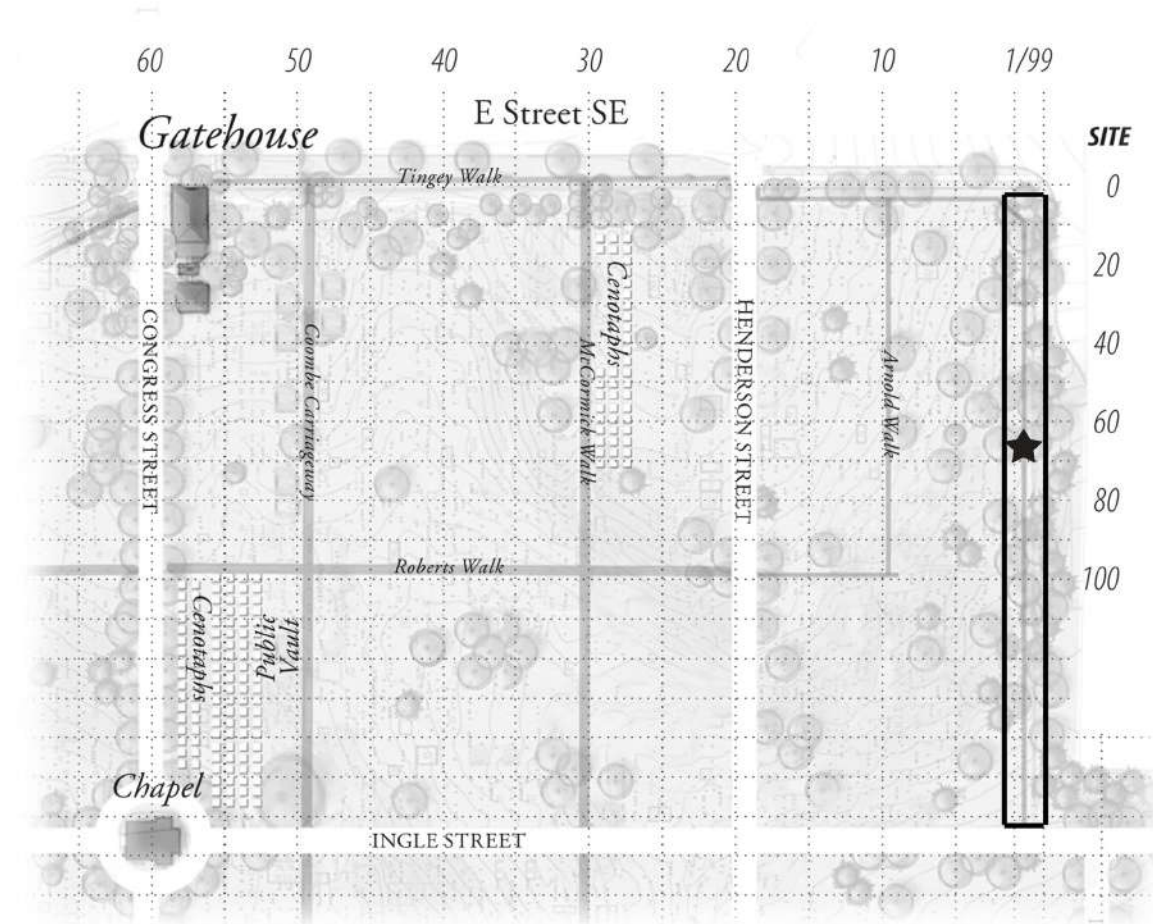


The Role of Clan and District Associations

The Chinese Exclusion Laws, first enacted in 1882, prevented Chinese from immigrating to the United States and prohibited them from becoming American citizens. The formation of families was severely curtailed and civic participation was restricted. The role of the clan and district associations became important. Throughout their lives in the United States, Chinese received comfort and material support from these associations and promises to care for them after life, to send their bones home for their final burial or to perform rites if they remained in the United States. In Washington DC, the Lee and Moy clan associations were prominent, as were the On Leong and Hip Sing Associations. Particularly prominent was an umbrella organization called the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA). Today, an association of almost 30 Chinese American organizations, the CCBA continues to honor its promise to individuals to care for their graves and perform the essential rites. Each year, during Qing Ming (the Sweeping Tombs Festival near Easter), the CCBA attends to rites at three cemeteries surrounding Washington DC where Chinese remain buried, keeping promises made in America in many cases over a 100 years ago.



