

Woo Yee Sing in front his laundry, in Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis about 1895. The business stayed at this Nicollet Avenue address until 1913.

A man named Charley own a Chinese laundry in downtown Shakopee in 1901.

Popular during the late 19th and early 20th century, these laundries were usually run by Chinese immigrants who would hand wash and press clothes for their patrons.

One of the first laundromats in Shakopee was recognized on September 20, 1901 in the ***Shakopee Tribune***.

Discrimination abounded toward the Chinese, even in our own local papers, calling them 'chinks' and Celestials.

A stereotype developed around the Chinese laundryman and eventually their shops closed.

—Charley Sam, the laundry man, has just had a well dug at his place of business, at an expense of \$85, and he wishes to announce to the public that he is now prepared to do family washing at much cheaper rates than before. Shirts, collars, cuffs, and general washing at right prices, and satisfaction guaranteed.

One of the first laundromats in Shakopee was recognized on September 20, 1901 at the *Shakopee Tribune*. This location might be the same one that Liu Kwong Kee took over by 1917.



Though the newspaper called the man “Charley Sam,” it is likely that was probably not his name. “Charlie” was a derogatory term for a Chinese man. Probably the people in Shakopee never learned the Mandarin or Cantonese name.

No more information was found about Charlie Sam and the laundry man in downtown Shakopee.



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Charlie Sam

In Shakopee 1901
(Picture not of Charlie)



In the 1840s and 1850s America begins to recruit Chinese laborers. *Wah gung* was the name of the migrating laborers. Chinese immigration influenced by first opium war, depressed agricultural output, and peasant rebellions.

At that time, war, famine, and a poor economy in southeastern China caused many Chinese men to come to America.

Most of them hoped to find great wealth and return to China. Between 1849 and 1853, about 24,000 young Chinese men immigrated to California. The Chinese immigrants worked mining gold.

Chinese immigrants soon found that many Americans did not welcome them. In 1852, California placed a high monthly tax on all foreign miners. Chinese miners had no choice but to pay this tax if they wanted to mine for gold in California.

Chinese workers were also the targets of violent attacks in the mining camps. The legal system offered little protection. It often favored Americans over Chinese and other immigrants.

After the gold rush ended, many Chinese immigrants worked as farm laborers, in low-paying industrial jobs, and on railroad construction.



Charlie Sam was a laundry man in Shakopee in 1901. The location is probably on Holmes Street, in what is now Digital Impact Solutions.

There were other laundry men in Shakopee, including Liu Kwong Kee, who had a shop at the same location in 1917.



Some of the immigrants worked on the railroad. From 1863 and 1869, roughly 15,000 Chinese workers helped build the transcontinental railroad.

They had to endure hazardous, unfair conditions and backbreaking labor. They were paid less than American workers and lived in tents, while white workers were given accommodation in train cars. The work was tiresome, as the railroad was built entirely by manual laborers who used to shovel 20 pounds of rock over 400 times a day. They had to face dangerous work conditions – accidental explosions, snow and rock avalanches, which killed hundreds of workers, not to mention frigid weather.

Few other jobs were allowed for people from China. On May 6, 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was signed which prohibited all immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States. This act, signed by President Chester A. Arthur, provided an absolute 10-year (which was extended) moratorium on Chinese labor immigration. For the first time, Federal law proscribed entry of an ethnic working group on the premise that it endangered the good order of certain localities.

Most of the Chinese men who came to the midwest moved from the west coast to escape the violence.

The first Chinese immigrants arrived in Minnesota in the mid 1870s. Wang See Ling arrived in 1875, and was an entrepreneur who started restaurants, stores import shops and hotels, in the Twin Cities and Stillwater, Iron Range, Duluth and ten smaller towns.

By the late 1800s, more than 100 Chinese immigrant men had entered the state, with most settling in St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Duluth.

In Stillwater, Minnesota, in the mid to late 19th century, several Chinese laundrymen set up shops. The first one, belonging to Sam Lung, operated a shop in 1879. After a few years, **The Stillwater Messenger** exalted the owners of the laundry, stating, “They are honest, industrious gentlemanly fellows, who have made many friends among our citizens.” Stillwater was the home of a Chinese Laundry for more than twenty years.

