



Ging Wei Wong 黄景焯 was born into a market gardening family in Edmonton. He has volunteered with the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association for over 30 years. 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. Wei has lectured at the University of Alberta to Global Academic Leadership Development participants from many post-secondary institutions across China. 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).

Harvest: Autumn Fields of Green

By *Ging Wei Wong* 黄景焯

I woke and felt a chill in my bedroom. I drew the covers back, hopped out of bed and dressed in my heavier farm work clothes.

It was Sunday, and there was no use delaying the inevitable. The sales orders of *yeh choy*, green head cabbage for Woodward's, MacDonald's Consolidated, Western Grocers, Scott National and Brown Fruit Company would have to be delivered to their warehouses early Monday morning. We needed an early start to harvest the cabbages, our main crop.

Under gloomy grey skies, we commuted the usual twenty minutes from our home in Dovercourt (12261-134 Street) via the St. Albert Trail traffic circle, going east, then north on 127 Street to 137 Avenue then north on 97 Street past the Griesbach Barracks on the two-lane Highway 28 to our market garden which was then located on RR #4, Edmonton (present-day location about two miles north of Northgate Mall in Eaux Claires).

The sight of the large poplar tree shedding mottled yellow leaves adjacent to the gravel driveway signaled our arrival. After opening the wire farm gate, Father (黄柏振 Wong Bark Ging) angled the red 1950s Chevrolet 1-ton flat bed stake truck toward the single clapboard garage.

Mother (袁氏黄Young See Wong) went to the old house to change into appropriate gear for the day ahead – putting on an extra pair of wool socks, thicker pants, a heavier coat and rubber boots.

Father would open the heavy wooden doors of the garage before inching the grey Ford 9N tractor out. Next he hitched the wooden sledge by its chains to the tractor.

Mother and I loaded the rusty old scale, the metal wheelbarrow, the old pail with the baling twine and harvesting knives, ten or more wooden bushel baskets, the old berry basket brimming with hundreds of tags bearing "B.G. Wong, Canada #1 Cabbage, 50 lbs" and tossed it on a pile of recycled burlap potato sacks fit to hold fifty pounds of cabbage each.

When the fields were too mucky for walking like this day, the truck was useless in the gumbo. Mother and I sat on the sledge, inhaling purple gas exhaust, as the tractor slowly inched its way to the work area – a field of green cabbage at its peak.

We could see our breath as we surveyed the plot – it would be a long day of toil. We off-loaded the essential paraphernalia to a suitable processing area.

The dew was dripping off the ripe cabbage heads and pooling in their larger wrapper leaves near the ground. As the heads of cabbage were cut, trimmed and dropped into



Wong family market garden looking from west property line towards the east – main crop of green cabbages.

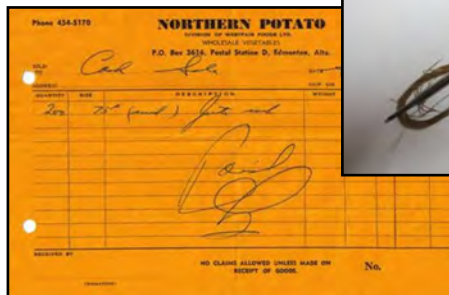
the bushel baskets, the discarded leaves helped to keep the muck off our rubber boots and formed an improvised pathway. Hands quickly got chilled from contact with the cold wet cabbage heads.

I remember several accidents when the knife cut through someone's flesh, and if it were not for the sight of blood, you wouldn't even know that you cut yourself because your hand was so numb from the cold.

When the baskets were full, it was time to lug them all to the processing area where they would be weighed on the rusty old scale and put into sacks of 50 pounds each. If we were too tired to carry them, we used the wheelbarrow. After a dozen or so sacks were filled, one of us would take up the task of sewing them up. Each sack would be sewn up tight with a bagging needle pulling baling twine, ensuring that one of the "B.G. Wong" identification tags was attached securely.

After the first batch was done, the ritual was repeated – cut the cabbage, fill the baskets, weigh the cabbage, put in sacks, sew them up ... again and again.

Thank goodness, my parents always had the good sense to return to our Dovercourt home to have a home-cooked lunch. It gave us time to warm up and re-energize. My father always hand-rolled his own cigarettes with Export brand tobacco. After lunch he would have a smoke while reading the *Chinese Times* newspaper from Vancouver that he subscribed to. We took advantage of the time to watch a little television before we returned to the market garden.



Sales receipt from Northern Potato for 200 (used) jute potato sacks. These were used to hold 50 pounds of green cabbages each.



Vintage 6 inch sail needle made in Glyda, England used with baling twine to sew up used potato sacks filled with 50 lbs. of green cabbage.

Before the day was complete, the sacks of cabbage were loaded onto the sledge - sometimes layered four to five deep. All the paraphernalia was put on top of the load and hauled back to the waiting truck. After the tools were put away, the harvest was transferred and stacked neatly in the bed of the stake truck. The whole load was then covered with a large quilt that was hand-made by sewing together jute potato sacks to protect it overnight.

After the tractor returned the sledge to its parking area, it was refuelled and parked back in the garage.

We made sure that the truck was fuelled up as well. Our supplier of farm gasoline, oil and grease was the United Farmers of Alberta Cooperative. The supplier would truck in the fuel, and fill our 45 gallon storage drums every couple months.

My job was to prime the pump and hand-crank it to fill a metal 5-gallon jerrycan, and then carry it out to the truck. After attaching the metal nozzle, I would have to hoist the jerrycan and drain the contents and repeat this several more times to top up the fuel tank.

After everyone put away the tools and changed their clothes we were ready for the journey home. The sun was setting as we dragged the farm gate closed, exhausted. The work was not all drudgery, I have to admit.

Produce that was not market-ready or imperfect was left in the fields.

Near the end of the cabbage harvest – sometimes as late as October, there was little left to reap but as long as there was the potential to make another dollar, we were out there searching for the last of the cabbages that were marketable.



Circa 1950 metal wheelbarrow.

We kids had a heyday with the undersized cabbages – perfect to toss around as footballs; going for the long bombs just like the football players did on the CBC’s black and white television broadcasts.

At the end of the day, we would only take the cabbages that were split open by their own plumpness for our kitchen table. Stir fried with *haa mai*, dried shrimp from Chinatown, it was delicious. The light frosts of early autumn actually made the cabbages sweeter. Knowing that it was the last day of the harvest, made it that much sweeter as well.

Summary of our market gardening business by:

Tax year and net income

1956	3309.87
1957	3585.51
1958	6056.15
1959	2327.47
1960	2193.45
1961	2971.10
1962	2535.88
1963	2122.90
1964	2285.33
1965	587.74
1966	3237.65
1967	2696.59
1968	2352.09
1969	2271.99
1970	2035.60
1971	935.58
1972	2614.04
1973	2337.51
1974	1476.07
1975	5914.12



Typical 1970s sale book to record orders of market garden vegetables from wholesalers.



United Farmers of Alberta Cooperative Ltd. Identification cards



Present day location of former Wong family market garden in Eaux Claire on Google Maps.

The Wong market garden was annexed by the City of Edmonton in 1971 and given the address of 9404 – 157 Avenue for the south half and 9405 – 160 Avenue for the north half.

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