attention to Astoria’s appeal for all types of transient and indolent men, which had much to do with its seasonal fishing industry and position as a port town, the writer stated, “there are enough here already of bummers and chaps ‘looking for work,’ and hoping they won’t find it.”¹³ In this sense, this layer of exclusionist discourse, which attempted to construct the ideal immigrant in contrast to the unwelcome one, sometimes moved the local discussion beyond just Chinese immigration to encompass broader elements of class and virtue.

¹¹ “The Right Kind of Immigrant” was the title of an article in the *Daily Morning Astorian*, August 20, 1885:3, and “The Difference” was the title of an article in the *Daily Astorian*, May 11, 1882:2. Anti-Chinese discourse often also centered on a gendered notion of Chinese immigration. The fact that the vast majority of Chinese immigrants through the late nineteenth century were male was used to reinforce the argument that Chinese immigrants had no desire to permanently settle in the United States.

¹² See Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), for discussions of the categorization of immigrants by “white” and “non-white” and the effects of these types of categorization on different classes and ethnic groups.

¹³ *Daily Morning Astorian*, August 20, 1885:3.

Nevertheless, the forceful exclusionary sentiments of the West Coast impacted national politics during the time period. The Chinese Exclusion Act was signed into law in May 1882. Its provisions barred Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States for the next ten years. Astorians fully considered themselves part of a united Pacific front favoring exclusion. Following President Arthur's veto of the first exclusion bill to pass Congress, the *Astorian* referred to him as "His Accidency" and opined that the result of this action would be the loss of the Pacific states to the Democratic Party.¹⁴ The *Astorian* tried to show its readers that even some of the town's local Chinese supported the bill, although it mocked the Chinese accent to do so, printing, "Me heap likee Chinee bill; too muchee Chinamen come, work too muchee, cheapee, no like."¹⁵ This suggested to Astorians that the local Chinese were taking up the same arguments as white supporters of the bill, believing their countrymen worked tirelessly and cheaply and therefore competed against those with higher labor standards. The Chinese Exclusion Act at least in principle appeared to satisfy most in Astoria and in the West, but the financial and logistical difficulties of enforcing the Chinese Exclusion Act would eventually frustrate white westerners and contribute to more vigorous action against the Chinese during the mid-1880s.

To the disappointment of many in the western region of the United States, Chinese immigrants continued to find ways around and through the immigration checks put into place following the Exclusion Act. An article titled "Artful Chinese" explained how, whether they were entering by "securing passage in Indian canoes" or by paying

¹⁴ President Arthur vetoed the first Chinese exclusion bill passed by Congress because of the time limit of its implementation. He favored a ten-year exclusion act rather than a twenty-year one. The modification of the bill to prohibit Chinese immigration for ten years then led to his signing it in May 1882.

¹⁵ *Daily Astorian*, May 23, 1882:3.

fishermen to smuggle them from British Columbia, “our Mongolian neighbors have been more anxious than ever to enjoy the privilege of nestling under Uncle Sam’s wing.”¹⁶ Stories about the continued arrival of Chinese appeared regularly in the papers, and, as Astoria served as an immigration checkpoint and customs station authorized to issue return certificates to departing Chinese, its name came up in cases elsewhere as well. In August 1885, the *Astorian* reported that, while 1,635 certificates had been distributed in Astoria, only twenty Chinese had returned through that port with Astoria-issued certificates. This allegedly occurred because Chinese could sell their certificates to buyers in China and the new “happy holder of the red certificate finds it an open sesame” into San Francisco’s ports, where officials were easily bribed to accept fraudulent certificates. Chinese entering through San Francisco could not even specify the location of Astoria, the article stated.¹⁷ The *Astorian* also claimed that certificates could be sold in Hong Kong for \$150, and, since steamship companies, custom house officials, and the Chinese all stood to profit from such “organized fraud,” this “certificate business” essentially invalidated the whole purpose and effectiveness of the restriction act.¹⁸ Astoria’s relatively significant place in the web of restriction act procedures thus shifted its criticisms beyond its local Chinese population to the broader spectrum of federal anti-Chinese regulations.¹⁹

While illegal immigration certainly contributed to increased frustrations, scholars offer an array of reasons for why the 1880s saw a sharp rise in anti-Chinese activity.

¹⁶ *Daily Astorian*, May 6, 1883:3.

¹⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, August 26, 1885:3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; *Daily Morning Astorian*, August 27, 1885:3; *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 23, 1885:3.

¹⁹ See Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 75-148, for a thorough analysis of the difficulties federal officials faced in enforcing the Chinese Exclusion Act during the first few decades of its implementation.

Many focus on the role of working class labor unions that found anti-Chinese sentiment to be an effective rallying point, but most seem to suggest that a combination of factors led to the increase in violence and hostility. Among these, and related to labor organizing, is the focus placed on Chinese exclusion by opportunistic politicians, the broader conflicts between capital and labor, immigrants disenchanted with the reality of life in the West, economic depression and widespread unemployment, sensational journalism, and the transport westward of non-white racial stereotypes during southern Reconstruction.²⁰ Whatever formed the root cause of anti-Chinese anxiety, by the mid-1880s, citizens in many cities were ready to retaliate against the Chinese and resorted to violence to handle the perceived problem. In September 1885, white miners in Rock Springs, Wyoming, rioted and killed fifty-one Chinese strikebreakers, and afterwards hostilities erupted in dozens of other Western cities.²¹ Chinese faced mobs, arsonists, and organized boycotts in towns from Kansas to California, the state which saw the most roundups. The situation had very much reached its climax by 1885 and 1886. Violence broke out in numerous cities where rioters burned Chinatowns and attacked, harassed, and drove out Chinese.

²⁰ See Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 51; Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 43-60; Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*; Henry Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 56-76; Najia Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States, 1848-82* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 201-213; Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 132-134; Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 170; Carlos A. Schwantes, "From Anti-Chinese Agitation to Reform Politics: The Legacy of the Knights of Labor in Washington and the Pacific Northwest," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 88:4 (Fall 1997), 175.

²¹ Craig Storti, *Incident at Bitter Creek: The Story of the Rock Springs Massacre* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991), 142.

Jean Pfaelzer's close analysis of this period reveals that the Chinese were rounded up and expelled from nearly two hundred towns just in the Pacific Northwest.²²

As tensions grew in the West, Astorians remained informed of the various movements against the Chinese. The *Astorian* covered these developments attentively, especially those that took place close to home, in Oregon and Washington territory, and it criticized more violent or extreme courses of action. It reprinted the *Seattle Chronicle's* account of the shooting deaths of three Chinese hop pickers in Squak valley, Washington territory, less than two weeks after the incident in Rock Springs.²³ It denounced a suspected dynamiting plot against the Chinese in San Francisco, calling it the result of "a lot of crazy cranks [who] have taken up the cry . . . just for the sake of notoriety, and bring the movement into disrepute."²⁴ The burning of Tacoma's Chinatown and the expulsion of its several hundred Chinese residents in early November 1885 earned the reproach of a writer who considered this course of action "criminally silly," a "folly" as it served to delay more effective restriction legislation and instead garnered sympathy for the Chinese from eastern observers.²⁵ The complicity of the mayor and other leading Tacoma officials and the callousness of the expulsion, as Chinese were forced to walk on foot towards Seattle, were the subject of widespread criticism, and the *Astorian* assured its readers that "the Tacoma idea will not be repeated here."²⁶

²² Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 253.

²³ *Daily Morning Astorian*, September 13, 1885:1. The *Astorian* also reported the acquittal of the alleged murderers: *Daily Morning Astorian*, November 4, 1885:3.

²⁴ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 18, 1885:2.

²⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, November 6, 1885:2.

²⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, November 8, 1885:3.

Astoria's press followed the growth of anti-Chinese tensions in Seattle from October 1885 to February 1886 especially closely. Demonstrations, boycotts, and mass meetings dotted the trajectory towards a violent outbreak there, but the *Astorian's* printers took note of assurances offered in speeches and in Seattle's newspapers that peaceful remedies were favored, "if possible."²⁷ When the forceful ousting of Chinese from their homes in early February resulted in a fatal clash between the agitators and the deputies recently appointed to protect the Chinese, the *Astorian* ran headlines that read "BLOODSHED" and "A Deplorable Affair."²⁸ It grouped this latest episode in anti-Chinese activity with the riots and violence that had been taking place in many other western cities, describing them all as "disastrous to the common cause that we nearly all agree in upholding—the hastening of the day when the Chinese shall go."²⁹ This last sentiment illustrates how the *Astorian* was clear not to condemn the fundamental *goals* of those engaging in riotous activity but rather the *means* being used in order to meet such ends. Its writers consistently supported the eventual displacement of Chinese laborers with whites, but they saw the use of force as reckless. *Astorian* writers and local residents often argued that instability in the West would actually help validate eastern opinions of the anti-Chinese movement as violent and irrational, slow the passage of legislation needed to enforce the Exclusion Act, and thus ultimately hinder "the gradual, peaceful

²⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 27, 1885:2 and November 6, 1885:3. See Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle, 1885-1886," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 39:2 (April, 1948), 103-130, for a full account of the lead-up to and outbreak of the anti-Chinese riots in that city. Two factions had actually developed in Seattle during these months, one composed of leading businessmen and city officials (the "better elements") who favored only legal means of action and one composed mostly of the working classes, who, led by labor organizers, sought immediate action and agitation.

²⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 9, 1886:2 and 3.

²⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 9, 1886:2.

expulsion of the Chinese” desired by the majority.³⁰ Another forceful expulsion of Chinese that took place in Oregon City before the end of the month earned the headline “Another Mistake.” The rousing of Chinese from their beds and their forced exodus became considered “on a par with the Tacoma and Seattle method.”³¹ As Astoria’s residents remained up-to-date on the events transpiring across the Pacific coast and particularly in the Pacific Northwest, they surely looked with anticipation at what their own future might hold.

Opinions expressed in the *Astorian* revealed a certain awareness that the concerted movement against the Chinese was rooted in some deeper economic issues, such as the natural consequences of supply and demand. One article, for example, insisted that “the present crusade against the Chinese is the inevitable result of present quiet times, scarcity of money and work.”³² Through this frame of argument, the *Astorian* shifted the focus from the Chinese themselves to their employers and those who patronized the industries in which Chinese worked: “We have no one but ourselves to blame for the presence of the Chinaman . . . His presence is unanswerable argument for the existence of a demand that he supplies.”³³ Some editorials also placed the “Chinese issue” under a wider array of problems stemming from neglect of local economies. In this line of thought, Chinese labor was simply a manifestation of Astorians’ failures to create and support a self-sustainable, local economy. In a long letter to the *Astorian* describing this more fundamental issue, one county local wrote:

³⁰ Ibid.; *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 16, 1886:2; December 18, 1885:2; December 23, 1885:2; December 30, 1885:3.

³¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 24, 1886:3.

³² *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 1, 1885:2.

³³ Ibid.

We use California made matches though made out of Oregon wood. We use imported coal while wood in abundance grows at our doors. We buy ready made shoddy clothing from the east, or send to California tailors when the tailoring should all be done here and out of woolens made in Oregon. . . . A long list of articles might be added, but this is enough to show that when we shall have banished the China labor we have not near begun the work of reform, the work of self protection, of home and self support.³⁴

In this sense, Astorians demonstrated an unwillingness to accept the Chinese as the cause of their problems and rather recognized that larger, and more challenging, economic forces were at play.

In arguing for the eventual departure of Chinese, the *Astorian* frequently articulated many of the typical arguments against them, but it also consistently advocated nonviolent strategies to accomplish their removal. Rather, it urged residents simply not to employ or purchase from the Chinese.³⁵ “The freeze out game is the best one to practice with Chinamen,” it declared, arguing that such economic pressure on the Chinese would gradually drive them out.³⁶ The newspaper, for example, offered the specific suggestion of giving preference to whites over Chinese in the job of knitting nets.³⁷ Yet, the *Astorian* made sure to emphasize that this “freezing out” could be done only “when the Chinaman can be got along without” in Astoria, when the economic situation improved and the “honest worker” could create a higher demand for his labor over Chinese.³⁸ A letter from a local resident reinforced the idea that the more fundamental problems responsible for

³⁴ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 30, 1885:3. Also see February 18, 1886:3 for a similar argument.

³⁵ See, for example, the *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 10, 1885:2, October 14, 1885:3, and February 23, 1886:2 for “the Chinese are slave laborers” argument; November 5, 1885:3 for how money paid to Chinese leaves the United States; December 1, 1885:2 and December 2, 1885:3 for descriptions of the debased living conditions of Chinese; and January 24, 1886:3 for a criticism of the Burlingame Treaty.

³⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 21, 1885:3.

³⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 12, 1885:3 and December 22, 1885:3.

³⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 23, 1885:2.

the anti-Chinese movement would not go away with the Chinese, but rather that once the Chinese left, “strikes will become fashionable and the old issue between labor and capital will be directly put forth without the subterfuge of a third party.”³⁹ So even while advocating Chinese removal and considering the most effective strategies for accomplishing it, some Astorians seemed cognizant that the current anti-Chinese movement served more as a momentary distraction in the indelible conflicts between labor and capital.

The *Astorian* reveals a further range of viewpoints about why the current campaign against the Chinese could be detrimental, especially for Astoria. One writer to the *Astorian* highlighted the various contributions that Astoria’s local Chinese made to the town, which included “running salmon canneries, ditching tide lands, raising vegetables, disposing of garbage about houses, grubbing out roots and stumps to get cultivatable land, [and] grading streets that cost more than the adjacent property is worth after the grading is done.” Considering all of these advantages to their presence brought this local resident to the conclusion that “I think it must be admitted there is no right, reason or justice in the present crusade of some of our good people against the Chinese in our city.”⁴⁰ The newspaper also shows that many locals were expressing another reasonable and urgent concern when it wrote: “‘Who will do the laundry work when the Chinese go?’ is asked 137 times a day.”⁴¹ The recognition that the Chinese functioned importantly in the local community challenged the aggressive and more ideological

³⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 30, 1885:3. The letter was given the title “A Comprehensive View,” and the writer also based much of his argument on the idea that buying imported goods instead of Oregon-made products was at the root of the current economic problem.

⁴⁰ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 17, 1886:3.

⁴¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 23, 1886:3.

arguments against them, and the prospect of actually losing the local Chinese brought this recognition to light for many Astorians. Some also identified the legal and moral quagmire that resulted from forceful expulsion: “Nothing is even politically right that is morally wrong. . . The Chinese have a right to be here” according to the treaty between their country and the United States, so anyone “who forcibly expels one of the yellow rats from his hole is guilty of an overt act.”⁴² Although the message here is for readers to respect the legal rights of Chinese, the quotation also exhibits how whites frequently animalized the Chinese in order to still maintain a sense of superiority over them. Such curious combinations of racism, restraint, and begrudging recognition of the need for Chinese characterized the discourse in Astoria during this time period.

As developments in Seattle remained “the principal topic on the streets” in Astoria in February 1886, residents speculated as to what would transpire in their own community, which held such a large number of Chinese. Caution seemed especially important as Astorians remained aware that “there is no place in the United States that has so many Chinese, proportionate to its population, as Astoria.”⁴³ The sheer numbers of Chinese and the fact that the town’s central industry depended so heavily on Chinese labor created the perception that, in Astoria, “the question assumes a different phase, a more important bearing than any other locality on the coast.”⁴⁴ Many of the towns that Chinese had been driven out of actually contained relatively few Chinese, so it seemed reasonable that locals saw their situation as more pressing and the repercussions of a

⁴² *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 19, 1886:2.

⁴³ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 10, 1886:3.

⁴⁴ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 23, 1885:2. On January 14, 1885:3, the *Astorian* called 2000 “a low estimate” of the number of Chinese in Astoria.

forceful movement as more serious.⁴⁵ Yet, it seemed that most in Astoria encouraged patience and care in regard to handling this matter for another, more obvious reason.

Astorians seemed all too aware of the disastrous effect that immediate removal would have on the canneries. Editorials in the *Astorian* made such concerns apparent. “It will be a mistake,” wrote one writer, “to drive the Chinese away from the canneries this season, unless sufficient white labor can be had to replace them.”⁴⁶ As the Chinese comprised the bulk of the cannery workforce, the prospect of losing them meant the prospect of losing the fishing season. And as Astorians tied the health of the canning industry to the economic health and survival of the community, the fate of the Chinese appeared to dictate the fate of the town. A report in the July 1887 issue of *West Shore* magazine discussed the ties between the industry and the town, stating that the average annual value of the canned salmon industry along the Columbia had reached three million dollars by the mid-1880s and that “the great seat of this industry is Astoria, where three-fourths of the canneries are located.” The citizens of Astoria and outside observers knew that to remove the Chinese from the community and from the canneries “would paralyze the business, and bring disaster directly or indirectly on every one in the place.”⁴⁷ For Astorians, the links were clear: “no Chinese, no canneries; no canneries, no business.”⁴⁸ They fully recognized the Chinese as pivotal to the success of at least the 1886 fishing season and feared the loss of this workforce, even as they supported exclusion. Astoria’s

⁴⁵ Pfaelzer brings attention to the actual low numbers of Chinese in many of the towns they were driven out of during this period. See Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*.

⁴⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 14, 1886:2.

⁴⁷ *West Shore*, July 1887, 549.

⁴⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 9, 1886:2.

particular situation, then, “required wise moderation and conservative action in dealing with this matter.”⁴⁹

The anti-Chinese agenda of local Knights of Labor assemblies fomented much of the agitation in the West. Organization members were involved in riots and expulsions of Chinese from Rock Springs and Tacoma to Seattle and Butte City, Oregon.⁵⁰ The objectives of local assemblies formed in the West during the depression of the 1870s and 1880s were quite different from those of the national organization. The Knights of Labor was originally founded in Philadelphia in 1869 with the intention to unite all wage earners—no matter their particular trade, religion, or race—against the abuse and exploitation of employers.⁵¹ However, the movement in the West and the Pacific Northwest in particular grew to focus rather narrowly against the Chinese, as white members of the lower and middle classes allied under the leadership of firebrand Daniel Cronin to create what historian Carlos Schwantes has called “a kind of indigenous labor union.”⁵² Cronin and other regional organization leaders recognized the strength of anti-Chinese sentiment in the West, so they placed it at the forefront of their battles with railroad and mining companies. As historian Rob Weir has noted, even though many organization members condemned lawlessness and even helped to police areas where an outbreak might occur, “the KOL’s own rhetoric fanned the flames.”⁵³ Their association

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Schwantes, “From Anti-Chinese Agitation to Reform Politics,” 174-184.

⁵¹ Storti, *Incident at Bitter Creek*, 102-103.

⁵² Schwantes, “From Anti-Chinese Agitation to Reform Politics,” 175-176; John D. Wilson, “The Knights of Labor in Oregon: 1880-1897,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Oregon, 1997), 10-13.

