

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

KAM WAH CHUNG COMPANY BUILDING

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Kam Wah Chung Company Building

Other Name/Site Number: Kam Wah Chung Museum

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: John Day City Park (Canton Street)

Not for publication:

City/Town: John Day

Vicinity:

State: Oregon

County: Grant

Code: 023

Zip Code: 97845

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: \_\_\_

Public-Local: \_\_\_

Public-State: X

Public-Federal: \_\_\_

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: \_\_\_

Site: \_\_\_

Structure: \_\_\_

Object: \_\_\_

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

\_\_\_

\_\_\_

\_\_\_

1

Noncontributing

\_\_\_ buildings

\_\_\_ sites

\_\_\_ structures

\_\_\_ objects

\_\_\_ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

# KAM WAH CHUNG COMPANY BUILDING

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## **6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: COMMERCE/TRADE  
HEALTH CARE  
DOMESTIC

Sub: department store  
Sub: medical business/office  
Sub: single dwelling

Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: museum

## **7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: No Style

MATERIALS: Wood, stone  
Foundation: Stone, concrete  
Walls: Wood, stone  
Roof: Metal  
Other: Brick and stone (chimneys)

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**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.****SUMMARY**

The Kam Wah Chung Company building is located in the eastern Oregon community of John Day. Adjacent to John Day's City Park and Canyon Creek, the building is a sole reminder of the town's once thriving Chinese community. Measuring 47' (north-south) by 26'7" (east-west), the Kam Wah Chung Company building is representative of vernacular buildings found in the American West. Built circa 1866 as a trading post, the building later served as a commercial, social, cultural, and spiritual center of the Chinese settlement of John Day.

The principal construction materials of the building are native stone and wood. The first floor exterior walls and foundation are made of locally quarried "Rattlesnake Tuff" volcanic tuffa (tuff) laid in a regular coursing, and the top story is of wood (pine) plank construction. A front facing gable roof with shed lean-tos and small, shuttered inset windows characterize the exterior of the structure. The building was expanded twice with a small second story added in the 1890s, and a north wing added circa 1917. The interior has seven rooms that were built for distinct purposes: a diagnosis and meeting room, herb room, general store, stock room, two bedrooms, and a kitchen/bunk room. The interior room configurations and finishes have been retained.

The building has perhaps one of the best material collections of its kind, for it contains hundreds of artifacts dating from the historic period including furniture, clothing, medicinal herbs, account books, letters, store merchandise, and household items that reflect Chinese culture and the use of the building. The Kam Wah Chung Company building is in good condition and retains a high degree of integrity architecturally and in its material collection.

The Kam Wah Chung Company building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, and restored from 1975 to 1977. Currently a museum, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department owns the Kam Wah Chung Company building.

**SETTING AND LOCATION**

The Kam Wah Chung Company building is located in John Day, Grant County, Oregon. At the junction of U.S. Highways 26 and 395, the eastern Oregon community has a population of about 1,900 residents. John Day is about two miles north of Canyon City, the county seat of Grant County. The two communities lie on a cultural heritage corridor known as "Journey Through Time" that extends from the Washington side of the Columbia River Gorge to the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in eastern Oregon.

The Kam Wah Chung Company building is northwest of John Day's downtown commercial district. Located adjacent to the 3.58 acre John Day City Park, the building and the park are east of Canyon Creek, a tributary of the John Day River, and are surrounded by a variety of land uses. A residential neighborhood is along the northern edge of the park, commercial uses are along the west bank of Canyon Creek, and a mixture of commercial and residential uses are at the southern and eastern borders. The City Park has a municipal swimming pool, playground, and a grassy area used for picnicking and other recreational activities.

Directly north of the museum is the swimming pool complex that has an asphalt parking area to the east. The park's playground is east of the museum and the parking lot is to the south. Various types of deciduous trees line Canyon Creek and the edges of the park. A narrow, paved sidewalk extends around the perimeter of the lawn area and the west and south sides of the Kam Wah Chung Company building. There are a few deciduous trees around the building.

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**PRESENT PHYSICAL APPEARANCE: EXTERIOR**

The Kam Wah Chung Company building, erected circa 1866, is a two-story structure constructed of native tuffa and wood. Completed in three phases, the structure shows the building's evolution throughout its history. The three phases of construction include the ground floor with a lean-to on the north and south sides (circa 1866), the second-story wooden addition (circa 1890), and the masonry addition (circa 1917) on the north side of the ground floor. Physical evidence suggests that the building was originally a one-and-one-half story wooden structure with lean-to sides. Wooden planks (box construction) covered the exterior of the barn-like structure. The stone walls were added at a later date during the period of significance, enclosing the original wood structure. The second story wooden gable structure sits on wood blocks on the loft's floor. The upper story has a smaller floor plan and does not sit squarely on the lower structure.

The building has exterior stone walls and plank (pine) interior walls. New below-grade concrete footings were poured during the 1970s restoration. At the same time, a new concrete foundation slab and moisture barrier was installed under the original floor and sleepers for stability. The ground floor walls are made of locally quarried, roughly-cut and squared tuffa blocks laid in generally uniform courses. Some decorative tooling of the stone surface is evident. The original mortar was a soft clay-like (mud) mixture; however, over the years the joints have been repointed with other mortar mixtures. The stone walls are eleven- to twelve-inches thick in the original section, and about sixteen- to eighteen-inches thick in the north addition.

Wooden stairs on the front (east) elevation rise to a small balcony and entrance door leading to the upper storeroom. A simple wood railing lines the outside of the stairway. The storeroom is covered with horizontal 1' x 8', channeled shiplap siding secured with wire-cut nails. These boards cover the wood plank construction. One-inch by six-inch board trim finishes the exterior siding. The east and west sides of the shed lean-to roofs are constructed of one-by-twelve inch vertical boards with open joints. Battens cover the vertical board joints on the west elevation; the bottom is finished with a wide trim board.

A gable roof with slightly projecting eaves covers the central portion of the upper story, a lower parallel gable covers the north addition, and shed roofs cover the side lean-tos. The roof is sheathed with sheet metal laid in wide strips finished with flat seams; the structure was originally roofed with flattened five-gallon kerosene can sheets—a technique that was frequently used by the Chinese throughout the West, such as in the Chinatowns in the mining towns of Tuscarora, Elko County; and Tonopah, Nye County, both in Nevada. A slightly corbelled brick ridge chimney rises above the main roof, and a stone chimney in the center of the north wall serves the north addition.

There are few windows in the building. The windows on the front (east) elevation of the main section are recessed in the stone walls and are covered with steel shutters with hand manufactured, irregular-sized steel strap hinges attached to the outside walls. The small window on the south elevation is also covered by a hinged steel shutter, and the windows on the ground floor of the west elevation and the north addition have shutters constructed of wide vertical wooden planks. Many of the original multi-pane wood frame windows are intact behind the shutters. Wood plank lintels support the window openings. The four-pane wooden sash windows on the east and west elevations of the upper story are finished with simple board trim.

Several doors lead into the building. Located in the center of the east elevation, the main door is constructed of vertical one-inch wide planks with surface-applied cross slats and hardware. The door has been clad on the outside with protective sheet metal panels, made from the same material as the roof—kerosene can sheets. The main door to the upper storeroom is on the east elevation and is constructed of vertical planks. There is another

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plank door on the west elevation of the storeroom; however, there is no evidence a stairway ever existed to this door. The doors in the north addition are standard five panel stock doors with wood plank lintels.

A screen porch is located on the front (east) elevation and has a shed roof covered with sheet metal. The upper portion of the porch is enclosed with posts and screening, and the lower portion is clad with board and batten siding finished with a wide board skirting. A screen door is on the south side of the porch. This porch was restored in 1979 from a 1937 photograph and serves as the mechanical room for the museum.

**PRESENT PHYSICAL APPEARANCE: INTERIOR**

The interior of the Kam Wah Chung Company is divided into seven rooms that served distinct purposes and include a front room, small herb shop, a bedroom, stock room, a general store, kitchen/bunk room, and an interpretative area once used as a bedroom.

The outer walls and room partitions of the original interior rooms are made of vertical one-by-twelve, and one-by-twenty-four inch pine planks secured with cut nails. Post and beam framing, box construction, supports the board and batten plank walls on each side of the center (original) end side section. The low ceilings in the central section of the building and stock room are constructed of board and batten, and the ceiling in the bedroom is covered with tongue and groove boards. Ceiling heights in these rooms average 7'8" high. The kitchen/bunk room and storeroom have sloped ceilings made of exposed planks supported by pole rafters. The floors are constructed of 1 x 12 inch pine plank boarding supported by 4 x 4 inch floor joists resting on 2 x 4 inch cribbing and a concrete slab. Vertical plank doors separate the rooms. The early knob and tube wiring system (currently twenty-four volt) was restored in the 1970s rehabilitation project. Single bare bulbs, hanging from long cords, light the rooms with the exception of some track lighting added in the interpretative room.

**Front Room**

The front room measures fourteen feet square and has plank doors that lead to the grocery, bedroom, kitchen, and outside. Used as a meeting room, this room also functioned as Ing Hay's diagnosing room for his pulsology readings. The vertical plank walls of the front room are decorated with wall hangings, historic calendars, liquor licenses, advertisements, a shrine cloth with small mirrors, and paper posters with Chinese proverbs such as "A humble house hopes for wealth," "Lucky stars shine on high," and "Heaven has blessed one with much luck." Several plank shelves have been installed on the upper portion of the walls and are lined with tins, dry goods, and other items. Furniture in the room includes Ing Hay's table used for diagnosing people's illnesses, chairs and tables, hand-made stools, a Grunow "All Wave" cabinet radio (circa 1938), a J. C. Brown clock (1878), a wood burning stove with a patent date of 1865, and a phonograph (circa 1905). For interpretive purposes, a small shrine decorated with joss sticks and oranges is in the southwest corner of the room. A half-wall on the west, topped with a wooden grill, divides the front room from the general store. This grill slides into the wall during open hours and is shut for security when closed.

**Medicinal Herb Shop**

A small room, four by six feet, is in the northeast corner of the front room and houses the herb room/apothecary where Ing Hay prepared his remedies. A half-wall topped by an iron grill with a pass-through opening separates the herb shop from the front room. A narrow plank door with a black porcelain knob on the west side of the room opens inward. This door has a lock for security purposes. A high wood counter with metal boxes and shelves below is located along the south wall, and shelving containing cigar and metal boxes, and bags of herbs line the entire north wall. Each box or tin is labeled in Chinese characters. A high shelf above the

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exterior window on the east side is lined with bags of herbs. Several items are on the counter: vials with remedies, a mortar and pestle for crushing and mixing, scales and weights used to measure the herbs, a Chinese abacus, and a coffee grinder to grind the herbs. Jars and vials on the counter contain items such as a rattlesnake, turtle, and powdered morphine. A bear paw also sits on the counter top. There are approximately 500 herbs and medications found in this room; to date about 250 have been identified and recorded. A small sampling of the medicines and herbs (common names) include wild asparagus, cocklebur, dwarf flowering cherry, clove, chicken gizzards, cardamom, citrus (orange), red pepper, tortoise shell, tiger bone, croton, caladium, summer cypress, onion, astor bean, bamboo, ginger, and pomegranate bark.<sup>1</sup>

**General Store**

The general store, west of the front room, measures ten by fourteen feet. A vertical, plank folding door on the east wall opens to the front room. The general store has plank walls and plank shelving along the south, west, and north walls. A wide counter is located along the east wall underneath the grill that opens to the front room. A freestanding table is in the middle of the room. This room served as the general store for the distribution of goods with a variety of merchandise still intact dating from the late 1800s to the early-mid 1900s. Sundries along the east wall include first aid supplies, vitamins, laxatives, eye droppers, cold creams, baking powders, lava soaps, spices, candies, liniments for humans and animals, razors, liver pills, Epsom salts, soaps, and Vaseline. All these are in their original containers and not opened. The room has an extensive collection of early 1900s teas, tobacco, and coffees in tins and soft packs, as well as packaged cigarettes and boxed cigars. Liquor and fruit juice bottles line some of the shelves. Firecrackers, candles, and matches are stored below.

The center table has an array of items including an optical set for testing eyes and miscellaneous lenses, fabric sacks, jars, canning lids, hops used in making beer, gambling items such as fan-tan and dominos, Chinese nuts and candies, fans, opium cans, and crude pipes. The long wood counter with drawers on the east elevation beneath the steel grill has more gambling items, American and Chinese playing cards, dice, almanacs and books, calendars, joss sticks, ledger books, slate chalk board, stamp pads, and calligraphy brushes. More than ninety bottles of unopened pre-prohibition whiskey were found between the ceiling rafters and under the floorboards in the sawdust insulation during the 1970s rehabilitation. These bottles are now housed in the Grant County Courthouse.

