

The Royal Café: Over a Half Century in Baker City 1936-1990

Part I

Introduction



In 1935, five related Chinese businessmen from a small village in southeastern China came to Baker City after having engaged in business ventures in Walla Walla and Pendleton. In Baker City they began by acquiring a second-story restaurant at 2009 Main Street called The Chinese Tea Garden. Soon they started a new restaurant at 1910 Main Street named Royal Café. That café remained under family ownership for over a half century.

The operation of the Royal Café was unlike any other business in Baker City. The original five co-owners--Allan Eng (1900-1978), Harry Eng (1900-1961), Gan Ong (1902-1994), Jack Eng (1904-1972), and Jimmy Eng (1906-1982)—presumably shared equally in the profits. All were married but lived like bachelors in small apartments above their café. Their wives continued living in China, sometimes for decades, due to U.S. immigration laws, which since 1875 forbid Chinese women from coming to the U.S. China's help in defeating Japan during World War II finally led to relaxation of the ban. Only then did the wives begin coming to Baker City to join their husbands, but that did not happen immediately, because the new law allowed only 105 Chinese to immigrate to the U.S. per year.

Sidebar: Two Important Sources of Eng Family History

Jack Eng Photos

In 2013 Perry Stokes, Director of the Baker County Library District, attended a yard sale at Annie Wong's home on Grandview Drive. There he bought for the Library's historic photograph collections a box of about 1,000 negatives of Jack Eng photos. Those who frequented the Royal Café will remember that Jack decorated the Royal Café with huge 4ft x 6ft enlargements of natural scenes of Baker Valley

As curator of the Library's historic photo collections, in 2013 I scanned over 200 of Jack's negatives, turned them into positive digital photos and added them to the Library's online website. Those photos and Eng family photos added later are available to view and download online at this website: <https://bakerlib.pastperfectonline.com>

Mary Lou Eng

Beginning in April 2020, Mary Lou Eng shared with me much about the history of her Eng relatives. We did so remotely via internet and telephone, because she lives 3,000 miles away in Virginia not far from Washington, D.C. But she was born in Baker City and is the granddaughter of Harry Eng and grandniece of Jack Eng, two of the five original owners of the Royal Café. Although Mary Lou left Baker City before entering grade school, she never forgot her roots here. Many of her closest relatives lived in Baker City several decades operating the Royal Café in Baker City.

An important fact to know about Mary Lou is that she is a talented and persistent genealogical researcher, who has for over fifty years been digging into the history of her Eng relatives, whose stories are found on two continents. Her help has been invaluable in identifying Eng relatives in Jack Eng photographs; and Mary Lou has added quite a few copies of her own photos to the library's collection.

The Royal Café was a profitable business. After the end of WWII, as the owner's wives arrived, sometimes a decade or more later, the owners one after the other began buying or building houses, mostly in the affluent Grandview area of Baker City.

Eventually retirements and deaths brought great changes to the Royal Café business. By 1965 Jack Eng and Allan Eng were the last of the original five owners of the Royal Café still living in Baker City. Jack brought on board as co-owner his son Henry Wong, who had worked in the business since coming from China to Baker City as a teenager in 1940. Jack and Henry expanded the Royal Café by adding the Shangrila Lounge and they started a sister Royal Café in Ontario, Oregon.

When Jack died in 1972, Henry assumed the title President of the Royal Café, assisted by his wife, Annie Wong. In January 1978 Henry died at age 50. Succeeding Henry as President, Annie ran the café until 1990, when she sold the business and retired. She lives with a sister and niece in New Mexico.

Immigration

In the early 1800's, when Europeans arrived in the area we call Oregon, sixty Native American tribes had been the sole human occupants for over 12,000 years. All the rest of us Oregonians are immigrants or offspring of immigrants. Beginning in the early 1840's over 300,000 people emigrated to Oregon from other states and foreign countries following the "Emigrant Road," later known as the Oregon Trail. Although the

Oregon Trail led the emigrants through future Baker County, no one settled anywhere in the eastern half of Oregon until the early 1860's. The eastern portion of Oregon was considered too far from markets in the populated area west of the Cascade Mountain Range, which was the actual goal of the slogan "Oregon or Bust."

Not until gold was discovered in October 1861 in future Baker County, did non-native settlement in eastern Oregon begin. First came persons of European extraction, followed shortly thereafter by Chinese, mostly from Canton, China. Not long after Baker City was platted in 1865, a block-long area called Chinatown sprang up within a block of the business district on both sides of Auburn Street from Resort Street to Powder River.

