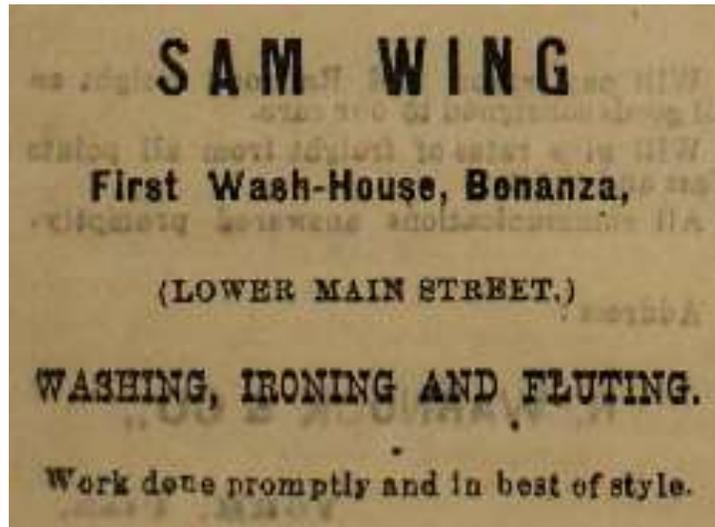


## Yee Sam Wing

Yee Sam Wing was born about 1844 in China. He immigrated to the United States about 1867<sup>1</sup> or 1869.<sup>2</sup> In the 1870 census he is living alone in Corinne City, Box Elder, Utah. He was listed as keeping a laundry and could read and write (presumably in Chinese).<sup>3</sup> His wife Mary (also known as Maile and Molly) was born April 1860 in China<sup>4</sup> and immigrated about 1870.<sup>5</sup> It was reported that they married about 1871,<sup>6</sup> but it is not clear when or where it actually happened. Sam was living alone on the 1870 and 1880 census, but his wife is listed on the 1900 and 1910 censuses. Sam and Mary had children living in China but could not afford to bring them to the United States.<sup>7</sup> Mary missed the children so much that Sam eventually sent her back to China.<sup>8</sup>

By 1877, Sam had settled in Silver Reef, Washington. Thousands of Chinese laborers had been looking for a place to settle after the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869. Silver Reef City was known for its tolerance of religions and races.<sup>9</sup> In 1880, there were 48 Chinese living in Silver Reef.<sup>10</sup> Sam owned a laundry house on lower Main Street<sup>11</sup> and was a druggist (practicing Chinese herbal medicine) in Chinatown.<sup>12</sup> Sam advertised his laundry business in the *Silver Reef Miner* between 1879 and 1882.



(*Silver Reef Miner*, 1 October 1879)

Sam was a Chinese mandarin, a governor or ruler of Chinatown, which was located east of Ormand's livery and the John Rice building. Sam was a good, educated man who was well liked<sup>13</sup> and of

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> United States Census, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> United States Census, 1870.

<sup>4</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>5</sup> United States Census, 1910.

<sup>6</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>7</sup> [The Pioneer Chinese of Utah](#), by Don C Conley, 1976.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Deseret News*, 27 August 1982, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> United States Census, 1880.

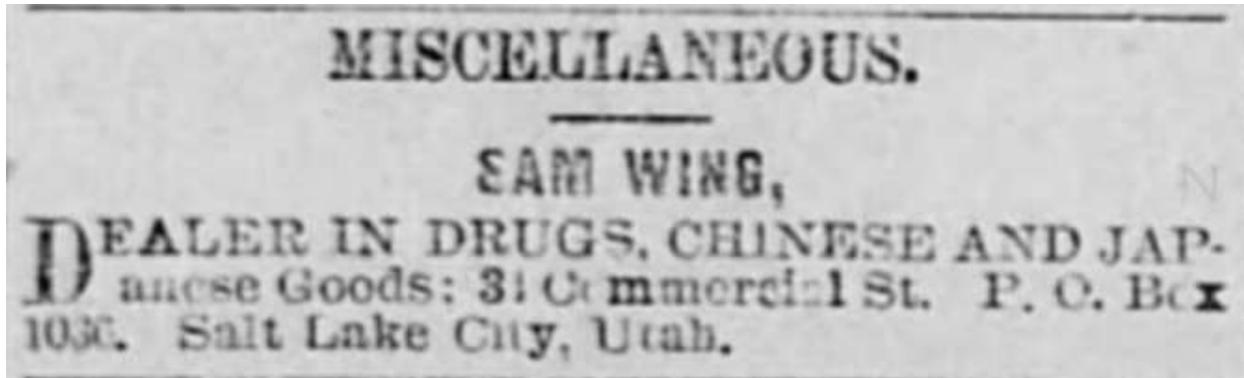
<sup>11</sup> *Silver Reef Miner*, 1 October 1879.