★ = Location of Range 99 Chinese Memorial Benches



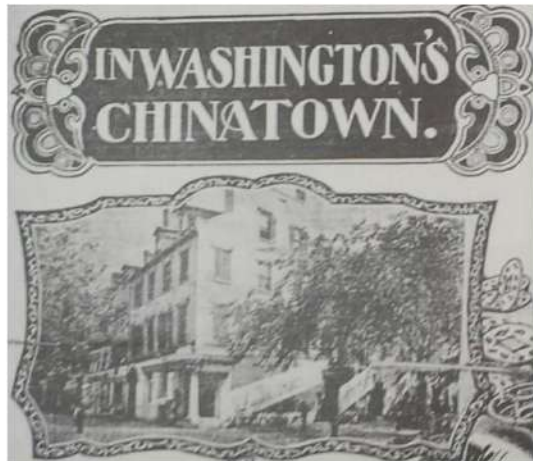
Walking Tour
Chinese Americans

History comes to life in Congressional Cemetery. The creak and clang of the wrought iron gate signals your arrival into the early decades of our national heritage. Surrounding you are the men and women who shaped the new capital and gave substance to the new nation congressmen and tradesmen, diplomats and domestics, explorers and architects, soldiers and musicians.

Among the scores of individuals interred at Congressional Cemetery were a large number of Chinese Americans. Between 1896 and 1938, nearly 100 Chinese were interred in various sections of the cemetery. Most were interred in Range 99, a section of the cemetery set aside for Chinese burials. The majority of them were single men, young or middle-aged, whose families in China could not join them. Many died of lung-related diseases such as tuberculosis but there were also those who committed suicide or were murdered. The remains of all were later disinterred and returned to China where family could attend to annual rites.

At Congressional Cemetery, the Chinese graves are unmarked and empty. However, the memorial benches now at Range 99 honor them as part of the American historic panorama that included other pioneers and builders of the nation --Indian Chiefs, Civil War Generals, politicians, soldiers, musicians and civilians of all kinds and social levels. This tour also highlights the importance of funerals and memorial rites to Chinese life in America.

A WORD OF CAUTION: The centuries have made many grave markers and sites unstable. Please be careful near grave markers and watch where you step; depressions and sink holes lie hidden in grass, and footstones and corner markers can trip the unwary.



The original DC Chinatown was located on Pennsylvania Avenue, between 3rd and 4th Streets. In 1884, there were close to 100 Chinese inhabitants and vendors. Fifty years later, the growing Chinatown had grocery stores, restaurants, drug stores and laundries, as well as churches and Chinese schools. In 1931, as part of the Federal Triangle redevelopment, Chinatown was moved to H Street between 6th and 7th Streets.

Association for the Preservation of
Historic Congressional Cemetery
Community · Leadership · Discovery

1801 E Street SE
Washington DC 20003
202-543-0539

Email staff@congressionalcemetery.org
www.congressionalcemetery.org

Funding for the preservation and maintenance of Historic Congressional Cemetery is provided (in part) by the Congressional Cemetery Endowment, which was created with matching funds provided by the Congress of the United States and administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Join us!

The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the restoration, interpretation, and management of Congressional Cemetery. It is predominantly a volunteer-based organization relying on over 400 neighbors, history buffs, conservators, dogwalkers, and armed forces personnel each year to restore and maintain this national treasure. Established in 1976, the Association is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The following dated news accounts, often using language offensive to people today, describe funeral practices for Chinese buried at Congressional Cemetery. The gravesites are numbered with Range (R) and Site (S) grid numbers. Individual names can be located at www.congressionalcemetery.org

Chinese Interments

Wing Lee Fun (died 3 June 1898, 35 years of age)
The Evening Star, June 7, 1898
Chinese Funeral Lee Fun Wing Laid to Rest With Appropriate Honors

All that was mortal of Lee Fun Wing was put in a grave in Congressional Cemetery yesterday, there to remain until the body can be resurrected and taken to China. Wing was only about 35 years old, and his death was due to consumption. He had recently lived at 330 Pennsylvania Avenue, where he died. At the grave, the Chinese burial services were participated in by relatives of the deceased and there was the usual fire made of the dead man's effects, and Chinese punk, white wine and eatables were placed on the grave to tempt the evil spirits. Lee Fun Wing was popular in the Chinese colony and he had a much larger funeral than most Chinamen have had in this city. While Undertaker J. Wm. Lee was the one who furnished the casket and arranged for the carriages, the celestials made all their own arrangements and notified the undertaker of the time of the funeral only a short time before they were ready to start. R132/S257

Moy, Joe (died 14 January 1910, 31 years of age)
The Evening Star, January 16, 1910
With Oriental Rites
Funeral of Moy, Joe to Be Held Tomorrow
Chinese Symbols to Decorate the Coffin and Feast Will be Ready on the Grave

With every touch of the Orient which can possibly be added to a Washington funeral train, the body of Moy Joe will be taken to Congressional Cemetery tomorrow afternoon. All the relatives and friends of Moy--and there are a great number of them--will follow the hearse. Moy Joe's body will rest in a coffin decorated with Chinese symbols wrought of paper flowers and odd-looking inscriptions on odd paper of far eastern make.