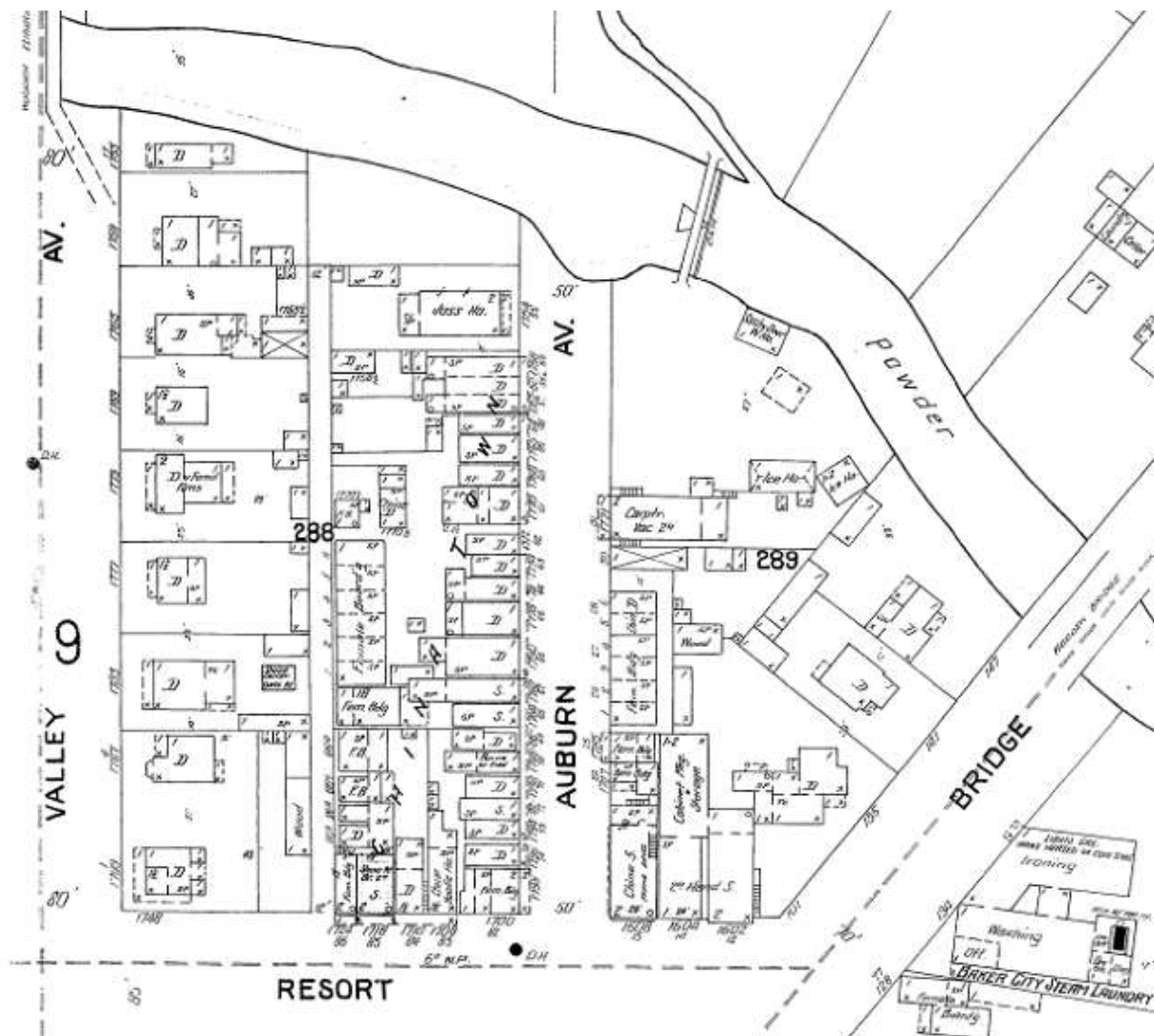


Baker City's Chinatown, ca. 1898, from top of Spring Garden Hill.

The Chinese temple with flagpole is the two-story brick Joss House on the north side of Auburn Street. On the second floor there was a statue of the Joss, a Chinese deity. See image below. On the building's east side is Powder River. In 1898 there was no bridge over the river. Chinatown extended from the Joss House west to Resort Street.



Chinatown Joss



1903 Sanborn Map of Baker City's Chinatown.

On the very eastern edge of Baker City, Chinese residents established a cemetery, where they buried their loved ones temporarily. After about five years, under the supervision of a relative, friend, or the family association, they dug up the remains, dried the bones, and shipped them back to the cemetery of their home village in China.

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On August 24, 2002, this marker was dedicated marking the Chinese Cemetery on the far east side of Baker City.

By 1940, almost all Chinese residents had left Baker City's Chinatown. Today a small pagoda imported from China in 2002 and an interpretive sign commemorate the former Chinese Cemetery.

Downtown there exists not one Chinese building to remind one that Baker City's Chinatown ever existed. The predominant building in Baker City's former Chinatown is today the headquarters of the Baker City Police Department on Auburn Street next to Powder River, where the Chinese Joss house (Chinese temple) used to stand. Only old photos survive to document over seventy years of Baker City's lively Chinatown.

The demise of Chinatown was followed by Chinese restaurateurs choosing to set up businesses in Baker City. During the five decades covered by this history, the number of restaurants in Baker City has remained consistently around fifteen, including an average of two or three operated by immigrants from China. Gracie Toy operated a restaurant in Baker from the 1930's until 1970. The Baker Café at 1826 Main Street, operated by Mon Lee, wife Huie Fung Tan, and their four children, was a Chinese-run restaurant for

18 years (1940-1958). After the Lee children graduated from Baker High School and moved to the San Francisco area, the parents soon followed. The longest tenured Chinese restaurant was the Royal Café at 1910 Main Street. The Royal Café and the Chinese who operated it for over 50 years are the focus of this history.

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Part 2

Wedding of Henry Wong and Annie Huie

Departing from a strictly chronological history of the Royal Café, Part 2 begins with a couple of photos taken over a decade after the café's founding. The photos introduce the reader to many of the Chinese residents who are the subjects of this history.

On March 20, 1950, Henry Wong and Annie Huie were married in Walla Walla, Washington, where Annie's parents lived at that time and where she graduated from high school. Both were born elsewhere--Annie in Lewiston, Idaho, Henry in China, having come to Baker City at age 14. More about both of them later.

Two expertly-choreographed formal wedding photographs include the five original owners of the Royal Café and many of the extended Eng family. The second photo presents the bride and groom, flanked by three bride's maids and three groomsmen.



People are identified in the photo with numbers 1-22.

*Persons below with names **bolded** are the **original 5 owners** of the Royal Café.*

Top Middle: 1. Annie Huie (bride), 2. Henry Wong (groom). 3. John Bohn (Baker City businessman, friend of Henry Wong).

Front Row L: 8. Unknown; 10. Robert Eng (groomsman and nephew of Allan Eng); 11. Gooley Eng (best man, son of Harry Eng, and cousin of groom); 15. Faye Eng (wife of Gooley Eng); 14. Mary Lou Eng (infant daughter of Gooley and Faye Eng).

