



Ging Wei Wong (黃景煒) was born into a market gardening family in Edmonton, Alberta. He has been working on his family tree since 1990 after the passing of his parents who left Toishan, Guangdong Province, China for a better life in "Gold Mountain" (Canada). He retired after a 35-year career in air traffic services. He is the Associate Producer of the award-winning documentary film *Lost Years: A People's Struggle for Justice* (2011). Wei was a presenter at the 2015 and 2019 Alberta Genealogical Society Conferences in Edmonton and was the winner of their Peter Staveley Memorial Award in 2018.

His writings have been published in the Alberta Genealogical Society's journal *Relatively Speaking: The Forgotten History of the Chinese in Canada* August 2015, Volume 43, Number 3. (Also published in *Families*, Ontario Genealogical Society, November 2015, Volume 54, Number 4)
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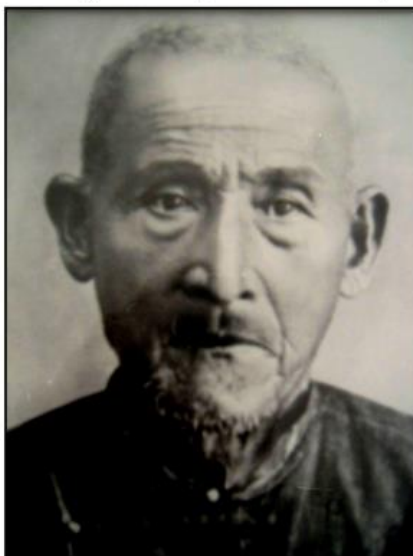
Chew Ging to Edmonton: Journey to the West

by Wei Wong

Almost 100 years ago, my father stepped onto Canadian soil for the first time. This is a story of how our family got its start in Canada.

In 1976 after retiring from our family's market gardening business, my parents Wong Bark Ging and Young See took a long-awaited month-long vacation to visit China with a tour group of 15 others from Edmonton. They had anticipated this trip for a long time. He was 68; she was 64.

When the opportunity arose to join a Chinese-speaking tour group from Edmonton, they started the paperwork in earnest to enable them to visit China – obtaining photographs, applications for Canadian passports, Alien's Application Form for Entry or Transit Visas via Canada Post to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Canada, in Ottawa, and the necessary vaccinations for travel.



Wong Lup Sing, China.

If it was a fascinating trip of discovery, it was also sobering to realize that it would be their last trip back to their country of birth. In September 1976, they returned from their trip with an intriguing item – a black and white photograph of my paternal grandfather, Wong Lup Sing, someone whom I had never met nor seen before. This became the earliest photograph I have of an ancestor on my family tree.

In fact, I never met any of my grandparents, but this one artifact ignited my curiosity to learn more about our family. My research over many years at family gatherings of one kind or another and chatting with older cousins, uncovered that my paternal great-grandfather Wong Doo Shew was believed to have been born around the time of the China's First

Opium War (1840-1842) when Britain flooded the country with opium which begat an addiction crisis in the Chinese population. Military confrontation with the Qing Dynasty resulted in the British forces shutting down Chinese ports and Hong Kong was ceded to them.

Wong Doo Shew had a son, Wong Lup Sing, followed by four daughters. My paternal grandfather, Wong Lup Sing (1858-1941) lived in our rural ancestral village of Chew Ging, Guangdong Province in China. The GPS coordinates for Chew Ging (潮境) are 22.275111, 112.668313. They lived in a country in turmoil, with war and political unrest, foreign interference, rebellion, and civil war. Canada, of course, had its own disorder and disturbances.

