

RETURNING HOME

Traditionally, Chinese people were transported from their place of death to their home village to be buried with family and ancestors. This extended even to those who passed away thousands of miles from their home, across land and sea, albeit with some difficulties attached. All the men buried at Range 99 were thus disinterred to be sent in ships across the sea to their families in the years of 1901, 1918, 1925, and 1927, a requisite decade after they perished. The reason to wait ten years was one of practicality—their bodies would have decomposed to bone by that point, making them easier to ship and then later cremate for interment at home.

CREMATION

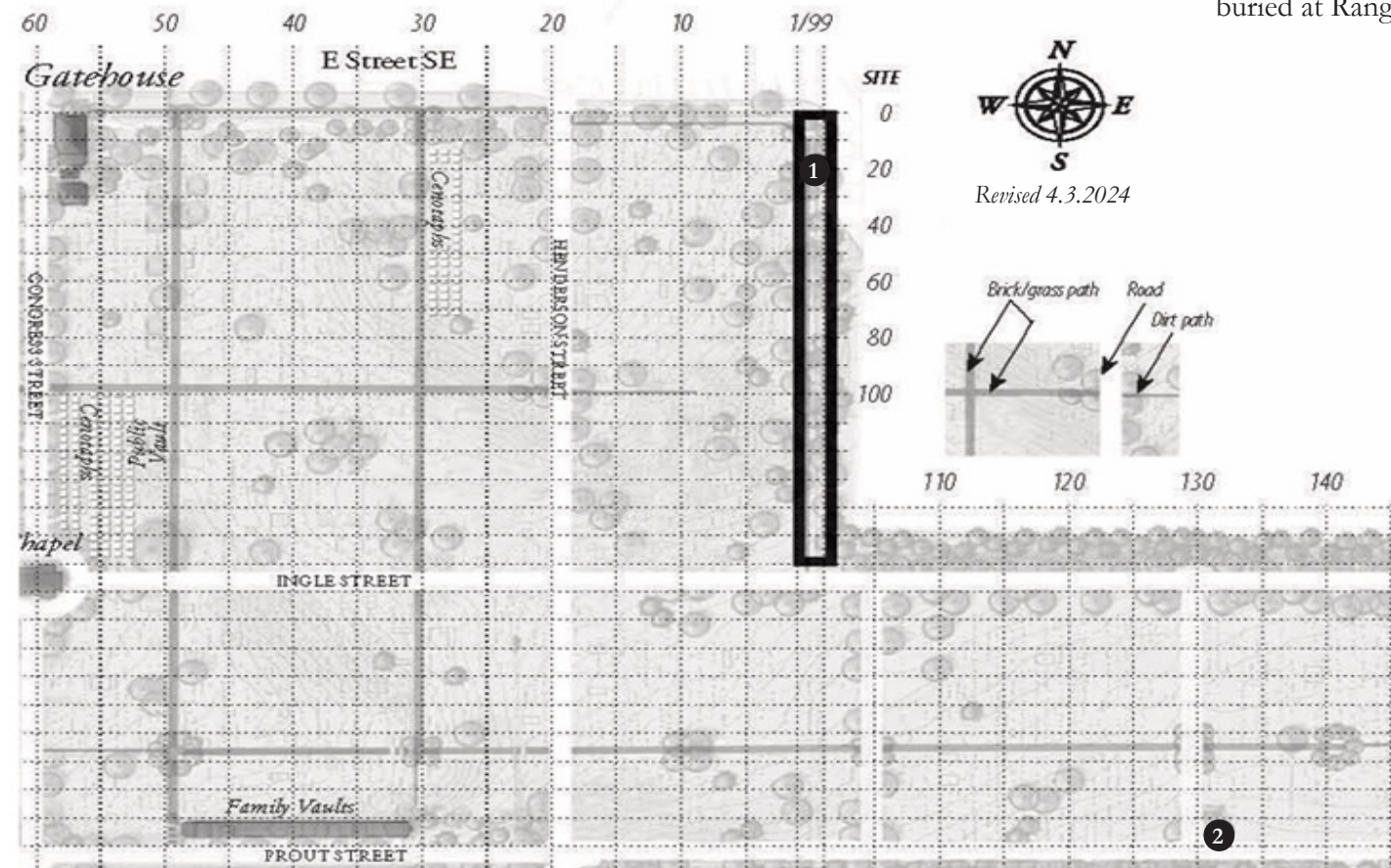
Although the practice for many years was to conduct in-ground burials in China, as cities grew in size and population, and large burial grounds became more inaccessible (particularly in-ground vaults favored by the wealthy), cremation became more common, then eventually the norm. This saved on burial space and cost of moving bodies home for burial. However, cremation had one downside. The tradition of burying the dead with their items from life (which they may or may not need in their journey to the hereafter) could not be followed. As such, personal effects were also cremated in ceremonial pyres to send the items along with the deceased.