One of Moy Joe's countrymen will ride upon the hearse and will make a startling figure as he scatters imitation money to the four winds of heaven. He will be "buying off" the evil spirits, who might

otherwise interfere with the passage of Moy Joe's spirit to its rightful resting place.

At the grave, a grand feast will be found waiting for the spirit before it takes its journey across the mystic chasm. There will be roast duck, roast chicken, sweetmeats, rice and tea, and there will also be a fire built somewhere near the grave. The last is one of the Chinese customs used at all funerals.

Moy Joe was at one time a laundryman, but he made enough money to sell out and retire to the Chinese quarter. He developed tuberculosis and, learning the probable outcome of it, he devoted his time to every effort possible at prolonging his life. He died Thursday at Sibley Hospital. R99/S11

Chinese Disinterments

Until the late 1930s, after ten years, it was customary for graves to be opened, the bones cleaned and placed in boxes, and shipped to China. Newspaper accounts described the disinterment of Chinese buried at the Congressional Cemetery.

The Evening Star, February 1, 1909, p. 9
Back to the Orient
Bones of Departed Chinamen to be Sent Home
Their Bodies Exhumed

As the winter sun crept over the hills back of Anacostia early yesterday morning, casting a pale light over a sleeping city and dispelling the chill mists of the Eastern branch, its rays fell upon its grim and cheerless a sight as ever greeted a dawn. Huddled in the far eastern corner of Congressional Cemetery, against the board fence that meets the river bank, was a small band of Chinese, bracing themselves against the bitter west wind with a determination demanded by a grisly task.

In front of them bent half a dozen gravediggers engaged in disinterring the remains of twenty-two Celestials, the last of whom had been buried at least five years, for shipment to their native soil--for a Chinese may not lie forever under foreign soil if he would enjoy perpetual happiness in paradise. Around them, silent and ghostly, arise the headstones that mark the resting places of dozens of other Chinese.

Throughout the morning the gravediggers worked diligently. By noon they had exhumed all the bodies designated by the Chinese committee which had the affair in charge.

The greatest secrecy was observed by the Chinese concerning the disinterment. When the digging was begun a party of Chinese was on hand. They watched everything until the last body was exhumed. When all but one left. He, a stout, heavy-checked man of middle age remained to keep a guard while the most grisly part of the ceremony was performed. That was the boiling of the corpses, which occupied the entire afternoon. This was necessary because only the bones are to be sent to China. The bones will be put into metal boxes for shipment. When they reach China they will be cremated and their ashes placed in urns.

The gravediggers attend to this gruesome work. But ever at their elbows was the watchful Chinaman, and no stranger was allowed to come near. Several tried to do so--persons who were at the cemetery for one reason or another and who, from idle curiosity, sought to find out what was going on within the shed--but they would be met by one of the gravediggers, who told them they could not approach.

Arrangements have been made by the Chinese to have the bones of their friends taken home on a ship which sails from New York Thursday. The disinterment was put off until the last possible day and was kept quiet. But for the necessity of obtaining permits for the disinterment of the bodies it would probably have been accomplished without anything being known about it.

Of the bodies that were disinterred yesterday none was buried later than 1903. Several were buried in 1896. Usually the remains are allowed to remain in the earth for five years, but sometimes the relations of the dead are unable, for one reason or another, to attend to their removal when the five-year limit is up, and so let them lie until the proper arrangements can be made. The twenty-two sets of bones will probably be sent Tuesday from Washington to New York, whence they will start on the long sea journey home.

Chinese Remembrance Festivals For the Dead

Chinese Remembrance Festivals for the dead were also held at Congressional Cemetery where families gather to clear away weeds, clean gravestones, make food offerings and burn paper offerings.

The Evening Star, August 22, 1906, p. 15
Food For The Dead Ceremony by Chinamen at Congressional Cemetery

A large portion of the population of Chinatown, on Pennsylvania avenue, proceeded to Congressional cemetery last Monday afternoon to celebrate the feat of feeding the dead. The ceremony is considered a very important one by the Celestials. The ceremony at the cemetery began at 2 p.m., the start having been made about an hour earlier. The preparations for the event were made several days in advance. Many of the Chinamen prepared tempting delicacies intended to appease the hunger of their deceased comrades journeying to the far-away land.

When the start was made it looked as though the party was off for a picnic rather than to engage in a solemn ceremony. The members were dressed in their best costumes, and in a carriage were baskets, boxes and bottles, the supplies including chicken, rice in large quantities, oranges, bananas, a peculiar brand of Chinese wine and other things. On their arrival at the cemetery, the food was carefully placed on the various graves of Chinamen. Small cups were filled with wine, and plates well laden with chicken and rice and fruit set on each grave. Punk was lighted over each grave and burned. Moy Gim conducted formal rites over each grave. A bonfire of paper of peculiar texture was lighted.



Memorial marker erected at a Chinese cemetery in Oregon, 1908, echoes sentiments in DC:

敬如在

"To Honor Them as if They Were Here"