A shrine is also located in the middle of the west wall in this room. The altar is recessed into a deep box and consists of brocade curtains imported from China, a place for a small seated image (no longer extant) common to Chinese folk religion, divining blocks and sticks, paper flowers, fruit, and beads. The altar was brought to the Kam Wah Chung Company building after the temple or "joss" house was vacated in the early 1900s.

**Stock Room**

A folding plank door opens into the stock room that measures ten by sixteen feet. The room has plank shelving on three of the plank walls. An overhead shelf hangs from the middle of the room. Boxes and containers of bulk items, still unopened, remain on the shelves and floor. These items are from regional companies and from China. This is an exceptional collection of bulk merchandise dating from the early 1900s. Unopened and preserved items found in the room include boxes with cans of oysters, salmon, clams, Massachusetts lobster, lard, and kerosene. Other items in the room include cigarettes, soaps, baking powders, Easter egg candy, candles, canned milk, oils, teas, sugar, and ceramic oil containers, large barrels filled with pickled foods, and small corked empty bottles. Many of these food items are labeled with Chinese characters on the exterior of the containers.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Barlow and Christine Richardson, *China Doctor of John Day* (Portland: Binford and Mort, 1979), 89-108.

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**Bedroom**

Ing Hay's bedroom is in the southeast corner of the building and measures eight by ten feet. The room has tongue and groove ceiling boards, and plank walls covered with original floral wallpaper dating from circa 1909. Furniture in the room includes the original iron bed frame with a thin mattress covered with a patchwork quilt. A few hand-made wooden pegged stools and chests are in the bedroom. Shoes still sit underneath the bed, and clothes from the building's owners hang from nails on the wall. Next to the bed is a wooden table with a cleaver, incense, candle holder, clock, joss sticks, and personal items such as razors, combs, soap, and a prescription bottle for "Doc Hay" that says "take three times a day." A small chamber pot is under the nightstand. Chests in the bedroom are filled with clothing, hats, and underwear. During the restoration of the building, \$23,000 in uncashed checks was found underneath the mattress in "Doc" Hay's bedroom. These date from the first decades of the 20th century.

**Kitchen/Bunk Room**

The kitchen is in the north side of the original structure and measures about ten feet three inches by twenty-four feet. The room has one-inch vertical plank walls, a sloped plank and beam ceiling, and wooden plank floors. A shelf along the north wall of the kitchen is stocked with dry and canned goods from different periods. Soaps, Wheaties, graham crackers, coffee, chocolate, spices, oils, soda bottles, honey, bacon, peanut butter, jams, canned fruit, pork's feet, and cans of vegetables line the shelves. Two cans of morphine sulphate (opium derivative) were also among the cans of food. The cabinet below is stocked with cooking and eating utensils, American pots and pans, Chinese dishes, a knife sharpener, tea kettles, and strainers. An indoor water pump is west of the counter. An upper cabinet east of the counter is hand-made and has Chinese characters painted on the cabinet doors. Ceramic jugs for soy or oils are on top of the cabinet and miscellaneous dishes are inside. A small table at the east end of the room sits below an original window converted into a cold storage area. Hand pegged wooden stools and chairs are near the table. The wood burning, cast-iron Niagara range, made in Duluth, is the focal point of the kitchen. A large wok, cast-iron pots and pans, and a tea kettle are on top of the stove. Lanterns hang from the ceiling and ladles from the walls. Large ceramic jugs were once filled with oils from China. Behind (south) of the stove is a small shrine, the Shrine to the Kitchen God, now arranged with a tea cup, orange, pomegranate, and candles. West of the range, a small, flat inset stone in the floor was used to cut firewood on; multiple marks on the floor attest to its extensive use. The kitchen is even equipped with the "latest" wire mousetrap that traps the vermin alive.

The west half of the room has two bunk beds against the south wall, and a washstand and dresser along the north wall. At one time, portions of this room were used as an opium smoking establishment evidenced by the dark staining on the walls and ceiling. Some of the blankets on the upper bunks date from the historic period. Advertisements from a 1927 mail order catalogue are used to line the walls adjacent to the lower bunks. The washstand, benches, and stools are all hand-made, the majority fastened with wooden pegs. A boarded-over window is at the west end of this room, and a plank door on the north wall leads to the interpretive room.

**Interpretative Room**

Interpretive exhibits were built in the northern addition that once functioned as a bedroom and storage area. The majority of the interior of this room has been covered with new boarding (original stone wall is exposed on the south elevation). A door at the east end of the room opens to the exterior (sometimes used to display items). Display cases in the room are filled with Kam Wah Chung Company artifacts and other related Chinese

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memorabilia. The extensive tool collection is displayed in this room. These interpretive displays were adapted for this use in the 1970s.

**Upper Story Storeroom**

The upstairs storeroom is only accessible by the exterior stairway on the east side of the building. The storeroom is divided into two rooms separated by a plank wall. Heavy Kraft paper, used for insulation, covers some of the horizontal plank walls and ceiling. There is an exterior door on the west wall; there is no access from the outside of the building to this door or no evidence of an exterior stairway. Floors in the upper story are constructed of one-by-twelve inch planks supported on two-by-four inch framing. This room houses some of the historic collection and newer Chinese artifacts associated with the Chinese New Year celebration.

**DOCUMENT COLLECTION**

The document collection and other artifacts found in the Kam Wah Chung Company building were preserved over the years due to the low humidity of eastern Oregon, the building's thick sandstone walls, the lack of windows and light, the insulation (dirt, sand, and pumice) in the ceiling, and the undisturbed environment maintained for a period of almost twenty years. Besides the comprehensive collection of artifacts found inside each room of the Kam Wah Chung Company building, there is an extensive collection of documents chronicling the daily lives and business transactions of owners Ing Hay and Lung On. This document collection is currently housed in eleven boxes stored in John Day's City Hall. Most of these documents have been translated and microfilmed. The following is an overview of the papers and documents.<sup>2</sup>

**Books**

The book collection shows the varied interests that Ing Hay and Lung On had in their business and personal lives. The collection includes handwritten books of verse, Chinese scrolls, English and Chinese dictionaries, the New Testament written in Cantonese dialect, poetry, novels, and books on opera, Chinese short stories, handwritten books about myths and Tong regulations, gambling rules and lottery regulations, writing tablets with practice lettering guides, a book in Chinese on how to write business letters, English-Chinese readers, text of Chinese operas, a Chinese block print book, and books from Ing Hay's collection for his medical practice including publications on herbal medicine, pulse diagnosis, surgery, women and children's health, and eye disease.

**Business Transactions Records**

The variety of business transaction receipts and documents found in the collection provide an understanding of the businesses that the two men developed. These business documents include money orders, letters about purchasing medical and grocery supplies, various price lists for the store, prescriptions for patients (written in English), out-of-state receipts for business transactions, account receivable ledgers, counter checks, notebooks listing meat purchases and payroll, several letters from Chinese-owned stores in San Francisco and Portland, railroad freight bills, postcard receipts, duplicates of checks sent to other Chinese businesses, returned checks, and bank notices. Various Kam Wah Chung business cards, advertisements, and calling cards are also in the collection.

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<sup>2</sup> List of Kam Wah Chung Collection housed in microfilm and in file boxes, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

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**Letters and Miscellaneous Records**

Many letters in the collection reveal the social life and interpersonal relationships between the owners of the building and Chinese relatives and friends. The letters also disclose the different personal and legal struggles that members of the Chinese community faced. Lung On's and Ing Hay's last will and testament and estate papers are housed in the collection along with letters from Lung On's wife, personal letters to friends with several asking for repayment of loans, love poems and letters, summons and court orders, insurance papers, liberty bonds from the Nationalist Chinese Government, transcripts concerning Chinese immigration, a donation to Sun Yat-sen's revolution, and lists of 262 people that contributed to the shrine in the Kam Wah Chung Company building. Miscellaneous records and artifacts include photographs, maps, subscriptions to the San Francisco Chinese daily newspaper, and artifacts such as purses, pens, cigar boxes, sacks, and a bamboo brush holder.

**HISTORIC PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**Site

Historically, the Kam Wah Chung Company building was one of several buildings (residences, stores, and a temple building) in the Chinese settlement of John Day. Early photographs show wooden structures on either side of the Kam Wah Chung Company building. As the Chinese population dwindled after the turn of the century, these buildings were demolished or abandoned. A fire in the mid-1930s destroyed many of the remaining Chinese buildings. By 1938, the Kam Wah Chung Company was one of the few buildings remaining in John Day's Chinese community. Today, the building is the only surviving structure associated with John Day's Chinese community.

Exterior

The Kam Wah Chung Company building was constructed in different phases as indicated through physical and photographic evidence, and oral interviews. Although the exact construction date is unknown, the building was most likely constructed in 1866 as a trading post and minor fortification of The Dalles Military Road, the main east-west wagon road connecting Idaho to western Oregon. This date also coincides with the discovery of gold in the area, and the development of mines along Canyon Creek near the building.<sup>3</sup>

Physical evidence uncovered during the restoration suggests the original portion of the building (central section and side lean-tos) was a freestanding structure covered with pine board and batten siding (box construction). A sand, dirt, and pumice layer between the two stories indicate that the building was originally a one-story structure. The stone walls were added around the plank wall building at a later date. These types of simple wood frame, barn-like structures were common building types in eastern Oregon during the early gold rush period.

The one-story building was expanded in the early 1890s with the addition of an upper floor built of wood. This small upper story (storeroom) was "placed" on top of the original one-story structure; the upper story was not tied into the lower story. The building was enlarged once more circa 1917 by adding a masonry wing to the north side.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Hartwig, "Kam Wah Chung Company Building," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1973).

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Steel shutters over the small recessed windows, and the shutters and flattened five gallon kerosene cans covering the main entrance door and roof made the building appear fortress-like. The use of steel shutters over the windows installed for security and fire protection, were commonly used in mining-related frontier buildings, such as in towns like Virginia City, Nevada, found in the West in the 1870s.

Features of the exterior were restored in the 1970s using photographic documentation and physical evidence. These include the brick chimney, the stairs to the upper story, some of the exterior shutters, the screen porch, and the balcony.

### Interior

The Kam Wah Chung Company's intact material collection is the most remarkable aspect of the building. Preserved in time, the artifacts date from the 1860s to the 1940s, and are intact in all of the rooms except the interpretive area (once a bedroom and storage room). The artifacts speak to the function and utility of each room and interpret the daily lives of the occupants and the community they served. The Kam Wah Chung Company building shows the evolution of the building throughout its long history and retains a high degree of architectural, historical, and cultural integrity on the interior and exterior.

## **REHABILITATION AND RESTORATION**

The Kam Wah Chung Company building was rehabilitated from 1975 to 1977 according to the "Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties."<sup>4</sup> The project included restoration, stabilization, and interpretation of the building. Elements of the rehabilitation project are listed below:

### Restoration/Rehabilitation

- Restored doors and windows;
- Reconstructed chimney;
- Updated and installed mechanical systems (inconspicuous in design);
- Installed fire protection system and alarms;
- Repointed exterior masonry;
- Restored bunk room and removed non-historic toilet facility;
- Restored front screen porch and rebuilt stairs to upper story and;
- Repainted exterior wood components using historic color found in professional color analysis.

### Stabilization

- Stabilized and added supports to foundation system;
- Installed structural anchors and supports for second story and roofs;
- Strengthened roof frame and tied two stories together;
- Improved site by adding perimeter drainage and a dry well;
- Removed invasive trees and shrubs;
- Re-roofed with new seamed galvanized metal roofing.

### Interpretation

- Adapted north bedroom for interpretative use.

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred Staehli, A.I.A. "Outline Specifications for Kam Wah Chung Company Building Restoration," John Day, Oregon, March 11, 1974.

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**INTEGRITY**

The Kam Wah Chung Company building retains a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association. These elements of integrity are further discussed below:

Location

The building is located on the original site near Canyon Creek.

Setting

The building is sited near Canyon Creek (location of early placer mine operations) along The Dalles Wagon Road. The demolition of the surrounding Chinese businesses and residences over time, the expansion of John Day, and the creation of the City Park have somewhat compromised the historic setting, however, an open space has been maintained around the building.

Materials

The stone and wood (pine) used in the construction of the Kam Wah Chung Company were the available local building materials. The stone was quarried from a nearby hillside. Only severely deteriorated components of the building were replaced during the rehabilitation/restoration. The historic materials and significant features of the building were preserved and restored, and the integrity of the building's extensive material collection has been maintained.

Design

Restored to its early 20th century appearance, the building's historic form, plan, structure, material, and style reveal the evolution of the Kam Wah Chung Company building.

Workmanship

Workmanship in the Kam Wah Chung Company building is evident in the stone construction. The sandstone blocks were roughly squared and an effort was made to finish the face of the stone with a tooled surface. Other stone buildings in the region display similar crafting. Although the original builder is unknown, many Chinese immigrants were skilled in masonry construction and built vernacular rural buildings.