⁵³ Rob Weir, “Blind in One Eye Only: Western and Eastern Knights of Labor View the Chinese Question,” *Labor History* 41:4 (2000), 428.

with anti-Chinese agitation and disruption in the region earned local lodges in the West the criticism of their eastern counterparts and worried Western business leaders about potential labor unrest in their own cities.⁵⁴

Indeed, an element of caution about the Knights of Labor was evident in Astoria. Four months before violence broke out in Seattle, the *Astorian* reported that an anti-Chinese meeting taking place in that city would be led by the Knights of Labor, which, as the newspaper characterized, “appears to have an element that delights in turmoil.”⁵⁵ One of February’s editorials in the *Astorian* suggests that Astorians were wary of the organization’s emerging presence in their own community. Attempting to clarify and assuage concerns that the Knights hoped to expel the Chinese and “shut the canneries up,” the editorialist affirmed that the organization’s purpose was to “uphold the dignity of labor” and assured his readers that, despite rumors to the contrary, it had no plans to “drive the Chinese away by threats or force of violence.”⁵⁶ The fact that demagoguery and disorder seemed to be making a route through the West, via the Knights of Labor, gained the attention of some Astorians.

Nevertheless, a group of local residents who met to discuss the growing regional conflicts in late 1885 decided to align themselves with the objectives of the organization and established a local Knights of Labor lodge. A committee of ten was formed, and speakers called for every action to be carried out “quietly, orderly and legally.”⁵⁷ Things then appeared to move rather quickly. By late January, they had sent a call to cannery

⁵⁴ Schwantes, “From Anti-Chinese Agitation to Reform Politics,” 175; Weir, “Blind in One Eye Only,” 421-436.

⁵⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 6, 1885:2.

⁵⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 16, 1886:3.

⁵⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 27, 1885:3.

owners to replace those Chinese making fishing nets with whites.⁵⁸ While the *Astorian* expressed some wariness about the rashness the Knights of Labor had exhibited in other places, the paper also demonstrated that support for action against the Chinese still existed. For example, editorialists argued vehemently against discharging the Chinese cannery workers before the 1886 season, but they did so “with the express understanding that next year other arrangements, leaving Chinese labor out of the calculation altogether, must be made.”⁵⁹ After sending its committee to the various canneries to discuss matters, the Knights of Labor reached an agreement with eighteen cannery owners on February 26, 1886, that, beginning September 1 of the same year, the canneries would no longer employ Chinese workers. Recognizing that “it is impossible for cannerymen on said river to dispense with Chinese laborers in canneries during the coming season,” the Knights of Labor delayed the date for displacement until after the close of the season and confirmed that, until then, they would “employ all lawful and proper means to protect said cannerymen and their Chinese employees from molestation or intimidation.”⁶⁰ The crafters of the agreement did not specify exactly how replacement of Chinese cannery workers with a sufficient number of whites would be carried out. But the local Knights did immediately set up a “free labor bureau,” headquartered in the store of one of their members, where any whites looking for employment and any local employers wanting to hire white labor could leave their names.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 28, 1886:2. The notice was printed in the *Astorian* for a full week.

⁵⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 14, 1886:2.

⁶⁰ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 23, 1886:3.

⁶¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 24 and 27, 1886:3.

The *Astorian* congratulated the town on reaching such a peaceful compromise for moving the Chinese out of Astoria. Touting the process of resolution reached locally as “The Astoria Method,” the newspaper again called attention to the comparatively large presence of Chinese in Astoria in order to demonstrate that “what was a picnic at Tacoma or Seattle with their few hundred heathen would be a widespread havoc here.”⁶² A month later, the *Astorian* enjoyed contrasting the continuing anxiety in Portland regarding potentially riotous elements with “the cheery bustle and business aspect of this city. . . . All who want work can find it, and the busy man has no time to put up mean jobs or plan bad deeds.”⁶³ Therefore, while Astorians may have felt content to have avoided the expulsions and disorder taking place elsewhere, their newspaper also attributed the maintenance of stability in Astoria to a functioning local economy.

The toll that the agreement between the Knights of Labor and local cannerymen took on the Chinese in Astoria is difficult to determine. Discussion of the agreement faded from the *Astorian*'s pages shortly after its publication, and it is certain that Chinese continued to fill the ranks of the cannery workforce after 1886.⁶⁴ When a July 1887 issue of the *Astorian* complained of the season's low salmon run, it stated that “in every cannery groups of disconsolate Chinamen are standing around, viewing with hungry eyes the few salmon tossed on the dock,” as their wages, which depended on the number of

⁶² *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 24, 1886:2.

⁶³ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 16, 1886:2.

⁶⁴ See Wilson, “The Knights of Labor in Oregon,” 46-51. Although Wilson discusses the agreement with cannery owners and the opening of the “free labor bureau” directly afterwards, he does not indicate what may have transpired regarding implementation of the agreement after the 1886 season. His study shows that a local assembly continued in Astoria at least until 1888, but he also notes the internal divisions and loss of membership that plagued the organization by that year.

cases packed, suffered.⁶⁵ Reporting on Astoria's salmon canning industry during the summer of 1887, a writer for *West Shore* wrote that, although girls sometimes worked as labelers in the canneries, "the factory hands are chiefly Chinamen."⁶⁶ Clearly, then, the Chinese continued to find work in Astoria's salmon canneries during the 1887 season and afterwards.

The general easing of regional tensions likely provided a significant reason that the Chinese were not driven from Astoria's canneries, as the working and lower middle class alliance leading the anti-Chinese movement in the Northwest factionalized and became less appealing. The economic climate also improved in the spring of 1886, and the Haymarket Square bombing in Chicago in May brought the Knights of Labor and the national labor movement in general into disrepute.⁶⁷ In Portland, Knights of Labor attempts to create a movement for Chinese removal faced stern opposition and had failed by the spring of 1886.⁶⁸ A letter written by four Astorian representatives of the Knights of Labor and printed in the *Astorian* in late March 1886 revealed some opposition to local organization members and their procedures in obtaining the agreement with Astoria's cannery owners. The letter sought to deny allegations that the Knights of Labor "threatened, or intimidated or blackmailed any canneryman on this river" to agree to its terms regarding Chinese labor. Addressing the charges against them, the Knights ensured readers that "we do not war with capital, we only ask honest pay for honest work."⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, July 8, 1887:3.

⁶⁶ *West Shore*, July 1887, 550.

⁶⁷ Schwantes, "From Anti-Chinese Agitation to Reform Politics," 180-181.

⁶⁸ Schwantes, "From Anti-Chinese Agitation to Reform Politics," 179.

⁶⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 31, 1886:3.

This denial of bribery and coercion suggests the existence of at least a contingent of Astorians who were suspicious about the agreement's legitimacy and hints that this contingent was aligned with or sympathetic to the interests of capital. At any rate, while local Astorians exhibited pride and relief in their avoidance of lawlessness, the really critical period for the Pacific Northwest region had subsided before the opening of the 1886 fishing season.

Some scholars have identified the important role of newspapers in helping to either incite or curb anti-Chinese violence during this period. For example, a competition that seemed to be waged between two Tacoma newspapers over which could be more rabidly anti-Chinese played an important role in the eventual violent outbreak there, while the participants in Seattle's newspaper war basically aligned themselves either on the side of labor, which agitated for removal, or on the side of capital, which argued against the unruly labor element.⁷⁰ On the other hand, Harvey Scott's *Oregonian* newspaper in Portland vehemently spoke out against the violence that characterized the regional anti-Chinese movement and criticized the local groups advocating for expulsion in that city.⁷¹ The Knights of Labor even called for a boycott of the *Oregonian* and the Portland *Telegram* because of the lack of sympathy shown for the movement by these journals. The *Astorian* can also easily be placed in the category of newspapers that helped deter a violent local outbreak. Even though it supported "a steady quiet movement . . . to get rid of the Chinese," it also consistently and emphatically denounced any illegal or forceful means to accomplish their removal, calling those "who talk 'agitation,' who

⁷⁰ Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 217-219; Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle," 108-124.

⁷¹ Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 43-60; Viola Noon Currier, "The Chinese Web in Oregon History" (Master's Thesis, University of Oregon, 1928), 56-64.

chew soap and froth at the mouth and want to start violent measures . . . the very worst enemies” to the cause.⁷² Its criticisms of regional riots and calls for care and restraint most likely both reflected local sentiments and directed them, ultimately aiding in keeping relative peace in Astoria.

Nevertheless, the intensification of anti-Chinese activity in the West filtered into Astoria in ways beyond the canning agreement. Municipal cubic air ordinances had become a popular legal maneuver intended to frustrate the ability of Chinese to live in the United States. Promoted as measures intended to ensure sanitary conditions, they required that all living spaces contain 500 cubic feet of space per person, a particularly difficult standard to meet for Chinese immigrant laborers living on low wages and often restricted spatially to certain areas. While San Francisco had enacted its Cubic Air Ordinance in 1870, Seattle and Tacoma both passed theirs in 1885, shortly before riots erupted in those cities.⁷³ Astoria’s passage of a cubic air ordinance in February of 1886 constituted one of its more localized and tangible responses to the heightened anti-Chinese attitude of the moment. Touted as “an ordinance for the preservation of health and the prevention of disease,” it required 550 feet of space per person, imposed a fine of between five and fifty dollars on violators, and gave police officers the right to investigate houses that they had “reason to believe” were “overcrowded.”⁷⁴ Although it is difficult to determine how much the ordinance was enforced, it was still on the books in

⁷² *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 21, 1885:3.

⁷³ The riotous expulsion in Seattle in February 1886 actually began when residents took it upon themselves to take a tour of Chinatown in order to, as they claimed, inspect the living quarters for cubic air violations.

⁷⁴ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 20, 1886:3. The quoted text is taken from the actual text of the ordinance, reprinted in the *Astorian*.

1896.⁷⁵ And meanwhile, some Chinese continued to live in overcrowded conditions, as Astoria's 1890 census enumerator found "the biggest batch of folks under one roof yet unearthed, . . . a nest of Mongolians, 160 in number" all living together in one dwelling.⁷⁶ Consideration and approval of a cubic air ordinance for Astoria during such a tense time suggest that the regulation functioned as a sort of localized, visible attempt to remedy what was widely perceived as the root of regional problems.

The flurry of anti-Chinese sentiment in the mid-1880s also helped the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union (CRFPU) in their efforts to gain a firmer hold over the local gillnet knitting industry. From the time of its formation, the CRFPU, headquartered in Astoria, brought strong pressures to bear on the canners over a variety of matters. Union members launched a strike over the price of fish during the 1886 season, which likely added to the distress canners were already experiencing from thinking they would soon lose their Chinese workers. In March of 1887, at the same time that the CRFPU and the canners entered into wage bargaining for the coming season, the Union released a decision that fishermen would no longer use nets that had been hung or salvaged by Chinese.⁷⁷ That season, one cannery owner came to the CRFPU to ask for permission to employ Chinese to mend nets for the fishermen, expressing his belief that "it would work a great hardship on the fishermen . . . to employ only white men, as a white man would not work at any time day or night like a chinaman," so the fishermen

⁷⁵ C.J. Curtis and the Committee on Ways and Means of the Common Council, *Charter and General Ordinances* (Astoria, Ore.: J.S. Dellinger, printer, 1896), 108. This was Ordinance No. 891, approved March 24, 1886.

⁷⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, June 15, 1890:3.

⁷⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 3, 1887:2 and March 5, 1887:2. According to the OED, to "salvage" means "to form a boundary or edging to."

would likely end up having to mend their own nets.⁷⁸ While debate ensued and at least one member spoke for allowing Chinese to mend and repair nets, others saw the need for consistency, adhering to the idea that, while “this union does not object to the employment of chinese in cannery,” it believed work in knitting nets should be given to white men.⁷⁹ This episode with the CRFPU revealed at least three things: that the canners were facing increasing hardship on different fronts, that they still depended on affordable and efficient Chinese workers, and that, as the CRFPU specifically did *not* target the Chinese working in the canneries, its efforts were intended to reinforce a strict division of labor in the salmon-canning industry based on race.

An attempt to keep the Chinese out of a specific area of Astoria constituted yet another example of the broader anti-Chinese movement finding expression in the town. Residents living on the north side of Water Street had sent a petition to the city council regarding the construction of a Chinese house in that area in June 1884.⁸⁰ But not until the spring of 1887 did the city council seem ready to draft an ordinance “for the removal of Chinese from Water street,” and even then, the draft ordinance “was read first and second times and laid over for further consideration.”⁸¹ Afterwards, the *Astorian* stated, “The Chinese remain on Water street,” and indeed, 1888 Sanborn maps show a large Chinese laundry in the area in question.⁸² This effort to restrict Chinese residents shows

⁷⁸ “Meeting minutes,” April 5, 1887, Columbia River Fishermen’s Protective Union records, 1884-1940, Reel 1, Microfilm, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Ore.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Daily Morning Astorian*, June 25, 1884:3.

⁸¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 23, 1887:3 and April 13, 1887:3.

⁸² *Daily Morning Astorian*, April 14, 1887:3. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1888, Astoria, Oregon, Sheet 6, Sanborn Map Company, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, and Environmental Data

that tensions similar to the ones generating lawlessness outside of Astoria reached a high point within Astoria as well during the mid-1880s. But while Astorians had been attentive to the spatial restriction of Chinese in other cities and expressed the idea that confining the Chinese was “a measure worthy of imitation,” a strong, united front to implement such forceful action appeared to be lacking in Astoria.⁸³

While this 1885 and 1886 period definitely brought more pressure to bear on the relations between Chinese and whites in Astoria, there is also evidence that routine elements of daily life persisted through this turbulent moment. For example, business continued as usual for the merchants of Chinatown. Through the early part of 1886, notices in the *Astorian* informed local residents that a new Chinese mercantile store and labor contracting business was opening on the corner of Benton and Chenamus in Chinatown. Two of the four partners of a local pawnbroking outfit, Kong Wing Company, announced that they would be retiring while the remaining two partners would continue the business. Another notice informed all concerned that Hong Sing Yeun had purchased Ah Jim’s business interest in the Chinese vegetable gardens at Smith’s point, while yet another notified readers that Dr. Loong would soon be renting the second floor of his building on Main Street for use as a restaurant.⁸⁴ In fact, E.C. Holden, the man specifically identified by the Knights of Labor as trying “to throw a slur” on the organization, was the auctioneer in the sale of three frame buildings belonging to Dr.

Resources, Inc. 2001, *Digital Sanborn maps 1867-1970* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: ProQuest UMI), <http://sanborn.umi.com/>.

⁸³ See, for one example, *Daily Morning Astorian*, April 11, 1885:2. This particular article was in regard to the town of New Yakima, Washington Territory, passing an ordinance to confine Chinese to a certain part of that city.

⁸⁴ These notices are interspersed and repeated through the *Daily Morning Astorian* between December 31, 1885 and February 12, 1886.

Loong.⁸⁵ The endurance and even degree of vitality of the Chinese commercial sphere indicates that the turmoil then surrounding northwest Oregon filtered into Astoria only to a certain extent.

Chinese in Astoria also engaged in typical forms of leisure. Gambling, for example, continued to serve as one of their favorite amusements. In January of 1886, “a muss kicked up” in Chinatown after a Chinese man claimed he was not paid for his winning hand and drew a knife on the dealers.⁸⁶ Although the *Astorian* deemed the scuffle a “young riot,” the assailant was quickly taken to jail and the “bad men who coaxed him into the scrape” resumed their dealing.⁸⁷ Significantly, the *Astorian* revealed how the town had become a sort of shelter for Chinese escaping from other, more hostile areas when it reported that gambling had become even more exciting for the Chinese since “the arrival of some of their sisters and cousins and uncles and aunts from Seattle, Tacoma and other foreign parts.”⁸⁸ There is even evidence of some amicable social interactions in Astoria in the midst of the regional racial turmoil. Soon after local Knights of Labor issued their initial call to cannerymen to dispense with Chinese workers, the *Astorian* reported that some ladies of Astoria who “went on a tour of inspection through Chinatown . . . were hospitably regaled with Chinese nuts, sweetmeats, tea and samshu.”⁸⁹ Although it is difficult to pinpoint the meaning of the reference to

⁸⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 31, 1886:3 and March 27, 1886:3.

⁸⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 7, 1886:3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 16, 1885:3.

⁸⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 4, 1886:2. I could envision the “inspection” referring to something as simple as going to Chinatown to shop, as many of the stores carried a variety of goods, from groceries and “fine crockery” to “fancy goods” and women’s clothing. It may refer to something more serious, but as

“inspection,” the report indicates a level of cordiality between the Chinese and white women of the community. As disorder characterized the situation in dozens of cities in the West, many Astorians, both white and Chinese, continued to interact and move forward in their daily lives.

In general, hostility towards the Chinese in the 1880s appeared more to punctuate the daily lives of Astoria’s residents than to consume them. The cultural and recreational activities of the Chinese in Astoria often lay in spatial proximity to the cultural and recreational venues of Astoria’s white population, and even sometimes provided a space for interaction between the two groups. For example, Astoria’s location near the windy mouth of the Columbia River made it a favored place for local Chinese to engage in one of their typical hobbies: kite-flying. On bluebird spring days in Astoria, residents of Chinatown and Astoria’s youth alike enjoyed flying kites, and the intensity and pleasure with which Chinatown’s residents pursued their hobby, and excelled at it, regularly sparked curiosity and amazement from white Astorians. Indeed, the Chinese were seen as “the boss kite flyers,” continuously building and flying an array of colorful kites.⁹⁰ The *Astorian* printers, for example, admired one that compared to a Caucasian kite as “an ocean steamship does to a skiff,” and poetically described how, although it took about a dozen “Chinese aeronauts” to get it into the air, “when it goes sailing aloft into the empyrean azure it looks like a bristling dragon spitting chromos at the affrighted multitude beneath.”⁹¹ Kite-flying provided a forum through which Astoria’s Chinese

police officers were sent to inspect for violations of the Cubic Air Ordinance, and I have not seen reference to whites examining Chinatown for health concerns such as smallpox, it is difficult to say.

⁹⁰ *Daily Astorian*, May 18, 1881:3.

⁹¹ *Daily Astorian*, June 1, 1883:3.

could engage in recreational activities in the sight of and sometimes alongside the community's white residents.

Theater offered another medium for informal association between local whites and Chinese in the 1880s. Liberty Hall, a theater and meeting hall, was loaned to the Chinese for their own theater production in late June of 1881, during the height of the fishing season. An advertisement in the *Astorian* announced with enthusiasm and fanfare that slack roping, juggling, throwing knives, and other “acrobatic feats” could all be seen for the price of fifty cents.⁹² A month later, performances were still “running in full blast every night to big audiences,” although the *Astorian* commented uncharitably that “it will be difficult to get the stink out of the hall” if they were to continue much longer.⁹³ Chinese dramatic performances, with all their intricate characters, symbolisms, and aural and visual displays, constituted an important cultural art form for the Chinese; for Astoria's white population, they proved to be a source of mixed curiosity and annoyance.⁹⁴ Although residents nearby complained of the noise emanating from performances that took place on the Sabbath, the newspaper pointed out that the theater “is not patronized by Mongolians exclusively” but rather proved to be a generally “big thing.”⁹⁵ By late 1883, Astoria's Chinese had plans to build their own theater across from Liberty Hall and had organized their own theatrical association as well.⁹⁶ Chinese theater, then, provided an opportunity both for white Astorians to glimpse the cultural vibrancy of

⁹² *Daily Astorian*, June 24, 1881:2.