REMEMBRANCE CEREMONIES

The process of mourning did not end with the funeral. Grave-visiting holidays such as Qing Ming (The Grave Sweeping Festival), the Hungry Ghosts Festival, and Winter Clothes Day continued to see families visiting their ancestors' graves to leave offerings and say prayers in remembrance of the souls that had passed. Qing Ming, celebrated in spring, focused on cleansing the graves physically and spiritually with incense, offerings, and physical cleaning of the space—this would be done only for the graves of ancestors. The Hungry Ghosts Festival, celebrated in late summer, is often celebrated at home, as the spirits would come to visit the family. Floating lanterns and food offerings would be made to guide the spirits and welcome them home. Any deceased person could be celebrated here. Winter Clothes Day was celebrated at the beginning of winter, seeing people burn paper clothing to send to their deceased loved

ones to keep them warm in the afterlife. Concurrently, new winter clothes would be sent to living loved ones as gifts. These celebrations of life continue today.

In absence of an extended family in the United States, the graves of those buried at Range 99 have been



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.

Join us!

The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization established in 1976 and 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 help restore and maintain this national treasure. In 1979, the Association succeeded in having Congressional Cemetery listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It became a National Historic Landmark in 2011. Please join the Association or make a donation and help in the third century of service to the Nation's Capital.

honored and cared for by the Moy and Lee Clan Associations and the On Leong and Hip Sang Associations. Today, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, an umbrella organization made up of over 30 Chinese American groups, has taken over the care, working in conjunction with the 1882 Foundation to host annual events to honor those once buried at Range 99.



Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery

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DC's Greatest Undertaking

ESTABLISHED 1807

Guide

CHINESE AMERICAN

History comes to life in Congressional Cemetery. The creak and clang of the wrought iron gate signals your arrival at a one-of-a-kind window into the past.

The latter half of the 1800s in America was a time of dream-chasing and entrepreneurship. People emigrated from around the world to seek out the opportunities that the new nation of the United States could offer; working the mines, fields, and railroads to build a better life for their family, be it those on this new soil or back at home across the sea. This included people from China who made their way to the U.S., a frontier of possibility and untapped resources for settlers.

It was also a time of endemic discrimination. Business owners saw immigrant workers, who willingly accepted lower wages, as a way to undercut their established labor force. Viewing Chinese immigrants as the problem rather than victims of systemic racism, many white laborers harbored anti-Chinese sentiments, with some even inciting violence against Chinese communities. As such, in the 1850s, right after the Gold Rush, many Chinese immigrant workers moved eastward in search of more opportunities. Some moved to Washington, D.C., founding the neighborhood known as Chinatown.

Reflecting D.C.'s Chinese Community, over 100 Chinese immigrants were laid to rest at Congressional Cemetery. Almost all were buried in an area known as Range 99, a section of the cemetery historically owned and maintained by J. William Lee Funeral Home expressly for the temporary burial of members of their community. Chinese burial practices often included the return of bodies to their ancestral homes, and thus the remains once interred in Range 99 have since been repatriated. Still, their memories endure.

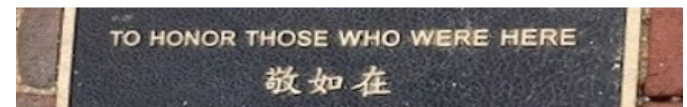
This informative pamphlet highlights these individuals once interred at Congressional Cemetery, as well as members of the Soo family, who remain buried here today. While many details about their lives were not documented, their funerals and legacies were, creating a window into the experiences and traditions of turn-of-the-century Chinese immigrants.

The graves at Range 99 are unmarked and empty. However, the memorial benches at Range 99 honor Chinese immigrants as part of the historic American panorama that included other pioneers and builders of the nation.

Please note that many of our resources are dated news accounts, often using language offensive to people today, but describe funeral practices for Chinese buried at Congressional Cemetery.

Furthermore, these Chinese names are Romanized in the manner of the day (known as the Wade-Giles System) and are not consistent with modern Pinyin (writing Chinese characters in Roman letters) practices.

The gravesites are numbered with Range (R) and Site (S) grid numbers. Individual names can be located at www.congressionalcemetery.org



敬如在

Jing Rúzài

“To Honor Those Who Were Here”

1. RANGE 99 MEMORIAL

Designed and installed by the 1882 Foundation in conjunction with the Chinese American Citizens Alliance and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Range 99 memorial is a reminder of the Chinese immigrants who lived and worked in D.C. Although their remains were disinterred for return to China a century ago, their presence is still memorialized as an important part of D.C. history, as is the robust presence of Chinese immigrants in the building of modern America. The memorial is intended to be an evolving space of reflection and thought for visitors to the cemetery as well as the descendants of the Chinese immigrants of D.C.'s Chinatown.

2. CHARLES LEE SOO (1868–1938)

Known as the “Original Mayor of Chinatown,” Soo was the president of the local On Leon Tong Chinese Merchant organization, and the owner of the Guysum Restaurant, which was located on the site of the modern NewBigWong restaurant at 610 H Street NW. A resident of D.C. for many years, Soo's obituaries noted that his life was celebrated through a combination of Chinese and American traditions, having a Christian funeral at Calvary Baptist Church and a Chinese-style funeral procession including banners and flowers carried by members of the On Leon Tong. Chinese and American bands played music for the services.