*Front Row R: 16. Lily Eng (wife of Jimmy Eng); 17. **Jimmy Eng** (brother of Harry Eng); 18. **Gan Ong** (first cousin of Jack Eng, second cousin of Harry Eng); 21. Ken Eng (son of Jack Eng, younger brother of groom); 22. **Harry Eng** (father of Gooley Eng).*

Back Row L: 9. Unknown guest; 12. Gary Eng (son of Jimmy Eng and nephew of Harry Eng); 6. Ing Hai Lim (mother of the bride); 7. W. Gilbert (officiating minister); 5. Ah Toy Huie (father of the bride).

*Back Row R: 4. **Jack Eng** (father of the groom, first cousin of Gan Ong, second cousin of Harry Eng); 19. Marjorie Fong (wife of Allan Eng); 20. **Allan Eng** (third cousin of Harry Eng).*



L – R: Clara Huie, Marie Huie, Fannie Huie, (bride's maids and sisters of the bride), bride Annie Huie, groom Henry Wong, groomsmen Gooley Eng (Henry's cousin), Jim Huie (Annie's brother), and Robert Eng (Henry's cousin).



Annie's parents, Ing Hai Lim & Ah Toy Huie, Annie & Henry, Henry's father, Jack Eng

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Part 3

National Origin of Royal Café Owners

All five of the original Royal Café owners—Allan b. 1900, Harry 1900, Gan 1902, Jack 1904, and Jimmy 1906--were born during a seven year period in the small village of Tung Sing Lai, population 200-300, part of the larger village of Har Peung about three miles south of today's Taishan City, the capital of Taishan County, Guangdong (formerly Canton) Province, China. Har Peung is located 45 miles west of Macao and 60 miles west of Hong Kong in the area of the Pearl River Delta. The 1,500-mile-long Pearl River drains a huge area of southeastern China. The river's mouth is bracketed by the cities Macao and Hong Kong, where the river empties into the South China Sea.

The California gold rush of 1849 lured a flood of Chinese laborers from poverty-stricken southeastern China. They broke into the U.S. labor market by working for less pay than white laborers. Chinese working for less pay provoked a backlash among U.S. miners and railroad workers, who complained bitterly that the practice brought down wages for all laborers. Eventually complaints were loud enough to be heard across the continent in Washington, D.C., resulting in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Side bar: Federal Chinese Exclusion Acts

The Page Act of 1875 was the first federal law ever passed directed at a single ethnic group. It was a reaction to Chinese women coming to the U.S. to be prostitutes or concubines. If they had children while in the U.S., the children would automatically become U.S. citizens under the 14th Amendment passed shortly after the end of the Civil War.

Beginning around 1850, as Oregon was being settled, Cantonese Chinese men began immigrating to Oregon seeking better paying jobs to support their families back in China. They came primarily from the Pearl River Delta in southeast China. In reaction to complaints that Chinese working for less pay brought down worker wages, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned the entry of Chinese laborers to the United States for ten years. Chinese merchants, diplomats, professionals, and students were exempt.

In 1892, Congress passed the Geary Act, which renewed exclusion of Chinese laborers for an additional ten years. Plus, it required every Chinese in the United States to carry a Chinese Certificate of Identity, which included a photo and a list of distinguishing physical characteristics, such as moles and scars. In 1902, the Chinese Exclusion law was renewed and made permanent. It was not repealed until 1943 as a gesture of goodwill toward China, which was an ally of the U.S. fighting the Japanese during WWII. Chinese could emigrate to the U.S., but limited by a Congressional quota set at 105 Chinese persons per year.

The War Brides Act of December 28, 1945, allowed alien spouses and natural and adopted children of members of the U.S. Armed Forces to enter the U.S. as non-quota immigrants after World War II. The Act expired in 1948.

Effects of the Chinese Exclusion Acts on the Engs

The Chinese exclusion acts had consequences for the Engs long before they came to Baker City. I've chosen Royal Café co-owner Harry Eng's family history to illustrate the effects on one branch of the Eng family. The story begins with Harry's father, Wah Eng, who was born in China in 1868, the youngest of five boys of the Eng family.

The second oldest son of the family, Ah Kim, came to the U.S. in the 1860's or 1870's. In 1878, while working in gold mining near John Day, Oregon, Ah Kim received word that his father had died. Following Chinese custom, Ah Kim returned to China sometime between 1878 to 1881 to pay respects to his deceased father. When Ah Kim was planning his return to the U.S. in 1881, his mother asked him to take the family's youngest son, thirteen-year-old Wah, with him. Ah Kim, who was at least fifteen years older than Wah, acceded to his mother's request.

After arriving in San Francisco, Ah Kim and Wah went north to Washington state, where they lived for seven years in Port Townsend at the north entrance of Puget Sound near Seattle, followed by two years in Seattle. At the time, Port Townsend was a major port for clipper ships traveling between Asia and the Northwest. Later, Seattle became a major port, when larger steam ships were the main form of transportation across the ocean. In 1891, when Wah was nineteen years old, the brothers moved to Walla Walla, where they lived in Walla Walla's Chinatown. The Eng brothers and Ah Kim's son, Ah Quong, along with several other Chinese businessmen, formed a partnership in a Chinese import-export business called Zee Tai Lung Company. By 1913 the number of partners had grown to ten.

One reason for forming company partnerships was financial. If Chinese businessmen did not individually have enough money to start a business, they pooled their money. Another reason for such partnerships was for Chinese to establish themselves as businessmen, as opposed to laborers, since the latter class was not allowed to enter the U.S. after passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

Immigration authorities occasionally interviewed local businessmen and bank managers to confirm that Chinese residents in Walla Walla were actually engaged in business. Another immigration regulation affected Chinese businessmen wishing to visit China and then return to the U.S. They had to acquire in advance of leaving a permit from immigration authorities that would allow their re-entry. Wah Eng's first return trip to China was in 1895 to get married. Wah Eng's second trip resulted in Harry's birth in 1900. A third trip resulted in the birth of Jimmy Eng in 1906.