China	Canada
1840-1842 The First Opium War	1858 Gold Discovered in Fraser Valley
1851-1864 The Taiping Rebellion	1880-1885 Canadian Pacific Railway completed thru BC
1856-1860 The Second Opium War	1885 Head Tax imposed on Chinese immigrants \$50
1894 The First Sino-Japanese War	Mid-1880s completion of railway Chinese move eastward
1899 The Boxer Rebellion	1900 Head Tax on Chinese immigrants \$100
1912 The Republic of China	1903 Head Tax on Chinese raised to \$500
1921 The Communist Party of China	1914-1918 First World War
1927 Shanghai Massacre	1923 Chinese Immigration Act banning Chinese immigration
1928 Reunification	1929-1939 Depression Years
1931 Civil War	1939-1945 Second World War
1937-1945 The Second Sino-Japanese War	1947 Chinese Exclusion Act repealed
1949 People's Republic of China	1959 RCMP investigation of Chinese immigrants
1958-1962 Great Leap Forward	1960 Chinese Adjustment Statement Program - Amnesty
1966-1976 Cultural Revolution	1967 Chinese Immigration Act revised

My grandfather Wong Lup Sing was born in 1858, in the midst of the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) when internal revolt was fervent against the Qing Dynasty. That same year gold was discovered in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia, Canada.

The news of gold in Canada spurred the interest of many Chinese families who were desperate to escape the political turmoil, droughts, floods, famine, poverty, crime, opium addiction and uncertain future of China. So many young Chinese men, with the means, left China to seek their fortune in Canada. Mining companies recruited Chinese labourers and paid their passage but terms of repayment were attached to their contracts. When the reality sank in that only a very few Chinese prospectors made it rich, the word reached the homeland but by then the Second Opium War (1856-1860) was having its negative impact as Britain and France invaded Guangzhou in southern China and advanced north into Beijing.

Conditions became more desperate for residents of Guangdong Province. For those Chinese dreaming of a better future, they were persuaded by recruiters from the Canadian Pacific Railway that their best opportunity to turn around their fortunes was employment as labourers to complete the national railroad through British Columbia. Between 1880 and 1885 a large influx of some 17,000 Chinese labourers helped complete the railroad but many got sick or died doing the most dangerous work.

The Canadian government had a hand in duping the Chinese. In the eyes of the government, the Chinese were looked upon only as a source of cheap labour. After the railway was completed they were no longer welcome in British Columbia or Canada for that matter. Many couldn't afford to return home so they eked out a living by operating hand laundries, restaurants or became merchants. Many of the displaced Chinese moved slowly eastward into Alberta and beyond.

In 1885, immediately after the railway was completed the Canadian government passed the Chinese Immigration Act that imposed a \$50 Head Tax to discourage any more Chinese wanting to come to Canada. In 1890 Wong Doo Shew died. As tradition had it, his oldest and only son, Wong Lup Sing, now 32 years old, would be responsible for his family.



Canadian Immigration Certificate issued to Wong Bark Ging dated August 20, 1921.

In 1894, the Qing Dynasty clashed with the Japanese in the first Sino-Japanese War. Taiwan was handed over to Japan and internal upheaval diminished the dynasty's hold on its people. The Boxer Rebellion saw a secret society known as the Boxers under the rule of the Empress Dowager slaughtering foreigners. China lost the conflict against eight European countries that sent troops.

Wong Lup Sing fathered two daughters and then a son, my father, Wong Bark Ging (黃柏振) who was born in 1905. Desperate families continued to scrounge up the means to finance passage for their sons to Canada. However, in 1900 Canada had doubled the Head Tax to \$100. Even that did not put a stop to Chinese immigration, so the tax was again increased five-fold to \$500 in 1903. A few categories were exempt: merchants, scholars, clergy and students; everyone else had to pay the onerous tax.

Uprisings continued in China when 15 provinces declared their independence from the weakened Qing Dynasty. Sun Yat-Sen, a western-educated revolutionary, took control in 1912 establishing the Republic of China. The First World War raged from 1914-1918.

By 1919, Wong Lup Sing had six children with Wong Bark Ging being his oldest son.

