

United States, due to the restrictions of the immigration law, Chinese tradition, and the high cost of trans-Pacific travel.

The majority of Chinese people in the United States, and in Minnesota, were mostly men. The first record of an Asian in Minnesota was Wang See Ling who arrived from China in 1875. He was one of the first Chinese entrepreneurs. Chinese entrepreneurs started restaurants, stores, import shops and hotels and businesses not just in the Twin Cities, but in Stillwater, then a lumber town, the Iron Range, Duluth, and ten smaller towns, including Shakopee.

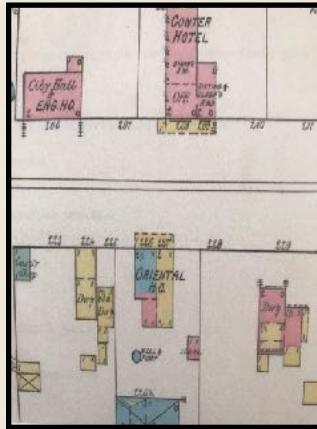
In fact, the first Chinese American woman was Liang May Seen was the first woman of Chinese descent to live in Minnesota when she moved here with her husband in 1892. Woo Yee Sing, a Chinese businessman from Minneapolis, was looking for a wife, and he found Liang; they were married that summer and she moved with him to Minneapolis. She overcame an impoverished childhood in China and teenage years spent in a San Francisco brothel to become a respected leader in the Chinese immigrant community in Minneapolis.

At least six Chinese American families were established in Minnesota before 1910. The Chinese American man in Shakopee, as far as what the Shakopee Heritage Society has found out so far, never did find a wife in Shakopee. But he did have family members and friends in Minneapolis. The weekly calls to Minneapolis was probably a life line for the man from Shakopee, and an opportunity to speak his primary language with others.



Liang and her son, Howard, c. 1910 by the Minnesota Historical Society.

## The Oriental Hotel



The Oriental Hotel was located between Lewis Street and Sommerville Street on Second Avenue, across from the Conter Hotel. This is a Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Shakopee, Scott County, Minnesota on June 1890 and available from the Library of Congress.

The decades of the 1930s and 1940s brought violent upheavals in China and were difficult times for Chinese Minnesotans, concerned for their relatives and for the future of their homeland. After World War II, Chinese American communities and businesses flourished in Minnesota. By 2002, Chinese immigrants and their descendants in Minnesota numbered more than 18,000 people. In Shakopee, about 10% of the people are Asian-Americans. Of those, about 55 people are Chinese Americans.

And the first documented Asian American in Shakopee was the Chinese American who called his friend in Minneapolis at the Strunk Drug Store in 1892.



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## SHAKOPEE HERITAGE SOCIETY



# A Chinese American Man

In Shakopee 1892  
(Picture not of the man)



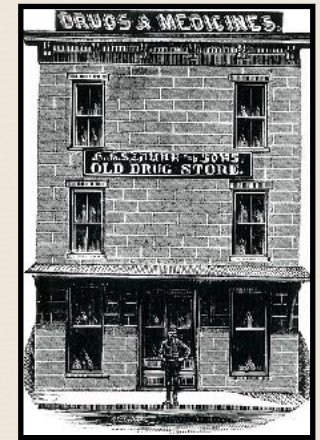
Chinese immigrants in the 19th century struggled to make a home for themselves in the United States. Despite harsh immigration restrictions and job discrimination that persisted well into the 20th century, Chinese people managed to put down roots in all parts of the country.

The first Chinese immigrants arrived in Minnesota in the mid-1870s. The first Chinese immigrant to arrive in Minnesota was Wang See Ling who arrived in 1875. He was one of the first Chinese entrepreneurs. Chinese entrepreneurs started restaurants, stores, import shops and hotels and businesses not just in the Twin Cities, but in Stillwater, then a lumber town, the Iron Range, Duluth, and ten smaller towns, including Shakopee. By the late 1880s more than 100 Chinese men had entered the state, with most settling in St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Duluth, and the rest scattered in smaller towns. In Shakopee, the first documentation of a Chinese person in Shakopee was in 1892.

In 1890 in Shakopee, the Oriental Hotel was in downtown Shakopee on Second Avenue, between Lewis Street and Sommerville Street.



C. Joseph Strunk ran the Strunk's Drug Store in the middle of First Avenue, between Homes Street and Lewis Street on the north side of the block. It was not until 1881 and early 1882 that telephones were installed in a few places, including the drug store. It was in 1892 that the first long distance calls started, from the old drug store, Strunk's Drug Store. This is also the first documentation of a Chinese American man from Shakopee, who called his friend in Minneapolis and spoke using his birth language.



It was probably not used in a derogatory way. It was just something to use for anything Asian, whether that's food, a business, a person, an idea. But it is not a word used today. "We use Asian, or Asian-American, now," said Kat Chow in a NPR interview. "That term's been outdated for a long time." Kat Chow notes that it is a cringe-inducing and sinister at its base, kind of like "chink" meant to box one group away for another's comfort. It makes one think of the caricatures of grinning Asian men with ponytails and buckteeth. In fact, the term oriental is not longer used from federal laws. It is not a word to use today.

It could be that the Chinese American man who lived in Shakopee in 1892 worked at the Oriental Hotel, or may have been a cook there. Most Chinese Americans were stuck in either as laundry men or restaurant workers. But there is no information about this person, including his name. He was just listed as "oriental."

In 1878, someone came to Shakopee to convince people to have telephones. The "telegraphy" system was operated by February of 1879, connecting Strunk's

Drug Store, the depot, Fr. Alois Plut's residence, and the Court House. By 1882, several local dwellings also got phones. Hines noted that they were "a nice plaything for little boys at either end."

Actually having a telephone that called long distance did not happen until 1892.

C. Joseph Strunk stepped to the back of the Old Drug Store on the north side of First Avenue and rang the bell, making the first long-distance phone call on September of 1892. He called the Noyes Brothers and Cutler at St. Paul, by way of Minneapolis.

The booth at the back of the store was the first and only for several years, of long distant service.

An Asian American man, the only one in Shakopee at that time, would call to a friend in Minneapolis, according to Julius Coller II. The Chinese American used to yell loudly to make sure it went through, and many white men at the store would wonder if he would just open the door of the booth, the singsong conversation would reach its destination easier than over the wire!

Family life developed slowly in Minnesota's early Chinese community and elsewhere in the