In 1914 Wah Eng sponsored his son Harry Eng, age 14, to come to the U.S. as a student. Harry Eng and Allan Eng, age 14, the oldest of the original Royal Café owners, came to the U.S. on the steamship S.S. Ixion. Allan and Harry came as students to join their fathers in Walla Walla, Washington. Allan's father was involved there in a restaurant business.

During their teenage years Allan and Harry attended school, but when not in school, they worked as laborers in Chinese laundries and restaurants, which was not allowed under the Chinese exclusion rules. Immigration authorities closely enforced adherence to the rules. While visiting Walla Walla, they discovered that young Harry was working as a laborer in a laundry. His father, Wah Eng, received a warning for allowing Harry to engage in work as a laborer.

Sidebar: Paper Names

An exception to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and later extensions, allowed Chinese businessmen in the U.S. to sponsor their sons to join them. But if there was not a family member businessman already in the U.S., Chinese parents devised an illegal way to send a son to the U.S. They found a Chinese businessman already in the U.S. who would sponsor their son as his son, sometimes after being paid to do so, by filing the proper application with U.S. immigration authorities. If the application was accepted, then their son immigrated under the surname of the sponsor. Their son's new surname name was called a "paper name" as opposed to the surname of his birth father. Jack Eng had the paper name Ong, since he was sponsored by his uncle Gue Ong. Later Jack changed back to his birth surname Eng. Jack Eng was not eligible to sponsor his son Henry, so Henry came also came to the U.S. under the paper name Wong, which he kept.

In 1917 Wah Eng established a new import-export business in Pendleton and put Harry in charge of management. That was the same year Harry registered for the U.S. draft and the year the U.S. started sending troops to fight in Europe during WWI. Harry was not called to serve.

Two more of the co-owners of the Royal Café, first cousins Gan Ong and Jack Eng, arrived in the U.S. a couple of years apart. Gan Ong, who was born in China in 1902 with surname Eng, came to the U.S. in 1920 to join his father, Gue Ong, in Pendleton. Immigration recorded Gan's surname as Ong, which is a common spelling variant of Eng. Jack Eng, who was born in 1904 in China, came to the U.S. in 1922 sponsored by his uncle Gue Ong. So Jack immigrated to the U.S. as Jack Ong. Jack later changed his surname back to Eng. In about 1926 Jack returned to China and married Sue Oye Lim. The first of their two children, Henry, was born in July 1927. After another trip to China, their son Ken was born in about 1935.

In 1921 Harry Eng went back to China to marry Ngoi Toy Lim. When he returned to the U.S., he brought his six-years-younger brother, Jimmy Eng, age 15, to join him and their

father in Walla Walla. Later Jimmy would become the youngest of the original co-owners of the Royal Café. Due to Chinese exclusion laws, Harry's wife, Ngoi Toy, did not come to the U.S. until 1967, six years after Harry's death in 1961. Although she was sponsored by her son, Gooey Eng, she never lived in Baker City. In 1999 at age 97 Ngoi Toy Eng died in San Francisco, where she is buried.

In 1926 Wah Eng retired as manager of the Zee Tai Lung Company in Walla Walla and returned to China, where he died ca. 1943. Wah Eng was buried in hills behind his home village. Tung Sing Lai, Wah Eng's wife, is also buried there. She was never allowed to join her husband in the U.S. due to the Chinese exclusion laws. They lived virtually their whole married lives separated by 7,000 miles of Pacific Ocean.

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Part 4

The Engs Come to Baker City

After Wah Eng retired to China, Harry continued running the import-export business in Pendleton until about 1924. Harry, Allan, Gan, and Jack partnered to purchase the Pendleton Café, which they operated from 1924 to 1934.

Sometime between the end of 1934 to early 1935, Harry, Allan, Gan, Jimmy, and Jack moved to Baker City and began operating The Tea Garden Café on the second floor of 2009 Main Street, formerly owned by Gracie Toy (1898-1971). Toy chose to start a new restaurant, Toy's Noodle Parlor, at 1917 Court Street, which she operated under various names until retirement in 1970.

The 1930 federal decennial census of Pendleton, Oregon, lists Allan and Harry as living in a boarding house that included Germans, British, and Italians. The next source of the whereabouts of the Engs is found in Baker City Directories, which list businesses, the owners, spouses, residence, and whether they are renters or owners. In Baker City Directories (BCD) for the years 1930-1935, there is no mention of Engs. However, the 1940 census indicates the Engs arrived in Baker City in 1935. The Baker County Library does not have the 1936 BCD. First documented mention of the Engs available in the library is found in the 1937 BCD, in which Jack Eng is listed as manager of The Tea Garden restaurant located on the second floor of 2009 Main Street (above today's Bella's Main St. Market). Listed as living in apartments across the hall from the restaurant are Jack Eng, plus Allan Eng and Harry Eng, cooks at The Tea Garden. The Royal Café is not mentioned in the 1937 BCD.



Jack Eng in The Chinese Tea Garden, located on 2nd Floor of 2009 Main Street

**Sidebar: Summary of the 1940 Federal Census
of Persons Residing at 2009 Main Street in Baker City**

The April 8, 1940, Federal Census listed nine male Chinese restaurant workers living in second-floor apartments at 2009 Main Street (above present Bella's Main Street Market): Jack Eng, Gan Eng, James Eng, Allen Eng, Harry Eng, Gooley Eng, Shou Heen Lew, Ah Pon Lui, and Eddie Wu. (Across the hall on the Main Street side of the building was the Chinese Tea Garden restaurant, where many, if not all, worked.)

All nine Chinese had been living there since April 1, 1935, all born in China, all had an 8th grade education, and all worked 60 hours per week. Total apartment rent for all nine residents was \$50. Individual resident information follows:

Jack Eng, age 36, head of the household and manager of a restaurant and received no wages.

