

THE ROCK SPRINGS MASSACRE

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As a youngster in Rock Springs during the period from 1910 to 1925 I would hear on many occasions comment on the troubles which existed between the Chinese and the white coal miners employed by the Union Pacific Coal Company in the early days of coal mining in the Rock Springs area of Southwestern Wyoming.

This trouble reached its climax on September 2, 1885 when whites at Rock Springs, Wyoming Territory killed 28 Chinese laborers, wounded 15 others and chased several hundred other Chinese out of town. In addition property valued at \$147,000 was destroyed. *

Marcus Outsen, my Grandfather, emigrated to America from Denmark in 1875. He had been a soldier in the Danish Army in the 1864 War with Germany which resulted, among other things, in the loss of his homeland, the Province of Schleswig-Holstein, to Germany as part of the spoils of that War. Not wanting any part of military service in the German Army about to engage in the Franco-Prussian War, he left my Grandmother and son and came to America, first settling in Omaha, Nebraska and later in Rock Springs, Wyoming.

In the year 1881 my Grandmother, accompanied by her son, age 11, migrated to the United States and came directly to Rock Springs. My Father, Charles Outsen, was that son and was present in Rock Springs at the peak of the "Chinese Massacre", or "Rock Springs Massacre", or as referred to in my youth in Rock Springs as the "Chinese Riot."

* "The Chinese Massacre," by Paul Crane and Alfred Larson, Annals of Wyoming, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 47-55 and Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 153-161.

This contradiction in terms stems somewhat, I believe, in the relationship of the observer or writer to the situation as it then existed. By this I mean that there was perhaps a tendency of the local citizenry of Rock Springs to label the dispute as a "Chinese Riot" rather than a "Chinese or Rock Springs Massacre". The latter terms, of course, reflecting somewhat unfavorably perhaps upon the white participants in that unfortunate occasion.

To place the "Chinese Riot" or "Chinese Massacre", whichever term is preferred, in its proper perspective one must go back a few years before 1885 to determine the root causes of such a serious disorder among peoples of different ethnic origins.

The California gold discovery in 1848 marked the beginnings of the Chinese migration to the United States. In 1862 Congress prohibited the importation of Chinese coolies, but many were brought in for construction work on the Pacific railways. Friction between the white and Chinese workers developed which brought about the Burlingame Treaty with China in 1868 and in 1880 the treaty was modified to the extent that China recognized the right of the United States to regulate, limit or suspend Chinese immigration whenever it was deemed necessary. In 1882 under the terms of this treaty Chinese Immigration was suspended for ten years. Later this exclusion became permanent.

In 1875 a strike^{occurred} in the mines at Rock Springs. Up to that time the mines had been worked by whites. The going rate for white miners in that day was one dollar per ton with a strike demand of one dollar and twenty five cents per ton.

The Union Pacific Railroad as the operator of the mines was not inclined to accede to these wage demands and as a means of continuing mining operations the company imported Chinese laborers to mine coal. Initially about 150 Chinese laborers were brought to Rock Springs in 1875. More came later, with the firm Beckwith, Quinn & Comany, acting as the labor procurement and payroll agency for the railroad.

At the time of the "massacre" there were 150 whites and 331 Chinese working in the mines at Rock Springs. The whites were particularly bitter against the Union Pacific Coal Department because of alleged mistreatments smoldering in the hearts and minds of the whites, and against the Chinese for refusing to join the whites in the 1875 strike which resulted in the discharge, and in fact, denial of further employment for many whites who had helped to instigate and take part in that strike.

Many of the white miners were recent English, Scotch, Irish and Scandinavian immigrants and also members of the Knights of Labor, a National labor organization which had experienced rapid growth and which had worked for the exclusion of Chinese laborers from the United States.

Generally speaking relationships between the whites and Chinese had been one of mutual tolerance and there had been few if any incidences prior to the massacre itself.

In the background, of course, there had been developing an increasing bitterness beyond that caused by the Chinese unwillingness to participate in the 1875 strike. This bitterness was caused mainly by alleged favoritism shown the Chinese miners in the assignment of work areas inside the mines.

Whites and Chinese miners were paid on a tonnage production basis. Good working conditions meant simply that coal was more easily accessible and because of better accessibility a higher tonnage could be mined, loaded and credited to the miner who had placed his metal identification check tag on the car for check off when it reached the weighmaster at the tipple outside the mine.

As to be expected there were rumors and rumblings of "deals and "payoffs" between the top Chinese community leaders, and Company officials such as mine or pit foreman, to place Chinese miners in the more favorably productive coal producing areas. Although pay-offs were denied by the Company the rumors persisted. Additionally there were complaints about the function of Beckwith, Quinn and Company as the Company Store, the miners and families in this instance being obliged to buy food and clothing with guaranteed payments by means of payroll deductions on pay days.