<sup>12</sup> Selected Letters of Abraham and Fanny Glassman: 1874-1886.

<sup>13</sup> A handwritten memoir by Eva L. Miles, sister of Juanita Brooks, dated 1 June 1975, from St. George, Utah.

sterling character.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese celebrated New Years with firecrackers, “Celestial” music, lots of fun, and forgiving of past grievances.<sup>15</sup> “Celestial” was a widely-used nineteenth century term for Chinese emigrants to the United States.

In 1890, Sam Wing is listed as a druggist in the Salt Lake City business directory.<sup>16</sup> Two years later, the United States government passed the Geary Act, an extension of a previous Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. It required all Chinese residents to carry a resident permit; failure to carry the permit at all times was punishable by deportation or a year of hard labor. The “Six Companies” organized resistance to the act and gained support from whites on the East Coast.



(*Salt Lake Herald*, 22 June 1890, p. 7)

The “Six Companies” consisted of the six most important Chinese district associations of California. Their early efforts included an attempt to deter prostitution in the Chinese community, to encourage Chinese immigrants to lead moral lives, and to discourage what they described as excessive continuing Chinese immigration.<sup>17</sup> The Chinese fought back by refusing to register and also refusing to pay for their own deportations, leaving the US government financially responsible. The Chinese government informed the US it would end all diplomatic and economic relations with the US. The Act was amended to appease the Chinese government but only provided an additional six months for Chinese to register.<sup>18</sup>

By 1893, of the 2,000 Chinese in Utah Territory, all but two had registered. Sam, “one of the most intelligent and most influential Chinamen” in Salt Lake City, was interviewed at his drug store on Commercial Street. He stated that the position of the Chinese was the same all over the country, advised by the Six Companies. “This requirement about filing a photograph was considered very objectionable, but we are opposed to the law as a whole. We think the effect of it will be to injure Chinese laborers, and shall not pay any attention to it until the courts have decided whether or not it is constitutional.”<sup>19</sup> Honorable Thomas D Riordan was hired to test the constitutionality of the Geary

<sup>14</sup> Memories of Silver Reef, in *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Vol 3, No 4, 1934, p. 115.

<sup>15</sup> *Silver Reef Miner*, December 2, 1882; 10 February 1883.

<sup>16</sup> *Utah Directory*, 1890.

<sup>17</sup> Documents of the Chinese Six Companies Pertaining to Immigration, pp. 17–25, in *Chinese American Voices*, by Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Wikipedia.

<sup>19</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, 12 April 1893, p. 8.

Act. It was challenged in the courts but was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1893 (the Act was finally repealed in 1952).<sup>20</sup>

Early in 1894, Sam's business on Commercial Street was in financial trouble. This was surprising as he was one of the prominent Chinese in business in Salt Lake City. Tom Chan, a well-to-do Mongolian, was placed in charge of the business by Mr L S Johnson who was put in charge of the case. The cause seemed to be that rent was too high for those hard times. In March there was a public auction of his merchandise, either by piece or in bulk.<sup>21</sup>

In December 1895, there was a wonderful Christmas program at the Chinese Mission, where Dr. Sam Wing gave a recitation of scripture.<sup>22</sup> In the fall of 1896, a police officer arrested Sam and another Chinaman, Hin Louie, at the Union Pacific depot for disturbing the peace. Hin owed Sam \$15 and was about to leave town without paying him; Sam learned of the intended departure and went to the depot to intercept him. A fight ensued and Officer Randolph captured both the "pig-tailed pugilists".<sup>23</sup>

Salt Lake City had the largest population of Chinese in the state. So it wasn't odd to have a 200-foot long Chinese dragon swaying down Main Street for the Pioneer Semi-Centennial celebration in 1897. The dragon had a head six feet tall, spitting fire. The back of the creature was constructed of red, yellow and green painted canvas and was suspended on arched staves, supported by poles from within placed at regular intervals. The curtained sides hung down within two feet of the ground showing the legs and feet of many Chinese marching in regular rhythm.<sup>24</sup>



Chinese dragon float during the Pioneer Semi-Centennial celebration in 1897

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, 16 February 1894, p. 8; 17 April 1894, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, 31 December 1895, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Salt Lake Tribune*, 30 September 1896, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Carter, "The Early Chinese of Western United States," 10:456.