Gan Eng, 37, lodger and a partner of a restaurant and received no wages. (Gan's official surname at immigration was Ong, a common spelling variant of Eng.)

James Eng, 34, lodger, a partner of a restaurant and received no wages. (Jimmy is his real first name.)

Allen Eng, 41, lodger, a partner of a restaurant and received no wages.

Harry Eng, 41, lodger, a partner of a restaurant and received no wages.

Gooley Eng, 19, lodger and dish washer at a restaurant; earned \$800 in income for the year of 1939.

Shou Heen Lew, 18, lodger and dish washer at a restaurant; earned \$800 in income for the year of 1939.

Ah Pon Lui, 41, lodger and cook at a restaurant; earned \$900 in income for the year of 1939.

Eddie Wu, 40, lodger and cook at a restaurant; earned \$1,000 in income for the year of 1939.

First mention of the Royal Café (1910 Main) is in the 1939 BCD. (The 1938 BCD is missing.) Jack is listed as manager of both The Tea Garden and Royal Café. Workers listed at the Royal Café are Gan Ong, Harry Eng, and James Eng; residence for all of the Engs in 1939 was still at 2009 Main. The 1940 BCD is missing, as are BCD's for the WWII years 1942-1945. Fortunately the library has the 1941 BCD, which lists numerous

Engs working at the Royal Café: Allen (Allan), Gan, Gooley (pantryman), Harry, Jack (also as manager of The Tea Garden), James (Jimmy), Robert Eng (son of Allan's brother), plus two non-Eng workers, Jan and San Toy. Looking under the name Royal Café in the 1941 BCD, we find listed as owners: Allen, Harry, Gan, Jack, and James. After the war the 1946 BCD listing of owners had not changed.

Royal Café's Support of the American War Effort

On December 12, 1941, five days after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, the *Democrat-Herald* ran an article about two of the owners of the Royal Café, Jack Eng and Jimmy Eng, who had each bought \$2,000 defense savings bonds. In an interview Jack Eng said, "I don't know why this should be so unusual. We are just doing our part and plan to do much more. After all, we Chinese must fight twice as hard, because we have twice as much to settle with Japan!"

Indeed, they did contribute much more. All five of the original owners and two sons, volunteered to serve in the U.S. military. Jack and Harry were rejected for medical reasons. Gan Ong and Jimmy Eng both served state-side in the Army. Harry's son, Gooley Eng, who enlisted in the Navy in July 1942 at age 20, was the only one to serve overseas. See image below taken shortly after he was discharged from the Navy in January 1946.



Chief Petty Officer Gooley Eng in 1946

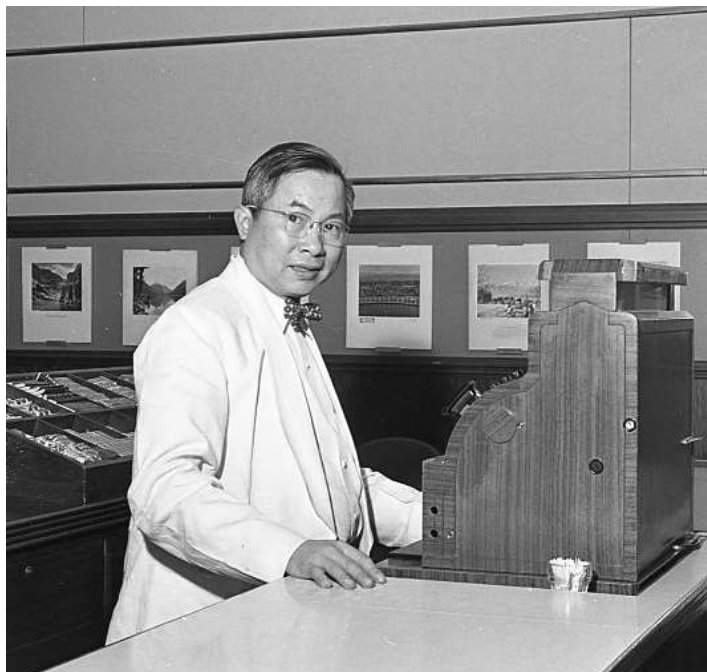
As a cook on a ship that sailed all the way to Guadalcanal, Gooley observed the results of the land and sea battles fought there at the beginning of the U.S. war against Japan in the Pacific. Gooley was assigned to a small transport boat which sailed around the Solomon Islands for two years between early 1943 to early 1945. Gooley's service in the Navy ended in January 1946, when his escort carrier was in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, where his ship was involved with the atomic bomb testing in the Marshall Islands. By the time he was discharged, Gooley had obtained the rank of Ship's Cook, First Class, a rank equal to Chief Petty Officer, and was in charge of one of two kitchens on a ship with a 3,000-man crew.

After discharge from the Navy, Gooley, who was not yet married, heard about the GI War Brides Act that allowed persons who served in the military to bring wives to the U.S. Instead of returning to Baker City, Gooley worked a year as a cook at the Evergreen Hotel in Vancouver, WA, in order to earn enough money to return to China and pay for an elaborate wedding. In Chinese tradition it was the groom's family who paid for the wedding. In 1947 Gooley returned to China, where he was introduced to his future bride, Faye Lee, by a woman from the same village, who had married into the Eng village. After several dates Gooley and Faye were married in October 1947. In early 1948 Gooley and Faye sailed on the S.S. President Wilson from Hong Kong to San Francisco and on to Baker City.