The incident which actually triggered the uprising on the part of the whites occurred at No. 6 mine early on September 2, 1885. Four rooms, or stalls, had been assigned to two white miners and two Chinese. The white miners placed shots in their two rooms but the shots were not fired. Allegedly the Chinese miners took over the two rooms assigned to the whites on the morning of September 2 and after firing the shots they proceeded to load out the coal. When the white miners appeared on the scene an argument ensued which culminated in a fight resulting in severe injuries to the Chinese and their evacuation from the mine. Shortly thereafter the white miners left the mine, proceeded to the Knights of Labor hall and began to stir up trouble for the Chinese. The word

passed around that there would be a meeting at 6:00 P.M. to settle the Chinese problem.

Several saloons served as gathering places for the whites for the remainder of the morning. Liquor was dispensed with antagonisms likely keeping pace with the effects of the drinking. When it became apparent that further trouble was brewing the stores and saloons agreed to dispense with the sale of drinks that day.

About 2:00 P.M., a mob of 150 whites armed themselves with rifles and other devices to serve as weapons and headed for Chinatown. Shots were fired and the Chinese, offering no resistance, fled to the hills with whites in pursuit. Many of the Chinese shacks were set ablaze and later that evening additional damage was caused by fires. For the most part those Chinese who escaped from the wrath of the whites worked their way to the railroad east and west of Rock Springs. On orders from the Union Pacific Railroad, train crews picked up the stragglers and transported them to Evanston for security.

Governor Francis E. Warren in Evanston for - a first-hand look at the Chinese refugee station, on the 4th of September appealed to President Cleveland as a means to prevent further trouble as follows:

"Unlawful combinations and conspiracies exist among coal miners and others, in the Uintah and Sweetwater Counties in this Territory, which prevents individuals and corporations from enjoyment and protection of their property, and obstruct execution of laws. Open insurrection at Rock Springs; property burned; sixteen dead bodies found; probably fifty more under ruins. Seven hundred Chinamen driven from town,

and have taken refuge at Evanston, and are ordered to leave there. Sheriff powerless to make necessary arrests and protect life and property, unless supported by organized bodies of armed men. Wyoming has no territorial militia; therefore I respectfully and earnestly request the aid of the United States troops, not only to protect the mails and mail-routes but that they may be instructed to support civil authorities until order is restored, criminals arrested, and the suffering relieved."

On September 6th the white miners at Evanston notified A. C. Beckwith, of Beckwith, Quinn and Company that they would shoot him if he did not see that all Chinese at Evanston were out of the town within three days. On the following day the white miners at Almy, near Evanston, threatened death to any Chinese who entered the mines. Consequently, no Chinese laborer worked either in the mines or on the tracks.

These actions convinced Governor Warren that the situation continued to be grave and he again appealed to President Cleveland in part:

"From the nature of the outbreak, sheriff or county cannot rally sufficient posse, and Territorial government cannot sufficiently aid him..

Insurrectionists know, through newspapers and dispatches, that troops will not interfere under present orders; and moral effect of presence of troops is destroyed. If troops were known to have orders to assist the Sheriff's posse in case driven back, I am quite sure civil authorities could restore order without actual use of soldiers."

The miners and merchants committee on September 8 wired General Manager S. R. Callaway of the Union Pacific Railroad at Omaha, asking for an interview in which to present their grievances against the Company. Callaway declined to be interviewed until property belonging to the Company was restored.

Commenting editorially in its issue of 5 September the Cheyenne Leader stated:

***"that such lawlessness should prevail in one of the oldest and largest settlements of Wyoming is a reproach to every citizen thereof. The Leader never had approved, nor does it now approve of the importation of Chinamen to replace white laborers ***but it must condemn in the severe language the act of mob violence perpetrated upon the defenceless Chinamen of Rock Springs, ***to murder them - heathens though they are - when fleeing before their pursuers, is an act of barbarism on par with Indian warfare. That the white men of Wyoming should be guilty of such inhumanity must forever be a stain upon the fair escutcheon of this territory.

It is now unquestionably the duty of our civil authorities to bring the guilty parties to justice. No efforts should be spared in that direction. Rewards should be offered for the detection and conviction of the murderers of thirty human beings - people needlessly slaughtered. Not until this is done, not until the guilty are duly punished, will the fair name of Wyoming be cleansed of the bloodstains cast upon it by the horrible outrage at Rock Springs."

