

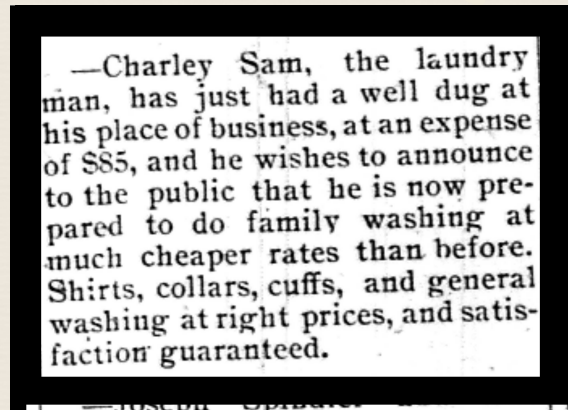
in the 19th century worked as laborers, particularly on transcontinental railroads such as the Central Pacific Railroad. They also worked as laborers in mining, and suffered racial discrimination at every level of society. Industrial employers were eager for this new and cheap labor, whites were stirred to anger by the "yellow peril."

Newspapers condemned employers, and even church leaders denounced the arrival of these "aliens" into what was regarded as a land for whites only. So hostile was the opposition that in 1882 the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibiting immigration from China. The Chinese Exclusion Act is seen by some as the only U.S. law ever to prevent immigration and naturalization on the basis of race.

This changed in 1943, when the Magnuson Act, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943, was signed into law on December 17, 1943. It allowed Chinese immigration for the first time since the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and permitted some Chinese immigrants already residing in the country to become naturalized citizens. However, the Magnuson Act provided for the continuation of the ban against the ownership of property and businesses by ethnic Chinese until the Magnuson Act itself was fully repealed in 1965.



As of the 2010 United States Census, there are more than 3.3 million Chinese in the United States, about 1% of the total population. It is estimated that as many as 10,000 Chinese immigrants and persons of Chinese descent live in Minnesota. Chinese Minnesotans live throughout the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota. The Twin Cities area has the second largest concentration of Mainland Chinese college and university students in the United States. In Shakopee, there are about 55 Chinese-Americans who live here.



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.



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Liu Kwong Kee

In Shakopee 1917

Compiled and written by David R. Schlieper, Shakopee Heritage Society © 2020





Liu Kwong Kee ran the laundromat in downtown Shakopee in 1917.

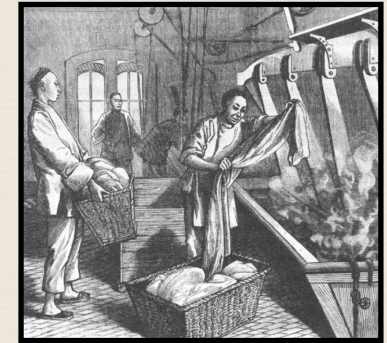
According to Ora Kopsisca, in an interview in the 1960s, Ora and his family moved to Shakopee in 1917. His father opened a garage in part of the building on 128 Holmes Street South in downtown Shakopee. The place used to be called Riverside Printing, and is now Digital Impact Solutions.

According to Ora, “Also in part of the same building was a laundry at that time” and was operated by a man who became Ora’s first acquaintance in Shakopee. His name was Liu Kwong Kee, and he was from China.

“I lived with the rest of my family in quarters directly above the building which housed the laundry and my dad’s garage, where he was a dealer for the Elcar. At the age of five or six, it was very easy for me to get along well with the elderly Chinaman,” said Ira.



Woo Yee Sing in front his laundry, in Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis about 1895. The business stayed at this Nicollet Avenue address until 1913. Liu Kwong Kee had a similar building in downtown Shakopee.



Few jobs were allowed for people from China, except for laundry or restaurant workers. Here is an example of people at a Chinese laundry, similar to what Liu Kwong Kee did in Shakopee.

Ora’s favorite memories was of Liu eating his favorite meals of boiled carp and rice. “His technique for eating the fish from a bowl with some of the cooking liquid was a combination of chopstick, dexterity, plus a sort of vacuum cleaner action,” said Ora.

Liu Kwong Kee had immigrated to the United States, probably in the late 1880s, and probably moved to San Francisco. He arrived to face severe anti-Chinese violence. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which restricted Chinese immigration to the United States, had also bolstered the segregation and social exclusion of Chinese immigrants already in the United States.

Most of the Chinese men who came to the Midwest during the 1880s and 1890s moved from the West Coast to escape this kind of violence. Liu Kwong Kee probably moved for the same reason. Minnesota was not free

from violence or discrimination, however. Liu Kwong Kee probably was taunted and called racist names. Like many Chinese men at this time, Liu became a laundry operator. He may have taken over the laundromat of Charlie Sam, who had a laundry place in downtown Shakopee at least since 1901.

The first Chinese immigrants arrived in Minnesota in the mid-1870s, almost all of them single working men escaping anti-Asian violence in the western United States. Most settled in St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Duluth, with the rest sparsely scattered in outlying towns, including, probably, Shakopee. Nationally, the Chinese population declined in the U.S. following the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 which stopped almost all immigration to the U.S. from China. However, the number of Chinese in Minnesota increased at this time due to migration from western states. By 1910 there were almost 400 Chinese men in Minnesota, though only a handful of Chinese families.