Feeling

The Kam Wah Chung Company building and its material collection express a historic period that spans some 70 years. The building and its contents show the cultural, work, and social lives of early Chinese immigrants who helped build the American West.

Association

The Kam Wah Chung Company building is a direct link to Chinese communities that once thrived in the American West. Although the building and its material collection have a particular association with the Chinese immigrants in John Day, they provide insights into the many Chinese communities in the American West and aspects of the daily lives of their residents.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:  
 Nationally: X Statewide:    Locally:   

Applicable National  
 Register Criteria:

A X B    C    D

Criteria Considerations  
 (Exceptions):

A    B    C    D    E    F    G

NHL Criteria:

1

NHL Theme(s):

- I. Peopling Places
  - 2. Health, nutrition and disease
  - 3. Migration from outside and within
  - 4. Community and neighborhood
  - 5. Ethnic homelands
- III. Expressing Cultural Values
  - 6. Popular and traditional culture
- V. Developing the American Economy
  - 2. Distribution and consumption
  - 6. Exchange and trade
- VIII. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community
  - 2. Commerce
  - 4. Immigration and emigration policies

Areas of Significance:

Commerce  
 Ethnic Heritage: Asian  
 Exploration/Settlement  
 Health/Medicine  
 Social History

Period(s) of Significance:

ca. 1887-1948

Significant Dates:

1887, 1940

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Unknown

Historic Contexts:

- X. Westward Expansion of the British Colonies and the United States, 1763-1898
  - E. The Mining Frontier
    - 2. Northwest: Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Western Montana
- XII. Business
  - D. Trade
    - 3. Retail
- XXX. American Ways of Life
  - E. Ethnic Communities

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**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.****SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Kam Wah Chung Company building qualifies as a National Historic Landmark under NHL Criterion 1 as the best known example of a Chinese mercantile and herb store in the United States representing the Chinese role in the post-Civil War expansion period of the American West. Buildings like the Kam Wah Chung Company once existed throughout the West but over the years have vanished due to deterioration, redevelopment, or intentional destruction. More than a rare artifact, however, the Kam Wah Chung Company building is significant for its association with Chinese immigrants in the development of the American West. Like the surviving Chinese temples in the West, such as those found in the California towns of Marysville, Oroville, and Weaverville, the Kam Wah Chung building is unique because of its interior contents and its part in the history of the region. Both the temples and the Kam Wah Chung building emphasize critical aspects of Chinese life: the spiritual and religious on the one hand, and mercantilism and medical on the other. Together, all of these structures served as community centers for Chinese Americans and as places for interacting with the larger community. In this regard, the American community benefited from Chinese herbal medicine and products sold at the store. As the historian Sue Fawn Chung observed: the Kam Wah Chung Company building “is nationally significant because it symbolizes the role Chinese medicine played in the development of the American West (and later, in other parts of the nation) by providing alternative medical care to the general population at a time when American medicine was in its infancy. . . . It also represents the commercial interaction between the Chinese merchant(s) and the majority population while serving a diminishing Chinese population.” Kam Wah Chung, with its collection of herbal medicines, mercantile records, and other artifacts dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, she concluded, is the only “building that can [adequately] ‘tell’ this story about medicinal and cultural exchanges.”<sup>5</sup>

Chinese herbal stores existed in many parts of the United States, but were particularly numerous in the American West where nearly all of the Chinese population resided in the late nineteenth century. Compared to other stores established in the western United States during this time, the Kam Wah Chung Company stands apart. With the exception of the Kam Wah Chung Company and the Chew Kee Store (Fiddletown, California), all of the Chinese herbal medicine stores, their herbal collections, and other materials have been destroyed or significantly altered. Although Chew Kee still stands, for example, it became a residence in 1913 and ceased to function as an herbal pharmacy. The store was restored in the 1980s, but its herbal collection no longer exists, with the exception perhaps of a few representative samples. Moreover, other Chinese businesses, like the Wah Chong Tai Company (Butte, Montana), retain only fragments of their original herbal medicines and other material collections. Still others, like those in the “Chinatown” in San Francisco, California, sell herbal medicines to contemporary Chinese-American communities, but their herbal collections continue to change and are more modern.<sup>6</sup>

The comparisons with these and other stores—discussed below—further underscore the importance of the Kam Wah Chung Company in the twentieth century. Between 1929 and 1945, herb stores declined for several reasons: 1) a campaign against Chinese herbalists in California from 1929-1932 that spread to neighboring states, 2) the Sino-Japanese War (1931-1937), and 3) the World War II era (1939-1945) when supplies from

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<sup>5</sup> Sue Fawn Chung to Barbara Sidway, June 15, 2004; Sue Fawn Chung, “Comments on Kam Wah Chung NHL Nomination,” May 7, 2004, copies of correspondence in files of National Park Service, National Historic Landmarks Program, Pacific West Region-Seattle.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Haiming Liu, “The Resilience of Ethnic Culture: Chinese Herbalists in the American Medical Profession,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1, no. 2 (1998): 173-174; Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

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China were unavailable. The Chinese herbal medicine practice suffered another major blow after 1949 (the establishment of the People's Republic of China) when the federal government banned all Chinese imports. Chinese herb stores rebounded when the ban was lifted in the 1970s, but they would never contain the type and variety of herbs found in stores from the late nineteenth century. Thus, Kam Wah Chung is the only known store in the United States with an intact collection of pre-1950s Chinese herbal remedies in its original setting. According to Anton Sohn, M.D., a pathologist and author of *The Healers of 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Nevada*, who visited Kam Wah Chung when he was head of the medical school at the University of Nevada, Reno, the collection is impressive and unusual. The herbs combined with the few still extant medical books in Chinese for the use of herbs to cure illnesses make Kam Wah Chung an unusual scholarly resource on Chinese medicinal practices and herbal remedies.<sup>7</sup>

The Kam Wah Chung Company building collection contains not only medicinal herbs, but also an impressive material collection that embodies the story of Chinese immigrants who contributed significantly to the cultural and economic development of the American West. The emerging West depended on an extractive economy, which relied on outside capital, markets, and labor. Chinese immigrants provided labor, skills, and technology needed to develop and build mines, transportation systems, industries, and communities in the West.

From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, nearly all of the nation's Chinese population was concentrated in the West in towns like John Day, Oregon, where businesses like the Kam Wah Chung Company served as a social center, post office, residence, labor contracting office, temple, general store, and medicinal herb shop for the Chinese community. The social, cultural, work, and religious lives of these early Chinese immigrants are revealed through the material collection that remains in the building. The Kam Wah Chung Company building's collection expands our understanding about Chinese culture and our nation's ties to China in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Kam Wah Chung Company building conveys and interprets the struggles and successes of early Chinese immigrants from the mid-1800s into the first half of the twentieth century. Owners Ing Hay and Lung On stayed in the rural community of John Day until the mid-1900s and succeeded in breaking many racial barriers that segregated the Chinese community. Other Chinese moved to urban areas to find work following the decline of the mining and railroad industries. The Kam Wah Chung Company remained in business until the late 1940s, illustrating not only strong ties to Chinese culture but also Chinese adaptation and assimilation to American society, as evidenced by the American goods in the store and the American community that patronized it. Closed in the 1950s, the building remained sealed for 20 years, like a time capsule, preserving the material collection inside. The Kam Wah Chung Company building is currently used as a museum.

### **Period of Significance**

The period of significance spans from 1887 to 1948. The beginning date of 1887 reflects the formation of the partnership between Ing Hay and Lung On and their purchase of the Kam Wah Chung Company. This period also corresponds with the large Chinese population living in John Day and eastern Oregon during the 1880s and 1890s, and the role the company played in the Chinese as well as larger community. The closing date of 1948 corresponds to the end of the business created and operated by Lung On and Ing Hay. Lung On died in 1940, and in 1948 Ing Hay, in failing health, moved away from John Day to live in a nursing home in Portland, Oregon. With On's death and Hay's departure (and subsequent death four years later), the Kam Wah Chung Company closed its doors. This date range also encompasses the time in which the Chinese population declined in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the result of Chinese exclusion laws. The population

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<sup>7</sup> Haiming Liu, "The Resilience of Ethnic Culture: Chinese Herbalists in the American Medical Profession," 173-174, 187; Anton Sohn, M.D., *The Healers of 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Nevada* (Reno: Greasewood, 1997).

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decline did not spell the end to the Kam Wah Chung Company's business, for it continued to operate—serving and treating—people within and beyond the John Day community. In addition, the date of 1948 reflects the effects of World War II and the inability for Chinese herbal storeowners to acquire supplies, and thus the decline of the herbal store business throughout the country.<sup>8</sup>

**NHL Historic Contexts**

*Westward Expansion and the Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific-The Mining Frontier (1959):* The initial pattern of settlement of the West was largely determined by the location of its mineral wealth. Even though others had crossed the country before the 1848 gold strikes in California, it was the miners that revealed to the nation the vast resources of the American West. Gold was the draw that attracted the first settlers. As new strikes were discovered, miners branched out into inland empires, establishing settlements wherever mines were located. Chinese immigrants were instrumental in the success of the early mining industry, providing the needed labor and skills in the developing industry. The Kam Wah Chung Company building represents this early mining frontier and is symbolic of the strong presence of the Chinese who helped build and expand the American West.

In the mid-1800s, Chinese immigrants came to the United States to find work and live, but also maintained ties to their ethnic homelands through elaborate social networks. Staying in contact with Chinese family members in their homeland was crucial to immigrants who were still expected to honor responsibilities to parents, relatives, wives, and children in China. For many, maintaining their ethnicity was crucial if they wanted to assimilate back into Chinese society upon their return. However, only an estimated 50 percent of the Chinese immigrants were able to go back to China, and many of those who remained demonstrated patterns of adaptation, as evidenced by the American products sold in the store. Chinese immigrants maintained some of their religious beliefs and held major traditional ceremonies while residing in the United States. The Kam Wah Chung Company building and contents embody the Chinese immigrants' effort to maintain their cultural heritage, ties, and traditions, while adjusting to their new environment by adopting aspects of the host society.

**HISTORIC BACKGROUND****CHINESE IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES**

As early as 1784, the United States established profitable trade networks along the central and southern coasts of China through the importation of sea otter pelts. Wealthy Chinese prized the fur for its warmth and water repellency, and perpetuated the profitable trade for decades. Trade networks remained one-way operations with China exporting little to the United States. Additionally, the Qing government (1644-1911) of China forbade Chinese to emigrate and charged those who did with treason. A variety of catalysts forced the opening of China to foreign goods and to overseas opportunities in the early 1850s. The closed-door policy that had, for centuries, limited Chinese emigration overseas changed. Concurrently, discoveries of gold on the West Coast of the United States provided a strong attraction for Chinese men seeking wealth.

Chinese migration to the United States was encouraged by many factors. In China, the mid-nineteenth century was marked by high population density, a severe shortage of arable land, and major political catastrophes marked by the Opium War (1839-1842) and the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). In the southern provinces of Guangdong (Kwangtung), and Fujian, a long history of periodic famines, floods, and droughts further encouraged Chinese to emigrate overseas in search of wealth and prosperity, especially in the gold mines of the

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<sup>8</sup> Sue Fawn Chung to David Louter, November 1, 2004, National Park Service, National Historic Landmarks Program, Pacific West Regional Office, Seattle.

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western United States.<sup>9</sup> Beginning in the late 1840s, the United States experienced a series of gold rushes beginning in California and eventually spreading to Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Nevada, and as far north as Montana and Canada. News of the 1849 gold rush spread across the globe and soon Chinese men were arriving in great numbers to try their hand in the gold fields of California. By 1854, the number of Chinese in California was estimated at somewhere around 25,000.

While many Chinese left their homes to seek refuge from the economic, political, and civil strife that plagued China, many others left China with a desire to expand their businesses overseas. Many immigrants were skilled business people who came from wealthy merchant families in the Pearl River Delta region. They brought with them their skills in business along with a proficiency in the English language that aided them in their journeys overseas.

Whether they were poor laborers or middle class business people, many immigrants came to the United States under a Chinese-controlled contract labor system where the immigrants worked-off the cost of transportation after their arrival, or through a clan or native-place networking system that would ultimately contribute to the economic prosperity of those remaining in China. (Immigration records, especially in the Pacific Northwest, show a greater tendency for the latter type of immigration system.) Immigrants boarded steamships in the ports of Canton and other bustling Chinese port cities and arrived in major western United States ports, including San Francisco, Portland, and Port Townsend, Washington. Upon their arrival, friends, relatives, labor contractors or associations such as native-place, benevolent, or fraternal organizations, assisted in finding jobs and housing and later provided social and recreational centers. Most of the immigrants came to the West to earn money for themselves and their families and they knew that if they wanted to return home, they had to be financially successful.