Location of Royal Café on 1900 side of Main Street



*Royal Café, 1910 Main, ca.1955
Flanked by Payless Drugs and Kennedy Building*



*Jack Eng, one of 5 owners, worked out front.
The other 4 owners worked in the kitchen, rarely seen by the public.*



*Jack's son, Ken Eng, preparing dishes to enter the washer.
Only known photo taken in kitchen, damaged in film developing.*

Eng Family Group Photos in Royal Café



1948 or 1949 Eng family celebration of Chinese New Year

Left side, front to back:

Sitting - Jimmy Eng , Lily Eng, Faye Eng, Ken Eng, Marjorie Fong

Standing – Robert Eng, Allan Eng

Right side, front to back:

Sitting - Harry Eng, Eng relative, owner of Seattle Chinatown business and hunting friend of Jack Eng, Arthur Fong, Henry Wong , Gooey Eng, Gary Eng;

Standing - Jack Eng, David Eng

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Eng Family Group Photo, January 1961

Left side: Mary Lou Eng, Marjorie Fong, Jimmy, Lily & Michael Eng, May & Gan Ong

Head of table: Eddie Fong (brother of Marjorie Fong)

Right side back to front: Gooey & Faye Eng, Sam Eng (changed his name to Sam Wu later on, son of Allan Eng), Allan Eng, Harry Eng, Jack Eng



Clockwise from left front: Marjorie Fong, Sam Eng, Jimmy, Lily & Michael Eng, ? , Eddie Fong, Gan, David & May Ong, Allan Eng, Harry Eng. Standing: Jack Eng.

Remodeled Royal Café interior.



Royal Café interior before remodeling.



Remodeled Royal Café looking toward front door.



Remodeled Royal Café looking toward kitchen.

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Part 5

Eng Families Purchase Houses in Baker City

During WWII Harry Eng's younger brother, Jimmy Eng, Gan Ong, and Harry Eng's son, Gooey Eng, served in the military. Jack Eng's son, Henry Wong, joined the Merchant Marine near the end of the war, when he was old enough to enlist. Changes to immigration law allowed servicemen to bring their wives from China to join them in the U.S. The Magnuson Act of December 1943 ended the Chinese exclusion acts, but set a nation-wide annual quota of 105 Chinese immigrants. Since Harry Eng and Jack Eng were not medically qualified to serve in the military, they could not bring their wives from China, until their wives applied for and were granted permission to be among the 105 Chinese allowed to immigrate annually to the U.S.

By the end of WWII, the Royal Café had been in operation for almost a decade. During that time co-owners had been putting in long hours and were being very frugal, including living like bachelors above their café. And they were saving money. Toward the end of the 1940's the Engs, whose wives had joined them in Baker City, had saved enough money to purchase or rent houses and move out of the second floor rooms above the café.

The first to move out was Harry Eng's son, Gooey (1922-2015), who had served three-and-one-half years in the Pacific. He brought his bride, Faye (1929-2003), to Baker City in 1947. In 1948 Gooey and Faye rented an apartment one block from Main Street and in 1949 bought a modest, well-built house at 1425 Court Street just a few blocks east of the Royal Café.



*Gooey and Faye Eng's Family (1952) at 1425 Court
Mary Lou, Dorothy, Twins Paul & Richard*

During three years, the couple had three children: Mary Lou (1948), twins Paul and Richard (1949), and Dorothy (1950). In 1954 the family moved to the San Francisco area, since Gooley felt there was little chance for advancement at the Royal Café.



Mary Lou & Faye (left). Gooie's & Faye's 4 kids playing in backyard with daughters of Faye's English teacher.



Grandparents holding twins Robert & Richard, Faye, Gooie, Mary Lou

Next to buy a house was co-owner Jimmy Eng and his second wife, Lily. They bought a small house at 2040 Grove several blocks east of the Royal Café, where Jimmy worked in the kitchen and Lily sometimes worked as a waitress. The first mention of Jimmy in Baker City is in the 1939 Baker City Directory, where he is listed as James, 33, a co-owner of the Royal Café.

In July 1942, seven months after war with Japan was declared, Jimmy joined the Army. He served state-side until the end of the war. His first wife, who was still in China, died of starvation in 1944. In 1948 Jimmy returned to China, where their three children had managed to survive the war. His two daughters by then were teenagers. While in China, Jimmy remarried and returned to the U.S. with his son Gary, ca. age 12, and his new wife, Lily Lau. Gary did not stay in Baker City, instead went to live with an older sister in the Sacramento or San Francisco area. In 1960 Jimmy and Lily had a son, Michael.



*Jimmy Eng and new wife, Lily, his teenage daughters, and son Gary.
Photo taken in China in 1948.*



Lily and Jimmy Eng.



Watching son Michael's first steps in Royal Café.



*Lily, Michael, & First Birthday Cake in Royal Café.
Michael more interested in new toy.*

In 1948 co-owner Allan Eng visited his wife, Shui Heng Lee and family, who were still living in the Eng village in China. Shui did not want to come to the U.S. In 1949 Allan married Marjorie Fong, who was born in Baker City and worked many years as a waitress at the Royal Café. Her parents, Oscar H. Fong and Cuie Fong, had lived in Baker since the early 1890's. Oscar moved to Oregon from California and met Cuie, who grew up in Baker. Their first son, Arthur Fong, was born in 1900 and their second son, Edward (Edwin), was born in 1903. Allan moved in with Marjorie and her brothers at 1718 Valley not far from the Royal Café. By then both Oscar and Cuie had died. Allan and Marjorie divorced in 1961.



*Marjorie Fong, born in Baker City, was a waitress at Royal Café.
Married Allan Eng in 1949, divorced in 1961.*

Around 1961 Allan helped his first wife, Shui, immigrate from Hong Kong to Baker City. Shui and other Eng village wives had fled to Hong Kong, when Chinese Communists took control of Southern China after the defeat of Japan. Having relatives doing business in the U.S. made them targets for being beaten or sent to re-education camps. By 1962 Allan and Shui were living in a ranch-style house built ca. 1953 at 2999 N. 2nd in the Grandview area of Baker City. By 1973 Allan, the last of the original five owners of the Royal Café still living in Baker City, moved with Shui to San Francisco to be near their two daughters and grandchildren.