On September 9 President Cleveland ordered the Army to move to Rock Springs to protect the Chinese and as a secondary mission to protect the mails although there was no indication that the "rioters" had interfered in any way with the mail service. Some 250 officers and men from Camp Murray, Utah territory were assigned the mission of escorting 625 Chinese from Evanston to Rock Springs exactly one week after the outbreak on September 2.

The use of troops for this purpose met with much objection from the press west of the Missouri. The Rock Springs Independent was especially bitter in its remarks and perhaps understandingly one sided in its criticism of the Union Pacific.

"The action of the company in bringing back the Chinese means that they are to be set to work in the mines, and that American soliders are to prevent them from being again driven out.

It means that all white miners at Rock Springs, except those absolutely required, are to be replaced by Chinese labor.

It means that the company intends to make a "Chinatown" out of Rock Springs, as they proposed to the Almy miners last Monday.

It means that Rock Springs is killed, as far as white men are concerned, if such a programme is carried out.

Hod do our miners and how do our business men like the situation, and what are they going to do about it?

There is but one thing to do: miners, merchants, and railway employees must unite as one man against such a high-handed proceeding. It is a matter in which every business man and every working man along the line of the Union Pacific is concerned.

If the labor organizations of Colorado and Wyoming, backed up by the business interest and public sentiment and public press of

the country, cannot enforce their demand that the Chinese must go, we are much mistaken as to their strength.

Neither the labor organizations nor public sentiment will uphold the brutal murder of the Chinese last week. The punishment of their crimes is within the province of the civil authorities, and they will not be molested in the prosecution of their duties. But innocent men with their families, and the business interest of Rock Springs, must not be allowed to suffer through the avenging spirit of the Union Pacific Railway. Let the demand go up from one end of the Union Pacific to the other, THE CHINESE MUST GO".

On September 20th, General A. McCook of Fort Douglas, Utah Territory, who had been in Rock Springs helping the Chinese consuls take testimony wired the Adjutant General of the Department of the Platte:

"Am fully convinced that any attempted trial and punishment by civil authority, United States or Territorial, of the men who murdered the Chinese on 2nd of September, will prove a burlesque and farce in the name of law and justice. The men who committed the murders are aliens; their murdered victims are also aliens, but under treaty protection. Martial law should be declared in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, the murderers arrested and tried by military commission."

General Cook's evaluation of public sentiment in the Rock Springs area was an astute observation of the sentiment which prevailed in the minds of the white citizens. This was borne out by the report of the grand jury convened in Rock Springs several weeks after the riot.

"We have dilligently inquired into the occurrence at Rock Springs on the 2d day of September last, and though we have examined a large number of witnesses, no one has been able to testify to a single criminal act committed by any known white person that day. Whatever crimes may have been committed, the perpetrators thereof have not been disclosed by the evidence before us; and, therefore, while we deeply regret the circumstances, we are wholly unable, acting under the obligation of our oaths, to return indictments. We have also inquired into the causes that led to the outbreak at Rock Springs. While we find no excuse for the crimes committed, there appears to be no doubt of abuses existing that should have been promptly adjusted by the railroad company and its officers. If this had been done, the fair name of our Territory would not have been stained by the terrible events of 2d of September.:

In this connection an interesting observation was contained in the editorial columns of the Cheyenne Leader under dateline of September 6 when it commented upon views expressed in an out of state paper.

"The Chicago Times in commenting severely on the Rock Springs outrage, says that although woman suffrage has prevailed in Wyoming for many years, the events at Rock Springs prove that the territory has not become civilized by means of it. Wyoming certainly will not go to Chicago to take lessons in civilization. Neither manhood or woman suffrage can prevent in Wyoming or anywhere else an occasional outburst of human passion, especially in a mining camp inhabited principally by

imported foreigners who have not become familiar with our institutions and certainly know but little of the principles underlying the elective franchise as legally established in this territory. Woman suffrage will aid Wyoming in effacing the disgrace of the Rock Springs outrage, by supporting for office only those who will duly and fully enforce the administration of the law against all law breakers."

The Chinese consul from San Francisco who went to Rock Springs deplored the refusal of the Sweetwater County grand jury to act upon the testimony provided by the Chinese and with the failure to act came the release of sixteen whites who had been arrested.

The Chinese consul then appealed to the U.S. Government for damages. After protracted argument with the Secretary of State it was finally decided by President Cleveland in a special message to The Congress that in view of the failure of Wyoming Territorial authorities to act and further because of absence of provocation the Chinese should be indemnified for their losses. A sum of \$147,784.74 was therefore paid to the Chinese Government on February 24, 1887 for distribution to those who lost property.