## CHINESE LABOR IN THE WEST

The great wave of western development that began in the 1850s dramatically altered the landscape of the western United States and British Columbia. Pre-1850 development of the West began as thousands of people from various ethnic groups migrated from east to west and south to north, settling on fertile and cheap agricultural land, particularly, in California and Oregon. The mild, wet winters along the West Coast appealed to farmers, further drawing immigrants to the region. These immigrants rearranged the social and physical landscape of the West and altered forever the region's history.<sup>10</sup>

The 1849 California Gold Rush drew immigrants to the gold fields of California where they worked for non-Chinese-owned companies or as independent gold prospectors. Quickly they realized the need for protection and worked in organized groups that often were clan or native-place based. Chinese immigrants contributed to both the history of the West and the technological landscape of the California gold mines. Using their centuries-old knowledge of irrigation systems, they became known for their ability to dig ditches to funnel water to placer mining sites that had little or no water available. Many unique technological innovations were brought with the immigrants from China including the "China Pump," also called "Dragon's Backbones," that was traditionally used to irrigate rice fields. In the United States, Chinese applied this unique technology to hydraulic mining. Additionally, they were adept at building dams, flumes, siphons, and hydraulic engineering devices, all essential to the mining industry.<sup>11</sup> When the quick returns of these early years diminished, the

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<sup>9</sup> For other theories on Chinese immigration overseas see Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 183.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Barlow and Christine Richardson, *Gum San: Land of the Gold Mountain* (Bend: High Desert Museum, 1991), 18.

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Chinese came into their own, panning for gold in the vast gravel banks, or tailings left by the inefficient hydraulic mining operations. In some places (such as narrow canyons), the tailings left by hydraulic mining and other placer operations were often neatly stacked, to allow for the unimpeded flow of the miners' large volumes of water through the mine itself. (In other areas, randomly arranged and amorphously-shaped piles of waste-rock tailings, which often covered a much larger portion of the ground surface, were more common.) Throughout the American West these neatly stacked tailing piles came to be commonly called "Chinese walls," and many of them were indeed built by Chinese labor. However, such features were also built by non-Chinese miners, when and where the site-specific topography demanded it.<sup>12</sup>

As railroads began crossing the nation in the 1860s, the demand for cheap labor increased. Because many European laborers were unwilling to work the long hours in the grueling mountain terrain, railroad barons began searching for new sources of cheap labor. The railroad companies began employing Chinese in 1865, and within two years, the Central Pacific Railroad employed 12,000 Chinese laborers; ninety percent of its entire work force.<sup>13</sup> The Chinese who worked for the railroads performed a variety of dangerous and labor-intensive feats. Stories of their efficiency and tales of competition between Chinese, and British and Irish laborers to see who could lay the most track in a single day attest to the rapid rate at which the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869. Thereafter, Chinese worked on the construction of other railroad lines, including narrow gauges, throughout the West. The railroad construction work involved leveling roads, clearing forests, building bridges and tunnels, cutting and transporting wood, making charcoal, and refurbishing or replacing railroad ties, to name just a few of the tasks.

Chinese laborers also worked in the lumber mills of Washington and Oregon, and the fishing industry of the coastal states. In doing so, Chinese laborers not only played an important role in the burgeoning economy of the Far West, but also had a direct impact on the development of the communication and transportation networks that crossed the nation in the last decades of the nineteenth century since they also helped construct wagon roads and the telegraph system in the western United States. Their skills as builders and stonemasons are evident in many buildings on the West Coast. By 1870, 63,199 Chinese resided in the United States; the great majority of these immigrants were living in the West.

By the late 1870s, the demographics of Chinese in the western United States again shifted from a workforce concerned primarily with railroad and mining work to laborers engaged more often with manufacturing, fishing, construction, and agricultural jobs, especially in California. Industries like shoe and clothing manufacturing, wool production, and tobacco processing (cigar making) were key employers of Chinese immigrants. For Chinese who chose to avoid the confines of factory work, agriculture provided another source of employment. China's agricultural history is long and immigrants who arrived in the United States often came from peasant families who had successfully worked the soil for centuries. Chinese who were farmers in the Pearl River Delta of southern China contributed to the rich agricultural tradition of the fertile valleys of California, from digging ditches to draining swampland and planting crops, thus bringing the citrus, potato, and sugar beet industries to the region. Chinese immigrants also provided essential labor for the development of California's wine industry. Throughout the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries the Chinese labored in still other ways. They worked as merchants, cooks, servants, boarding house workers, and laundrymen, providing invaluable service to the growing frontier communities that were to become urban industrial centers. According to the 1870 and 1880 census manuscripts for John Day, the Chinese were barbers, jewelers, blacksmiths, teamsters, carpenters, and shoemakers as well.

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<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey M. LaLande, "Sojourners in Search of Gold: Hydraulic Mining Techniques of the Chinese in Southwestern Oregon," *Journal of Industrial Archeology* 11 (1985): 29-52.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Journey to Gold Mountain: The Chinese in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), 31.

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**CHINESE SETTLEMENTS**

The influx of the Chinese labor force resulted in establishing Chinese communities in urban and rural areas of the coastal states of Washington, California, and Oregon, and the other western states of Idaho, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah. These communities housed support services for the labor force, including Chinese-owned mercantile stores, laundries, restaurants, groceries, hotels, residences, gambling halls, benevolent societies, labor contracting offices, medicinal herb shops, and temples. These “Chinatowns” existed throughout the West and were typically segregated from the rest of the non-Chinese community.

Washington State’s Chinese communities first centered around the port towns but quickly spread to the eastern portion of the state as gold strikes spurred development of the “inland empire” in the 1850s and 1860s. Chinese enclaves were found in communities such as Port Townsend, Port Gamble, Bellingham, Tacoma, Fort Colville, and Walla Walla. Chinese communities in neighboring Idaho were in Lewistown, Sandpoint, Coeur d’Alene, Idaho Falls, Lewiston, Warrens, Idaho City, Silver City, and Boise. Nevada’s mountainous region and mining strikes stimulated the development of many Chinese communities including Winnemucca, Elko, Tuscarora, Unionville, Virginia and Carson Cities, and Aurora. And California had Chinese settlements throughout the state, including: Eureka, Weaverville, Chico, Marysville, Yuba City, Sacramento, Locke, Fiddletown, China Camp, and San Francisco in the northern region and communities in Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, and San Diego in the southern region. Butte had the largest Chinese population in Montana with other settlements in Helena, Billings, and Virginia City. Utah’s Chinese communities coincide with the route of the transcontinental railroad and mining industries, settling in communities such as Salt Lake City, Park City, Ogden, Terrace, and Corinne, and in Wyoming Chinese settlements were located in Evanston, Rock Springs, and Green River.

The settlement of Chinese in Oregon followed the pattern of the other West Coast states. Port towns such as Portland and Astoria developed first. Chinese entered Portland in the early 1850s as steamship service was established between Portland and San Francisco to supply goods and services to miners in California. The Chinese population grew slowly in the state until the gold strikes in the 1860s in British Columbia, eastern Washington, Idaho, and eastern and southern Oregon created interest in the interior regions of the state. Chinese communities were established throughout the state and could be found in southern Oregon in Jacksonville along the Rogue River, Klamath Falls, and in the Willamette Valley in Albany and Salem. The discovery of gold in eastern Oregon created the rapid development of mining towns that had sizeable Chinese communities. These communities were found in Prairie City, Eldorado, Auburn, Baker City, Sumpter, Granite, Susanville, Monument, Sparta, La Grande, Canyon City, and John Day.

**CHINESE ARRIVAL IN JOHN DAY**

The 1860s marked gold rushes in the semiarid land of Eastern Oregon that encouraged Chinese to migrate to regions east of the Cascade Mountains in search of wealth and new labor opportunities. In 1862, a group of miners passing through Eastern Oregon for the gold fields of Idaho camped and decided to inspect the Canyon Creek riverbed for gold. When their pans produced, the Eastern Oregon gold boom began with fervor. It was not long before sojourning Chinese arrived in the region to try their luck at gold mining.

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Census Date	Total U.S. Population	Total Chinese Population in U.S.	Total Chinese Population in Western States	% of Chinese Residing in the Western States
<b>1850</b>	<b>23,191,876</b>	<b>4,018</b>	—	—
<b>1860</b>	<b>31,443,321</b>	<b>34,933</b>	<b>33,149*</b>	<b>95%</b>
<b>1870</b>	<b>38,558,371</b>	<b>63,199</b>	<b>62,804</b>	<b>99%</b>
			49,277 CA 4,274 ID 1,949 MT 3,152 NV 3,330 OR 445 UT 234 WA 143 WY	
<b>1880</b>	<b>50,155,783</b>	<b>105,465</b>	<b>99,803</b>	<b>95%</b>
			75,132 CA 3,379 ID 1,765 MT 5,416 NV 9,510 OR 501 UT 3,186 WA 914 WY	
<b>1890</b>	<b>62,947,714</b>	<b>107,488</b>	<b>93,915</b>	<b>87%</b>
			72,472 CA 2,007 ID 2,532 MT 2,833 NV 9,540 OR 806 UT 3,260 WA 465 WY	

**Table 1:** Distribution of Chinese in the United States, 1850 to 1890. Western States included in the study: California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. (United States Bureau of the Census, 1850-1890, retrieved from Historical Census Browser, November 8, 2004, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.)

\* Estimated number of Chinese. Chinese were not enumerated separately until 1870 census.

In mining towns in the West, migrations occurred as miners followed the “booms” and left the “busts.” There was a constant shift in population. Grant County had the largest Chinese population in eastern Oregon: 940 in

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1870 and 905 in 1880. According to the census manuscript in 1870, John Day had 85 Chinese; in 1880 the figure rose to 358. (Note: 1890 census manuscript burned in a fire.) In 1880, Kam Wah Chung undoubtedly was the main social and commercial center for the 2,065 Chinese in the eastern Oregon counties of Baker, Grant, Umatilla, and Union.<sup>14</sup>

Unless the host population was hostile, Chinese could be found in most frontier towns with economic opportunities at one time or another in the late nineteenth century. Life in these small communities was in sharp contrast to urban centers like San Francisco, Sacramento, Marysville, Oroville, and Weaverville (all in California) and Virginia City (in Nevada). The economic decline in the late 1880s to early 1890s in rural communities, combined with other factors that included discriminatory laws, forced the Chinese to return to China or relocate to urban centers in Portland, San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles by the turn of the twentieth century.

This trend held true for the John Day region, where Canyon City was the first town to develop as Chinese began arriving in the early 1860s. The Chinese section of Canyon City began as a few shacks where Chinese lived, isolated from the surrounding community. As the immigrant population increased more buildings were erected, including merchandise stores and gathering houses. The 1870 United States Census lists 162 Chinese in Canyon City working as miners and in other support businesses.<sup>15</sup> The town remained the hub of Chinese life only until 1885 when a fire destroyed the enclave. Rather than rebuild in the sometimes-hostile social climate of Canyon City, hundreds of Chinese chose to travel down the valley, two miles to John Day, also known as “Other Town” or “Tiger Town.” By 1887, there was a thriving Chinese population in John Day numbering somewhere between five and six hundred immigrants, located outside the townsite along the east bank of Canyon Creek.

As was the case in other rural and urban Chinese communities in the West, the Chinese at John Day modeled their community on traditional social organizations developed over the centuries in China. These traditional social and business organizations helped assure stability in the minority population and provide commonality, safety, and financial support for its members. In John Day, three traditional groups affected development of the Chinese community: the *lineage association*, an organization composed of relatives who shared a direct bloodline; the *clan association*, an organization composed of more distantly related family members who didn’t necessarily share a direct bloodline; and the *district or native-place association*, an organization loosely based on a shared geographic origin in China. Members of this type of organization generally came from a common province and were bound by shared dialects, customs, food, and dress.<sup>16</sup> A Chinese man who exhibited unique leadership skills and could serve as a mediator between Chinese when conflict within the group arose generally headed district associations. In John Day, local business leader and part owner of the Kam Wah Chung Company, Lung On, headed the local Sze Yup district association.

The Chinese in John Day organized into close-knit communities both for support and protection in an often hostile social environment. A shared physical environment that resembled home gave the immigrants a sense of normalcy in a country very different from the one they had left behind. The celebration of important traditional

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<sup>14</sup> “1870-1890 United States Census, Oregon,” United States Bureau of the Census, 1850-1890, Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, accessed November 8, 2004, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. The number of Chinese cited in Canyon City’s 1870 census was most likely lower than the actual number of Chinese residents. A more accurate figure might be obtained by doubling the number of resident Chinese.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the traditional social organization in China see, Patricia Ebrey and James L. Watson, eds., *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000-1949* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986); Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin, eds., *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

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festivals, such as Chinese New Year's and the Autumn Moon Festival, brought Chinese from outlying regions (in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Nevada) to John Day. Shops sold ordinary American goods, imported European goods, and products imported from China via trade centers like San Francisco, Sacramento, Seattle, Portland, and Port Townsend. Fish and ducks were raised in a communal pond and large vegetable gardens were grown to help sustain the community. A temple or "joss" house, restaurants, a laundry, residences, and small hotels for visitors existed within the Chinese enclave and welcomed immigrants from around the region to shop and meet with one another. At the center of this environment stood the Kam Wah Chung Company building. For decades it served as the hub of Chinese life for those living in the surrounding counties and border towns.