⁹³ *Daily Astorian*, July 26, 1881:3.

⁹⁴ For a discussion of theater in different regions of China, see Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: From 1840 to the Present Day* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975).

⁹⁵ *Daily Astorian*, July 28, 1882:3 and June 16, 1882:3.

⁹⁶ *Daily Astorian*, April 3, 1883:3 and *Daily Morning Astorian*, November 17, 1883:3.

their Chinese neighbors and for the Chinese to demonstrate that their presence in the community extended beyond merely providing a dependable workforce.

Although white fishermen strictly prohibited Chinese from fishing on boats in the lower Columbia, they did not stop Chinese from fishing off the docks and through the plank cracks that covered the northern portion of Astoria.⁹⁷ As one *Astorian* writer quipped, “the double row of Chinese fishermen along the wharves gives a decidedly Mongolian aspect to the landscape when viewed from the river.”⁹⁸ White fishermen did not seem to view the Chinese as competition, since the fish the Chinese caught were deemed “objectionable to a Caucasian palate.”⁹⁹ The small porgy and tomcod that the Chinese caught along the shallow banks underneath and alongside the city and used to supplement their diet served as another indication of the deplorable but thrifty habits of the Chinese. Indeed, the success that the Chinese often had fishing off the docks impressed Astorians. Describing how the Chinese could catch an assortment of fish by placing remnant salmon bits in nets and dropping the nets off the docks, the *Astorian* remarked that “an industrious Mongolian caught twenty yesterday in as many seconds.”¹⁰⁰ While restrictions on where the Chinese could fish indicate the kind of discrimination Chinese faced in Astoria, the resourcefulness the Chinese demonstrated in working within this discriminatory regime was not lost on whites.

⁹⁷ The fishermen on the lower Columbia were mostly Finnish and Scandinavian, and, especially after the formation of the Columbia River Fisherman’s Protective Union, they maintained increasing regulation over who could fish salmon in the Columbia at what times and with what types of traps. There also seemed to be a tale that circulated among the Chinese about a Chinese man who had snuck out on a boat to “make a raid on the fishing grounds from which his kind was so rigorously excluded.” The man was allegedly caught, bound, and put out on a boat “by a gigantic descendant of the Vikings” and never heard from again. From the *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 29, 1885:3.

⁹⁸ *Daily Astorian*, December 5, 1882:3.

⁹⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 7, 1884:3.

¹⁰⁰ *Daily Morning Astorian*, May 1, 1889:3.

Along with Chinese New Year, Chinese burials provided an important and expressive illustration of Chinese customs for Astoria's white residents to observe and attempt to understand. A photograph from an 1892 burial suggests the amount of attention these elaborate burial ceremonies garnered from white passersby (Figure 3). A large crowd of white men and women with brimmed hats stood on tiptoes and peered over and around one another to get a glimpse of what was happening. They surrounded the tables where an assortment of food such as rice and pork, decorations of colored tissue paper, and collections of some of the belongings of the deceased were laid out. This particular ceremony took place in front of a saloon a few blocks away from Chinatown. "Professional mourners" adorned in white robes and head wraps generally performed the ceremony in town before a procession of participants, scattering paper along as they went, carried the remains up the hill pictured in the background to be buried

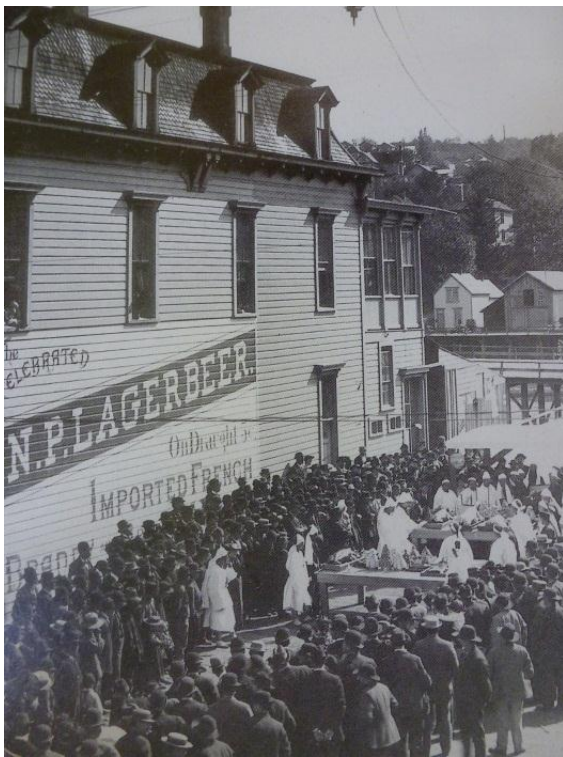


Figure 3: Chinese burial ceremony, 1892. Source: Steve Forrester and Clatsop County Historical Society, *A Pictorial History of Astoria, Oregon: The Early Years* (Portland, Ore.: Pediment Pub., 1997), 70.

in their own relegated area on the edge of the town's cemetery.¹⁰¹ The procession, which included these paid mourners, a hearse, grieving family members, musicians, and wagons carrying the huge assortment of food, amazed the *Astorian's* writers, who called it "one of the most fantastic things ever seen in the streets of this city."¹⁰² The newspaper described how, according to Chinese custom, the family and friends would burn the clothes, bedding, and other "personal effects of the defunct Celestial" after the burial, while the prepared food on the tables would be laid out around the grave.¹⁰³ All of these burial customs, from the burning of belongings and paper money to the consumption of food by the graveside so that its "essence" could be consumed by the deceased, reflected how the Chinese regarded connections between the living and ancestral worlds as central to their belief systems. The intricacy of a ceremony often indicated the social status of the deceased.¹⁰⁴ For local storeowner Ah Lee Wung's elaborate funeral in 1883, the "boss mourner" had to remain "busily engaged in . . . keeping off the crowd of sacrilegious white folks who were not allowed to desecrate the sacred surroundings with unsanctified hands," a situation that likely resembled the one in the photo, where white witnesses formed a tight oval around the center of activity.¹⁰⁵ Although Chinese burials might have contributed to the exoticization of Chinese by white Astorians, thus reinforcing a sense of cultural separation, the fact that they did not take place out of sight or in isolation could

¹⁰¹ Steve Forrester and Clatsop County Historical Society, *A Pictorial History of Astoria, Oregon: The Early Years* (Portland, Ore.: Pediment Pub., 1997), 70; *Daily Morning Astorian*, June 12, 1888:3; *Weekly Astorian*, June 19, 1886:5.

¹⁰² *Weekly Astorian*, June 19, 1886:5.

¹⁰³ *Daily Morning Astorian*, May 30, 1890:3.

¹⁰⁴ Ellen Johnston Laing and Helen Hui-ling Liu, *Up In Flames: The Ephemeral Art of Pasted-Paper Sculpture in Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 6-10.

¹⁰⁵ *Daily Astorian*, February 24, 1883:3.

also be interpreted as providing a point of cultural and physical contact, an important opportunity for whites to observe their community's Chinese inhabitants.

Proper burial for deceased Chinese remained important for them while abroad, and Astoria's coroners seemed to understand this fact. Building coffins, performing coroner's inquests when necessary, helping to transport the dead to the city cemetery by wagon, and finally burying bodies all fell under the general purview of the city coroner, and newspapers show that during this time Astoria's coroner carried out these functions for the Chinese who died in Astoria as he carried them out for whites. In 1887, the City Council passed a resolution that the coroner would be required to begin paying two dollars to the city auditor and to obtain a permit for all Chinese he buried on city property.¹⁰⁶ Although this ordinance may have initially targeted the Chinese, it appears that by the early 1890s a five dollar fee and a permit were required for all persons interred at the city cemetery. The same regulation, though, applied for disinterment, which likely affected the Chinese more than whites, as the Chinese periodically exhumed and shipped the bones of deceased Chinese back to their home country for permanent burial there.¹⁰⁷ The practice of disinterment exhibited the significance of native place loyalties in Chinese culture; yet, it also helped justify white perceptions of Chinese immigrants as sojourners, a label thus paradoxically sustained both by white racism and Chinese customs.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 9, 1887:3.

¹⁰⁷ Curtis and Committee on Ways and Means, *Charter and General Ordinances*, 256-57. This was Ordinance No. 1415, approved July 11, 1891.

¹⁰⁸ Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford, University Press, 2000), 9-10.

Astoria's coroners nonetheless participated in Chinese disinterment. In August 1886, a representative of one of the Chinese Six Companies stopped in Astoria during a longer trip through the Pacific Northwest to exhume the remains of Chinese and send them back to China. Upon arriving in Astoria, he "called on Coroner Ross" to help him dig up the bodies of two company members who had died in 1881. The *Astorian* detailed the process for its readers: how the bones were placed on a white cloth in zinc-lined boxes of particular lengths, the top of the box soldered on, and the box marked with the name of the Chinese district that would be its final destination.¹⁰⁹ The Chinese representative informed Coroner Ross that the representative of another company would also be coming through Astoria soon to disinter the bodies of former company members. Chinese were often buried in the city cemetery for between five and eight years before Six Company representatives exhumed their remains for shipment overland to San Francisco, where typically they were then loaded onto a steamer for China.¹¹⁰ Although Astoria's Chinese were buried in a segregated area of the city cemetery, they could generally expect for their countrymen's graves to be protected there. After the town's sexton found the headstone of a Chinese grave broken, the *Astorian* vehemently condemned the act, stating that "whether Chinaman or Caucasian, the spirit that actuates respect to the dead is the same."¹¹¹ As the sexton announced that he would pay five dollars for information on the culprits, the newspaper added that the guilty party "deserves to be laid by the heels in the deepest dungeon in the bailiwick."¹¹² The sad and

¹⁰⁹ *Weekly Astorian*, August 14, 1886:3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*; *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 3, 1890:3.

¹¹¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, April 21, 1885:3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

unavoidable reality of burying one's dead created another important pathway to association between Astoria's Chinese and some of its white residents, perhaps one lined more with empathy than with intimacy but that nevertheless elicited some accommodation, even for the strange customs and particular needs of the "heathen Chinese."

In Astoria, contact zones for white and Chinese Astorians extended beyond recreational and cultural practices, as both utilized the local court system as a recourse for settling a variety of complaints. The courts provided a viable means for Chinese to resolve business transactions and incidents of theft or violence, both among themselves and with whites. In 1883, Mike Sullivan alleged that Lum Dot assaulted and stabbed him with a file. The proceedings garnered much attention from the Chinese community, as the newspaper reported that 217 "Mongolians" attended and "with open eyes and mouths stood stolidly staring at the proceedings."¹¹³ Initial "testimony was voluminous and conflicting," and the court sentenced Lum Dot to be tried before a grand jury.¹¹⁴ At two different times during the months-long case, Chinese acquaintances of Lum Dot paid his bail, pledging that they were merchants, householders, and residents in Astoria and would pay \$300 to the court should Lum Dot fail to "render himself amenable."¹¹⁵ At Lum Dot's trial before the grand jury three months later, the jury remained "out all night" and unable to agree upon a verdict. Lum Dot was eventually discharged and his bail money

¹¹³ *Daily Astorian*, October 31, 1883:3. The *Astorian* aptly demonstrated the carelessness that contemporaries had with Chinese names, as it called the defendant Lam Duck and wittily gave the article written about the case the title "A Lam Duck."

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *State of Oregon v. Lum Dot alias Ah Hod* (1884), Judgment Role 1180, Circuit Court Case Files 1124-1199, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container, No. 13, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.

returned.¹¹⁶ This was not the only case brought by a white person against a Chinese that did not result in a guilty verdict. And it demonstrates that the Chinese took a strong interest in the legal proceedings of their brethren and proved willing and able to participate in the legal system, since several in the Chinese community also had the financial ability to post bail for their compatriots.

Chinese also often brought suits against one another to Astoria's courtrooms. In late 1883, the newspaper reported that officers had recently been kept busy serving writs of attachment to various residents of the Chinese community.¹¹⁷ Many of these Chinese plaintiffs sought the recovery of money, often hundreds of dollars, that they had loaned, worked for, or given in the form of "goods, wares and merchandise" to their fellow Chinese.¹¹⁸ These cases involved Chinese not only as plaintiffs and defendants but also as witnesses and active observers. On a January day in 1884, over two hundred Chinese gathered outside the courthouse to watch their fellow countrymen battle out their financial conflicts in court and to engage in the customary beheading of a chicken before each Chinese witness was called to testify.¹¹⁹ The proceedings seemed to be quite an event. An officer had to be appointed "to prevent the steaming crowd from invading the sacred precincts of the inner temple," while "six lawyers, two interpreters, a basket of chickens, twelve jurymen, [and] sundry bundles of red and yellow paper, were among the

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 19, 1883:3.

¹¹⁸ See *Ah Lie v. Ching Young* (1884), Judgment Role 1212, Circuit Court Case Files 1200-1296, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 14, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.; and *Kwong On Long & Co. v. Heu Lee* (1883), Judgment Role 1141, Circuit Court Case Files 1124-1199, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 13, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore. for a couple of examples. Both of these cases were eventually settled and dismissed.

¹¹⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 5, 1884:3.

adjuncts of the scene.” Even as white participants looked upon the decapitation of so many chickens with “mingled feelings of alarm and regret,” and worried about their price going up as a result, this practice proved to be like many of the other customs of the Chinese in Astoria, both mystifying to and tolerated by the white community.¹²⁰

One of the most interesting court cases involved Jennie Wong, a local Chinese woman who was arrested in Astoria in June 1885 for violating Ordinance No. 172, “an ordinance to suppress Bawdy Houses.” After the police judge found her guilty and sentenced her to a fine of fifty dollars, she filed an appeal to attain a jury trial at the circuit court, swearing with an “x” mark, indicating her illiteracy, that she had “no money or means whereby to pay for a jury. That without a jury trial I cannot have a fair and impartial trial.”¹²¹ After the circuit court affirmed the initial verdict, her attorney C.J. Curtis, who commonly represented Chinese, filed an appeal to the Supreme Court of Oregon based not only on the allegation that the court erred in its judgment but also on the notion that the ordinance itself was unconstitutional as it conflicted with the state’s jurisdiction over the suppression of bawdy houses. Two Chinese, who gave a written affidavit that they worked as merchants in Astoria and were worth two hundred dollars, signed Jennie Wong’s undertaking of appeal, which made them responsible for costs if the final judgment was against her. Although the Supreme Court in Salem ultimately found for the City of Astoria in June 1886, a full year later, the case highlights the presence of Chinese women in Astoria and demonstrates the willingness of Astoria’s

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *Jennie Wong v. City of Astoria* (1886), Judgment Role 1369, Circuit Court Case Files 1297-1387, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 15, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.

Chinese to resist legal maneuvers against them, even during a time when animosity against them was especially intense.

While anti-Chinese rhetoric filled western newspapers and occupied the social and political discussions of the day, Astoria's Chinese actively took advantage of the recreational, legal, and commercial opportunities that the town had to offer. They continued to make use of their prospects for work in and around Astoria as well. The canning industry thrived during the early 1880s, and, as more canneries opened along the Columbia, Chinese continued to fill the ranks of the indoor workforce. Although William Hume, one of the four Hume brothers who basically brought the salmon canning industry to the Columbia, refused for years to hire Chinese to work in his cannery, he finally discharged his white laborers early in the 1885 season and thus became the last cannery owner on the river to employ Chinese.¹²² Whereas it was difficult to find white laborers to work inside the canneries, most saw "the lithe Celestial" as "well adapted" to the work. "He is attentive, exact, prompt, faithful, and silent," wrote Emma Adams of the U.S. Fish Commission.¹²³ An *Astorian* article printed during the early part of the 1882 season told that, when there was little other news for the newspaper to convey, reporters could always go to an Astoria cannery "and straightway all troubles vanish in looking at the agile Mongolian as he disposes of the salmon that the Caucasian captured the day before." The article poetically detailed the intricate canning process for its readers, describing the Chinese workers as "gentle gazelles" who conveyed "sublime

¹²² *Daily Morning Astorian*, May 16, 1885:3; Emma H. Adams, "Salmon Canning in Oregon," *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission, Vol. V, for 1885*, 49th Cong., 1st Sess., House Miscellaneous Doc. No. 34 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885): 364. An article from the *Weekly Astorian* on November 16, 1878:4 had pointed to William Hume's refusal to employ Chinese as an example for others, stating that "if he has made money with white labor, others can."

¹²³ Adams, "Salmon Canning in Oregon," 364.

indifference” to the high value of what they did for the canneries. Their perceived talents for such assembly-line work drew both cynicism and amazement from observers like the *Astorian* reporter, who wrote that “they have been crystalized by ages of want and abject peonage to be more automatic than human. They act as though they were wound up to run a certain number of hours, and that one need not be astonished to hear a whizzing sound in any one of them.”¹²⁴ The description again reveals how whites utilized the rhetorical tool of dehumanization to maintain a sense of white dominance over Chinese. But while perceptions of them as non-humans who were inherently inclined for a life of drudgery often inspired some of the most pungent arguments against their presence in the West, the importance of these qualities for the success of the canning industry, and accordingly for the success of Astoria, was not lost on most observers.

Increased operations and high salmon runs brought the canning industry along the lower Columbia to its peak during the 1883 season, when canners packed over 629,000 cases of salmon and the value of the industry reached over three million dollars.¹²⁵ Even before the season began, the atmosphere seemed ripe for success, as the *Astorian* referred to the town as the “present mecca” for people traveling along the Pacific Coast.¹²⁶ Although white and Chinese workers came in droves prior to the beginning of each year’s salmon run, there were some Chinese who worked for the canneries in the off-season too. One important task involved making the tin cans in which the salmon would be packed, and the Chinese proved to be especially “dexterous” at this operation. As preparations

¹²⁴ *Daily Astorian*, April 29, 1882:3.

¹²⁵ W.A. Jones, “The Salmon Fisheries of the Columbia River,” Senate Exec. Doc., No. 123, 50th Cong., 1st Sess. Vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1888), 59. Following this season, cases packed and the value of the industry along the Columbia began a slow decline and would not reach this 1883 peak again.

¹²⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 27, 1883:3.

were made for what was expected to be a busy 1883 season, the *Astorian* described how “a pensive looking Mongolian gang” could crop, cut, roll, and join sheets of tin expertly “so as to form a perfect cylinder.”¹²⁷ In fact, prior to the 1884 season, the *Astorian* argued against the establishment of a can-making company in Astoria. Cannery owners felt they had to employ Chinese for more than just a few months of the year in order to secure their labor for the canning season, so “the making of cans has heretofore utilized this otherwise unprofitable time.”¹²⁸ Being able to attract and rely on a Chinese workforce then outweighed the potential benefits of having a local company devoted to manufacturing cans. The Chinese had become such a crucial element of salmon canning operations on the lower Columbia that cannerymen made decisions based upon safeguarding their presence for the salmon runs.

