

Early Immigration: Chinese American Portrait Cards



Portrait Card 1



Florence Chin Eng

伍
陳
聘
霞

Born in 1909, Tolsan District, Kwangtung Province, China

Florence Eng's grandfather was in the U.S. during the 1880s. Her father came in 1909, first working in the lumber camps then in a restaurant. Florence Eng came over with her mother in 1923 by boat; they spent twenty-one days on the ocean. They were among the very few Chinese women who came to the U.S. at the time. Most of the first Chinese immigrants were male. They came for work and planned to return later; their wives were left in China.

After Florence Eng arrived, she was locked in an immigration station for two weeks until she proved she was her father's real daughter. She recalls, "Sometime when you see your father down there, he would come to look at you through the window—but no talking. The women, they put them in a separate room and then the men in a separate floor. They watch you just like a hawk. They check your human waste, urine and everything."

Photo by Dean Wong

Card 1: Florence Chin Eng

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Florence Chin Eng (born in 1909, Toisan District, Kwangtung Province, China): Florence Eng's grandfather was in the U.S. during the 1880s. Her father came in 1909, first working in the lumber camps then in a restaurant. Florence Eng came over with her mother in 1923 by boat; they spent twenty-one days on the ocean. They were among the very few Chinese women who came over to the U.S. at the time. Most of the first Chinese immigrants were male. They came for work and planned to return later; their wives were left in China.

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Portrait Card 2

William Eng



Born in 1929, Seattle, Washington

伍
偉
麟

William Eng grew up working in his father's knitting store, hand laundry and Chinese restaurant. He and his brothers also had a shoeshine business to earn money for the family.

"My brothers and I used to have a shoeshine business called Three Brothers Shoeshine. I was 10, Nelson was eight and Tuck was six. We'd charge five cents a shine. We'd start in the International District and work our way down to First and Occidental. The people used to like how Tuck shined the shoes because he was so cute doing it. So Nelson and I just carried, lugged the stuff and Tuck would shine."

Photo by Dean Wong

Card 2: William Eng

p.66

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Portrait Card 3



Bill Kay

駱麟聖

Born in 1916, Olympia, Washington

Bill Kay's grandparents were one of the first Chinese families to settle in Olympia, arriving there in 1878. Most of the other Chinese settlers were single men. To help other Chinese survive in a foreign country, various social organizations were established within the Chinese community, including family associations. Typically these associations helped people who shared the same family name.

Bill Kay says, "I'm a member of the Locke Association. If an immigrant came over from a village or the same area as the other Lockes were, they could always depend on the association to give them a hand, like going through a lot of problems that required somebody to translate for them or do whatever to help them out."

Photo by John D. Pai

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p.36

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Portrait Card 4

Fannie Eng Lung



伍
麗
梅

Born in 1896, Port Townsend, Washington

Fannie Eng Lung's father was one of the earliest Chinese merchants in the Northwest. She was the first Chinese woman born in Port Townsend.

"My mother was a picture bride. My father was here. He sent a picture of himself in his youth; and then when she came over, she saw his hair was all white. They struggled and I used to struggle with them. I helped my mother look after my brothers and sisters...I wanted my children to go to school. I wanted them to be something, to have a worthwhile life, make a name for themselves. I don't care what they do as long as what they're doing is doing good."

Photo by Dean Wong

Card 4: Fannie Eng Lung

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Portrait Card 5



**Harriett
Wu**

伍清蘭

Born in 1910, Hoiping District, Kwangtung Province, China

Harriett Wu's father, Ah King, was a prominent cannery contractor, who held the responsibility to supply labor for canneries in Alaska. He also provided funds for the Chinese Village at the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, held in Seattle.

She recalls, "Our store—the King Chong Lung Company—was the gathering place for all these workers that wanted to go to work up in the canneries. We paid for their passage, and then when they came to the store, they cooked their meals and ate together and waited for that certain day when they could go up to the canneries... I remember how they all gathered around a potbellied stove and sat around the stove and spun tales of their experiences. That memory I'll never forget. They were good men, dedicated men. That was their livelihood—to go up to the canneries, save their money and come back home."

Photo by Dean Wong

Card 5: Harriett Wu

p.48

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Portrait Card 6

James Mar



馬
錦
全

Born in 1914, Seattle, Washington

James Mar's parents started the Yick Fung Company, an importing and exporting firm, in 1913. Following his service in the U.S. Army during WWII, James returned to continue the business until 2008, when he closed the storefront and donated its contents to the Wing Luke Museum. The store is now a permanent part of the museum.

The Company was also the agent for the Blue Funnel Line for travel back to China. James recalls, "Since we had an average of about 85 passengers every month, there was a need for someone to transport their baggage and a need to haul the passengers. So, my dad started a Yick Fung Express Company ...and the China Cab Company....we had cots on the second floor...(and) a kitchen here with a cook....I think my dad thought about covering all the bases, and I think we did, as far as assisting the passengers during their short stay here in Seattle, before their departure for the Orient."