He is buried with his son, Raymond, and granddaughter, Anita, and was survived by six other grandchildren.
R120/S227

DISINTERRED RESIDENTS

The following are the names of those disinterred from Range 99 and repatriated for burial in China.

* Feb 1st, 1901

Dan Moy, Gam Loy, Gim Lee, Gong Lee, Goo Moy Ni, Hing Yuen, Jung Moy Jung, Kee Lim, Kee Moy Guan, Koong Goon Tong, Lee Mon Sock, Look Lee, Moon Lee Gong, Moy Hong, Nie Moy Git, Shan Moi Won, Sing Moy, Wah Moy, Wing Chin, Wing Lee Fin, Wing Moy, You Moy

* March 28, 1918

Fib Lee, Guy Lee, Ho Lee, Lee Jim, Lee Way Doo, Shun Moy, Wang Lee, Wong Lee

* August 26, 1925

Yuen Lee

* December 1925

Nie Moy Imai

* March 15-18, 1927

Chew Lee, Chung Moy, Cling Chin, Ding Mabel Ting, Doo Lee Nun, Dunn Moy, Fing Moy, Foo Chin, Fou Moy Gue, Gar Moo Ni, Gee Jung Thro, Gee Lee, Heng Moy Tong, Hing Lee, Hing Lee, Hip Lee, Hong Lee, Kee Ong Son, Charles King, Chin King, Lang Moy, Dorsey Lee, James Lee, Lee Moon Foo, Lim Lee K, Ling Chin Soon, Long Chong, Lum Lee Tong, Lung Lee, Ming Lee Thy, Mon Lee, Moy Jin, Joe Moy, Sae Moy, Nom Lee Wung, Nom Lee S, On Lee, Pot Moy, Que Lee, Moy Sam, Shapdo Lee, Shill Guy Sun, Shing Lee, Shung Wong, Sing Chin Way, Sing Mai, Sing Moy, Sing Moy Fung, Sing Ong, Son Lee, Suey Lee, Suey Moy, Sul Moy D, Taitta Moy Chee, Tom Lee, Toung Lee Thur, Toy Moy, Charlie Wah, Wah Moy, Wah Moy, Charlie Wing, Wing Moy, Wong Long, Wong Moy Hin, Willie Wu, Yep Lee Mou, Yong Lee

Many of the men buried at Range 99 were featured in the *Evening Star*, a local newspaper which ran from 1852–1981. These articles were simple obituaries focused on their manners of death, occupations, and service information — although some went into deeper detail about their lives.

They were laborers, restaurant owners, and laundrymen working out of D.C. Chinatown. Some passed away from old age; others of illness, murder, or suicide. Some were survived by children and wives; some died bachelors. Many were impoverished; others were affluent—there were many different people who were buried in Congressional, then later disinterred to be returned home to China for burial.

CHINESE BURIAL PRACTICES

The *Evening Star* ran articles and expanded obituaries that

focused on the Chinese funerary practices observed by their reporters. These traditions maintained by Chinese immigrant families as well as their descendants were seen as exotic and odd by their turn-of-the-century readers who were often not exposed to communities outside their own, let alone different funeral rights. This is evident in the othering language used by the *Evening Star*, referring to the Chinese immigrant communities as: “the Chinese,” “Celestials,” and “Chinamen”; and their practices as “startling,” “peculiar,” “odd-looking,” and “far eastern.” Truthfully, the ceremonies were not so different from the wakes held at the time, a community mourning the death of one of its members with reverence and care. Practices were rooted in what is today called “Chinese folk religion,” an amalgamation of many folk traditions and beliefs held by multiple localized Chinese ethnic groups into widely held customs and spiritualities.

Here are some of the specific practices specified by the *Evening Star's* reporters.

PROCESSION

Not unlike western funeral practices, the *Evening Star* described the Chinese community's funerals as having a procession from funeral home to cemetery for burial. These processions were lively as opposed to somber, the casket decorated with paper flowers and talismans—in one article, it was noted that the decedent's friend even rode atop the hearse to scatter fake bills as they rode. The *Evening Star* described this as a ritual to buy off the evil spirits that may be plaguing the deceased, although this could have been the beginning of a series of offerings made to the deceased by their mourners.

GRAVESIDE OFFERINGS

At the grave, offerings of food, more ritual paper money, and joss (incense) were made by the mourners to the deceased as a show of respect and interconnection between the living and the dead members of community. The purpose of these offerings varied depending on family tradition; however purposes included: to bribe evil spirits to stay away from the deceased, to feed or otherwise support the deceased on their journey to the afterlife, to bribe the judges of the afterlife to be lenient in their decisions, or to otherwise soothe the soul of the deceased and prevent their spirit from becoming a “hungry ghost,” — that is to say a malevolent one.