The First World War ended with the Treaty of Versailles but the domestic movement protesting the Chinese government resulted in the formation of the Communist Party of China in 1921. A village neighbour, Wong Check Suen had been somewhat successful after sojourning to Canada and had returned to the village of Chew Ging. If the headlines of the day were not enough, the poor weather conditions affected the agrarian societies of the countryside, where starvation led to theft and clashes between landlords and clans. So, Wong Lup Sing discussed with his neighbour, Wong Check Suen, how his eldest son, Wong Bark Ging might seek out better opportunities to help his family. The Chinese tradition since time immemorial was that the oldest son would take care of his parents in their old age and take over the responsibility of the family if the parents were to die prematurely – a heavy burden indeed.

Wong Check Suen had settled in Vancouver, British Columbia as a merchant. After agreeing to help Wong Lup Sing's impoverished family, they made plans for Bark Ging to leave Chew Ging village in 1921. At the age of 13, Wong Bark Ging left his entire world and family in the ancestral village and made his way to Hong Kong. There must have been some sort of farewell to see him off, and perhaps some connections and support from Wong Check Suen's network that eased his departure from his family.

It is not known how he paid his passage. In the day, the immediate family would pay for passage if they had the means, but if the cash was not available as might very well have been the case, then money would be borrowed from extended family members. If that was not sufficient, then money may have been borrowed from clan societies or community members knowing full well that these loans must be repaid. Regardless, Wong Bark Ging boarded the *Empress of Asia* owned by Canadian Pacific Steamships that sailed the Pacific Ocean taking him to find his fortune to help his family, to Canada – referred to as *Gold Mountain* by Chinese dreamers.



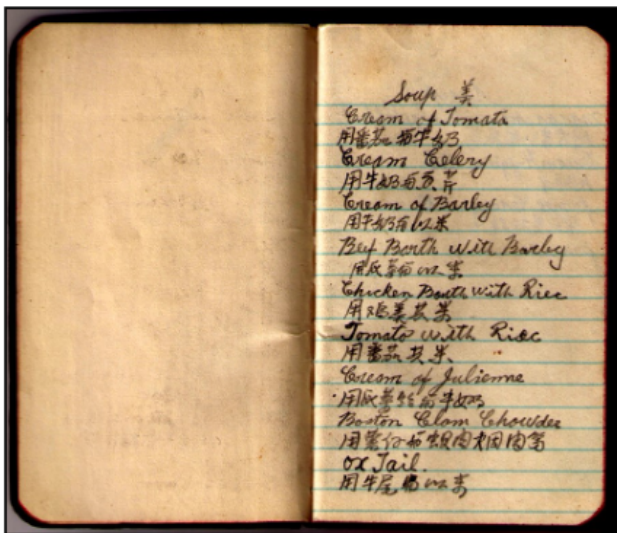
Wong Bark Ging's suitcase believed to contain his belongings on his trip across the Pacific Ocean.

A glimpse of what the voyage might have been like from Paul Yee's book, *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver*, Douglas & McIntyre, 1988:

"...The first step away from the village led to Hong Kong...At the docks of Hong Kong, authorities checked the immigrant's belongings and fumigated them with foul-smelling sulphur...The voyage across the Pacific took one month...the passengers slept, ate, and gambled to pass the time. The meals covered by the passage fee were badly prepared...There was fish and all kinds of things, but it wasn't cooked very well...If you weren't seasick, you could visit around the ship. If you were seasick, you slept."

"When the ship finally docked in Vancouver, a stony welcome awaited arrivals at the immigration station on the waterfront at the north end of Burrard Street. Immigrants have few fond memories of their enforced stay there while officials checked their papers and their health...We were like prisoners. There were bars in the windows. There was roll call, bed call, a time to sleep, a time to wake up, just like in the army camp. The Chinese called it "the piglet pen." There were guards to keep you in line; you couldn't go outside the compound without permission, and visitors were regulated. The food was very bad: generally there was a dish of soup, then they used the same meat from the soup and mixed it with vegetables and served it with rice. That was supposed to be Chinese food. The station was noisy too, with trains going back and forth all day long."

