

## INTRODUCTION

A Chinese presence has been recorded in these United States for over two centuries. The earliest instance occurred only two years after the end of the Revolutionary War. In 1783, three Chinese seamen arrived on the East Coast as part of the crew of the *Pallas*, a ship that sailed from Canton, China. In subsequent decades a few more dozen Chinese followed their footsteps and landed on the East and West Coasts. However, a permanent Chinese community in America did not spring into existence until the mid-nineteenth century.

The California Gold Rush of 1849 attracted thousand upon thousands of gold seekers, fortune hunters and adventurers from all parts of the globe, including large numbers of Chinese. The latter were largely villagers from the Pearl River Delta, Guangdong Province on the southeast China coast. Chinese soon became a familiar part of the California scene. They congregated in the gold mining areas, and in San Francisco they established the beginnings of Chinatown. As the state's economy developed, they settled in towns and cities throughout northern, central and southern California. From the Golden State they migrated to all corners of the West and eventually to all parts of this nation.

Since their arrival, Chinese have been part of the mosaic making up America's multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society. They were key participants in California, contributing to the transformation of the state from a frontier wilderness into a region with flourishing agriculture and industries. Writings lauding California pioneers, however, often covered only sketchily, if at all, the important role of the Chinese. Moreover, the few references usually left the reader with the impression that the Chinese were merely a faceless and nameless mass of humanity that somehow were involved in gold mining, railroad construction and a multitude of other activities. One of the reasons usually given for this neglect is that very little biographical material has been available.

The present work on the Ah Tye family promises to make up for some of this deficiency. More than two decades ago, two junior members of this family, Lani Ah Tye Farkas and Doreen Ah Tye, took on the daunting and challenging task of combing through

voluminous documents and conducting dozens of oral interviews. From these scraps of information, Lani has fashioned a coherent and detailed history of three generations of Ah Tyes. *Bury my Bones in America* is one of the few Chinese American family histories to have been published.

Yee Ah Tye, the progenitor of the family, was an immigrant to California during the early Gold Rush period. He was a California pioneer in every sense of the word. During his long, multi-faceted career as merchant, gold mine operator and Chinese community leader, he was an eyewitness to, and participant in many historical events. The accounts of the careers of Ah Tye's descendants are no less fascinating, as they each in their own way thrust ahead to overcome obstacles and coped with being Chinese Americans in a changing California.

The Ah Tye story provides valuable insights into the Chinese American historical experience. Hopefully it will inspire the publication of other such histories and fill in the numerous gaps that still exist in this field today, thus leading to deeper understanding of Chinese American historical development.

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