Gan Ong (1902-1994) was the third oldest of the co-owners of the Royal Café. He came to the U.S. in 1920 at age 18 to join his father in Pendleton. His father had previously lived in Walla Walla. In the 1930 Federal Census Gan was living in Pendleton working

as a cook. Gan visited China, ca. 1925, and married May Huie in 1926. A son born in 1926 died at about age seven. Later they had a daughter, Winifred (Winnie), after Gan returned again to China in about 1932. In 1942 Gan served in the U.S. Army, but after several months he was honorably discharged, reason unknown.

The first mention of Gan Ong in Baker City was in the 1939 BCD, which listed him as one of the co-owners of the Royal Café residing on the second floor of 2009 Main, which was across the hall from The Chinese Tea Garden restaurant, the Engs first business in Baker City. Eventually the co-owners began living above the Royal Café at 1910 Main sometime during WWII.

In about 1948 Gan returned again to China. During that trip Gan and May adopted their son, David. May, Winnie, and David left the Eng Village and moved to Guangzhou (formerly Canton City), the state capital of Guangdong Province (formerly Canton Province). When Communist forces started moving south through China, Gan's loved ones left Guangzhou and fled to Hong Kong. Gan's and May's daughter, Winnie, graduated from college in Hong Kong and obtained a graduate degree in Taiwan. Winnie attended pharmacy school at Oregon State College (now OSU), ca. 1958-1961.

The 1958 BCD lists Gan as still living above the Royal Café. Sometime during that year May arrived from China to join Gan in Baker City. The couple was finally together permanently after thirty-three years of living on two different continents. In 1959 Gan and May bought a modern ranch-style house at 855 Idlewood Street in Baker City. Co-owner Gan worked as a cook and pastry chef at the Royal Cafe and May was a dishwasher.



Gan Ong, wife May, Winifred, David

Winifred moved to Seattle in 1962. When Gan Ong retired from the Royal Café in 1964, Gan, May, and David also moved to Seattle to be near Winnie. About 10-15 years later, Winifred got a position in Silicon Valley area and moved to California. Gan and May followed a few years later. David Ong stayed in Seattle.

With Allan, Jimmy, and Gan having been joined by their wives and buying or renting houses in Baker City, just Harry and Jack of the co-owners were still living above the Royal Café. Harry died in February 1961, his wife never having joined him in the U.S. That left Jack as the last of the co-owners still residing above the Royal Café. But that changed in 1962, when Jack's wife, Sue Oye, was finally allowed to immigrate to the U.S.

Soon thereafter Jack and Sue Oye built a new ranch-style house on an empty lot at the southeast corner of D & 1st streets. Their new address was 2880 1st Street. (When I was a child in the 1940's and 1950's, I lived across the street from 2880 1st Street. At that time the site of Jack and Sue Oye's new house was a farm implement and feed store, behind which was an earthen potato cellar. That corner was and is today at the very end of Main Street, but in the early 1900's at the very northern edge of Baker City that was where the town's trash was dumped. Today that end of Main and 1st streets is completely urbanized.)

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Part 6

Royal Café Management Turns a New Page

The year 1964 is especially notable in the history of the Royal Café for two reasons: Jack and Allan were the last of the original five owners of the Royal Café still living in Baker City, and that year Jack's first son, Henry, became a partner with his father in the Royal Café. (But the very last original owner living in Baker was Allan Eng, who did not move away until 1973, long after he had retired from the Royal Café, and a year after Jack Eng died.)

Henry Gan Eng, aka Henry Wong (1927-1978), was born in China. In 1940 at the age of 14, Henry came to the U.S. to join his father, Jack Eng. Up to that point Jack had had only extremely limited contact with Henry, who was still living with his mother, Sue Oye, in the little Eng village in southeast China. In Baker City teenager Henry attended St. Francis Academy, where he learned to speak English and continued his education.

The first written evidence of Henry's coming to the U.S. is noted in the 1941 BCD, which lists Henry Wong as a restaurant worker at the Royal Café residing at 2009 Main Street, which was where the café's Chinese workers initially lived after arriving in Baker City. Not long thereafter they began living in apartments above the Royal Café. The apartments were accessed via a street-level entry with its own address, 1910 ½ Main Street, which led up a stairway to the building's second floor.

In 1950 Henry married Annie Huie in Walla Walla (see Part 2 for wedding story and photos). Annie was born in Lewiston, Idaho. In 1936, when Annie was still a young child, her parents decided to take the whole family to China to live for a few years. Once the family was settled, the father soon returned to the U.S., moved from Lewiston to Walla Walla, where he had purchased a farm, and began growing potatoes and Chinese vegetables.

The timing of the trip to China was unfortunate. In 1937 Japan invaded China. The invasion prompted a premature return to the U.S. in 1938. Fearing the ship might be sunk with the loss of mother and all children, the family booked passage on two ships. Annie's mother had three of the children with her on one ship; Annie's older brother had the other three children with him on another ship. Luckily both ships arrived safely in the U.S.

Right after their marriage, Henry and Annie lived in Baker City. The 1953 BCD listed Henry as a cook at the Royal Café and Annie as a telephone operator for Pacific Telephone Co., both of them living in a new house at 2220 D Street (northwest corner of D and 3rd streets). They continued living there until 1960-1961. During that period they were living in Pasco, WA, where Annie was working as a telephone operator. After returning from Pasco, Henry and Annie resumed living at the 2220 D address.

Beginning in 1966 the BCD listed Jack and Henry as the sole partners in the Royal Café business. That's probably the same year Henry took a leadership role and his father started easing into retirement. By 1969 they had acquired ownership of the adjoining building on the south side of the Royal Café, the three-story Kennedy Building located on the northeast corner of Main and Court streets.

The site of the Kennedy Building has quite a history, including much remodeling. On that empty corner in 1873, Catholic priest Father DeRoo built the two-story Arlington Hotel, the first brick structure in Baker City. The Arlington was sold and became the Cosmopolitan Hotel, to which a third story was added. Eventually that story was remodeled to match the two underlying stories. That became the Kennedy Building.