Although the Union Pacific won its battle to keep the Chinese at work, and the indemnity was paid there gradually came about a restriction on the employment of Chinese. This was caused by restriction on immigration and public sentiment opposed to further employment of Chinese. Chinese laborers, it was well known, sent their earnings to China. They added little to the wealth of the Territory. White employment in fact appeared the best prospect for future development and prosperity and in this the Union Pacific most certainly would share.

Therefore from a high of 914 Chinese in the Wyoming Territory in 1880 there remained only 130 Chinese in the State of Wyoming in 1930. These were in occupations other than in mining.

Little evidence remains today of the one time existence of a Chinese Community in Rock Springs. Today there are no peddlers or Chinese Laundries but second and third generations of Chinese operate three of the finest restaurants in the city: New Grand, Sands and Western Cafes.

The site of the military barracks with two original buildings on the West side of the quadrangle are intact and occupied as households. On the East side of the quadrangle is a Catholic elementary school consisting of former barracks buildings with interiors adapted to classroom use and with brick veneer exteriors present a modern decor.

The Chinese section of the City cemetery lies alongside the road leading from the main gate. Grave markers, in the main consisting of porous sandstone with identification inscribed in Chinese characters; plus grave markers consisting only of wooden boards with largely indistinct written markings and with all grave sites with built up mound of earth, and the area badly in need of attention in the care of weeds, and housekeeping in general.

Gone are the days when a Chinatown in Rock Springs existed with 600 to 700 Chinese inhabitants.

Gone are the days when the Chinese celebrated their New Year with a dragon parade in the streets of Rock Springs.

Gone are the days when the youngsters of Rock Springs bought Chinese firecrackers complete with Chinese descriptive characters and with a stick or two of punk given gratis to serve as a lighter.

Gone are the days of the Chinese Drug Store on Pilot Butte Avenue operated by a Chinese who not only dispensed herbs and drugs for the sick but also functioned as an unlicensed physician administering to the ailments of his countrymen.

Gone are the days when the Chinese vegetable dealer made the rounds with his horse and wagon selling fruits and vegetables using a woven basket as a container on one end of a stick balanced by an iron weight on the other to determine the weight of the produce sold to the housewife customers.

*Post
Ah Say?*

Gone are the days when Sam Hee the undisputed leader or "Mayor" of Chinatown would visit one day each month at the home of Marcus Outsen, County Commissioner and on each visit the three Outsen grandsons would be gifted with the munificent sum of 25 cents in newly minted 25 cent pieces - no more, no less and with no variation in purpose or procedure.

Gone are the days when the same Sam Hee, at Christmas time, would hire the local horse drawn delivery wagon to deliver his gifts to selected citizens of Rock Springs' the value of the gift it would seem commensurate with the status or position of the head of the household in the community.

Gone is the day when Sam Hee was arrested by the U.S. Immigration Service for smuggling Chinese into the United States. Sam Hee in turn was escorted to Santa Fe, New Mexico to stand trial, and Sam Hee, while awaiting trial to disappear never to be seen again.

Gone are the days when the graves in the Chinese cemetery would be festooned with coconut sticks, lechee nuts, chocolate candies, suckling pig, roasted duck as gifts to the dead spirits; the spirits in turn

circumvented by uninhibited whites appropriating the offerings to their own use. One must assume that the Chinese knew this but it did not deter them from following their time honored custom. Further it is said that when told that the dead could not rise from the grave to eat the food offerings a Chinese responded that neither could the dead rise from the grave to smell the odor of the flowers placed there by the whites.

Gone are the days of the underground horse and mule barn in Mine #8 and a mule who refused to work for a substituted driver when his own longtime Chinese driver would be absent for a holiday or illness.

"Doctor Jim"

Gone are the days when the Chinese Stable Boss Lao Chee better known as "Jimmo" fancied himself as a duly appointed Deputy Sheriff during the mine strike in 1922 and as a self appointed deputy would come up town to chase the kids from the streets at curfew time. Lao Chee couldn't read English and what he thought was a sheriff deputy badge was only a star shaped affair inscribed with the words "Chicken Inspector." How Jimmo came of this, I do not know.

Gone are the days when one could observe the Chinese miners walking to and from work; one behind another in single file and likely as not the man at the head of the column was in conversation with someone quite far to the rear.

Gone are the days in fact when thousands of employees were engaged in the production of coal in Southwestern Wyoming. Despite this loss of a type of industry the area made adjustments and many of the employable workers became associated with the mining of trona. These operations coupled with oil and gas production, cattle and sheep, recreation and

tourism have made this region of Wyoming more viable perhaps than any comparable part of our State.

Then again, who knows, coal as a useable resource may come back but it is not likely that the Chinese will come with it.