Indeed, the seasonal character of Astoria’s fishing industry and the town’s location at the mouth of the Columbia gave it an important place in the web of Chinese migrant labor in the Northwest. Hundreds of Chinese flocked every year to Astoria to work in the canneries from April 1 to August 1, joining the several hundred who lived there year-round and who helped cater to the cannery workers’ needs, both subsistence and recreational, during the summer. Steamboats and railways increasingly carted Chinese laborers from Astoria to various places along the Columbia and elsewhere to work in canneries and on railroads, and the approach of the canning season brought the typical steamer-loads of fishermen and Chinese laborers to Astoria. Some of the Chinese came straight off of work with the railroads. The *Astorian* reported in 1881, for example, that “an Indian file of celestials trotted through our streets from the Oregon Railway and

¹²⁷ *Daily Astorian*, January 26, 1883:3.

¹²⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 22, 1884:3.

Navigation company's dock to the Chinese quarters."¹²⁹ Between the 1883 and 1884 canning season, the Oregon Pacific Railroad found three hundred Chinese in Astoria willing to go to Corvallis to build tunnels.¹³⁰ Cannery owners on rivers that enjoyed later salmon runs could also look to Astoria for Chinese workers around August. Those on the Umpqua and Coquille rivers, for example, sometimes sent for Chinese men to board vessels for their canneries around this time.¹³¹ The onset of Alaska's canning industry in the late 1880s, and the fact that many of Astoria's cannery owners opened fish packing establishments there, would increase Astoria's important role in this movement of Chinese migrant labor. Therefore, not only did Astoria's cannery employers rely heavily on the Chinese for their own local industries, but regional employers also looked to the town to find Chinese laborers.

Like so many other westerners in the late nineteenth century, Astorians anxiously awaited the day when a railroad would connect their town and industries with major cities, and Chinese labor proved pivotal to the construction of Oregon's railroads in the 1880s. As crews of both Chinese and white workers built short lines and branch lines all around Oregon, the *Astorian* kept its readers up to date on their progress and whereabouts. One constant was labor scarcity. The *Astorian* reported in the summer of 1881 that the Oregon Railway & Navigation Company (O.R. & N.), although already employing three hundred whites and twelve hundred Chinese, still needed more men, "whatever their nationality or color."¹³² Oregon was among the few states "calling loudly

¹²⁹ *Daily Astorian*, February 17, 1881:3.

¹³⁰ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 13, 1883:3.

¹³¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, August 2 and 8, 1884:3; August 11, 1885:3.

¹³² *Daily Astorian*, June 28, 1881:1.

for Chinamen for building railroads.”¹³³ While the Chinese exclusion bill received loud and virtually unanimous support from the West coast, the *Astorian* reported that the head of the Northern Pacific Railroad (N.P.R.) was bemoaning how difficult it was “to get Chinamen to come to this coast in anything like the number needed.”¹³⁴ As all seemed to wonder “where will the men come from to build railroads?,” the O.R. & N. and N.P.R. even supposedly contemplated sending boats to China to bring back a few thousand Chinese to do the work.¹³⁵ While this circumstance of railroad labor scarcity was not limited to Astoria, the *Astorian’s* reports of it reveal that the need for laborers to build much-desired railroads often outweighed arguments against their employment and presence in that industry. It seems likely that Astorians discussed and contemplated this conundrum as they read the *Astorian’s* reportage of both the exclusion debate and labor scarcity, especially as Astoria’s Chinese often provided that needed labor. Railroad-building in Oregon, then, brought to the surface an important dissonance between the rhetoric permeating political and legislative discourse and the on-the-ground needs of both Oregonians and Astorians.

Despite the economic value of Chinese in Astoria, the racially charged atmosphere of the late nineteenth-century West made them easy and acceptable targets for the young and rambunctious. During Astoria’s infrequent winter snow storms, some boys in the town enjoyed pelting Chinese passersby with snowballs. The *Astorian* admitted that the anger and fuss the “insulted” Chinese victims displayed over their

¹³³ *Daily Astorian*, July 22, 1881:1. This article also listed Arizona, New Mexico, and British Columbia as “calling loudly for Chinamen” to build railroad lines.

¹³⁴ *Daily Astorian*, January 18, 1882:1.

¹³⁵ *Daily Astorian*, January 4, 1882:2.

misfortune encouraged rather than deterred the boys in their “sport.”¹³⁶ Yet, during the economic and social hardships the Chinese faced in the winter of 1886, the newspaper actually conveyed empathy for “the luckless Chinamen” who “found additional worry in this sad world” by serving as prey for others’ winter fun.¹³⁷ In late 1884, aggravated Chinese and their private employers both complained to officials about the snowballing. Employers protested that, because of the practice, they were finding it “difficult to get their servants to go on errands about town.” Astoria’s judge then posted a public notice that anyone caught harassing Chinese with snowballs would be charged with assault and battery and “punished to the full extent of the law.”¹³⁸ Hence, the employer class served again, albeit for selfish reasons, as protectors of Astoria’s Chinese residents, reinforcing the notion that acceptance of the Chinese in Astoria sometimes relied to an important degree on their economic functions and connections to the middle and upper class.

Chinese and non-Chinese residents of Astoria did have physical altercations, generally ones less animated than those described at the beginning of this chapter, but class and ethnicity often mixed together to play a role in these disputes. One incident, labeled a “war of races” by *Astorian* writers, occurred when “a drove of Chinese” were herding hogs down Concomly Street, a typical activity for the Chinese who raised hogs inside the city.¹³⁹ When one of the hogs fell onto a worker digging a trench for a water pipe, the Caucasian worker struck both the hog and one of the Chinese men “and consigned him and his kinsfolk to eternal combustion.” Three of the Chinese witnesses

¹³⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 9, 1890:3 and February 9, 1884:3.

¹³⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 21, 1886:3.

¹³⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 27, 1884:2.

¹³⁹ *Daily Astorian*, December 19, 1883:3.

proceeded immediately to Justice Fox demanding that the perpetrator be arrested; the chief of police “made diligent but ineffectual search after the offender.”¹⁴⁰ The scuffle reveals the sort of working class, interethnic tensions that sometimes found physical expression on the ground in Astoria. A small surge in unprovoked attacks on Chinese men in 1890 also suggests that the diversity of Astoria’s working class often animated disputes. Two Chinese peddlers were beaten, one in lower town by three Russian Finns and one in the upper town by what the newspaper called “hoodlums who need watching.”¹⁴¹ A white passerby called for the police and stepped in to stop the beating in upper town, and residents there became “indignant over the occurrence and others of a similar nature,” requesting a police officer for the area to prevent more disturbances.¹⁴² While these outbursts do reveal a level of antipathy for the Chinese that led to physical assault, they also suggest that such aggression was condemned by many white residents and remained mostly confined to Astoria’s ethnically diverse working class.

One might perceive a contradiction in the fact that Astorians generally opposed physical offenses against the Chinese while anti-Chinese language and racist remarks permeated discourse in the town. However, white Astorians often seemed to think of local Chinese more as nuisances than as seriously troublesome, rendering forceful actions against them largely unnecessary. For example, some Astorians came to consider local Chinese as having a bad habit of stealing. A watch stolen from a local jewelry store that ended up in a Chinese pawnbroker’s shop led the *Astorian* to write that the Chinese “have

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 28, 30, 31, 1890:3. Lower and upper town correspond to the areas of town more downriver and upriver, respectively. Lower town formed more of the commercial center, while upper town was composed mostly of canneries.

¹⁴² Ibid.

no scruples in stealing, upon any and every occasion.”¹⁴³ Some cases involved allegations against Chinese in the private employ of Astoria’s white residents. The consequences were quite severe for Ah Sing when Col. James Taylor found that his “enterprising” Chinese cook had, over time, stolen eighty dollars from his safe; the cook was found guilty and sentenced to serve five years in the penitentiary.¹⁴⁴ While Taylor leased property at Smith’s Point to Chinese for cultivating gardens, the legal measures taken to punish Ah Sing demonstrated his lack of tolerance for deceitful Chinese employees.

While larceny cases were not strictly confined to Chinese defendants, Chinese were suspected to be behind a rise of burglaries in early 1885, leading the *Astorian* to suggest that “a dose of lead is what these miscreants worst need.”¹⁴⁵ One of these attempted burglaries happened at the house of Mr. and Mrs. George Wood. When a Chinese man tried to force his way through a window of the Woods’ house, Mr. Wood eventually “thought it had gone far enough,” so he pulled the man in, hit him with his pistol, and then shot at the suspect as he ran away.¹⁴⁶ A black mark allegedly created under the eye by the pistol became a point of interest during the burglary trial, as, according to Wood, it identified Ah Jim as the suspected criminal. While a “dense mass of Chinese” witnessed the proceedings, a Chinese barber testified that, when Ah Jim stopped in his shop the afternoon before the attempted burglary, he already had a black

¹⁴³ *Daily Astorian*, April 8, 1882:3.

¹⁴⁴ *Daily Astorian*, February 6, 1883:3. *State of Oregon v. Ah Sing* (1883), Judgment Role 1073, Circuit Court Case Files 1024-1122, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 12, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.

¹⁴⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 21, 1885:3.

¹⁴⁶ *State of Oregon v. Ah Jim* (1885), Judgment Role 1465, Circuit Court Case Files 1461-1522, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 17, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.

mark under his eye.¹⁴⁷ Another Chinese man testified in the same way regarding the mark, saying that it was created when a piece of wood Ah Jim was cutting for Mr. Ferchen broke off and hit him. Ah Jim, under questioning, confirmed this account of the mark's origin, but nonetheless, he was found guilty of breaking and entering with the intent of larceny. When the judge overruled a motion for a new trial based on the claim of Ah Jim's attorney that there was an "insufficiency of evidence to justify the verdict," the attorney brought the case to the Supreme Court of Oregon in February 1886. The Supreme Court ultimately dismissed the appeal and required Ah Jim to pay costs and serve five years in prison.¹⁴⁸ While the final outcome may demonstrate how the odds generally stacked against the Chinese in legal cases against whites, the court record also shows the attention Chinese paid to court cases that involved their fellow countrymen and reveals that there were Chinese and attorneys who were willing to contest these odds.

The *Astorian's* coverage of these larceny cases conveyed white residents' increasing frustrations with attempted burglary in Astoria and an association of these burglaries with the town's Chinese. While reporting on the trial of Ah Jim, the newspaper described his supposedly routine ploy of knocking on a door to see if anyone was home, then producing a chicken for sale if the occupant answered the door.¹⁴⁹ Characterizations of these Chinese thieves as "slippery" were typical, as another story explained how one had proven able to regularly evade detection while stealing clocks from the store of A. Van Dusen by secreting a clock as he entered the store and then "moseying around . . . till

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 29, 1885:3.

¹⁴⁸ *State of Oregon v. Ah Jim*, JR 1465.

¹⁴⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 29, 1885:3.

suspicion was disarmed.”¹⁵⁰ The *Astorian* at one point remarked that “this burglary business has gone about far enough” and “summary measures” were needed “to check it.”¹⁵¹ A few days later, a small shoot-out occurred when a white man found a Chinese man trying to steal his chickens, and the *Astorian* warned that “there will be a funeral in Chinatown some of these fine days unless they change their ideas regarding the acquisition of property.”¹⁵² Chinese were accused of burglarizing both stores and private residences, even sometimes by their fellow countrymen.¹⁵³ Larceny cases against the Chinese often resulted in fines and prison terms for the accused, but occasionally charges against an accused thief were dismissed by the trial jury and the defendant discharged. The noticeable proportion of larceny charges among the cases that involve Chinese during this period, along with the sentiments expressed in the *Astorian*, reveal that, while such circumstances did not bring violence or some organized movement against the Chinese, they did lead local residents to view some of their Chinese neighbors as untrustworthy.

Frequent fire alarms set off by a burning flue or chimney in a Chinese building provided another significant source of complaint for Astoria’s non-Chinese residents. Short quips in the *Astorian* indicate the almost routine nature of these occurrences: “The

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; *Daily Morning Astorian*, November 14 and 15, 1884:3.

¹⁵¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 28, 1885:3 and January 29, 1885:3.

¹⁵² *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 1, 1885:2.

¹⁵³ See, for example, the case of *State of Oregon v. Lee Lin Fong* (1885), Judgment Role 1376, Circuit Court Case Files 1297-1387, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 15, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore., in which Lee Lin Fong was accused of stealing a pipe and lantern from the residence of the Long Moon.

usual Chinese chimney called out the department at nine o'clock last Sunday."¹⁵⁴

Although a majority of the time, the *Astorian* had “no damage” to report when an alarm was sounded from Chinese quarters, Astorians viewed the wooden “Chinese tinder boxes scattered throughout the city” as making the entire town vulnerable.¹⁵⁵ The repeated scares fueled negative stereotypes of the Chinese as living in overcrowded, unsanitary, and dangerous conditions. Added frustrations sometimes stemmed from witnessing the “thoughtless” and “half-crazed” Chinese who “flapp[ed] around like so many chickens with their heads cut off” as they rushed to save their own items instead of helping to put out the fire.¹⁵⁶ The newspaper suggested giving Chinese whose burning chimneys called out the fire department “a good wetting down” with the fire hoses once the excitement had passed, and the fire department occasionally “got even” by doing so.¹⁵⁷ But the seriousness of the matter eventually prompted inspections of Chinese stovepipes and flues to prevent a major conflagration.¹⁵⁸ Reporters’ sarcasm probably indicated the level of controlled anxiety felt by most Astorians over the frequency of fires started in Chinese quarters. Although consistently praising the fire department for responding to the “usual” Chinese chimney with its “usual alacrity,” Astorians mostly conveyed exasperation with the Chinese and their burning chimneys.

¹⁵⁴ *Daily Astorian*, June 19, 1883:3. The houses Chinese lived in were often called “rookeries,” which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, refers to “a dense collection of housing, esp. in a slum area; (also) a lodging house with overcrowded quarters.”

¹⁵⁵ *Daily Astorian*, February 9, 1883:3.

¹⁵⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 29, 1884:3.

¹⁵⁷ *Daily Astorian*, May 1, 1883:3 and October 10, 1890:3.

¹⁵⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, November 30, 1888:3 and August 6, 1889:3.

While the association of Chinese with fires and larceny provided two common sources of vexation for Astoria's whites, other more singular incidents reinforce the notion that white Astorians considered some of the habits and recreational pursuits of the Chinese to be irritating, but not enough to provoke forceful action. For example, a "Chinese concert" in Chinatown aroused the ire of the *Astorian's* printers, who called it "a most confounding nuisance." When someone clarified that it was some sort of Chinese "religious exercise," the newspaper responded sarcastically that it nevertheless "cause[d] the majority not heathen in that locality to exercise sacreligious."¹⁵⁹ Chinese often became excitable while enjoying their time off of work in the many gambling halls and saloons scattered along the northern edge of the commercial district. But the "diabolical howling and general cussedness" that emanated from one particular Chinese saloon in Chinatown caused the *Astorian* to remark that it "should be razed to the ground."¹⁶⁰ Yet, Astoria's vice and red light district, located alongside and overlapping with Chinatown, attracted many more than the Chinese. The town's brothels and taverns boomed during the salmon canning season, attracting lots of transient fishermen, who, as one writer recounted, brought with them "their many kindred evils" and sometimes gave Astoria the reputation of being "a rough place."¹⁶¹ Some of these irritations that Chinese Astorians posed for white Astorians, then, resembled the types of problems that any boisterous, ethnically diverse, working class population, of which the Chinese really were a part, would provide.

¹⁵⁹ *Daily Astorian*, April 21, 1881:3.

¹⁶⁰ *Daily Astorian*, June 17, 1883:3.

¹⁶¹ Alfred Cleveland, "Social and Economic History of Astoria," *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 4:2 (June 1903): 147.

Although some local Chinese activities greatly irritated white Astorians, others, and one in particular, elicited the sincere admiration of many of the town's whites. Perceptions of the Chinese as incredibly thrifty and productive generally angered whites because they allowed the Chinese to be strong working class competitors. But when Astoria's Chinese applied these qualities to their cultivation of Smith's Point, which lay between the Columbia River and Young's Bay on the western edge of town, they were esteemed. The Chinese leased about one hundred acres of land at Smith's Point from Col. James Taylor, a long-time resident of Astoria, and their gardens and hog pens there supplied the town with meat and a variety of vegetables. A side contribution of this local Chinese industry involved the Chinese collecting much of the town's garbage to feed to their swine. The ability of the Chinese to cultivate the area of Smith's Point, previously covered with thickets of brush and logs, led the *Astorian* to write that they "set a good example of industry to many of the superior race."¹⁶² Through "care and toil," the Chinese "transformed unsightly hillsides into fertile tracts of soil" and earned the approbation of many of Astoria's white residents.¹⁶³ Whites also noticed the business savvy the Chinese demonstrated in their gardening endeavors. The *Astorian* reported that "these indefatigable folks" earned \$2000 from harvesting just a six-acre patch of the "most luxuriant crops" during the 1887 canning season.¹⁶⁴

Yet, white reactions to the success of these Chinese gardens still often involved a curious combination of scorn and respect. One article described how, where boys in other places could be shown the merits of toil and persistence through an ant farm, in Astoria

¹⁶² *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 26, 1885:3.

¹⁶³ *Daily Astorian*, March 13, 1883:3.

¹⁶⁴ *Daily Morning Astorian*, August 20, 1887:3.

boys could look to the “human prototypes” of ants, the Chinese. Even while upholding that, in the business of growing and selling vegetables, the Chinese “certainly earn all they get,” the writer attributed the success of the Chinese to “their horrible rat-like thrift.”¹⁶⁵ Thus, even when conveying their merits, there was a tendency to animalize the Chinese. Their economical habits drove contradictory attitudes towards them both inside and outside of Astoria, and some contemporaries, such as political speaker Col. R.G. Ingersoll, recognized and communicated that the better qualities of the Chinese often were responsible for the animosity against them. Ingersoll wrote, for example, that “their virtues have made enemies, and they are hated because of their patience, their honesty and their industry.”¹⁶⁶ Admiring and despising the Chinese for their industriousness was common. While their successes in cultivating the area of Smith’s Point earned the local Chinese more accolades than derision, the prevalent attitudes of the day were still apparent.

The mid-1880s likely represented the worst, most dangerous moment for Chinese immigrants in the United States. As a variety of factors culminated to inspire white immigrants and white Americans to take targeted action against the Chinese and push them out by force, Astorians, both white and Chinese, navigated cautiously through this moment of turmoil and managed to maintain relative stability. Sinophobic rhetoric that had laid the groundwork for anti-Chinese animosity to reach such a high level definitely had a place in Astoria, but so did the Chinese. Astorians recognized both the economic importance of the Chinese and the necessity to keep law and order. Therefore, rhetoric

¹⁶⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 21, 1884:3.