Henry and Jack had big plans for the ground floor of the Kennedy Building. Those plans, however, did not include the top two floors. So, the Engs had those two stories removed. But that was not the end of the remodel. The exterior of both the Main Street and Court Street sides received a façade of moon stone from a quarry on Dooley Mountain. The one-story building took on the exterior look it has to this day.



*Removal of 2nd & 3rd stories of Kennedy Building.
Bottom floor became the Shangrila Lounge.*

Although there are no photos showing the inside of the Shangrila Lounge, there are photos of extensive remodeling of the interior and exterior of the Royal Café.



Jack Eng manned the cash register, posing at remodeled front entrance.



Royal Café interior before extensive remodeling.



Remodeled interior of Royal Café, looking toward Main Street entrance.



Remodeled interior of Royal Café, looking toward kitchen.

I'll digress here to mention Jack's other son, Ken Ying Eng, born in China in 1935, eight years younger than older brother, Henry Wong. (When I was in school at North Baker Grade School in 1948, three Chinese teenagers spent several months attending North Grade in order to learn English before joining their peers in junior high school. Ken was one of those three.) Ken excelled in school. When he graduated from Baker High School in 1954, he was president of his senior class. In addition, he had been vice president of his junior class, on the Nugget yearbook staff four years, a member of National Honor Society his last two years, and as a sophomore won the National High School Photo Contest. Post-high school Ken attended Stanford University and later Massachusetts Institute of Technology, then went on to work as a nuclear physicist in California.



*Ken Eng, younger son of Jack Eng, came to U.S. in 1948.
He graduated from Baker High School in 1954.*

Jack and Henry turned their attention to remodeling the shortened Kennedy Building into a night club they named Shangrila Lounge. And about the same time they gave the Royal Café a completely new look. Jack took several photos of the café's new interior, but in the more than 1,000 Jack Eng negatives in the Baker County Library's Jack Eng Collection, there's not one photo of the interior of the Shangrila Lounge. Those who remember the interior say there was a wonderful dance floor on the Main Street side

and on the east side of the building were a bar and a banquet and conference room that could accommodate 300 people.

The Shangrila Lounge opened with much fanfare on November 10, 1969. The opening night act was Sheb Wooley, singer, actor, and comedian, best known for the song "The Purple People Eater." A *Record-Courier* photo of the opening showed Wooley hamming it up with Henry and Annie Wong and Jack Eng. Entertainment for the rest of the week was the Ink Spots, famous for their hit song with the clever title "I don't want to set the world on fire, I just want to start a flame in your heart."

On the morning of October 20, 1972, while working in his rose garden at 2880 1st Street, Jack suffered a heart attack and died. According to an obituary in *The Record-Courier*, Jack was born October 25, 1904, in China. Officiating at his funeral was lay pastor James Shaver of the Christian Church. A long cortege of cars followed the hearse and casket to Mount Hope Cemetery. On the way up Main Street, the procession paused in front of the Royal Café. The purpose, it's said, was to allow Jack's soul to enter for a last look and return to his body. Both Jack and Sue Oye are buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery. Jack's wife, Sue Oye, died in 1980.



Sue Oye Eng, wife of Jack Eng

Upon Jack's death, his son, Henry Wong, became sole owner of the Royal Café. The next year, 1973, Henry and Annie built a new house on an empty lot at 3055 Grandview Drive. Baker City Directories for the years 1973-1976 list Henry G. Wong as president of the business. In 1976 Henry opened a sister Royal Café in Ontario, Oregon, 72 miles southeast of Baker City.

Sometime in 1977 Henry, a longtime smoker, was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. Toward the end of the year he traveled to Mexico, where in those days clinics

treated cancer patients with laetrile, a substance made from apricot pits, which the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has never found efficacious for curing cancer. Henry died January 12, 1978, in Tijuana, Mexico. Officiating at his funeral in Baker City was his brother-in-law James B. Huie. Interment was in Mount Hope Cemetery quite near the monument for his parents, Jack Eng and Sue Oye Eng. (Henry and Annie had no children.)



Henry Wong (1927-1978)

Upon news of Henry's death reaching Baker City, the *Democrat-Herald* ran an article heaping glowing praise on Henry. Here are a few excerpts. "He regularly worked as a cook during the mid-day and evening shifts, while overseeing the Shangrila Lounge. He often worked 16 hours a day, seven days a week, but he never complained....He loved his work and often told friends who'd say he needed a vacation, 'Work is my happiness.' Henry "gave countless donations to countless causes, but shunned publicity, so his generosity went unrecognized.... Henry Wong won't be remembered because he was active in the community. He wasn't. He wasn't much of a goer, or doer, or a joiner. But Baker County is the richer" for his having lived here.

Baker City Directories from 1978 through 1990 list the owner of the Royal Café as Mrs. Annie Wong, President. When Annie retired in 1990, it ended over a half century of Royal Café on Main Street. Over the next ten years ownership and name of the restaurant changed several times. Since 2010 the family-owned Delicioso Mexican Restaurant has occupied the 1910 Main St. location. The building that housed the Shangrila portion of the business was purchased by a businessman from Idaho about a year ago and is undergoing restoration, new purpose for building as yet unknown.



Annie Huie Wong

Many residents of Baker City will remember Annie not only as proprietor of the Royal Café, but also for her many Chinese artifacts that have been on display in the south end of the ballroom of Baker Heritage Museum since March 1995.

Annie Wong continued living in Baker City for many years. Today Annie lives with her sister Clara in New Mexico.

Jack Eng and Sue Oye Eng are buried in Mount Hope Cemetery in Baker City. Their flat stone below may be seen right behind the upright stone of Henry and Annie Wong (see further below).





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Dedication

This article is dedicated to the memory of the 5 original owners of the Royal Café and to later owners Henry and Annie Wong. As of this writing Annie Wong is 96 years old.



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 Baker City, Oregon
 April 10, 2022