Wong Bark Ging arrived in Vancouver on August 8, 1921. Records show that Bark Ging, age 13, came as a "merchant's son" exempt from paying the Head Tax. This would have been consistent with Wong Check Suen, a merchant, bringing his neighbour's son, Wong Bark Ging to Canada as his own. After satisfying the immigration officers with his documents and passing the necessary medical examinations, Wong Bark Ging was issued his Canadian Immigration Certificate. He was released into the custody of the generous village neighbour Wong Check Suen.



Notebook with popular western menu items in Wong Bark Ging's handwriting in English and Chinese.

Wong Check Suen had eight children of his own to house and feed so any support he gave to Wong Bark Ging must have been very limited. Wong Bark Ging had to find employment somehow and fast. With very little education, if any at all, he immediately became an unskilled labourer. He may have worked for Wong Check Suen to get started, then possibly for other businesses or restaurants. After work, he attended sessions in Chinatown to learn basic English using common phrasebooks of the time.

Meanwhile, the Canadian government was determined to stem the flow of Chinese to Canada. On July 1, 1923 the Chinese Immigration Act was enacted to literally ban all Chinese from entering Canada. This day became known as "Humiliation Day" to the Chinese. Can you imagine what went through the mind of the teen-aged Wong Bark Ging? Having arrived two years earlier in 1921, he had no means to return to China. With the new legislation, he did not know when he would see his parents or family again,

if ever. After acquiring the confidence to strike out on his own, Wong Bark Ging worked his way from British Columbia to Alberta. It was said he worked in some camp kitchens and cookhouses along the way.

A black address book that Wong Bark Ging kept had names of places in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan among its entries. These may have been contacts who had moved east after the railroad was completed in 1885. They were referred to him as he looked for work to support himself and his dear family back in China. By 1924 he came to Alberta and worked as a cook.

The address book recorded the potential employment contact information found below. The only date found written in that notebook was October 29, 1930:

Druid Cafe, PO Box 19, Druid, Saskatchewan; Royal Cafe, Lamont, Alberta; Lakeside Coal, Wabamum, Alberta; Rox Cafe, PO Box 9, Alliance, Alberta; Boston Cafe, Tompkins, Saskatchewan; Dominion Cafe, 10365 - 97 St, Edmonton, Alberta; Northern Laundry, 10128 - 99 St, Edmonton, Alberta; New Public Cafe, 804 -2nd St E, Calgary, Alberta; Depok Cafe, Lacombe, Alberta; Kerrobert Cafe, PO Box 211, Kerrobert, Saskatchewan; Plenty Cafe, Plenty, Saskatchewan.

The Great Depression started in 1929. The New York Stock Market fell dramatically. Canada as a result suffered high levels of unemployment and poverty. With the severe drop in the economy, people could no longer afford to eat out at restaurants. This could have been the impetus that led Wong Bark Ging into an alternate vocation. "Hop Woo, 9013 - 101 Ave, Edmonton, Alberta" was also an entry amongst the restaurant names and addresses. After years of research, it was finally determined that Hop Woo was a market gardening partnership between Wong Bark Ging and Chew Lung Kie.

Further entries included vegetables and seed types - evidence that Wong Bark Ging embarked on a journey of self-employment as a market gardener in Edmonton:

Vegetables and Seed Varieties (as recorded): *Onions-Burnby, Carrots -Red Chanburag, Beets -Early Wonder, Turnips-Queede, Parsnip-Goumag, Onions -large-arisagraig, Parsley-Champion Moss Curled-Imperial F Sampale, Cauliflower-Early Erfurt, Cabbage-Golden Acre, Celery-Golden Plum, Tomatoes-Greenbourne Sunrise, Cauliflower-Sluis Brothers, Cauliflower-Eureka Early Snowball, Cauliflower-Danish Giant, Cauliflower-Dry Weather*



Wong Bark Ging, winter 1930, Edmonton.



Young See's studio portrait taken prior to 1930.