Photo by Dean Wong

Card 6: James Mar

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Portrait Card 7

Hing W. Chinn



陳慰庭

Born in 1930, Toisan District, Kwangtung Province, China

Hing Chinn came to Seattle to join his father at the age of nine. When he first came, he stayed at the immigration station for several weeks. But some people stayed there for a few months, and some even for years. He described the station as a place like a jail house with bunk beds and metal bars, and each room holding twenty to thirty people. The immigrants were only let out during lunch and dinner.

Speaking of his experience, Hing Chinn said immigration officers asked all kinds of questions and many related to his house in China. For example: How many chairs and windows were in the house? Is your house the third one in a row from the road? He says, "You have to prove you are the real McCoy. A lot of people are real sons, but they can't get out because the answers doesn't match... Before we came over, we memorized all those questions....If you don't answer correctly, they kick you back."

Photo by Dean Wong

Card 7: Hing W. Chinn

p.10

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Portrait Card 8

**Henry
Louie**

雷立



Born in 1916, Toisan District, Kwangtung Province, China

Henry Louie came to the U.S. in 1934 to join his father. He was one of the founding members of the Luck Ngi Musical Club, started in 1938. He was drafted into the Navy during World War II and later worked at the Hong Kong Restaurant, retiring in 1980.

“My mother didn’t come here. She was in the village. She couldn’t come here because she didn’t have the proper papers – merchant papers. Only if you had a birth certificate could you come here. That was the rule in America.

“I learned to play the saxophone first. Later, I learned to play the Chinese instruments....I can play almost all of them. If you come from China, you’re so far away from your village....That’s why I learned music – so that I will not forget my home and where I came from.”

Photo by Dean Wong

Card 8: Henry Louie

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Portrait Card 9

Ruth Mar



馬維錫太太

Born in 1913, Los Angeles, California. Ruth is pictured at right; photo circa 1937.

Ruth Mar moved to Seattle with her husband when he was to attend the University of Washington in 1932, to major in aeronautical engineering—a field concerned with the design, production and maintenance of aircraft.

She described her first experience moving to Seattle. She says, “We tried to buy a house and found a nice place on 23rd Avenue near the University. It said, ‘For rent,’ so we went and looked, and they wouldn’t let us go in. They said, ‘It’s rented already.’ Then we looked at a house on 27th and Jefferson. In fact, we paid the down payment for the rent and we were ready to move in. Then the door was barred and we couldn’t move in... When my husband graduated from the UW, he couldn’t get a job. In fact, he went to Boeing School of Aeronautics down in Oakland, California. And Boeing wouldn’t hire him.”

Photo courtesy of Mary Doung Chinn.

Card 9: Ruth Mar

139 (Note: The book has a later photo of Ruth)

Ruth Mar (Born in 1913, Los Angeles, California): She is pictured at right, taken around 1937. She moved to Seattle with her husband when he was to attend the University of Washington in 1932, majoring in aeronautical engineering—a field concerned with the design, production and maintenance of aircraft.

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Portrait Card 10

George Ham



許
啓
富

Born in 1929, Seattle, Washington

George Ham used to work in his mother's business, the Sun Hing Laundry, on 23rd Avenue and South Jackson Street in Seattle. His parents wanted him to get a college degree so he graduated from Seattle University in 1953, majoring in accounting. However, because of discrimination, George ended up working in the stock room of an insurance company.

He describes their work at the laundry business: "The laundries were long hours. What you did was you sent the laundry out to be washed and it would come back and you'd do the rest. Like starching the shirts, drying them, ironing the collars and cuffs. And then you'd iron the rest of the body of the shirts. At times, my parents worked 16 hours a day." He and his siblings also helped iron the shirts for about eight to twelve hours or more a day.

Photo by Dean Wong

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Portrait Card 11

Ben Woo



胡國恩

Born in 1923, Seattle, Washington

Ben Woo's family had a laundry business. Growing up, he always had to go directly home to help out the business after school.

He says, "I always felt more than a little deprived during my teens. Where other kids were free to participate in school activities, being poor and being Chinese and having to share in the laundry work seemed very unfair. There was a lot of racism during that period. At least once a week you were accosted and told to go back where you came from. Even kindly people like my teachers would, in all friendliness, tell me I should work hard and get a good education and go back home to China to 'help my own people.'"

Photo by Dean Wong

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Portrait Card 12

Josephine Chinn Woo



胡陳蓮芳

Born in 1919, Seattle, Washington

Like many other Chinese kids of the time, Josephine Chinn Woo was asked to attend both the regular American school and then the Chinese school from four to seven o'clock, making it a long day for her.

Josephine graduated from Franklin High School in Seattle, but did not go on to college. As she explains, "In those days, I thought that there was not too much sense in going to college because friends that I know who had gone to college ended up being waitresses. We couldn't get jobs in offices, in Caucasian places. And if you get to some lowly job in a department store, that was real hot stuff. My friends were waitresses in Chinatown."

Photo by Dean Wong

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