¹⁶⁶ Col. R.G. Ingersoll and T.J. Geary, “Should the Chinese be Excluded?” *The North American Review* 157: 440 (July 1893): 57.

and action against local Chinese remained tempered, while contradictions generally characterized race thought and the state of race relations in Astoria. Arguments emanating from the *Astorian* suggest that most local whites supported the more ideologically-driven anti-Chinese rhetoric saturating the Pacific Coast during this tumultuous time period. But they also indicate that many Astorians, especially the employer class, realized that larger economic problems formed the root of working-class restlessness, which found its outlet with the Chinese. So, while things did escalate in Astoria in the mid-1880s, they also appeared to quickly lose steam. The Chinese had businesses in the town, they utilized the court system, they cultivated gardens, they worked outside the canneries, and they engaged in cultural and recreational activities that were their own but that often provided a venue for interaction with and observation from white Astorians. Essentially, the Chinese lived, worked, and died in Astoria just as other residents did. Astorians noticed that the Chinese served functional roles in their community and that forceful movements against them were therefore simply irrational. Although the fundamental assumption that the Chinese would have to go never faded from discourse, trying to reconcile how they would go brought localized arguments to the forefront of the discussion in Astoria. And the community conversation, as conveyed through the town's newspaper, reveals how Astorians probed their way through the racial entanglements of the mid-1880s. All the same, the Exclusion Act would soon begin to take its toll, and Astoria would see a consequential decrease in its Chinese population for good or ill. The decline of the Chinese in Astoria would generally correspond with increased interactions with the white community, but this would not prevent another surge of hostility against them before the turn of the century.

CHAPTER IV

ANCHORING IN:

TOWARDS A MORE STABLE COMMUNITY

Following Astorians' careful navigation through the tumultuous period of the mid-1880s, race relations in Astoria took steps forward and backward as residents looked to the uncertain future of the Chinese presence in the town. Exclusion policies and declining salmon runs both contributed to a substantial numerical decrease of Chinese in Astoria after the heyday of the salmon industry and the Chinese presence during the mid-1880s. Yet, this ebb had corresponding flows, such as a gradually increasing integration and stability of Chinese in the community. Actions of local leaders proved again that racial bigotry in Astoria had limits, while some residents noticed and even called attention to contradictions in the way whites treated and regarded their Chinese neighbors. As the availability of jobs and Chinese in the canneries decreased, the skills the Chinese had developed in this line of work became more recognized and valued. Local Chinese continued to diversify their occupational contributions to the community as well. Yet, naysayers maintained a place in Astoria, and a new newspaper in 1892, which sought to represent the region's working class and Democratic sympathizers, made the voices against the Chinese more prominent. This newspaper shamelessly tried to bring the "Chinese question" to the forefront during a time of economic depression and renew the local anti-Chinese movement. But, like the movement of the mid-1880s, this one would be short-lived. Thus, as Astorians, both white and Chinese, began to feel the

effects of exclusion, they continued to move between racial acceptance and inequality, working to find some sense of balance and stability. While exclusion policies at the federal level remained difficult to enforce, Astoria provides one example of how whites and Chinese on the local level negotiated and wrestled with the prospects of an enduring Chinese presence.

A “sojourner” mentality, emerging from a Chinese cultural emphasis on native place loyalties but sustained by anti-Chinese racism, accompanied many Chinese who immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century. The fact that most Chinese immigrants were adult males served as a source of condemnation from whites, as it fed the widespread perception that these men traveled to the United States only to earn money to send back to families in China.¹ However, this trend was beginning to change by the end of the nineteenth century. Women constituted about 1.3 percent of the Chinese population of Clatsop County in 1880, and census enumerators counted no Chinese children. By 1900, 19 Chinese women and 16 Chinese children lived in the township of Astoria, comprising 5.9 percent of that township’s Chinese population. Of the women, ten were listed as a contractor’s, merchant’s, or laborer’s wife, and one was listed as a merchant’s mother.² In 1890, the *Astorian* reported that a group of American children were “having a merry time” one afternoon playing with two young Chinese girls “who

¹ Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 44, 55; Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 9-10.

² 1880 and 1900 United States Manuscript Census, Astoria township, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com. I count those twelve years of age and younger as “children.”

were gorgeously arrayed in all the bright colors so peculiar to those people.”³ Although this observation still hinted at the exoticization of local Chinese, the story illustrates how the virtues and simplicity of childhood could help transcend racial barriers in an interracial town. An increased number of Chinese families in Astoria overall suggested a slightly more established presence in the city and indicated that some Chinese did not plan to return to China but to make their lives and livelihoods in Astoria.

Some Chinese in Astoria demonstrated their intentions to remain in the United States by learning skills that would more fully integrate them into society. In 1890, the *Astorian* reported that a night school for Chinese held in the back of a Presbyterian Church and conducted by a Rev. Dr. Campbell was “numerously attended.”⁴ A year later, a prominent local physician hoped to open a Chinese Baptist mission school in the local Baptist church. According to the *Astorian*, he “made a canvas of the city” to collect money from residents who supported his endeavor and successfully “secured \$136.”⁵ The development of these night schools suggests not only an inclination on the part of the Chinese to assimilate to an American way of life, but also a noteworthy level of endorsement for the project on the part of the community. It also reveals the strong association between religion and early outreach to Chinese immigrants. However, the *Astorian’s* editorial comment about the schools disclosed yet again how paradox persistently pervaded the contours of racial thought in Astoria. It quipped, “The Chinese mission schools are a great thing for the wily heathens who want to learn how to read and

³ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 13, 1890:3.

⁴ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 7, 1890:3.

⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 3, 1891:3.

write English, and thus acquire superior value in the labor market.”⁶ Although the writer considered a local Chinese desire for education to be “a great thing,” this was not enough to remove their racial stigma as “wily heathens.”

The *Astorian*'s treatment of the prevalence of gambling in Chinatown provides another fitting example of the contradictions that characterized attitudes about the Chinese in Astoria. On a couple of occasions, the *Astorian* carried lengthy articles to inform its readers about the gambling habits of the Chinese. The newspaper essentially promoted the idea that an affinity for gambling was inherent to the Chinese race, labeling it “another trait of character which reflects no credit on them.” One writer even lamented “that a people so philosophical and industrious should be influenced from day to day to fall into each other’s traps” and “to stake their hard-earned and scanty wages upon chances.”⁷ After describing how Chinese working in white households in the city would often take turns pocketing various essential items with which to stock their gambling dens, from sugar and oil to candles and dishes, another article described two games typically played by the local Chinese. Revealing the active existence of a social hierarchy among Astoria’s Chinese population, the reporter wrote that “the common fellows that we see splitting wood and carrying swill and cutting up hogs and selling vegetables can no more get into a game of faro than they could into a lodge of Masons.”⁸ A detailed explanation of how to play fan-tan, one of the most popular games among Chinese immigrants of the time, followed.⁹ Articles like this attempted to both inform and

⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 4, 1891:3.

⁷ *Daily Astorian*, October 7, 1883:3.

⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 30, 1885:3.

⁹ Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America*, 38-39.

stigmatize, to be both fascinating and distressing for readers, for while the Chinese were depicted as virtually helpless to their obsession, willing to spend “their last dollar in the world,” they were also portrayed as ingenious with it, or “the best counters in the world.”¹⁰ These types of lengthy descriptions most likely served to satisfy a curiosity among readers of what their Chinese employees and neighbors did during their time off while also validating opinions of the Chinese as intrinsically corrupt.

Although Astoria’s newspapers promoted stereotypes against Chinese as “inveterate gamblers,” they did not suggest that the Chinese were the only gamblers in Astoria.¹¹ They did, however, sometimes draw causal links between the vices of Chinese and those of whites. The array of gambling halls in Astoria’s vice district catered to many of the city’s working men, and the widespread gambling taking place in Astoria despite its illegality even eventually prompted discussion of an ordinance to license gambling halls in the city. A local citizen wrote to the *Astorian* of his worries that increased gambling among “the lads of Astoria” was “sapping up the aspirations, the energy, the honor, and the morality” of these young men.¹² Another newspaper, the *Astoria Daily Budget*, similarly expressed concerns over the “vagrants,” the “thugs,” and the prevalence of saloons in the city, but it also suggested that “young lads” were “taking their first lesson from vice” by “hanging about” the Chinese gambling halls.¹³ In this sense, although whites admittedly partook in various “immoral” activities about the town, some blamed the Chinese and their perceived racial depravities. The *Budget* alerted its readers

¹⁰ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 30, 1885:3; *Daily Astorian*, October 7, 1883:3.

¹¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 30, 1885:3.

¹² *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 28, 1893:2.

¹³ *Astoria Daily Budget*, June 8, 1894:1.

that even several women in the town participated in an underground lottery run by the local Chinese. According to the article, Astoria women “who would not be suspected of gambling” purchased and marked tickets that their Chinese laundrymen brought to their door.¹⁴ Thus, while few believed that the social ills found in Astoria were solely restricted to the Chinese, the ostensibly unhealthy habits of Chinese were seen as having a corrupting influence on local whites.

A similar phenomenon is shown in the way Chinese were blamed for the spread of opium. Considered “the curse of China,” opium-smoking became much more of a concern, in fact an “impending evil,” when white Americans started taking up the habit.¹⁵ Although many, including Astorians, blamed the British for the introduction of opium into China, stories of opium’s spread to the more respectable classes and to the youth of America disseminated through American society and fueled anti-Chinese opinion.¹⁶ The forays of vulnerable young men and women into urban Chinatowns to smoke opium and the drug’s physiological and psychological effects were cause for special concern, as this threatened to “emasculate the coming generation, if not completely destroy the white population of our coast.”¹⁷ The *Astorian* occasionally carried lengthy articles that both acquainted its readers with the titillating details of smoking opium and cautioned them of its threat to take over all classes of society. One article, for example, explained the intricate process and the addictive qualities of smoking opium, but reported a lack of

¹⁴ *Astoria Daily Budget*, July 13, 1894:1.

¹⁵ *Daily Astorian*, October 12, 1881:3.

¹⁶ A *Daily Astorian* article from October 18, 1882:2 for example implicated Britain for China’s opium problems.

¹⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 12, 1881:3; Diana Ahmad, “Opium-Smoking, Anti-Chinese Attitudes, and the American Medical Community, 1850-1890,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 1:2 (Summer 2000), 53-65.

knowledge of its production, as the Chinese “alone know how to ‘cook’” it. The writer followed this description by relaying that numerous “harrowing accounts” existed of young, white men and women who “have become slaves of the habit,” and that even the wealthy “prefer the filthy bunk in the rear of a Chinese wash house” to their own homes for a place to consume the drug. The intermingling of the races as a result of opium’s spread was seen as just as troublesome as its physiological effects. The discourse surrounding opium, thus, was often racialized. The article employed fearful language to prove that, although opium-smoking was “an Asiatic vice,” it was “dragging down our people to depths that can nowhere be found in Aryan civilization.”¹⁸ As with gambling, whites became much more concerned about Chinese smoking opium when this habit threatened to spread beyond its perceived racial confines.

While much of the discussion about opium in the local newspaper echoed the broader concerns of Americans regarding the moral debasement of the Chinese, the issue also took on a more interesting and complex framework in Astoria. Both Chinese and whites were arrested for smoking opium and paid fines for engaging in the activity, and police officers occasionally raided local opium dens, which were owned by Chinese. But when the latter part of the 1880s saw a distinct rise in Chinese arrests for opium-smoking, some residents noticed. The Chinese were typically able to post bail for five or ten dollars if caught smoking, and, as many of them failed to appear in court, the *Astorian* openly observed that the city was gleaning considerable revenue from these arrests, even insinuating that this may have been the motive more so than actually punishing and pursuing alleged criminals. In April 1890, for example, the *Astorian* conveyed that “the six natives of the land of Confucius” who had been arrested for “indulging in the fumes

¹⁸ *Daily Astorian*, February 3, 1882:1.

of opium” posted their ten-dollar bail, which would “contribute to defraying the expenses of the city government of Astoria.”¹⁹ The following month, “two Mongolian maidens with romantic names” and four Chinese men were arrested for “inhaling the fumes of opium,” and, as the *Astorian* described, the ten dollars left by each of them “slid into the city’s money box.”²⁰ A comparative study of whites and Chinese arrested for gambling between 1899 and 1902, conducted by archivist Liisa Penner, revealed that both groups of gamblers paid a fine around the same time each month for their habit, suggesting that this worked more as a profit-making scheme than as a corrective system.²¹ Thus, in early 1890, police officials likely did utilize arrests for opium-smoking and target the Chinese in order to bolster their city’s finances.

Some local observers, however, seemed to question the difference between Chinese smoking opium and whites engaging in such activities as drinking whiskey, especially since the former “courts repose, rather than disturbance.” In 1889, in the midst of the high numbers of opium arrests, the *Astorian* printed: “‘Why not let the heathen Chinee smoke his weed since Caucasians smoke theirs?’ ask those who think it is inconsistent to pull an opium joint, and let another kind of joint alone.”²² The newspaper’s defense of the local Chinese increased with the arrests over the next few months, and it often highlighted this contradiction of arresting Chinese “for quietly smoking opium” while whites smoked tobacco and “gambling run[s] openly and

¹⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, April 13, 1890:5.

²⁰ *Daily Morning Astorian*, May 20, 1890:3.

²¹ Liisa Penner, *Astoria, Oregon, Police Department Records, April 29, 1899 to April 18, 1902: Chinese and Caucasian Gambling Records Compared* (Astoria, Ore.: Liisa Penner, 1995).

²² *Daily Morning Astorian*, September 10, 1889:3.

unrebuked all the time.”²³ While many whites had no qualms about associating Chinese with gambling and opium-smoking, the *Astorian*’s coverage of arrests during this period suggested that some members of the local public were both aware of and troubled by racial inconsistencies in treating the issue.

A rise in the number of arrests of Chinese gamblers at about the same time also did not escape public attention, especially as it seemed to correspond with a decrease in the number of whites apprehended for the same offense.²⁴ The *Astorian* employed sarcasm to propose that the arrests were the result of racial discrimination, as it became more obvious that the Chinese were being targeted by local officers of the law: “The Chinese are catching it for gambling. That’s right Soc it tu em. Why do they gamble, being Chinese. They ought to be white men; then they could gamble as much as they wanted.”²⁵ The paper reported police raids on several gambling halls, where officers arrested groups of Chinese men engaged in leisurely games. Eventually, city officials felt compelled to address the issue. In July, Mayor Crosby issued a statement to the city council in which he referred to the nearly weekly reports in the papers of Chinese men arrested for gambling. He openly called for local law enforcement to end the racial discrimination taking place in Astoria, arguing that “violation of the law is not less reprehensible when committed by the Caucasian than by the Mongolian,” and asserting that it was the “duty of [the committee on health and police] to hold the police department to a strict and impartial accounting for this state of affairs.”²⁶ A grand jury

²³ *Daily Morning Astorian*, July 10, 1890:2.

²⁴ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 18, 1890:3.

²⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 1, 1890:3.

²⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, July 23, 1890:3.

that indicted a number of Chinese for smoking opium and gambling made a similar statement regarding the number of Chinese brought to court for these offenses. Like the mayor, the jury directed its sentiments towards arresting officers. Although admitting that evidence did show the guilt of the defendants before them, they noted the suspicious prevalence of Chinese appearing in court as compared to whites. They ultimately “recommend[ed] that the next raid upon opium fiends and gambling dens be a general one without discrimination as to race and color, and that white offenders be brought to the bar of justice alongside their Asiatic brethren, so that it shall not appear that there is a law to arrest a Chinaman and no law to arrest a white man for the same kind of a crime.”²⁷ The way this story of Chinese gambling and opium-smoking unfolded offers an important illustration of the complex ways racial thought played out on the ground in Astoria. It is difficult to determine whether some Astorians opposed the discriminatory treatment of Chinese because of a genuine belief in racial fairness or because they did not want their city to develop a reputation for malfeasance. In their dispositions toward exclusion, Astorians had tended to insist on law and order and legal correctness. Therefore, fairness in the eye of the law may have constituted the prime motivator. Regardless of the reason, while local whites assented to notions of the Chinese and their habits as dangerously polluting to the white race, city leaders in Astoria proved unwilling to engage openly in racial discrimination, thus offering another demonstration of the mediating processes that typified race relations in Astoria in the late nineteenth century.

In an era of exclusion, the important economic roles that Chinese had come to play in Astoria created another glitch for local whites who characterized themselves as opposed to the Chinese. Shortly after the Exclusion Act passed in 1882, the *Astorian*

²⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, September 25, 1890:3.

commented that “this exclusion business seems to be a sort of boomerang, as far as Astoria is concerned.” Although it maintained that passing exclusion legislation was “right,” the article described how “the whilom meek Mongolian” had, since the Act’s passage, become “stuck up,” assertively setting his own price for work such as laundry and wood-cutting with less concern about competition. “He knows his worth, and demands it,” the author stated with apparent indignation.²⁸ Years later, despite the amplified rancor against Chinese during the mid-1880s, some of the consequences of exclusion ironically continued to be troublesome for Astorians. Residents realized the value of Chinese workers and expressed concern about their shrinking presence. As non-Chinese girls increasingly replaced Chinese men as household servants, women complained that a girl who knew sufficient English and “who can boil water without burning it . . . is in great demand.” Some also pointed to the fact that many girls would quit work after marrying. The *Astorian* conveyed the broader labor scarcity problems and the previous ability of Chinese to fill this need when it wrote, “Astoria ladies have the same trouble that other folks have about getting help. The Chinese are not so numerous as they used to be.”²⁹ While those who so loudly and vehemently called for Chinese exclusion often refuted the notion that labor scarcity necessitated a Chinese presence, the view on the ground in Astoria suggested something slightly different.

The declining numbers of Chinese especially affected the canneries. The canning industry and Astoria’s Chinese population simultaneously waned after both reached their peak in the mid-1880s. At the same time that cannery owners faced depleting salmon runs and increased competition from Alaska and other parts of the Pacific Coast,

²⁸ *Daily Astorian*, October 4, 1883:3.

²⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 6, 1891:3, September 1, 1889:3, and February 13, 1890:2.

exclusion started to take its toll on the Chinese workforce. The 1880 census listed over fifteen hundred Chinese working in the county's canneries, but by 1890, only 925 Chinese *lived* in Astoria, and that number would drop to 601 by 1900.³⁰ Local cannery owners became alarmed about losing their skilled and reliable workforce. The owners of Hapgood & Co. in Astoria seemed distressed when their contractor, Wing Sing & Co. in Portland, could not produce enough Chinese men to fill the workforce for the coming season. After sending several requests to Wing Sing & Co. for a cook and twenty-five more cannery men, Hapgood & Co. finally threatened to “hire white men in sufficient numbers to supply the deficiency in Chinamen and charge their wages to your account.”³¹ As unionized fishermen continued to exert pressure on cannery owners to pay higher prices for fish, the shrinking supply of Chinese labor frustrated the effectiveness of the traditionally dependable contract labor system and increased cannery owners' distress.³²

For those Chinese remaining in Astoria, their skills and training provided them with the ability to maintain their value in the canneries despite increasing competition from both technology and other labor groups. A 1911 immigration report described the late 1880s as the period when the Exclusion Act “brought to an end the influx of Chinese coolie laborers.” The legislation's effect on the Chinese gradually brought other races and groups to work in the canneries, but, as it did so, the value of Chinese workers increased.

³⁰ 1880 United States Manuscript Census, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com; Department of the Interior, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 476; Department of the Interior, *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900*, Volume 1, Population, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 636.

³¹ Hapgood and Company to Wing Sing and Company, June 5, 1890, Hapgood and Company Records, University of Oregon Manuscripts, Eugene, Ore.

³² *Ibid.*; Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union, “Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union” Booklet (Astoria, Ore.: G.W. Snyder, 1890), 12-15, Special Collections and Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Ore.

The report explained that non-Chinese workers were hired only “after the largest possible number of Chinese have been contracted for” and added that, in mixed-race workforces, the Chinese maintained the more highly skilled positions, as cannery work had been especially “fitted for that race.” “In fact,” the report asserted, “this industry has been, and still is, more dependent upon Chinese labor than any other.”³³ Historian Chris Friday characterized what developed in the canneries as an “aristocracy of labor,” with Chinese workers at the top. In addition to Chinese workers’ skills and experience in the canneries, ethnic and social ties to labor contractors allowed them to keep favored positions even as competition with other groups increased. Also, the particularities of salmon and salmon runs on the Columbia rendered automated technology like the so-called “Iron Chink”—a machine created to mimic the movements of Chinese butchers—less favorable than manual processing.³⁴ Hence, while cannery owners were among those residents who felt most threatened by the dwindling numbers of Chinese, the Chinese themselves experienced a general rise in their status and appreciation in the workforce.

Although cannery owners faced growing difficulties to maintain homogenous Chinese workforces, short remarks in the *Astorian* indicate that the Chinese in Astoria found other economic opportunities about the town, work that frequently brought them into contact with their non-Chinese neighbors. Raising pigs not only constituted a viable source of supplemental income for local Chinese, but it also created a side benefit for residents, as Chinese collected food waste from around town to feed their swine. The

³³ *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigrants in Industries Part 25: Japanese and other Immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States*, Vol. 3, 61st Cong., 2d Sess. Senate Document No. 633 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 389.

³⁴ Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian-American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 45, 85, 97, Ch. 4; Phillip B.C. Jones, “Revolution on a Dare: Edmund A. Smith and his Famous Fish-Butchering Machine,” *Washington State Historical Society: Stories*, 2012, <http://stories.washingtonhistory.org/leschi/teaching/pdfs/sts-ironchink.pdf>.

newspaper noted how they would “go from house to house” to gather “the fragments of the domestic cuisine” to give to their pigs. The Chinese reportedly had “an understanding” with many of the households who contributed food waste, which involved “cut[ting] the kindling that starts the family fire; an arrangement that is mutually satisfactory.”³⁵ Chinese could also be called upon to do more spontaneous tasks. As the “Mssrs. Taylor” embarked upon a new venture smelting scrap tin, they employed Chinese “to collect the material,” which, although considered “not very pleasant business,” could “be done by main strength and patience.”³⁶ Chinese gardens in Astoria also continued to be a profitable commercial endeavor for local Chinese, as the *Astorian* noted that “increasing acreage under cultivation by Chinese gardeners in this vicinity, year by year, makes it less necessary to depend on California for vegetables by steamer.”³⁷ A few years later, the newspaper assured its readers that “the Chinese garden is in good condition and gives good promise of large crops.”³⁸ The routine interactions that locals had with Chinese vegetable peddlers, who went door to door selling their produce, led to local Chinese gardeners having a generally positive reputation in the community. One resident, for example, remembered fondly the Chinese gardener who sold produce to her family. Nicknamed “Lemon John,” he was “a favorite with all the children in the neighborhood,” she wrote, because he brought them an assortment of treats.³⁹ Outside of vegetable peddling, it also appeared that local Chinese continued to knit nets and cut wood about

³⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 4, 1889:3.

³⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 8, 1890:3.

³⁷ *Daily Morning Astorian*, June 4, 1889:3.

³⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, May 14, 1893:3.

³⁹ Violet Keeney, “Chinatown,” Chinese in Astoria vertical research file, Clatsop County Historical Society Archives, Astoria, Ore.

the town as needed.⁴⁰ The 1900 census listed the occupations of 415 of Astoria's Chinese as simply "laborer" (although nearly half of these were most likely cannery laborers).⁴¹ This shows that, while some Chinese operated laundries, tailor shops, and stores in Astoria, a rather large contingent also continued to supply general labor for a wide range of tasks.

As a railroad connection with Portland loomed in Astoria's near future, Chinese workers also played an important role in making that vision a reality. In 1889, local labor contractor Sai Get served as procurer of Chinese labor for the Pacific Construction Company's building of the line between Hillsboro and Astoria. He signed a contract agreeing to furnish up to one hundred Chinese for construction of the rail line. According to the contract, the Chinese supplied by Sai Get would need to be "strong, first class able bodied men, peaceably disposed and experienced in such work." Each laborer would earn \$1.15 per ten-hour day, to be paid over to Sai Get monthly. The Pacific Construction Company reserved the right to employ other men should Sai Get fail to provide sufficient laborers or neglect to replace laborers who "shall prove to be lazy or shall disobey or fail to obey all of the orders" of the company. The contract further stipulated that, for every thirty-five workers, one cook, one "book-man," and one "tea-boy to carry tea to said laborers" were allowed. An interesting aspect of the contract involves its considerations of the Columbia River fishing season. The parties agreed that, in March of 1890, Sai Get could "withdraw . . . a number of chinese laborers, not to exceed Seventy in all, to work

⁴⁰ *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 4, 1889:3 and February 28, 1890:3; *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 26, 1893:1.

⁴¹ 1900 United States Manuscript Census, Township of Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com. The location for nearly half of these was recorded as a local cannery.

at packing Salmon on said River during said season, without violating the terms of this contract.” Sai Get would then need to procure laborers to replace those sent to the canneries, but the Pacific Construction Company agreed to pay all transportation expenses “of said chinese laborers so withdrawn, and their baggage, to Astoria,” as well as the transportation expenses of the “substitute” workers.⁴² As Sai Get also served as a labor contractor for the Astoria Packing Company, this situation was probably particularly advantageous for him.⁴³ The contract itself illustrates the sense of detachment between the negotiated and the negotiators in the contract labor system, as companies and contractor middlemen dictated the terms of work for large groups of Chinese laborers. Furthermore, it reveals how such agreements functioned prominently within a web of migrant labor in which Chinese were moved like cargo across Oregon and the Pacific Northwest to work in vital regional industries.

Indeed, arrangements for transportation of goods and laborers became a point of contention in late 1891 when C.W. Rich, the manager of a steamer, sued Hong Chong & Co. for what they allegedly owed Rich for transporting laborers and a variety of goods to work sites on the Astoria & South Coast railroad. Hong Chong & Co. and their attorneys maintained that W.H. Parker and the Pacific Construction Company had always been responsible for paying transportation costs for the workers and their freight. Although the defendants called W.H. Parker, Sai Get, Parker’s bookkeeper, Hong Chong, and Go Bong all as witnesses for them, the jury found the partners of Hong Chong & Co. guilty. The

⁴² Labor Contract for Railroad Work, Accession #91.99.1, Clatsop County Historical Society Archives, Astoria, Ore.

⁴³ Copy of *R.L. Polk & Co's Astoria City (and Vicinity) Directory, 1890*, Vol. 1 (Portland, Ore.: R.L. Polk & Co., 1890), 79, “Research Indexes for Clatsop County,” Book 1, Clatsop County Historical Society Archives, Astoria, Ore.

attorneys for the indicted men then filed for a new trial based on fresh evidence provided by W.T. Beveridge, a foreman for the Astoria & South Coast railroad during the time in question. The foreman alleged he had had conversations with Rich in which Rich indicated that he knew he was to give all bills for transportation to Parker and the Pacific Construction Company. Despite Beveridge's willingness to testify in a retrial, the defendant's motion was denied, and Hong Chong & Co. was required to pay more than two hundred dollars for the suit and court costs. In this case, W.H. Parker had been listed as the contractor for the Pacific Construction Company, while the role of Hong Chong & Co. was generally unclear and unexplained.⁴⁴ Thus, the case reveals the sometimes complicated nature of the contract labor system, especially in large work projects that involved a variety of parties and intermediaries, all looking for their share of profits delivered from the sweat of Chinese laborers.

The case also importantly hints at associations between particular whites and Chinese. Labor contractors typically enjoyed a much higher financial and social standing than the common Chinese laborer, a situation that brought them into more frequent contact with whites and allowed their affairs about town to garner more attention. Sai Get's elevated status, for example, is indicated in the fact that he was the only Chinese person listed in an 1890 Astoria city directory.⁴⁵ In February of 1893, the *Astorian* reported that Sai Get, "the well known Chinese merchant and contractor has purchased a considerable amount of tide land between Young's Bay and Warrenton," demonstrating a level of attention to his financial transactions not generally shown to those of the typical

⁴⁴ *C.W. Rich v. Hong Chong & Co.* (1892), Judgment Role 2273, Circuit Court Case Files, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container No. 26, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.

⁴⁵ Copy of *R.L. Polk & Co's Astoria City (and Vicinity) Directory*, 1890, 79.

Chinese laborer.⁴⁶ In the court case above, several whites testified along with Sai Get and another Chinese on behalf of the Chinese defendants Hong Chong & Co. Isaac Bergman, one-time mayor of Astoria and owner of three lots leased to Chinese tenants in Chinatown, was one of the signers of Hong Chong & Co.'s undertaking on appeal, a form of surety if an appellant ultimately loses his or her case.⁴⁷ At least some of the leaders of the town, then, such as Bergman, seemed to share a certain common ground with their Chinese counterparts, one that most often had economic undercurrents but that nevertheless allowed for these points of contact. Prominent local banker, I.W. Case, for example, handled financial transactions for some of the local Chinese. He served as surety for a Chinese plaintiff who alleged that another Chinese, a foreman in one of the canneries, owed him money; the defendant was questioned about how much he had deposited at Case's bank.⁴⁸ Case in fact advertised in the *Astorian* that drafts drawn from his bank could be "available in any part of the U.S. and Europe, and on Hong Kong, China."⁴⁹ The 1880 census also shows two Chinese living as servants in the home of Case.⁵⁰ Thus, the connections between whites and Chinese in Astoria provide indications that some mutually beneficial relationships existed between leading whites and local Chinese which likely had some influence on the overall racial atmosphere in Astoria.

⁴⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 7, 1893:3.

⁴⁷ *C.W. Rich v. Hong Chong & Co.*, JR 2273; *Ledger of Ordinances*, May 1886 to November 1890, 163-164, Book 3, Astoria Public Library, Astoria, Ore.

⁴⁸ *Charley Yen v. Ah Ho & Hong Chung* (1884), Judgment Role 1320, Circuit Court Case Files 1297-1387, Accession No. 2010A-016, Container, No. 15, Clatsop County, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Ore.

⁴⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, January 4, 1888:2.

⁵⁰ 1880 United States Manuscript Census, Township of Astoria, District 23, page 30, Clatsop County, Oregon, population schedule, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed through www.ancestry.com.

north and northeast of the post office and customs house, where the Chinese would have obtained their return certificates before departing America's shores for a trip to China. The 1888 map shows two Chinese barber shops and multiple gambling halls interspersed among all of these stores, and an 1889 city directory suggests that there were also two pawnbrokers and a meat market near this intersection. Labor contractors often operated out of merchandise stores as well.⁵¹ The 1888 map labeled many of the businesses in Chinatown as "gambling" houses. Despite a state law against gambling, there seemed to be a generally open atmosphere for it, a situation supported by numerous newspaper

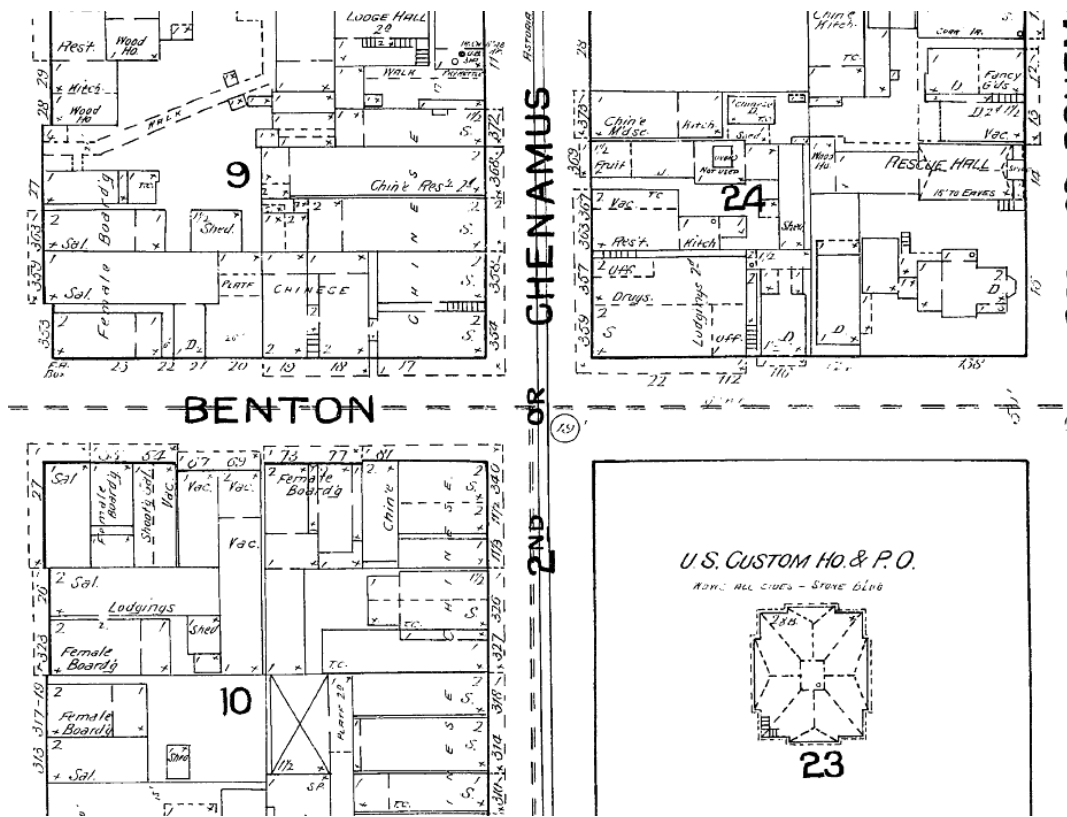


Figure 5: 1892 Sanborn map of Astoria's Chinatown. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1892, Astoria, Oregon, Sheet 5, Sanborn Map Company, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, and Environmental Data Resources, Inc. 2001, *Digital Sanborn maps 1867-1970* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: ProQuest UMI), <http://sanborn.umi.com/>. Note: North facing left.

⁵¹ R.L. Polk & Co.'s Portland City Directory, 1889, 809-873, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.

reports during the 1880s about gambling hall fights. However, none of the businesses listed in an 1889 directory contained “gambling” in their descriptions, and, as some of these gambling spaces are seen at the back of other types of stores, Chinese storeowners who operated gambling houses probably kept them behind a storefront business. In the 1892 Sanborn map of the same area, no “gambling” houses appear. Many of the buildings, still listed under the broad heading of “Chinese,” simply have an “S.” to designate “store.” While gambling likely persisted in the backrooms of some of these buildings, Sanborn interestingly reclassified them around the same time that Astorians’ attitudes towards gambling seemed to be shifting. In addition to the increased arrests of gamblers in the early 1890s, by 1893, Astorians were considering a new ordinance to license and regulate gambling houses, as laws against the practice proved ineffective.⁵² Although the Sanborn Company’s decision to alter its categorization of the businesses may have had little to do with Astoria’s preferences, the timeliness of the change is worth noting. At any rate, the maps show the continued growth of the Chinese commercial enclave in the midst of downtown Astoria.

The location of this Chinese enclave provides an interesting opportunity to analyze the varied roles and levels of integration of Chinese in the community. A resident of Astoria during the first decades of the twentieth century commented that “Chinatown separated the business district from the more unsavory section of town which consisted of saloons, gambling houses, sailors’ boarding houses, [and] brothels which seem to be part of every seaport town.”⁵³ Indeed, the concentrated area of Chinese grocery and merchandise stores composed the northwest corner of Astoria’s main commercial district,

⁵² See, for example, *Daily Morning Astorian*, March 28 and 19, 1893:2 and March 30, 1893:3.

⁵³ Violet Keeney, “Chinatown.”

and on the other side of these stores, along the waterfront just to the north and northwest of Chinatown, lay numerous saloons and “female boarding houses,” with some of the Chinese gambling halls intermingled with them. General stores and other businesses in Chinatown then did create a sort of buffer between the vice district and white-owned businesses in Astoria’s commercial center. And similar to the way the Chinese gambling halls closer to the water blended well with the other recreational establishments in that area, the Chinese businesses that lay closer to the commercial district conformed more with the white-owned, more utilitarian-based operations there. For example, three Chinese wash houses and two Chinese merchandise stores are shown on Main street between Chenamus and Squemoqua, just to the southeast of Chinatown and more within the white commercial area. The 1889 city directory lists Chinese goods stores Quong Shing Chung and Sue Yuen Lung & Co. in this location, as well as Wing Tai Chon, which offered Chinese goods and labor contracting services. Chinese wash houses appeared to have the broadest range throughout the city, from the vice district to the area heading towards upper Astoria. As well, two Chinese tailors, likely Boo Woo & Co. and You Nom, operated in the eastern section of town, where they likely catered to some non-Chinese patrons.⁵⁴

Wing Lee & Co.’s location and its regular appearance in the *Astorian* indicate that this store was frequented by more than just Chinese shoppers. “Importers and Dealers in Chinese and Japanese Fancy Goods,” Wing Lee & Co. offered everything from lacquered ware to tea and ladies’ underwear. In addition, owner Ju Guy promoted himself as a

⁵⁴ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1892, Astoria, Oregon, Sheets 1-17, Sanborn Map Company, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, and Environmental Data Resources, Inc. 2001, *Digital Sanborn maps 1867-1970* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: ProQuest UMI), <http://sanborn.umi.com/>; R.L. Polk & Co.’s Portland City Directory, 1889, digital image, Ancestry.com, 809-873, accessed through www.ancestry.com.

contractor who could furnish “Chinese Laborers promptly for all kinds of Work.” Demonstrating that he was attuned to the seasonal needs of Astoria’s non-Chinese populace, in November and December of 1887, he took out an advertisement in the *Astorian* promoting the store as “the only place to buy the Cheapest and Finest articles for your Christmas and Holiday Presents.” The announcement directly addressed prospective patrons, assuring that “You are welcome to call and examine our immense new stock.”⁵⁵ In the days leading up to the Fourth of July, the first line of the store’s advertisement proclaimed “Fire Works at the Japanese Bazar.”⁵⁶ Wing Lee’s location was useful for soliciting white customers. On Squemoqua, the main street for business in Astoria, it lay between a jewelry store and a cigar store with millineries, tailors, grocers, and a restaurant all across and along the same street.⁵⁷ Wing Lee & Co. represented a small group of Chinese shop-owners who situated themselves closer within the white “space” of Astoria. The physical position of the various businesses of Chinese, from the gambling halls in the vice district to the cluster of Chinese stores, visually demonstrates their rather fluid and variegated roles in Astoria, across both space and time. The Chinese were culturally distant but within observation, and economically on the fringes but also in the center. In this way, the location of Chinatown offers a spatial manifestation of the place of the Chinese in Astoria, a place that was both segregated and discreetly integrated and that was constantly being reconciled by the community as a whole.