**THE KAM WAH CHUNG COMPANY**

The exact date of construction for the Kam Wah Chung Company is not known. The best historical evidence suggests it was built sometime in the late 1860s, and that it may have served as a supply outpost near the Dalles Military Road. The Dalles Military Road was the major east-west road that connected Fort Boise, Idaho, to The Dalles, Oregon, and beyond. The Kam Wah Chung Company building was sited along the east bank of Canyon Creek, the location of early placer mines.<sup>17</sup>

A lease for the building shows that the Kam Wah Chung Company existed and was owned by Chinese as early as 1878.<sup>18</sup> A December 15, 1883, advertisement in the *Grant County News* says: "Kam Wah Chung, contractor for Chinese labor. Laborers of all kinds furnished at short notice. John Day, Oregon." In turn, Kam Wah Chung's owner (known to the Americans by his store name, a common practice at that time) sold the building (and business) to Ing Hay and Lung On in 1887. The two men headed a group of investors, typical of Chinese business partnerships of the time, continued the name Kam Wah Chung Company, and remained in business for over fifty years.

Lung On arrived in John Day after a brief stay in San Francisco. Originally from a middle-class Chinese family, Lung On was educated in the Chinese classics and English language and was a skilled business person. In 1887, he set his sights on eastern Oregon where he met his future partner and lifetime friend, Ing (Doc) Hay. Ing Hay first arrived in the region in 1885 after leaving China with his father on the advice of five uncles who were living in Walla Walla, Washington. Ing Hay was a trained Chinese herbal doctor and pulsologist but lacked the English language and business skills of Lung On.

The two men met in early 1887 and decided their combined skills would benefit each other in business. As was the case with many merchants starting new companies in the United States, the men decided to borrow the capital needed to purchase the Kam Wah Chung Company building. After Ing Hay's uncles loaned the two entrepreneurs the money, they purchased the store from its original Chinese owners. By 1888, the two men were selling goods to the Chinese community from the little stone building. Located in the center of the Chinese settlement, the Kam Wah Chung store, and its owners, became the backbone for Chinese life in northeastern Oregon. The Kam Wah Chung Company, or the "Golden Flower of Prosperity," served as a social and supply center, post office, labor-contracting office, medicinal herb shop, and as an outlet for other business ventures.

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Hartwig, "Kam Wah Chung Company Building," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service), 1973. Barlow and Richardson, *China Doctor of John Day*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Kam Wah Chung Company Collection, Kam Wah Chung Company Building, John Day, Oregon.

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**Social Center and Post Office**

The Kam Wah Chung Company building was a center for daily social activities. From morning until night, Chinese could be found coming and going from the building. Some shopped for goods and various daily supplies while others came to the building to spend time with fellow immigrants. Most Chinese in and around John Day came from Toishan province in southern China and belonged to the local Sze Yup district association of John Day. These men shared a common dialect, food, dress, and customs, and enjoyed the chance to meet at the building to share news from other sojourners or maybe a word from family and friends back in China. The store stocked Chinese language newspapers, magazines, and books as well as American newspapers and magazines. This was typical of rural Chinese stores that served an American public as well as Chinese customers. English-Chinese dictionaries as well as books on the U.S. Constitution and American history also were available to customers. Moreover, like many large Chinese stores throughout the West, the Kam Wah Chung Company served as a meeting place for social and recreational activities. The cook (usually an employee of the store with some talent in cooking) provided meals and drinks of hot tea or alcohol. Conversation, news reports about events in the U.S. and/or China, reminiscences, and stories were extremely important and those who could read, read aloud Chinese and American newspapers and magazines. Poetry readings were another type of entertainment. Those who had musical talent also performed on string and wind instruments, gongs, and drums. Sitting around the little wooden table, men played traditional gambling games like *fan tan* or *mah zhong*. Finally, the building served as a kind of hostelry. In the back room, next to the kitchen, small bunks lined the walls and were commonly used by travelers who normally were not allowed in mainstream hotels.

Men also could smoke opium here until it became illegal – and perhaps even when it was illegal. Much of the general information about opium smoking has been part of the American negative stereotyping of the Chinese in order to mobilize public opinion against them. In his excellent study of the drug, R. K. Newman wrote, “the physiological dangers of opium consumption were greatly exaggerated in the late nineteenth century and these exaggerations have shaped our assumptions about the drug ever since.”<sup>19</sup> The Chinese knew about the healing properties of poppy seeds since the tenth century. Opium was useful in treating diseases like dysentery, cholera, and other bowel complaints as well as being used as an analgesic for rheumatism, neuralgia, toothaches, minor fractures, and muscle pain. Undoubtedly all thirteen Chinese men who were buried in Carlin, Nevada’s Chinese cemetery used some quantity of opium because all suffered from some type of serious bone fracture during their lifetime.<sup>20</sup> The social and recreational use of opium smoking did not mean that the person was addicted to the drug. In fact, most Chinese smokers were relatively healthy because of the small quantity used. Daniel Liestman, in his study of Port Townsend’s Chinese community, examined the value of opium seized from individual Chinese as being worth less than \$100 in the majority of cases while opium seized from Euro-Americans frequently were worth three times that amount and suggested that Euro-Americans, not Chinese, were the big drug dealers.<sup>21</sup>

In 1909, Congress passed a law prohibiting the importation of opium. After Congress realized this did not stop opium smoking, it passed the Harrison Narcotic Act in December 1914 with broader anti-opium provisions, and yet as late as 1930 according to Federal Narcotics Commissioner Harry J. Anslinger, opium dens could be found in many American cities.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> R. K. Newman, “Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration,” *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 4 (October 1995): 766. His article demythologizes the Chinese opium problem with scientific and historical evidence.

<sup>20</sup> See Aaron Gallogas’s forthcoming master’s thesis in anthropology at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Liestman, “‘The Various Celestials Among Our Town:’ Euro-American Response to Port Townsend’s Chinese Colony,” *Pacific Northeastern Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (July 1994): 93-104.

<sup>22</sup> Edward M. Brecher and the editors of Consumer Reports Magazine, “Chapter 6: Opium Smoking is Outlawed,” Schaffer Library of Drug Policy, <http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/Library/studies/cu/cu6.htm>.

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In addition to serving as a social center and important meeting place for Chinese, the Kam Wah Chung Company building housed a post office that provided a crucial link to Chinese around the West and back home in China. The post office was not an official U.S. post office but was for the use and convenience of the local/regional Chinese population. More often than not, these merchants also sent money home on behalf of the miners and other residents or sent the gold to be assayed if a Chinese assayer did not live in town. Literate Chinese merchants and physicians often wrote letters on behalf of their countrymen in the area and mailed them to China.

The post office's importance was threefold. First, it helped connect individual Chinese with one another in the United States. The post office catered to Chinese who wanted to keep in touch with one another as the majority of Chinese were constantly moving to find work opportunities. Additionally, Lung On and Ing Hay served as middlemen in locating lost Chinese friends and relatives who had moved to eastern Oregon. The post office served as a crucial link in this process.

Second, the post office connected Chinese with family and business associates in China. With the help of Lung On, and his beautiful calligraphic script, Chinese could write letters home to fathers and mothers, wives, and friends. For family in China, these letters were of utmost importance. Letters told of when men might return to their relatives and often included gifts of money that provided sustenance to families in China.

Finally, the post office was a business link for Chinese in the United States and in China. Letters left behind in the archives of the store document intricate business transactions that took place via handwritten letters that passed through the post office. Goods and services were ordered and debts were cleared. The post office also served as an importing station for goods from China. Here, shipments of rice, foodstuffs, clothing, mining equipment, and even Chinese-language newspapers and periodicals arrived and were distributed through the store. These shipments served Chinese throughout eastern Oregon.

**Commerce: The General Store**

The Kam Wah Chung general store was the hub of activity and was located in a small room separated from the main room by iron bars. Shelves of the mercantile and storeroom were stocked with a variety of goods including items from China such as sandalwood fans and ginseng. Candy, cigarettes, tobacco, cigars, matches, firecrackers, beer, incense, and gambling supplies lined the shelves along with staples such as first aid items, sundries, soaps, coffees, teas, candles, lard, canned goods, sugar, flour, cotton, and rice. Garments could be ordered through the store from mail order catalogues.

The store served as a wholesale outlet for stores in neighboring communities including Baker City, Susanville, Mt. Vernon, and Prairie City. Bulk supplies from the store were also sent to isolated ranches and outpost. The Kam Wah Chung Company store purchased a majority of their inventory from vendors in Portland, San Francisco, and China (Canton and Hong Kong) but also received goods from vendors in Seattle, St. Louis, and Chicago.<sup>23</sup> The store also supplied the local community with alcohol, evidenced in the full liquor bottles found under the floorboards in the 1970s rehabilitation. The store supplied goods to the non-Chinese of John Day as well. Calendars, advertisements, notepaper, and business cards touted the store as a seller of "medicinal herbs, groceries, and general merchandise" and were written in English to attract non-Chinese customers. The extant merchandise in the store dates from pre-1900 to the 1940s.

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<sup>23</sup> Chia-Lin Chen, "The Golden Flower of Prosperity," (thesis, Portland State University, 1971), 9.

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**Herbal Medicine and Treatment Center**

From the mid-nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese doctors offered indispensable medical services to both Chinese and non-Chinese patients. During the first half of the twentieth century, many Chinese herbalists had more non-Chinese patients than Chinese ones.<sup>24</sup> Their activities enrich our understanding of the American West as a culturally diverse region. By the turn of the twentieth century, they could be found in the eastern part of the United States as well.<sup>25</sup>

Haiming Liu, in his article “The Resilience of Ethnic Culture: Chinese Herbalists in the American Medical Profession,” pointed out that the Chinese herbalist in the United States differed from his counterparts in China because the former was also a businessman while the latter were medical scholars who were well acquainted with all of the classical medical texts dating from the first century B.C. Chinese herbalists in the United States built a commercial network, imported the herbs, advertised in local and regional newspapers or publications (such as directories), and dispensed herbal concoctions. In 1878, the booming mining town of Virginia City, Nevada, had four Chinese physicians advertising in the *Wells Fargo Directory of Businesses*. This was a profitable profession, which can be exemplified by herbalist Li Putai of San Francisco (d. 1893) who had an annual income of \$75,000.<sup>26</sup>

The Wah Chong Company, founded in 1868 in Seattle and possibly connected with Kam Wah Chung in John Day (this is based upon the similarities in the name), published a book of herbal recipes. Subsequently other Chinese herbalists in the West published their recipes on how to achieve a balance between the *yin* and *yang* (two complementary forces in the body; when one is out of balance, illness results). Because Native Americans also used herbal medicines, Chinese herbalists sometimes worked with medicine men in order to substitute local plants for expensive imported ones.

Ing Hay was well known in the Chinese and non-Chinese community for his effective treatments. His herbal medicine and treatment center was located in front of the Kam Wah Chung building. Behind a small counter and enclosed by an iron cage that divided the front room from his supplies, he saw his customers. At first, his patients were Chinese miners but when the numbers of miners dwindled, his business continued to flourish due to his reputation for effecting cures in cases where western medicine had failed. Ing Hay used the traditional Chinese “pulse” method for diagnosing illnesses (pulsology) and could even give a history of past ailments. (There are ten pulses, five on each hand, that are connected with the body and can be used for diagnosis.) For example, based upon pulsology, he once told a mother of four that she had had five children, which she denied at first and then admitted that one of her children died at birth. Women comprised at least one-third of his patients who found relief from “women’s complaints,” complications arising from childbirth or menstrual problems, and pelvic ailments. For example, for various diseases of pregnancy, he used the leaves and stems of *Cilan* (*Arethusa japonica*) and the roots of *Shudihuang* (*Rehmannia glutinosa*). His pharmacopoeia included over 500 concoctions that have remained “frozen in time” on the store’s shelves.<sup>27</sup>

Ing Hay’s practice covered wide areas of Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and Nevada, and through his mail order service, even more distant places. He saw patients in person either through office visits or house calls. Patients

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<sup>24</sup> Haiming Liu, “The Resilience of Ethnic Culture: Chinese Herbalists in the American Medical Profession,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1, no. 2 (1998): 180-181.

<sup>25</sup> “Chinese Drug Stores in America,” *American Journal of Pharmacy* (December 1887), noted four herbal shops in Philadelphia, for example. Retired Colonel Pong Lem, Ph.D., now residing in Texas, has a collection of his father’s Chinese medical library from when his father practiced in Philadelphia.

<sup>26</sup> Liu Boji, *Meiguo Huaqiao Shi [A History of the Chinese in the United States of America]* (Taipei: Commission of Overseas Chinese Affairs, 1976), 314.