Republic of China was established, and mere months after the Qing Dynasty was overthrown ending over two thousand years of imperial rule in China precipitating a chaotic political maelstrom. In 1921, Mao Zedong established the Chinese Communist Party. Sun Yat-sen, leader of the Republic of China died in 1925, and Chiang Kai-shek took over a fragile central government.

Young See's photo studio portrait may have been sent to Wong Bark Ging in Canada, probably in advance of the arranged marriage on December 30, 1930 (29th day of the 10th month in the Chinese lunar calendar). The wedding celebrations may have been muted under the financial constraints and circumstances. Young See recalled (many years later when applying for her Canada Pension) that the wedding was attended by family and just a few locals whose names she had forgotten. Young See moved in immediately with Wong Bark Ging's family. Her life was now focused

Certificate of Registration issued by the Consulate of the People's Republic of China in Vancouver.

Consistent with the market gardening cycle, his first opportunity to leave Edmonton came in the fall of 1930 after harvest time. He departed in October 1930 destined for China to attend his arranged wedding in the ancestral village of Chew Ging. By this time, almost half his life had been spent in Canada.

Back at his birthplace, he got reacquainted with his parents and siblings. And, for the first time, he set eyes upon his youngest sister who was born three years after he left for Canada. She was now six years of age.

It was very unlikely that he had ever met or had any feelings for the 18 year-old girl that his parents arranged for him to wed. Young See was born in 1912, the year the



Wong Bark Ging on horseback at the Riverdale market garden.



Wong Bark Ging's house located at the rear of Government House, 1949.

on taking care of Wong Bark Ging's parents and family. Their time together was short-lived as Wong Bark Ging was obligated to return to Canada in time for the upcoming gardening season, alone. Because of Canada's Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923, he returned to Canada via Vancouver on May 25, 1931, not knowing when he might see his family or bride again. Wong Bark Ging left just as the civil war in China progressed to Mao's Red Army's Long March in 1934. By 1936 Mao's communists clashed with Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang and by 1937 all out war began with the Japanese.

The Second World War started in 1939 with the couple 11,000 kilometres apart. On the rare occasions that Young See talked about her life in China, she alluded to some of the chores that she was required to do. Apart from cooking, cleaning and caring for Wong Bark Ging's family, she mentioned two in particular. She often said that she had to watch the water buffalo, *bai ngow*. In the agrarian society, it wasn't uncommon for a family to keep a beast of burden to cultivate the fields. The fields could have been owned by several families or neighbours. At the end of the growing season, Young See told of the hardships of cutting rice stalks, *gwut woh*. This was the practice of using curved bladed knives to cut the ripened rice stalks, gather and transport them back home to be laid out and dried. From this harvest came the meager supply of rice for the coming year.

Through all of this Bark Ging continued to send remittances from Edmonton to help his family in China. With these remittances his family had the financial means to construct a house in the New Territory of Hong Kong. It was completed in 1939. When remittances could not get through to Hong Kong because of the war, Wong Bark Ging instructed Young See to return to the ancestral village so that she could receive the remittances there. When Japan invaded the area, the people scattered and hid from the Japanese for fear of being shot or slaughtered. Young See never talked about her family, just that they all died during the war. She had an older brother and an older sister. It is not known how or where they met their untimely deaths – starvation being a possibility. At a time much later in her life when she was depressed, she recalled being so alone and seriously considered becoming a nun. A nun she reckoned, at least, would have food and a roof over her head. Young See fled with Wong Bark Ging's younger brother's family to the new house in the New Territory. Her father-in-law, Wong Lup Sing died in 1941. In December 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and Hong Kong. The Japanese occupied their house and a couple of other residences nearby. With trepidation, they luckily survived without being mistreated.

In 1945, Japan surrendered but civil war broke out again in China. Meanwhile in Canada, Wong Bark Ging's recorded address on August 17, 1940 was the same as Hop Woo, 9013 – 101 Avenue in Riverdale, Edmonton. He had been in the market gardening business for at least 10 years.