⁵⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, November 19, 1887:2. The advertisements continue in various issues until February of 1888. After Christmas, the advertisement changed slightly to read: “This is the only place to buy the cheapest and finest articles at any time.”

⁵⁶ *Daily Morning Astorian*, June 21, 1890:3. This advertisement continued through late July 1890.

⁵⁷ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1892, Astoria, Oregon, Sheet 7, Sanborn Map Company, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, and Environmental Data Resources, Inc. 2001, *Digital Sanborn maps 1867-1970* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: ProQuest UMI), <http://sanborn.umi.com/>.

However, there was a portion of the town's population that did not favor adjusting to a Chinese presence in Astoria. The *Astoria Daily Budget*, a new local newspaper founded in 1892, set out to challenge directly the attitudes and apathies, or whatever it was, that had allowed the Chinese to create a niche in Astoria. While the *Astorian* played an important role in the suppression of violence and the tempering of passions against Chinese in the mid-1880s, the *Budget* very explicitly and purposefully attempted to lead a renewed movement against Astoria's Chinese in the mid-1890s. The *Budget's* writers made no attempt to disguise the fact that their sympathies lay with the working man in the battles between labor and capital, and correspondingly with the Democrats in party politics. The *Budget* squarely placed the blame for the silver crisis and the 1893 depression on the shoulders of Republicans, and, in regard to local affairs, it expressed exasperation that "a few individuals," or a political "ring," seemed caught up in "running' the town."⁵⁸ As a strong supporter of labor, the *Budget* did not take a positive view of the Chinese.

A couple of significant factors combined in the early to mid-1890s to cause whites along the West Coast to once again view the Chinese as viable outlets for their frustrations. The depression of 1893 contributed to a swell in anti-Chinese feeling. Additionally, ongoing Chinese immigration into the country led Congress to strengthen exclusion legislation through the Geary Act, passed in 1892. The Geary Act extended the provisions of the Exclusion Act for ten more years and required all Chinese laborers residing in the United States to register for an identification certificate within one year, which they would be forced to carry with them at all times or be subject to immediate deportation. The Geary Act constituted a severe infringement on Chinese civil rights,

⁵⁸ *Astoria Daily Budget*, September 16, 1893:2, August 7, 1893:1, and December 27, 1893:2.

stimulating widespread complaints among Chinese leaders and many eastern whites, who likened its certificate requirements to those needed to register a dog. Following its passage, the Chinese Six Companies issued a circular to all Chinese in the United States to refuse to comply with its registration provisions. The effects of the boycott are difficult to measure. While only a small minority of Chinese laborers decided to obtain identity cards by the time the deadline had passed, the Supreme Court upheld the Geary Act in a New York test case. However, a severe lack of funds for deporting the thousands of Chinese who refused to register prevented the government from making mass arrests, which left many, mainly rural whites, feeling restless. Vigilantism ensued during the summer of 1893, as the uncertainty surrounding the Geary Act, coupled with the economic depression, prompted a resurgence in hostilities along the West coast.⁵⁹

As a deluge of citizens' arrests overwhelmed California's justice system by early fall of 1893, the *Astoria Daily Budget* took the lead in instigating a local anti-Chinese movement. Writing daily about the dire economic situation, the *Budget* sought to pin a resolution to it on the backs of departing Chinese and laid out the beneficial effects of displacing Chinese workers with whites in plain terms. In late July 1893, the *Budget* disclosed that white girls who had been employed labeling cans in the salmon canneries had recently been replaced by Chinese willing to do the work for half the pay.⁶⁰ The *Budget* sought to make the dichotomy between starving whites and rapacious Chinese clear. It persistently argued that "while groups of half-starved men" desperately searched for work loading and unloading ships or cutting wood about town, and "while virtuous

⁵⁹ Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 230-237; Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007), 291-297.

⁶⁰ *Astoria Daily Budget*, July 25, 1893:1.

and industrious young women and girls” went “from door to door in search of housework at almost starvation wages . . . there are bright faces, happy chatter and abounding plenty in Chinatown!”⁶¹ On the other hand, according to the paper, “if the Chinese were driven out of Oregon there would be work for every idle person in the state.”⁶² The *Budget* reported on the Chinese situation daily throughout September and October and brazenly prodded its readers to take action. It disregarded the logistical limbo then faced by federal officials to enforce the Geary law and rather suggested to Astoria’s citizens that “now is the time to commence arresting Chinamen.”⁶³ In order to illustrate the widespread approval of the newspaper’s sentiments, for several days the *Budget* even carried the opinions of locals who endorsed the rallying cry of “the Chinese must go!” A majority of those who wrote in voiced their convictions that whites were being deprived of jobs and a decent livelihood because of the Chinese and the preference for employing them over whites.⁶⁴ Noticeably common in these remarks is the language of “driving them out.” One writer even stated that “they must go, if not peaceably, then by force.”⁶⁵ Although many assented to the basic notion that the Chinese were undesirable, such language indicated a particularly precarious situation in Astoria.

The amplified state of Sinophobia in Astoria extended beyond newspaper columns and translated into on-the-ground activity. Early in September, an anti-Chinese petition circulated through Astoria, and the *Budget* encouraged everyone to sign it,

⁶¹ *Astoria Daily Budget*, January 8, 1894:2.

⁶² *Astoria Daily Budget*, September 12, 1893:1.

⁶³ *Astoria Daily Budget*, September 12, 1893:2 and September 27, 1893:1.

⁶⁴ *Astoria Daily Budget*, September 20, 21, 22, 23, 1893:1.

⁶⁵ *Astoria Daily Budget*, September 21, 1893:1.

promising that when “it is properly signed a meeting will be called and a club formed which will mean business.”⁶⁶ After more than seven hundred people reportedly had signed the petition, a meeting was called for October 2. The announcement in the *Budget* urged everyone to attend and conveyed a strong sense of urgency for “getting the lepers out of the country,” declaring “Delay is dangerous. . . It is now or never.”⁶⁷ The day after the meeting, the *Budget* jubilantly spouted the headline “A Whopper!” and reported that hundreds of people had to be turned away because Liberty Hall had quickly filled to capacity. The newspaper clearly hoped to validate the local movement as not reckless or unruly but composed of “a sober, intelligent and earnest body of men,” which included “no boisterous rabble, . . . [but] a representative crowd of the business and working men of Astoria.” Indeed, the *Budget* reported that local judge, river pilot, and businessman J.H.D. Gray was elected chairman, and two city council members even made speeches. The Chinese boycott of the Geary Act provided useful fodder for the new movement, as the Chinese now became depicted as a group of “aliens” who had “openly and flagrantly” defied U.S. law. Therefore, the primary resolution reached by meeting participants involved the “immediate” enforcement of the Geary Act, meaning the deportation of all Chinese in the city and county. Attendees offered their “personal assistance” in carrying out this task and “further declare[d] that we believe neglect on the part of the Executive Department to enforce the ‘Geary Act’ may result in the forcible expulsion of the Chinese from this country.”⁶⁸ The intentions of the group most certainly appeared serious.

⁶⁶ *Astoria Daily Budget*, September 15, 1893:1.

⁶⁷ *Astoria Daily Budget*, September 25, 27, 1893:1.

⁶⁸ *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 3, 1893:1.

While the *Budget* explicitly aided and abetted the anti-Chinese movement, the *Astorian* took a noticeably different approach with its coverage. In its front page reports of “mob violence” in California, of the driving out of Chinese workers from hop fields in Butteville, Oregon, and of the federal debate over how to enforce the Geary Act, the *Astorian*’s commentary echoed that of the mid-1880s, stridently advocating law and order along the Pacific coast.⁶⁹ However, indications of conflicting local opinions were also apparent. In September, the *Astorian* found it necessary to refute accusations that it “has championed the cause of the Chinese or advocated their retention in this country.”⁷⁰ Overall, the *Astorian* sought to reaffirm its position that “we are absolutely in favor of the enforcement of the Geary law,” but, while the government remained in limbo regarding its enforcement, “it is a menace to the very foundation of our constitution for private citizens to dare to anticipate the action of the law.” It carried editorials from other newspapers in Oregon and Washington to illustrate that others viewed the situation similarly and agreed with the idea that simply driving the Chinese away would not solve the more complex issues and would be detrimental to the Pacific coast.⁷¹ Therefore, the *Astorian* essentially supported non-involvement in handling what it viewed as a federal issue.

A heated exchange of printed words ensued between the two newspapers, as the *Budget* frequently lambasted the *Astorian* for “advocat[ing] the employment of Chinamen in preference to our own people” and even began referring to it as the “Morning

⁶⁹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, September, 2, 3, 6, 13, 1893:1.

⁷⁰ *Daily Morning Astorian*, September 23, 1893:2.

⁷¹ *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 1, 1893:2.

Chinaman.”⁷² It particularly took issue with the fact that a major financial backer of the *Astorian* was cannery owner Samuel Elmore, “a man who employs a hundred Chinamen when there are thousands of white people in need of work.”⁷³ In one issue distributed before city elections, the *Budget* printed a caricature of a grinning and dopey-looking Chinese man and mocked the Chinese accent in a fictitious letter to the *Budget’s* editor (Figure 6). Despite the fact that the Chinese could not be made U.S. citizens and therefore could not vote, the imitation conveyed the idea that a Chinese man would not

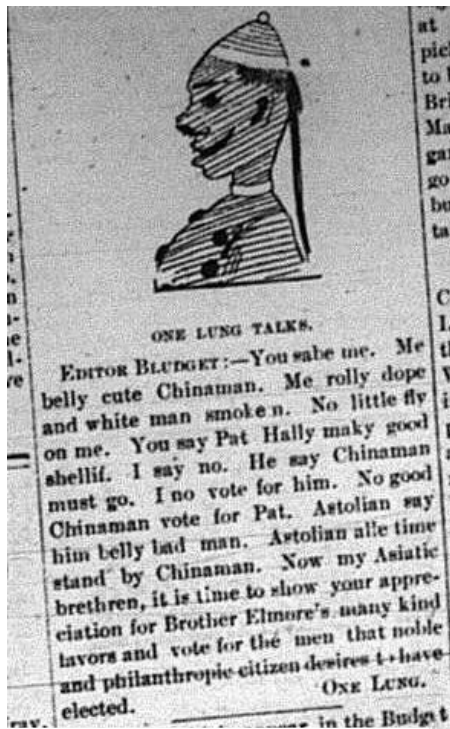


Figure 6: *Astoria Daily Budget* article mocking the Chinese. Source: *Astoria Daily Budget*, May 28,

vote for a certain candidate for sheriff because the *Astorian*, which “alle time stand by Chinaman,” said “him belly bad man” who would deport the local Chinese.⁷⁴ With this piece and with numerous others, the *Budget* sought to strongly link its rival newspaper with support for the Chinese.

Although most of the caustic and accusatory commentary came from the columns of the *Budget*, the *Astorian* offered one quite salient appraisal of the *Budget’s* efforts to rally together an anti-Chinese movement. Under the headline “Very Rough on Chinese Tailor,” the *Astorian* pointed out the incongruity of the *Budget’s* “heroic stand against the

Chinamen” while it simultaneously published advertisements for local Chinese tailors

⁷² *Astoria Daily Budget*, December 12, 1893:2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Astoria Daily Budget*, May 28, 1894:1.

Wah Sing & Co. Furthermore, the article contained an affidavit from Chan Yam, a tailor at Wah Sing & Co., that Oscar Dunbar, the *Budget's* proprietor, was a frequent patron of the business, Chan Yam having let out a pair of pants for Dunbar only three weeks before. In another column on the same page, the *Astorian* sarcastically remarked, "It might be well for the proprietor of the Evening Budget, before he drives all the Chinese out of the city, to recover from his Celestial tailor the correct measurement of his waist" so that he could avoid having "his figure circumnavigated" by a new tailor.⁷⁵ The *Budget* responded without denying that its owner used a Chinese tailor, writing rather that "the Chinaman advertises in the Budget because he knows his advertisement reaches the most people, and he also pays his bills, something that the white imported Chinaman who edits the Morning Chinaman does not do."⁷⁶ The truth of the *Astorian's* report effectively reveals the complicated and contradictory nature of race rhetoric and race relations in Astoria in the late nineteenth century. While the *Budget* shamelessly declared that "every man must show his colors" and "stand out in bold relief, either for a white man or a Chinaman," its owner and editor patronized a local Chinese business, and one that competed locally against whites in the same trade.⁷⁷ The fact that even one of the most virulent anti-Chinese advocates struggled to reconcile his professed Sinophobia with his daily needs shows how the complicated blend of overt racism and tacit acceptance of Chinese had become rather thoroughly ingrained in Astoria.

Nevertheless, the anti-Chinese movement in Astoria seemed to be quickly gaining momentum. A committee, formed at the first meeting, began "a vigorous campaign" to

⁷⁵ *Daily Morning Astorian*, October 3, 1893:3.

⁷⁶ *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 3, 1893:2.

⁷⁷ *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 10, 1893:1.

“induce the business men to discharge their Chinese help” and threatened to expose the ones who did not.⁷⁸ The committee planned to appoint a white contractor to negotiate with cannery owners about hiring white men to do the coming season’s cannery work for nearly the same pay as the Chinese.⁷⁹ The *Budget* also revealed that “two secret anti-Chinese orders,” the Sons of Labor and the Friends of Labor, were contributing to the cause. The Friends of Labor had tasked some of its members with “obtain[ing] the names of those who want to work.”⁸⁰ In December, the *Budget* even reported that “preliminary steps have been taken” to “revive” the Knights of Labor in Astoria.⁸¹ There thus appeared to be a contingent of the community very eager to put their anti-Chinese principles into action.

By the end of the year, the movement even had some successes to report. In October 1893, the *Budget* disclosed that “there are no more Mongolian woodchoppers to be seen about the streets.”⁸² The same month, some local men and members of the anti-Chinese movement began conspiring to open a white steam laundry as “the means of getting rid of about 75 Chinamen who are now living off of the white people.”⁸³ And the *Budget* also disclosed the names of two cannery owners who reportedly had agreed to displace their Chinese with whites for the coming season. Although those at the *Budget* “could not vouch for the truth of the rumor,” their efforts of persuasion seemed clear, as

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 12, 1893:1.

⁸⁰ *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 14 and 20, 1893:1.

⁸¹ *Astoria Daily Budget*, December 28, 1893:1.

⁸² *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 12, 1893:2.

⁸³ *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 19, 1893:1.

they publicized that “to judge from what we know of the gentlemen, and their inclination to always do the right thing, it is no doubt true.”⁸⁴ From the beginning, the *Budget* visibly sought to play an integral and multifunctional role in the anti-Chinese movement, by both covering its progress and development and actively recruiting and pressuring people to its cause.

Yet, cracks in the campaign were soon evident. When the *Budget* investigated why a local druggist had a few Chinese men sawing wood for him, the druggist told the paper “that no white men showed up for the job.”⁸⁵ A cannery owner had reportedly expressed a similar concern over procuring whites to work in the canneries.⁸⁶ Already by late October 1893, the *Budget* divulged that a local “gentleman” had said “the Chinese agitation was about ‘fizzled out,’” indicating a lack of energy in the movement.⁸⁷ One man who had attempted to start a new steam laundry employing all white labor could not afford the start-up expenses, and it appeared that only one cannery owner agreed to hire white workers.⁸⁸ The newspaper that had so fervently tried to stimulate the crusade against the Chinese even admitted by the end of 1893 that it “believes the whole matter has been sadly neglected,” despite the large number of initial signatures of people who “pledged themselves to do all in their power to get rid of the pests.”⁸⁹ J.H.D. Gray wrote a letter to the *Budget* in response to some skepticism about his diligence as elected

⁸⁴ *Astoria Daily Budget*, December 16, 1893:1.

⁸⁵ *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 26, 1893:1.

⁸⁶ *Astoria Daily Budget*, September 20, 1893:1.

⁸⁷ *Astoria Daily Budget*, October 28, 1893:1.

⁸⁸ *Astoria Daily Budget*, May 7, 1894:1, March 5, 1894:1, and May 10, 1894:1.

⁸⁹ *Astoria Daily Budget*, December 30, 1893:4.

chairman of the movement. Citing a lack of attendance at meetings and an unwillingness among the people to act and support their elected leaders, he wrote that the agitation “has gone to sleep.” At the same time, he expressed that he found himself “assailed by cannerymen on one side and extremists on the other.”⁹⁰ His sentiments underscore how a spectrum of opinions existed on the Chinese question in Astoria, from apathy to antagonism to extremism. While the *Budget* tried to keep efforts alive through early 1894, the trajectory of the movement, even when viewed solely through the perspective of one of its main supporters, the *Budget*, offers a cogent portrayal of the overall structure of anti-Chinese sentiment and activity in Astoria. While opposition to the Chinese was a constant, underlying element of racial understanding and identity for whites, it was one that inspired forceful movement at rather predictable moments. Although Sinophobia was noticeably present in Astoria through the late nineteenth century, it is important to recognize that these more vibrant spurts of anti-Chinese enthusiasm generally lacked staying power.

A key reason for the deceleration of the local anti-Chinese movement was the passage of the McCreary Amendment, which extended the window for Chinese to register themselves with the federal government and obtain an identity card until April 1894. The Supreme Court’s upholding of the Geary Act and China’s unwillingness to support its overseas citizens in their refusal to register led the Chinese Six Companies to ultimately reverse its protest and advocate compliance with the law.⁹¹ By early 1894, word had reached Astoria that the Chinese would begin registering. The *Budget* unhappily read this as sure evidence that “the Chinese now in possession of the canneries

⁹⁰ *Astoria Daily Budget*, February 2, 1894:1.