<sup>27</sup> Barlow and Richardson, *China Doctor of John Day*, 54-108.

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also wrote to him describing their symptoms and he diagnosed the illness, sent the herbal remedy with detailed instructions on what to do, and continued the correspondence until the patient was cured. Once he concocted a brew with over 83 different herbs to cure a man suffering from swollen feet. He probably inherited a customer list from the previous herbal doctor known as Kam Wah Chung. Newspaper articles, diaries, and letters testified to his success. He saved the lives of all his patients in the 1915 and 1919 flu epidemics in eastern Oregon, allegedly cured cases of meningitis, and saved a person's limb from being amputated by a western physician. Letters and prescriptions in the collection showed that he practiced medicine for most of his life.<sup>28</sup>

Chinese herb doctors risked being charged for practicing medicine without a license. In 1887, the California state legislature passed the Medical Practice Restriction Act that required a license to practice medicine and other western states followed shortly thereafter. In 1905 Ing Hay was charged with practicing medicine illegally as part of an anti-Chinese American crackdown on Chinese practitioners of herbal medicine. However, like other popular Chinese herbalists in the West who helped the community, "no jury would convict him" and he continued to practice.<sup>29</sup>

### Labor-Contracting Office

While social life in these Chinese communities was critical for the immigrants who longed for the routines and traditions of home, another equally if not more important factor in the lives of immigrants was job opportunities. Most immigrants who labored for non-Chinese companies were contracted out with the assistance of a Chinese labor contractor. The contractor served as a middle person for the Chinese laborers and had a clear understanding of both the English language and business etiquette. In the sometimes hostile labor climate of the United States, these contractors also helped Chinese protect themselves against unfair labor practices and lost wages.

In John Day, Lung On served as the primary labor contractor from the late 1890s to the early 1900s. Lung On, with his English-language and business skills, helped many Chinese obtain jobs in mines, logging camps, ranches, and restaurants. When a dispute arose, Lung On often stepped in to help find a solution to the problem. Furthermore, when Chinese were not paid due compensation for their labor, Lung On served as a surety in court cases; he supported fellow Chinese in such cases both financially and with his spoken testimony when he vouched for fellow immigrants in court. Although many labor contractors charged fees for their services, it is not clear if Lung On did. In fact, like many businesses in company towns in the West, Lung On would have profited from supplying the new laborers, thus recovering his costs indirectly.<sup>30</sup>

By the 1880s, court cases against Chinese in the West began to increase in number. Generally, these cases concerned theft and nonviolent crimes by Chinese. However, many others, especially in urban areas, dealt with cases of habeas corpus. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and subsequent anti-Chinese exclusion and restrictive immigration acts through 1924, severely limited the number of Chinese entering the United States. When the immigration officials (in the 1880s, collectors of customs at each port) denied the Chinese entry, some of the immigrants challenged the decision by filing petitions for *writs of habeas corpus* and alleged that the immigrant had the right to land and was being detained unlawfully. *Habeas corpus* became a symbol of the Chinese struggle against the racist exclusionary laws (until 1924 the Chinese were the only nationality to fall in this category). In John Day, immigration restriction posed a legitimate threat to Chinese trying to enter the United States as laborers as well as to those who were trying to return to the states after visits to China.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. The 1910 census manuscript listed him as the only Chinese doctor in John Day.

<sup>30</sup> Sue Fawn Chung, telephone interview by David Louter, November 1, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002),

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## Immigration Assistance

As local leader of the district association, Lung On provided assistance to newly arrived Chinese as well as to those who were seeking permission to enter the United States. In the late 1880s and 1890s, Lung On provided documents that would help Chinese immigrants pass the rigid customs inspections that plagued the Chinese at every port of entry along the West Coast.<sup>32</sup> Lung On wrote detailed letters and shipped them to China from the building's post office that described the numerous questions that Chinese were expected to answer when they arrived at port. His letters also schooled Chinese on how to answer customs officials' questions so immigrants could ensure safe passage to the United States. In his struggle to help immigrants, he aided both his own family members and the friends and associates of other Chinese in John Day.

## Religious Center

As a hub of Chinese social activity, the Kam Wah Chung Company, and Ing Hay in particular, provided important religious services. Chinese religion is a diverse mixture of beliefs. Daoism, Buddhism, and the religious aspects of Confucianism are combined with local folk beliefs and practices to form the backbone of Chinese religion. Unlike western religions, eastern religions often are not exclusionary but incorporate different belief systems. The four character phrases on the sides of the altar are meant to bring good fortune. The burning of incense and offerings of food (usually fruit) and drink (in the teacups) demonstrated respect for the deities and ancestors at the small altar behind the kitchen. Many religious artifacts were found in the Kam Wah Chung Company building.

At one time, John Day's Chinese community had an established "joss" house that served as both community meeting house and religious temple. As the town's Chinese population waned, however, the shrine was moved from the temple to the Kam Wah Chung Company building (after 1900). Here, Ing Hay, a Buddhist, performed rituals for Buddhist immigrants. The shrine stood in a small room complete with ornate, brocade curtains and a small seated image of Buddha. Ing Hay carefully tended the small altar and placed daily offerings of food and incense before the shrine. For those immigrants seeking religious leadership, Ing Hay offered his services.

For Chinese seeking other forms of religious guidance, Ing Hay could provide a variety of other religious traditions including divining sticks, the *I-Ching*, and more methods of fortune telling.<sup>33</sup> Everyone, from immigrant miners to Chinese businessmen from across the region wrote to the Kam Wah Chung Company for spiritual guidance, and those in and around the store frequented the building to worship according to their specific religions. Ing Hay's services provided an additional source of revenue. Worshippers often sent money to remodel the shrine, and they also purchased incense and other supplies. And when they came to pay homage or they wished to be blessed, donations would be given in gratitude.<sup>34</sup>

Lung On and Ing Hay also played prominent roles in the observance of traditional burial rites that formed the backbone of lineage associations in China. For Chinese families, proper burial arrangements were essential for the wellbeing of both living and deceased members of a family. Numerous generations of Chinese were

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<sup>32</sup> For more on Chinese exclusion and entry to the U.S. in the era of exclusion, see Lucy Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigration and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), and Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Barlow and Richardson, *China Doctor of John Day*, 30-32. For more on popular Chinese religion see David Johnson, ed., *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Culture: Five Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> Chai-Lin Chen, "The Golden Flower of Prosperity," 11.

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expected to be buried in shared plots in specific burial arrangements. For Chinese immigrants who died while laboring in the United States, this customary observance was particularly problematic. To assure that proper burial rites were observed and the bones of dead Chinese were returned to China for proper burial, immigrants supported one another after death. This connection was documented in letters left behind at the Kam Wah Chung building. A telegram remarked, "I am shocked by the telephone call from Lung On that our friend Kung-lin was shot and killed by an American... Enclosed is \$30; I am sending it to help with the expenses of his funeral."<sup>35</sup> On several occasions, Chinese in and around John Day donated money to organizers who were preparing to send the bones of deceased Chinese back to family in China.

In addition to burial rites, there were certain responsibilities that Chinese were expected to address while living overseas. Despite their physical distance from home, immigrants were nonetheless expected to participate in the maintenance of family burial plots and family temples back in China. In keeping with its function as a religious and postal center, the Kam Wah Chung Company aided Chinese in respecting these traditional responsibilities. A letter located in the Kam Wah Chung post office attests to the responsibilities that often arose from home. "Yesterday we were informed...that the tomb of our great-Grandfather is being rebuilt so that his descendants might be prosperous. Each member at home is going to contribute from four to six dollars, but the money is still not enough, so we fellows in America should offer our shares."<sup>36</sup>

For years, the Kam Wah Chung Company served as communication center for Chinese immigrants who wanted to stay in touch with relatives overseas. It was also used as a temporary stopover for Chinese immigrants. In the 1890s, Ing Hay and Lung On added on to their store erecting a second story for boarders as new mining discoveries and railroad construction temporarily increased the population in the region. However, the use of the upper floor as living quarters never materialized; the upper story was only used as additional storage space for the business.

## THE CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Chinese were not considered a welcomed addition to American society. Beginning in the 1850s, numerous laws taxed Chinese for their businesses, their participation in labor, and even, it seemed, for the air they breathed.<sup>37</sup> In California, the Cubic Air Ordinance gave law enforcement officials the right to jail immigrants who did not have at least 500 cubic feet of air in their living quarters. In Oregon, "An act to tax and protect Chinamen mining in Oregon" was passed in 1860, and required a set fee to be paid yearly by Chinese for their work in independent mining endeavors. Another law required that Chinese pay \$50 a month for the privilege of "trading, buying, and selling goods, chattels, merchandise and all kinds of livestock; and every kind of trade and barter among themselves."<sup>38</sup> Other familiar legislation further affected Chinese immigration. The Page Law of 1875 barred the importation of women (particularly Chinese women) into the United States for the purpose of prostitution. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred the entry of Chinese laborers to the United States for ten years, and the Scott Act of 1888 made it unlawful for any Chinese laborer to enter the country who had not been a resident within the United States prior to the passage of the act. Furthermore, all certificates that were issued prior to the passage of the Scott Act that had granted certain Chinese merchants permission to reenter the

<sup>35</sup> *Kam Wah Chung Collection*, microfilm 74, reel 3, Oregon Historical Society.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* For more on burial rites and traditions in China see, Johnson, *Ritual and Scripture*; Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, eds., *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Maurice Freedman, *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979).

<sup>37</sup> For more on specific laws directed against Chinese see, Charles J. McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle Against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> Jerry Easterling, "The Chinese Laborer in Oregon," *Statesman Journal*, July 17, 1977, p. 7.

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United States after traveling abroad were declared null and void. Finally, the Geary Act of 1892 served as a ten-year extension clause to the original 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The 1924 Immigration Act incorporated earlier Chinese exclusion and restrictive measures, making it impossible for Chinese to immigrate legally since “aliens ineligible to citizenship” (the Chinese) were denied entry into the United States. These exclusionary laws affected Chinese communities around the West including John Day.

## URBANIZATION AND THOSE WHO STAYED BEHIND

With the passage of these laws, Chinese immigration decreased dramatically in the 1880s and 1890s. Chinese already residing in the country were directly affected as well. Concurrently, the downturn in the mining, railroad, and road-building industries in rural regions encouraged the immigration of Chinese to larger urban areas during the last decades of the nineteenth century. For John Day, this meant a decrease in its Chinese population. The 1880 census reports 358 Chinese living in John Day (315 employed as miners) with a total of 905 Chinese living in Grant County. By 1890, the number of Chinese residing in Grant County had fallen by almost two-thirds to 326 residents. Statewide, the census showed a Chinese population of 9,540 with the vast majority of Chinese living in the urban center of Portland. By 1900, 10,397 Chinese lived in Oregon while Grant County only registered 114 Chinese immigrants. There were about 100 Chinese living in John Day circa 1900.<sup>39</sup> An early account states: “At the present there are perhaps a hundred Chinamen in John Day. They have their own stores, three in number, and the community is apart from the main town. The inhabitants of this quaint settlement are orderly and apparently contended, and while, as is their way, they do not mingle with Americans nor do they adopt American Manners and customs, they are not considered a detriment to the town.”<sup>40</sup>

This downward trend in John Day’s Chinese population follows the same pattern found in the other western states. Many rural Chinese residents moved to urban areas like Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco to find jobs, search for more social interaction, and to marry. By 1910, there were only 47 registered Chinese in Grant County; Lung On and Ing Hay were two of these remaining immigrants. Lung On and Ing Hay were unusual in their insistence on staying in John Day. They succeeded in breaking through many racial barriers that segregated the Chinese community. Ing Hay did this through his medical practice and Lung On through his extensive real estate ventures and early car dealership. As the local Chinese population declined, the building served primarily as the center for Ing Hay’s medical practice and general store, and the headquarters for Lung On’s small business empire.<sup>41</sup>

The general store continued to prosper after 1900 as shown in the correspondence and invoices left in the collection. The partners began to attract non-Chinese patrons. Lung On and Ing Hay expanded their building circa 1917 by constructing an addition to the north side that served as Lung On’s bedroom and a storage area. The addition attests to the stability and prosperity of the various businesses the partners engaged in.<sup>42</sup> Even with the decrease in the Chinese population in John Day, the Kam Wah Chung Company was still the heart of the community’s “Chinatown.” The non-Chinese community frequented the settlement more, and in the 1920s, was active in the Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations which in the early years had been shunned by non-Chinese residents. This acceptance of Chinese festivals and celebrations showed the changing attitudes of Caucasians towards the Chinese residents of John Day.

<sup>39</sup> “1870-1910 United States Census, Oregon,” United States Bureau of the Census, 1850-1890, Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, accessed November 8, 2004, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

<sup>40</sup> *An Illustrated History of Baker, Grant, Malheur and Harney Counties* (Portland: Western Historical Publishing, 1902), 443.