Wong Bark Ging's occupations were recorded on December 31, 1943 as gardener and cook. It is believed that he had a partnership in a cafe or restaurant business to supplement his market gardening income. It made sense not to be idle in the winter months. On June 27, 1944 his occupation was recorded as a labourer on a stamped Certificate of Registration issued by the Consulate of the People's Republic of China in Vancouver.

Bark Ging must have known that a long drawn out civil war in China between the Red Army and the Nationalist Party ensued. Added tensions with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria precipitated the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937-1945.

Young See's Republic of China Provisional Passport, May 1949.

Wong Bark Ging's Certificate of Canadian Citizenship.

Chinese Immigration records Young See Wong, age 37, as a "housewife." Medical tests were ordered and her chest x-ray for tuberculosis on June 28, 1949 showed no evidence of the disease. Results were sent to 842 Gore Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia, the address of family friend Wong Check Suen.

Receipt dated June 24, 1949. The handwritten "2 pcs" might refer to 2 pieces of luggage.

The Second World War of 1939-1945 brought Canada into the fold. Suddenly the Chinese in Canada were of two minds. Some were adamant to do nothing for Canada due to the injustices they suffered from institutional racism and discrimination. Others thought that if they did nothing, their plight would continue. A good number rallied and joined the military to support Canada in the war effort.

After the war, the Chinese in Canada lobbied for equal rights. Consequently, the government recognized the important roles that Chinese-Canadians played in the war – pilots, instructors, labourers, signals operators, interpreters, mechanics, special operations, etc. The Chinese Exclusion Act was subsequently repealed in 1947 ending 24 years of separation of the Chinese in Canada and their families in China. The doors were finally open to Chinese immigration again. The rush was on for the Chinese in Canada to obtain Canadian citizenship before they could make application to bring their spouses and children under 18 years of age to join them.

Wong Bark Ging earnestly set his mind to obtain Canadian citizenship. On his Canadian Citizenship Application Wong Bark Ging's occupation was recorded as self-employed gardener and his address was "Rear of old Government House grounds." He was still a partner with Chew Lung Kie operating Hop Woo Ltd. in Riverdale. On January 17, 1949, Wong Bark Ging was granted Canadian citizenship.

By this time Young See was living in Hong Kong navigating the paperwork and medical exams in preparation to come to Canada. She received a Republic of China Provisional Passport dated May 5, 1949. In June of 1949 she received an International Certificate of Inoculation Against Cholera and an International Certificate of Vaccination Against Smallpox from the Port Health Office of Hong Kong. Having been cleared to travel Young See arrived in Vancouver on June 27, 1949 by airplane. The General Register of



Wong Bark Ging and Young See, 1949.



Young See, Hop Woo Ltd. market garden, Riverdale 1949.

Young See became a Landed Immigrant on July 4, 1949. After Young See's short stay with the Wong Check Suen family, she was put on the train to Edmonton. When Wong Bark Ging arrived to meet her, the conductor was closing the doors to the Strathcona Train Station. Bride and groom were finally reunited in Edmonton after a forced separation of 18 years by the notorious Chinese Exclusion Act.

Bark Ging's house located at the rear of Government House was moved to 12782 – 113 Street in Calder. It was a wood-framed house put on a new foundation without a basement. It was transformed with corn silk yellow stucco and white trim that finished the exterior. There were no eavestroughs. Wooden shakes covered the roof. There was no running water, no indoor plumbing and no built-in bath-

room. Water was trucked in and stored in a large galvanized drum. Originally wood-heated, the house was converted to natural gas after it was moved to Calder. It was also upgraded with electricity. Between the sidewalk and the house, hollyhocks stood tall in the flowerbeds during the summertime.

Having endured 18 long years of forced separation and over a vast distance of 11,000 kilometres, this is where Wong Bark Ging and Young See started their new life together in Canada. He was now 44. She was 37.

References available from rseditor@abgenealogy.ca

RS



Wong residence at 12782 – 113 Street, Edmonton 1949.



Wong Bark Ging and Young See in their Calder home 1949.