⁹¹ Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 319-334.

and laundries of Astoria expect to remain.”⁹² Through the next few months, the *Budget* laid the blame for the continuing Chinese presence on problems with exclusion act provisions and enforcement, and on employers, such as Astoria’s cannery owners who, “had the matter been pressed . . . could not have refused to accede to the wishes of the community.”⁹³ The federal government reported large numbers of Chinese registering under the McCreary Amendment, prompting the *Budget* to even comment in early July that the Chinese had “set an example of obeying the laws.”⁹⁴ Thus, as Chinese locally and nationwide demonstrated that they would abide by the McCreary Amendment and register themselves with the federal government, white Astorians demonstrated an overall lack of fortitude for carrying on a prolonged anti-Chinese movement.

The journal of local lawyer Frank Spittle provides a fitting final example of how, in regard to associations with the Chinese, opportunity and opposition often intertwined in ways that complicate our understandings of race relations in the late nineteenth century. Immigration law under the Exclusion Act prohibited Chinese immigrant laborers from entering the country and allowed passage only to those who could prove they were merchants or members of the upper class. Thus, many Chinese laborers gained illegal entry into the United States by passing themselves off as Chinese merchants, which could be done with a white witness willing to attest to one’s occupational status.⁹⁵ While the

⁹² *Astoria Daily Budget*, January 9, 1894:2.

⁹³ *Astoria Daily Budget*, March 14, 1894:2.

⁹⁴ *Astoria Daily Budget*, July 6, 1894:2. Pfaelzer questions the numbers of Chinese that the federal government reported to have registered, stating that the numbers, summing 100,000, “simply do not add up,” thereby suggesting that the government exaggerated the McCreary Amendment’s success in order to mitigate racial tensions. See pages 330-331.

⁹⁵ Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 91-92.

Budget publicly raised suspicion about local whites “who make a living by identifying Chinese ‘merchants,’” Spittle’s 1894, 1895, and 1896 business ledgers reveal, indeed, that the intricacies of exclusion offered financial opportunities.⁹⁶ Frequent entries in the ledgers showed that making out affidavits and certificates for landing Chinese in Astoria served as a regular source of income for Spittle, who charged five dollars for each deed of documentation. A typical entry, for example, recorded on February 23, 1894, read “Drew Affidavit for landing Wong Ah Shing, charged 5.” April usually saw a stream of Chinese laborers flowing into Astoria before the canning season. On April 17, 1894, Spittle wrote that he was “Engaged all day making out affidavits to land Chinese from Str Islander.” Could it be possible that he misrepresented some of these Chinese in order to allow them entry as merchants, when they may have been coming to work in the canneries? Some entries named the white witness used to verify the identity of a Chinese person landing in Astoria. On January 26, 1894, Spittle recorded that he was “Attending to landing of Sue Gow” because “F Parker declined to give up his certificate unless he got \$5 for drawing his affidavit.” Spittle then “Saw Capt of Str Signal who promised to attend to the matter tomorrow.” Parker apparently did not want to see Sue Gow landed without getting his share of the deal.⁹⁷ Spittle’s journal, then, serves as an important, lasting indication of the inner workings of Chinese exclusion, revealing that it was in no way a one-sided matter but rather double-edged. While Pacific coast residents had demanded Chinese exclusion in order to stem an Asiatic flood, both whites and Chinese subverted and manipulated the system to work in their favor.

⁹⁶ *Astoria Daily Budget*, December 29, 1894:1.

⁹⁷ Journals of Frank Spittle, 1894, 1895, 1896, Business Records Box, Clatsop County Historical Society Archives, Astoria, Ore.

Thus, as the Chinese presence in Astoria waned, it also became in a sense more solidified. Despite another wave of anti-Chinese energy and the growing ramifications of the Exclusion Act, the Chinese remained in the canneries, and they remained in Astoria. This industrialized town in northwest Oregon demonstrates that, in terms of the Chinese, the contours of race could be quite fluid. While on the surface, white attitudes may have seemed simple and clear-cut, a closer look reveals that defining what it meant to be “anti-Chinese” was a rather nebulous process. The *Astorian* even conveyed its own sense of the racial conundrum when it printed the following anecdote about California politician Frank Pixley in February 1889:

Frank Pixley is a strong opponent of Chinese immigration and loses no opportunity to hit ‘John’ a lick, but an eastern friend who recently dined with him noticed that he had Chinese waiters at the table. ‘How is this, Frank,’ said the friend. ‘You profess to be opposed to the Chinese, and yet you employ them about your house?’ ‘Very true,’ said Pixley, ‘I am opposed to them ‘on principle,’ but I never allow my principles to interfere with my personal comfort.’⁹⁸

The story expresses the hypocrisy behind the anti-Chinese movement in the West and acknowledges the complexity of race relations in Astoria. White Astorians often did not have enough fortitude and faithfulness in their anti-Chinese ideologies to substantively change the current state of affairs, and there were even certain activities that showed a level of common or mutual interest between whites and Chinese in the community. The flames of racial animosity flared up from time to time in Astoria, but they also sputtered and withered, suggesting that the Chinese could not be steadily held accountable for the troubles of whites. And some contradictions even appeared too obvious to escape notice, such as arresting Chinese for offenses that whites were clearly guilty of as well, or

⁹⁸ *Daily Morning Astorian*, February 26, 1889:4. Frank Pixley was a California politician, a Republican, and an anti-Chinese supporter. See Gerald Stanley, “Frank Pixley and the Heathen Chinese (A Phylon Document),” *Phylon* 40:3 (3rd Quarter, 1979), 224-228.

leading an anti-Chinese movement while simultaneously supporting a local Chinese business. Astoria's Chinese surely felt the animosity directed against them, but they also showed an acute awareness that this wall of enmity had holes. They had allies in the community, and they served multiple needs. Surges of anti-Chinese hostility would come, but they would also likely pass, and Chinese residents could meanwhile continue to make a place in Astoria. Although the number of Chinese in the town began its long and steady decrease in the late 1880s, locals would continue to negotiate and grapple with the Chinese presence in the community through the twentieth century. Indeed, the difficult process of recognizing and reconciling the place of the Chinese in Astoria would persist, albeit in the sphere of public memory, even into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The decrease in the numbers of Chinese in Astoria through the twentieth century was accompanied by the continued integration of those who remained. In 1899, due to competition and a trend towards company mergers, several salmon canneries along the Columbia River closed, and eight companies consolidated into one to form the Columbia River Packers Association (CRPA). Chan Ah Dogg, a Chinese merchant in Astoria who was also called the “mayor of Chinatown,” was one of the CRPA’s few regional labor contractors in the 1910s. He acted as superintendent of Astoria’s first Chinese school, which opened in 1913, and also led—to the applause of Astoria’s white residents—a cleanup effort of the Chinese-inhabited area around Bond Street (formerly Chenamus) in 1916.¹ Although the *Budget* described Chinatown at this time as “a bewildering conglomeration of filth and wickedness,” the newspaper that had been so fervently anti-Chinese in the early 1890s had also noticeably changed its tune by the 1910s. A *Budget* reporter, after attending a Chinese New Year celebration with Astoria’s mayor and chief of police, wrote that the Chinese are “eager to serve and become of value to the community. They understand the human race, love their children, are painstaking in their work, clean in their homes, and proud of their ancestors.”² This perspective of the Chinese is a far cry from the verbal hostilities directed at them in the early 1890s, and it demonstrates the increasing stability of race relations in Astoria. Nevertheless, insults

¹ *Astoria Evening Budget*, August 1, 1913:6 and June 23, 1916:1.

² *Astoria Evening Budget*, January 29, 1917:6.

still sometimes accompanied compliments to Astoria's Chinese heritage. A Clatsop County history written in 1958 imparted with a tinge of condescension that "the small minority of Chinese in the county were of a much better class" than those of previous decades.³

Although Chinatown remained a rather lively place during the early twentieth century, in August 1941, its last buildings on Bond Street were razed for highway rerouting.⁴ Chinese students attended school with whites by this time. Even though the salmon runs declined and the focus of commercial salmon fishing shifted to Alaska, some Chinese continued to labor in the canneries through the 1930s and 1940s.⁵ In 1940, Astoria's Chinese numbered only 117, of which thirty-five percent were female.⁶ And in 1980, the number was nearly the same: 119 total Chinese, of which sixty percent were female.⁷ Where Chinese had represented thirty percent of Astoria's population in 1880, by the 2010 census, the broader category of "Asians" represented only 1.8%, or about 170 in number, of Astoria's total population of 9,477.⁸ Some Chinese who live in Astoria today can still trace their Astorian Chinese heritage back to the early decades of the twentieth century.

³ Emma Gene Miller, *Clatsop County, Oregon: A History* (Portland, Ore.: Binfords & Mort, 1958), 199.

⁴ *Astorian Budget*, August 9, 1941:1, 2.

⁵ "Astoria" and "Canneries," last updated on June 2010, Northwest Power and Conservation Council, Columbia River History, <http://www.nwccouncil.org/history/astoria.asp>.

⁶ Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940—Population*, Vol. 2, Part 5 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 1004.

⁷ Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population*, Vol. 1: Characteristics of the Population, Chapter C: General Social and Economic Characteristics, Part 39: Oregon (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983), 18.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, "State and County QuickFacts, Astoria (city), Oregon, 2010," accessed through *Census.gov*, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/41/4103150.html>.

In 1984, historian David Peterson wrote an article for the Clatsop County Historical Society's quarterly publication, *Cumtux*. The article included a section about the Chinese experience in Astoria. After reading Peterson's submission, Roger Tetlow, the editor for *Cumtux*, replied that he found Peterson's depiction of racial bigotry and discrimination against the Chinese to be "one-sided and biased." He stated that he and others to whom he had shown the article, all of whom went to school with Chinese and other Asians, "never saw the faintest sign of discrimination," adding that even "some old-time Astorians . . . held the Chinese they knew with a high regard of esteem and affection." He favored omitting that section of the article, unless Peterson could "rewrite it in a different vein."⁹

In his response letter, Peterson upheld his interpretation "that Astoria's Chinese suffered from a significant amount of persecution in the late 1800s." He even cited a few quotations from 1893 issues of the *Astoria Daily Budget* to support his argument that "at worst, lead citizens and elected officials publicly advocated driving the Chinese out of the city." He assented to a few minor revisions but expressed his belief that, while recent articles about Astoria's Chinese typically sought to convey "how colorful" they were, "little has been said about the racism" that they faced in Astoria. Peterson ended his reply by asking Tetlow if "only certain points of view [were] allowed in CUMTUX?"¹⁰

Although Tetlow apologized for his "hasty ill-mannered note" sent previously, he maintained his stance that if he printed Peterson's article as it was, "we could create a great deal of animosity towards Cumtux from many segments of our readership," as the

⁹ Roger Tetlow to David Peterson, August 7, 1984, Chinese Research Boxes in possession of Liisa Penner, Clatsop County Historical Society Archives, Astoria, Ore.

¹⁰ Peterson to Tetlow, September 30, 1984, Chinese Research Boxes in possession of Liisa Penner, Clatsop County Historical Society Archives, Astoria, Ore.

article conveyed, according to Tetlow, “an incorrect impression of years of persecution, segregation, and social ostracism.” Tetlow admitted that “undoubtedly, many of the things you have written are true but there are many things on the other side of the coin that are also true which you have not written.” Expressing his quite different perspective of the history of white/Chinese relations in Astoria, Tetlow wrote, “With a few noteworthy exceptions, the Astorians and the Chinese lived side by side quite comfortably.”¹¹ An article about Astoria’s Chinese written by David Peterson was eventually published in *Cumtux* in the summer of 1986, and its portrayal of the Chinese experience in Astoria aligned closely with his original conclusions.¹²

This disagreement between Tetlow and Peterson reveals how, even a century after the critically tense decade of the 1880s, this community has continued to struggle with its own acceptance and understanding of the Chinese place in Astoria. If white Astorians in the late nineteenth century wrestled with their own determination and rationale in pushing forward an explicit anti-Chinese doctrine, how can modern-day Astorians comprehend the racialized thoughts and actions of their predecessors? How does this community in the present day reconcile the two very distinct views of Tetlow and Peterson? Peterson stressed to Tetlow that “if we refuse to look unflinchingly at our forebearers faults, if we ignore the hatred and evil that are present in every age, then history loses its potential to

¹¹ Tetlow to Peterson, undated, Chinese Research Boxes in possession of Liisa Penner, Clatsop County Historical Society Archives, Astoria, Ore.

¹² See David Peterson, “Artifacts, people and history,” *Cumtux: Clatsop County Historical Society Quarterly* 6:3 (Summer 1986), 7-8.

instruct and teach us.”¹³ This sentiment evokes the power and relevance of achieving more accurate historical understandings and memories of the past.

Yet, as we begin to recognize the general notion of “race” as a social construct rather than an immutable biological trait, examinations of race relations in local historical communities can take on a somewhat different framework. We are starting to acknowledge and to understand more thoroughly that racial categories and separation emerged because they served particular functions for those societies that utilized them, most noticeably for white society members who sought to justify superiority and dominance over “others.” This in turn, then, makes it important to study how people on the ground worked to exhibit racial attitudes when they were based on assumptions or more abstract needs rather than on reality, and when doing so actually conflicted with people’s everyday experiences and observations. Indeed, probing localized race relations, like those between whites and Chinese in Astoria, reveals numerous complications that stem from the difficulties and impracticalities whites have faced when trying to translate their racial ideologies into action. Similar contradictions exist today. For example, while some Americans express potently racist opposition to the presence of Mexicans and Mexican laborers in the United States, they fail to recognize the crucial role that Mexican workers play in our domestic economy, particularly in the agricultural sector. Therefore, the conclusions formulated in this analysis of whites and Chinese in Astoria reinforce the idea that “race” has been socially constructed. While racial discrimination was definitely present in Astoria, investigating the moments of mediated tensions and the lines of association and negotiation between Astoria’s white and Chinese residents moves us

¹³ Peterson to Tetlow, September 30, 1984, Chinese Research Boxes in possession of Liisa Penner, Clatsop County Historical Society Archives, Astoria, Ore.

toward an even deeper understanding of how people in the past, and in the present, have grappled with this nebulous concept of race.

Almost twenty years after the last major salmon cannery on the Columbia, the Bumble Bee Cannery, shut down in 1980, Duncan Law, a long-time Astoria resident of Chinese descent, visited the Columbia River Maritime Museum, located on Astoria's Marine Drive. When he left, he felt disappointed that he found no mention of the Chinese in the museum. "Astoria was the salmon capital of the world, and the Chinese were exclusively the processors. Yet there was no mention of the Chinese anywhere in the museum," he later recalled.¹⁴ Law himself began working in the canneries in the 1930s, when he was only fourteen years old. He worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day and considered his work in the canneries as "an opportunity," "a springboard to get an education."¹⁵ After college, he in fact devoted his professional life to research on fisheries. Law, a former member of Astoria's city council, died just this past February, his countless contributions to the community celebrated by Astoria's residents. And the Columbia River Maritime Museum has since included the Chinese in its interpretive exhibitions of Astoria's maritime history.

Law's assessment of Astoria's public memory had a significant influence. When he gave the interview above to a newspaper reporter in 2010, Astoria's city planners were in the process of fundraising for their one million dollar bicentennial project, the Garden of Surging Waves. The Garden is being built just a few blocks from where Astoria's old Chinatown was located, and it will commemorate the contributions of the Chinese to Astoria's history. Astoria Mayor Willis Van Dusen championed the idea of a Chinese

¹⁴ Lori Tobias, "Overlooked Astoria history will get its due," *The Oregonian*, October 15, 2010.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Garden after a discussion with Law.¹⁶ Van Dusen himself is a descendant of Adam Van Dusen, who owned the local store from which a Chinese man was reportedly stealing clocks in the mid-1880s (see Chapter III). Originally, the park was to be located by the riverfront, closer to old Chinatown, but in 2011, planners decided to move the Garden to the downtown block next to City Hall, or what designer Suenn Ho has called “the living room” of Astoria.¹⁷ The garden will feature artwork commissioned from Shaanxi Yuan Kun Sculptural Arts Company in Xian, China, which includes a Moon Gate (a traditional Chinese garden structure), marble dragon columns, bronze scrolls, bronze timeline markers, a cast bronze incense burner, and Ling Bi rocks. Art pieces by Oregon artists and materials symbolizing the many Chinese contributions to Astoria, such as rails and wooden planks to represent Chinese work on the railroads and in the canneries, will also be interwoven into the design.¹⁸ The Garden will cover the northwest corner of what has been recently renamed Heritage Square, which will eventually house a space for community gatherings as well. Overall, it places the Chinese story front and center of a broader commemoration to the various people who constructed the city and its sense of community. Van Dusen spoke aptly when he said, at the groundbreaking celebration of Heritage Square in April 2012, “This is not Chinese history. This is Astoria history.”¹⁹ This sentiment effectively conveys the need to understand the history of Chinese in

¹⁶ “About: The Idea for a Garden,” AstoriaChineseHeritage.org, City of Astoria, 2012.

¹⁷ Chelsea Gorrow, “Chinese Garden supporters embrace move to downtown Astoria location,” *Daily Astorian*, May 18, 2011.

¹⁸ See “Design,” AstoriaChineseHeritage.org, City of Astoria, 2012.

¹⁹ Chelsea Gorrow, “Astoria Embraces Chinese Legacy,” *Daily Astorian*, April 16, 2012. Since the mid-2000s, plans, fundraising, and construction on the Garden have progressed, with collaboration between the city council’s project team, Astoria’s Chinese Park Committee, and designers from MulvannyG2 Architecture firm in Portland.

Astoria not purely as one of white discrimination or of Chinese endurance, but rather as one about the raw evolution of an interracial American community.

Sam Johnson, director and president of the Columbia River Maritime Museum, also spoke aptly when he stated that “we have a long way to go before we can truly recognize what that [Chinese] heritage means to us.”²⁰ The letters between Roger Tetlow and David Peterson reflect this continuing challenge to understand the history and place of the Chinese in Astoria. Since the late nineteenth century, it seems, white Astorians have been reckoning with the Chinese presence in their community. As Astorians today work to recognize and commemorate the contributions of Astoria’s Chinese and to correct this important gap in their public memory, they will also likely probe for a better understanding of the community’s history with race. They will probably struggle in this endeavor too, as this history is generally riddled with contradictory expressions of group difference and group dealings. Reconciling the dissonance between principle and reason and the rationales of both cohesiveness and separation seems to be a perpetual task. This especially appeared so in the late-nineteenth-century American West, where rapid economic development, a diverse racial landscape, and a potent but undefined sense of nation all combined to help foster incredibly complex and dynamic social relations. The contours of race in Astoria, in the 1870s and today, have, then, both enabled us to better understand the complexities of this particular region and time period and offered us a compelling example of a fundamental human enigma.

²⁰ Chelsea Gorrow, “Recognition Starts with a Blessing,” *Daily Astorian*, October 18, 2010.

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