<sup>41</sup> Barlow and Richardson, *China Doctor of John Day*, 71.

<sup>42</sup> Chai-Lin Chen, “The Golden Flower of Prosperity,” 8.

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Lung On, the main business person for the Kam Wah Chung Company, was involved in many other ventures including buying and selling real estate, establishing one of the first automobile dealership in the region, and investing in the cattle industry. Lung On's "hobbies" (horse racing, gambling, and womanizing) often provoked arguments between the two owners. However, Lung On became a well-respected citizen in John Day, and was known for his skill in business practices and command of the English language. Lung On also made sure the Kam Wah Chung Company building was equipped with the latest in modern conveniences. The store had an indoor water pump, phonograph, telephone, radio, and was one of the first buildings in the county to get electricity.

Ing "Doc" Hay's medical practice also continued to grow after the turn of the century as his ability gained recognition with both the Chinese and non-Chinese communities. Ing Hay became known throughout eastern and central Oregon for his ability as a herbalist and pulsologist. Invoices in the collection dating from 1900 into the 1920s showed that his supplies for his medical practice gradually gained prominence over the general store merchandise.<sup>43</sup> There were over 500 various herbs and medicines still in the collection used by the doctor to treat his patients. "Doc" Hay was known for his treatment of many diseases that traditional practitioners could not cure. His practice even extended outside the immediate environs of John Day treating patients as far north as Walla Walla, Washington, the Nevada border to the south, Portland on the west, and Payette, Idaho, on the east.<sup>44</sup> Patients in Seattle, Astoria and Klamath Falls in Oregon also requested his services. A doctor in San Francisco also consulted with Ing Hay.<sup>45</sup> "Doc" Hay continued to practice medicine into the 1930s even though his eyesight was failing.

Like many Chinese who stayed in the United States, Ing Hay and Lung On faced different problems than those who returned to China. For instance, Lung On, the son of a wealthy and well-connected family in China, chose to stay in the United States rather than return to traditional life in China. He was scolded by family in China and received numerous letters chastising him for his lack of concern for his wife and child's well-being. Ing Hay, like Lung On, had married before coming to the United States, but never returned to his family in China. Many Chinese faced similar anger from family who had expected their sons to return to their responsibilities as leaders of families in China. Like many immigrants in Chinese communities throughout the West who remained in the United States, Ing Hay and Lung On lived as single men with families in China until their deaths. Because of various exclusionary laws and lack of resources, few Chinese women were able to immigrate to the United States, especially to isolated rural communities like John Day.

The businesses of Ing Hay and Lung On continued through the Great Depression. After a brief illness, Lung On died in the Kam Wah Chung Company building in 1940. A testament to Lung On's business prowess can be seen in his estate that was estimated at over \$90,000; a substantial amount in 1940. His estate was left to his lifetime partner, Ing Hay. Hay continued to run the business until 1948, when he fell and broke his hip. He was no longer able to run the store and moved to a nursing home in Portland, Oregon, where he died four years later. Upon Hay's death in 1954, half of his estate was to go to Lung On's daughter; however, she never received her inheritance because of adverse trade relations and political tensions with China in the 1950s.<sup>46</sup> Instead, the Kam Wah Chung Company building and the rest of Hay's estate went to his nephew Bob Wah who had come to John Day to apprentice and help Ing Hay after the death of Lung On. In 1955, Bob Wah donated the building to the city for use as a museum to interpret the Chinese history of the area. For almost 20 years, nothing was done. The building was locked and remained unopened, preserving the collection in the dry climate of eastern Oregon. In the 1970s, the building was rediscovered, restored, and opened as a museum. The Kam Wah Chung

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>44</sup> Barlow and Richardson, *China Doctor of John Day*, 60.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Hartwig, "Kam Wah Chung Company Building."

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Company building and artifacts not only tell the history of Chinese immigrants in the gold mining region of John Day but also the story of Chinese-Americans who helped build the American West.<sup>47</sup>

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COLLECTION**

The Kam Wah Chung Company building and its contents are the greatest single surviving group of materials known dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that reflect the lives of the Chinese immigrants in the American West.<sup>48</sup> The collection includes artifacts and documents dating from the 1860s to the 1940s that have been studied by scholars from the United States and abroad. The written documents in the collection augment the other artifacts in the building and provide insights into the cultural, spiritual, social, and professional lives of these early Chinese immigrants. Most herbal stores of this time period have either lost their collections or they have been substantially altered. The only other Chinese herbal store comparable to Kam Wah Chung is the Chew Kee Store in Fiddletown, California. From 1913 to 1965, however, its owner converted it to a residence, modifying its interior and eliminating its herbal pharmacy. Although restored in the 1980s, the Chew Kee Store's collection, including its herbal medicines and other artifacts, is neither as extensive nor as intact as Kam Wah Chung's. Kam Wah Chung's herbal medicines are especially important because they appear to have been frozen in time, protected in a time capsule when the shop closed in the mid-twentieth century. Active Chinese herbal medicine stores in Asia and the United States, such as those in the large urban "Chinatowns" of San Francisco and other major cities, change through time and cannot acquire some of the products readily available between 1880 and 1950. Moreover, as noted earlier, military conflicts and trade policies severed the ties between Chinese herbal stores in the United States and China around the middle of the twentieth century further enhancing the Kam Wah Chung collection's importance. Finally, the arid environment of the John Day country contributed to the preservation of the Kam Wah Chung herbal collection. Here one can find perhaps the most extant collection of Chinese herbal remedies dating from the late nineteenth century.

Commerce: The Kam Wah Chung Company served as a primary dry goods provider for the Chinese and non-Chinese population in eastern Oregon. In addition to the imported traditional goods and foodstuffs, the store carried basic western items that non-Chinese farmers and ranchers purchased. Shelves and cabinets in the general store were lined with a variety of sundries, potions, groceries, recreational games, and items such as beer and cigarettes. The inclusion of American products like lard, soap, and maple syrup indicated adjustments made to the host society and the requirement to deal with American wholesalers, which many shopkeepers in San Francisco's Chinatown did not have to do.

In addition to the herbal medicines, the Kam Wah Chung collection includes ledger books, receipts, and letters that provide a broad understanding of the company's operations and its multi-faceted role in the community. They indicate the distribution of goods, where goods were purchased, and how they were delivered. Considered apart from the herbal medicines, these business records are one of the best collections of this type of material and show the link between urban and rural Chinese communities as it served as a middleman in trade goods. There are some fragmentary business records of a Chinese merchandising firm held in the University of California's Asian American collection, but Kam Wah Chung's records are more extensive, cover a longer time period, and are more complete. The \$23,000 worth of uncashed checks found in the building indicates the extent of the sales area, the banking establishments in the region dealing with Kam Wah Chung, and the types of patrons who used the company's services.

<sup>47</sup> Barlow and Richardson, *China Doctor of John Day*, 93-97.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

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**Labor Contractors:** The Kam Wah Chung Company served as a labor contracting center for decades and facilitated deals for Chinese laborers looking for work. As labor contractors, the Kam Wah Chung Company also served as a mediator for unfair treatment of and unpaid wages to Chinese laborers. The subculture of Chinese labor history is evident in court documents and letters in the collection requesting Chinese laborers on ranches, in personal homes, and as workers in a variety of labor-based industries. This work culture helped many immigrants earn the capital necessary to live in the United States, travel back home, and support family abroad.

**Health/Medicine:** Ing Hay became known as the “China Doctor” of John Day. His small apothecary was stocked with over 500 kinds of herbs and medicines that were mixed together to form his remedies. Documents in the collection indicate the source of the herbs and the wide distribution of his remedies. This collection has been catalogued and studied and is used to interpret traditional Chinese medicine. The artifacts such as the abacus and scales in the herb room represent the tools used to weigh and sell these remedies. The patient receipts, checks, and letters show that Ing Hay initially served the medical needs of the local Chinese, and later gained the respect of and served the needs of the Caucasian community. Eye testing equipment and lenses found in the collection indicate that Ing Hay may have also served as a local optometrist. A small pillow and desk in the front room were used by Ing Hay for his pulsology readings, and medical books in the collection attest to Ing Hay’s commitment to his profession. His collection stands today as one of the best known traditional collections in the United States.

**Social History, Culture, and Religion:** A glimpse into the social, spiritual, and cultural lives of Chinese immigrants can be seen in the collection left in the Kam Wah Chung Company building. Letters from Chinese laborers to their wives, ledgers, gambling records, papers indicating Ing Hay’s presence as a spiritual leader, and postmarked envelopes help interpret the Chinese experience in the American West.

Chinese in John Day and throughout eastern Oregon are emblematic of the transfer of traditional Chinese social organizations to the United States. Traditional social organizations helped unite immigrants and created stability in a foreign land. Letters in the collection document the struggles and concerns of these Chinese immigrants and document how they stayed connected to their relatives and heritage in China.

Chinese retained elaborate traditional ceremonies and religious beliefs while residing in the United States. A religious temple and smaller shrines in various rooms located in the Kam Wah Chung Company building provided a variety of traditional religious opportunities including Buddhism, Daoism, and fortune telling. Offerings on the shrines are still intact in the building, increasing our understanding of how these shrines were used. Inspirational affirmations in Chinese script can be seen above the doorways and on the walls.

Activities that provided the backdrop to socializing in Chinese culture also existed within the Kam Wah Chung building. Traditional festivals, and religious and social activities provided stability and security to immigrants while residing far from their homeland. The shrines, games, gambling material, opium smoking paraphernalia, alcohol, firecrackers, letters, and receipts left in the building indicate the types of social and cultural activities shared by the patrons and residents of the Kam Wah Chung Company.

**Daily Lives:** The Kam Wah Chung Company building and its collection provide insight into how Ing Hay and Lung On lived in and used the building. Each room’s function is clearly defined. The majority of the furniture is hand-made. Small stools and benches fitted together with wooden pegs and tapered upright supports (Chinese construction technique), and tables outfit the rooms. A large chair in the corner of the front room is strategically placed by the wood-heating stove that was patented in 1865. The dimly lit rooms have posters, calendars, and advertisements on the plank walls chronicling the history and interests of the owners. A cabinet

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radio, literary books, phonograph, and records show their interest in music and the arts. American and Chinese food and utensils are seen in the kitchen that show how Ing Hay and Lung On combined both Western and Eastern cultures. The indoor wood chopping block and water pump, the cleavers in every room, and the shuttered windows provide clues to their concern for security and safety. Candles, kerosene, gas fixture, and electric lights in the building show the progression of technologies, which were adopted by Ing Hay and Lung On. Even though a modern rodent trap sits by the kitchen door, a square cut from the corner of the door allowed cats to pass through doorways in search of mice.

**COMPARATIVE STUDY**

Summary: The Kam Wah Chung Company building with its extensive material collection is a nationally significant historic resource in the West and the United States that dates from the post-Civil War development period, a time when the future of the West was the future of the nation. This comparative study lists pre-1900 buildings in the West that were used as Chinese herb shops and/or general stores: only above ground resources and collections, are included in the study. Other significant types of Chinese-related buildings such as extant temples, are not discussed as part of this study. However, it should be noted that both temples and structures like the Kam Wah Chung Company building represent critical aspects of Chinese life: the spiritual and religious on the one hand, and mercantilism and medical on the other. The emphasis here is on the latter. For comparative purposes, eight western states (California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, and Montana) were included in the study. The reason for selecting these states reflects the fact that nearly all of the Chinese in the United States resided in these eight states in the late nineteenth century. In 1870, for example, 99% of the Chinese in the United States lived in these states. The percentage dropped to 95% in 1880 and 87% in 1890.

<b>Date Built</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>State (City)</b>	<b>Collection Intact in Building</b>
1851	Sun Sun Wo Company	California (Coulterville)	No
1850s	Chew Kee Store Fiddletown Historic District	California (Fiddletown)	Yes
1854	Sing Kee Store	California (Volcano)	No
1858	Man Lee/Wah Hop Dry Store	California (Coloma)	No
1866	Kam Wah Chung Company Listed in the National Register	Oregon (John Day)	Yes
1870s	Chinese Store	California (Dutch Flats)	No
1870s	L. T. Sue Herb Company	California (Hanford)	No
1874	Ah Louis Store	California (San Luis Obispo)	No
1870s- 1880s	Ming Chinese Store	California (Plymouth)	No
1879	Vee Tai Mercantile Company	Washington (Port)	No

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		Townsend)	
1880-1943	New Chinatown Historic District	Oregon (Portland)	No
1883-1930	San Diego Asian/Pacific Thematic Nomination	California (San Diego)	No
1899	Wah Chong Tai Company Butte National Landmark District	Montana (Butte)	No

**Table 2:** List of Chinese-related herb/general store buildings in the western states studied. Individual descriptions of each state's resources follow this table.

**Table 1.** Moreover, the selection of these sites underscores their role in the history of the nation's westward expansion since all of these structures were built between 1850 and 1900.<sup>49</sup>

The comparative study shows only a few buildings of this type remaining in the West that illustrate the culture and lives of early Chinese immigrants. From the eight states studied, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming have no extant historic Chinese buildings like the Kam Wah Chung Company building. Washington and Montana have extant buildings representing once thriving Chinese communities; however, these structures do not have intact material collections. California has the greatest number of extant resources similar to this kind of property in the western states. Only the Chew Kee Store in Fiddletown, California, includes a diverse material collection; however, the Kam Wah Chung Company building contains a more extensive and complete collection depicting early Chinese culture and business in the West.

### Description of Comparable Resources:

These resources are itemized in Table 2.

#### California

- 1851 - Sun Sun Wo Company, Coulterville, Mariposa County. Built in 1851, by Mow Da Sun, the adobe general store was in continuous operation from 1851 to 1926. Some of the original shelves and counters are still in the store but the collection is no longer intact.
- 1850s - Chew Kee Store, Fiddletown, Amador County. The Chew Kee Store, constructed in the 1850s, is a one-story rammed-earth building used as an herb shop and general store, and later as a residence. The store was thought to have been initially occupied by herb doctor, Yee Fong (Fung) Cheung. By the 1880s, another Chinese-American, Chew Kee, ran a general store in the building selling groceries, dry goods, and herbs. Kee and his wife operated the store until the property was deeded to their adoptive son in 1913, Chow Chong Yow. Chow Chong Yow, also known as Jimmy Crow, used the building as his residence from 1913 until his death in 1965. In 1967, the building was conveyed to the State of California, and in the 1980s an archaeological investigation was concluded, restoration of the structure undertaken, and cataloging of the collection completed. The Chew Kee Store currently operates as a museum. The Chew Kee Store was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 as part of the Fiddletown Historic District and is listed as part of the Fiddletown California Historic Landmark No. 35.

<sup>49</sup> This comparative study was based on an analysis of records and data from a variety of resources including: State Historic Preservation Offices, historical societies and museums, university archives, scholars in Asian Studies, State Parks Departments, web sites referencing Chinese-American historic sites, the Asian American Comparative Collection's list of *Asian American Sites and Museum Exhibits in the Pacific Northwest and Great Basin* by Priscilla Wegars, and *Five Views: A History of Chinese Americans in California: Historic Sites*, California Department of Parks and Recreation (see reference section).

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The Chew Kee Store is similar to the Kam Wah Chung Company in that it functioned as an herb shop and general store. However, the Chew Kee Store differs from the Kam Wah Chung Company due to its use as a residence from 1913 to 1965. The building's conversion to a residence altered its interior and ended its operation as an herbal pharmacy. Compared to Kam Wah Chung, the Chew Kee Store's collection is limited. While it contains the artifacts of a Chinese doctor's office and general store, such as a wooden examining table and shelves for goods, the medicinal herbs are gone. Perhaps with the exception of a few representative samples, the herb drawers are empty. On the other hand, the Kam Wah Chung Company's collection is far more extensive reflecting an unbroken period of use as an herbal store and medical facility, as well as its multi-faceted historic use as a labor contracting office, general store, religious center, post-office, and residence.

- 1854 - Sing Kee Store, Volcano, Amador County. Built in 1854 by a non-Chinese resident, the building served as the Kee family's general store and medicinal herb shop from 1870 to 1905. There is no historic collection intact in the building.
- 1858 - Man Lee Store, and Wah Hop Dry Goods Store and Herbal Medicine Shop, Coloma, El Dorado County. Built in 1858, the Man Lee Store served as a banking and trading center, and the Wah Hop Store served as a general store and herb shop in the mining community. The stone buildings currently function as museums with gold mining exhibits and artifacts on display depicting pre-1900 Chinese life in Coloma. Located in Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park, the buildings were rehabilitated in 1958, outfitted with displays interpreting aspects of Chinese-American history, and opened as a museum. The displays and collections were created from a variety of Chinese collections; most of the artifacts are not directly associated with these two Chinese buildings/businesses.
- 1870s - Chinese Store, Dutch Flats, Placer County. The adobe warehouse/store was built in the 1870s in Dutch Flat's original Chinatown established in the 1850s by Chinese miners and railroad laborers. There is no intact historic collection associated with the building.
- 1870s - L. T. Sue Herb Company, Handford, Kings County. Erected after Hanford was established in the late 1870s, the brick building served as the herb store of the well-known herb doctor Lok Ting Sue who treated both non-Chinese and Chinese clients. There is no intact historic collection within the building although some artifacts saved from the store are located in the Chinese temple museum across the street.
- 1874 - Ah Louis Store, San Luis Obispo, San Luis Obispo County. Built in 1874, the Ah Louis Store was founded by On Wong who erected it as a store and labor contracting office. The Ah Louis Store is listed as a California State Historic Landmark and is still owned by the Louis family. The store has a collection of Chinese artifacts dating from the historic period. The Ah Louis Store's collection differs from the Kam Wah Chung in that the owners still actively buy, trade, and sell merchandise, and therefore, is not as intact a historic collection as the Kam Wah Chung Company's.
- 1870s/1880s - Ming Chinese Store, Plymouth, Amador County. The Ming family constructed the store of native stone and brick in the 1870s/1880s. There is no known historic collection intact in the building.
- 1883-1930 - San Diego, California, Asian Pacific Thematic National Register Historic District. The period of significance dates from 1883-1930 and contains buildings associated with Asian populations including Chinese-related buildings. The extant Chinese buildings, however, were not used as general stores/herb shops and reflect a later developmental period. For example, the Chinese Historical Society Museum is in a former missionary school.

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*Note:* San Francisco's "Chinatown" was rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake. These buildings do not represent the primary period of Chinese immigration. Although the town of Locke, California was constructed (1915) by Chinese agricultural workers, the buildings do not represent the primary period of Chinese immigration.

**Nevada**

- There are no documented Chinese related medicinal herb shop and/or general store buildings remaining in Nevada.

**Montana**

- 1899 - Wah Chong Tai Company, Butte, Silver Bow County, Montana. Seattle merchant Chin Chun Hock established the Wah Chong Tai Company in 1893. A new two-story building was erected in 1899 for the company and opened as a mercantile store selling Chinese and American goods. An herb shop was located in the back and a restaurant on the second floor. The Wah Chong Tai Company and the neighboring Mai Wah Noodle Parlor buildings are now being restored by the Mai Wah Society, Inc., to hold permanent and temporary exhibits to interpret Butte's Asian history. The material collection associated with the Wah Chong Tai Company is not intact. Part of the collection is housed in the Montana Historical Society, in Helena, and some of the original collection was sold. The Wah Chong Tai Company building also represents a later development period. The building is a part of the Butte Central Business District National Register District.

**Idaho**

- There are no documented Chinese herbal medicine shop and/or general store buildings still standing in Idaho. Artifacts (written material and inventory) from the Al Fong Herbal Medicine Shop are on exhibit and in the collection of the Idaho Historical Museum in Boise.

**Oregon**

- 1866 - Kam Wah Chung Company, John Day, Grant County. Subject building, circa 1866.
- 1880-1943 - New Chinatown, Portland. New Chinatown is located in Northwest Portland and has twenty-nine contributing historic buildings that date from 1880 to 1943 that are listed in the National Register as part of a district nomination. These buildings housed a variety of Chinese businesses including restaurants, laundries, bakeries, gambling houses, hotels, apartments, firecracker manufacturers, groceries, and benevolent societies. Representative of a larger urban Chinese (and Japanese) community, these buildings were constructed after the initial period of Chinese immigration associated when urban Chinese laborers were moving into larger towns to find work and a sense of community. According to local Chinese scholar and the National Register nomination, none of the buildings pre-date 1880 and have the kind of material collection similar to the Kam Wah Chung Company building. In other words, there are not historic collections like those of Kam Wah Chung. What one might find would be collections similar to other contemporary herb stores in the United States whose collections declined after World War II when the federal government banned all imports from China.<sup>50</sup>

**Utah**

- There are no documented Chinese medicinal herb and/or general store buildings still standing in Utah.

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<sup>50</sup> Phone interview with Suenn Ho, Assistant Professor in Portland's Urban Architecture Program at Portland State University, scholar in the study of "American Chinatowns," March 2002, Portland, Oregon, Kam Wah Chung Company Collection, Kam Wah Chung Company Building, John Day, Oregon.

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**Washington**

- 1879 - Vee Tai Mercantile Company, Port Townsend. The mercantile store, established in 1879 by the Ng family, became one of the largest groceries in Port Townsend in the 1890s. The multi-story, brick building was restored in the 1990s and represents the early Chinese community in Port Townsend. The building currently houses commercial businesses and does not have any of the original artifacts/collection associated with the Chinese community.

**Wyoming**

- There are no documented Chinese medicinal herb and/or general store buildings still standing in Wyoming.

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**Interviews**

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Boyd, Robert. Curator of Western Heritage. High Desert Museum, Bend, Oregon. Site visit, phone interview, and e-mail correspondence, October 2001 and March 2002.

Chace, Paul. Cultural Resource Consultant and Anthropologist, Escondido, California. E-mail correspondence, March 2002.

Cheung, Dr. Wai Tak. Herbalist and acupuncturists. Portland, Oregon. Phone interview, December 2002.

Chung, Sue Fawn. Associates Professor, Asian Studies, Department of History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. E-mail correspondence, March 2002.

Costello, Julia G., Ph.D. Foothill Resource Associates, Mokelumne, California. Phone interview about the Chew Kee Store in Fiddletown, California, March 2002.

Fisher, Robert. Collections Department, The Wing Luke Asian Museum. Seattle, Washington. Phone interview, March 2002.

Ho, Suenn. Assistant Professor, Urban Architecture Program, Portland State University. Portland, Oregon. Phone interview, March 2002.

Hobbs, Jo. Grants Manager, Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office. Phone interview, March 2002.

Houser, Michael. Architectural Historian and National and State Register Program Director, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. Olympia, Washington. Phone interview, March 2002.

Jausto, Shere. Historian, Montana State Historic Preservation Office. Helena, Montana. Phone interview, March 2001.

Jefferson County Historical Society. Port Townsend, Washington. Phone interview, March 2002.

Jensen, Cory. National Register Coordinator, Utah State Historic Preservation Office. Salt Lake City, Utah. Phone interview, March 2002.

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Leong, Mary. Active member of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, Portland, Oregon. Phone interview, December 2002.

MacIntosh, Heather. Preservation Advocate, Historic Seattle, Seattle, Washington. Phone interview, March 2002.

Michael Houser. Architectural Historian, Washington Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. Olympia, Washington. Phone interview, March 2002.

McCormick, Mary. Cultural Resource Specialist, Renewable Technologies, Inc. Butte, Montana. Phone interview, February 2002.

Michnimer, Carolyn. Curator of the Kam Wah Chung Museum for over 20 years, John Day, Oregon. Personal interview, November, 2001.

Ossa, Rebecca. Architectural Historian, Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. Phone interview, March 2001.

Proelss, Rachel. Asian Studies Office, University of Utah. Salt Lake City, Utah. E-mail correspondence, March 2002.

Sperry, Janet. Former Collection Manager/Registrar, Montana Historical Society. Helena, Montana. Phone interview, March 2002.

Stahli, Alfred F., A.I.A. Restoration Architect. Portland, Oregon. Personal interview, November 2001.

Veerkamp, Anthony. National Trust for Historic Preservation, Western Office, San Francisco, California. Phone interview, March 2002.

Wah, Dr. Ed. Relative of Ing Hay, previous resident of John Day. Portland, Oregon. Phone interview, December 2002.

Wegars, Priscilla, Ph.D. Asian American Comparative Collection. University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. Phone interview, March 2000.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

Previously Listed in the National Register. NR # 73001575, 03/20/1973

Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.

Designated a National Historic Landmark.

Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #

Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

State Historic Preservation Office

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- Other State Agency  
 Federal Agency  
 Local Government  
 University  
 Other (Specify Repository):

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: 0.42 acres

UTM References:	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Easting</b>	<b>Northing</b>
	11	344280	4920040

Verbal Boundary Description: The Kam Wah Chung Company building is sited on a parcel of land lying in the Southwest quarter of the Southwest quarter of Section 23, Township 12 South, Range 31 East, W. M. in John Day, Grant County, Oregon. The parcel is described as follows: Beginning at a point 355.0 feet North and 181.0 feet West of the Southeast corner of the SW1/4 of said Section 23; thence West, 150.0 feet; thence South 15° East, 145.56 feet; thence East, 112.33 feet; thence North, 140.6 feet to the place of beginning.

Boundary Justification: The Kam Wah Chung property includes the area owned by the State of Oregon, Parks and Recreation Department that includes the Kam Wah Chung Company building and its immediate surroundings. More specifically, the boundary embraces the extant historic property that was historically operated as the Kam Wah Chung Company.

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK  
September 20, 2005