On the 1900 census, Sam was living with his wife, his laundry business partner, and seven lodgers, in Mercur City, Tooele, Utah.<sup>25</sup> Sam was the most prominent Chinaman in the county, known as “Doc Chinaman”. He owned a drug store where he practiced Chinese herbal medicine<sup>26</sup> and was the proprietor of a laundry that employed four Chinese men.<sup>27</sup>

Mercur had a “great fire” in 1902, and Sam is listed as losing property in the business district. His store and laundry were worth \$2500, and he was uninsured.<sup>28</sup> He must have rebuilt or resettled his business, as he is still listed with a laundry from 1903-1904.<sup>29</sup>

Mrs. Evalee Fackrell was a neighbor of Sam and Molly and described their home: “Just a beautiful little home, just a little home--with two rooms, and the men that run the laundry lived back further. I never went into their apartment at all. They had their laundry in the back part of the home.” Molly visited Evalee often to admire her baby boy.<sup>30</sup> On one occasion, when Evalee's baby was crying during the early morning hours, Sam recognized symptoms of colic and rubbed a "Chinese peppermint oil" around the baby's mouth and navel. The baby stopped crying so immediately.<sup>31</sup>

In 1907 Sam made the news when the police raided the chop suey restaurant of Nom Lung on Commercial Street. He was arrested as one of the proprietors of the place, on a charge of selling liquor on Sunday. Patrolman J M Lyon, who had been watching the place all day, instigated the raid as the result of evidence which he gathered during the day. He claimed to have several witnesses who would testify to having purchased beer at this restaurant during the day. Sam's bail was fixed at \$100, which he failed to pay.<sup>32</sup>

On the 1910 census, Sam is listed as a general practitioner physician; he owned his own home free and clear; he could read and write but his wife could not. They were living on Main Street in Mercur City.<sup>33</sup> By 1914, Sam was living on South Temple Street in Salt Lake City.<sup>34</sup> He had a Chinese Herbal Medicine Store near the Salt Lake railroad terminal.<sup>35</sup> In the 1920 census, Sam was a lodger in a rooming house, run by a divorced woman with four children, on south west Temple Street.

In his declining years he longed to see his native land, but did not have the means to gratify his desire. It was a neighbor, Enos A. Wall, who gave him the money to make the trip to China and return.<sup>36</sup> Enos was a millionaire from copper mining and lived in a two-story adobe home which had been built in 1880 by Mormon Bishop James Sharp. Enos transformed the home into a palatial dwelling which is now occupied by the LDS Business College.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>26</sup> Revisiting Utah's Past, Utah Museum of Fine Arts Evening for Educators, 27 September 2006, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Carter, "The Early Chinese of Western United States," 10:456.

<sup>28</sup> *Deseret Evening News*, 26 June 1902, p. 5; 27 June 1902, p. 1; *Salt Lake Herald*, 26 June 1902, p. 1; 27 June 1902, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Utah State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1903-4, Vol 2, pp. 200, 722.

<sup>30</sup> [The Pioneer Chinese of Utah](#), Don C Conley, 1976.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, 1 April 1907, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> United States Census, 1910.

<sup>34</sup> US City Directories 1822-1995.

<sup>35</sup> Revisiting Utah's Past, Utah Museum of Fine Arts Evening for Educators, 27 September 2006, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Memories of Silver Reed, in Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol 3, No 4, 1934, p. 115.

<sup>37</sup> [Utah History Encyclopedia](#).

Toward the end of his life, Sam lived at 166 Plum Alley in Salt Lake City. Plum Alley ran north-south dividing the city block between Main and State streets, with cross streets Frist and Second South. It was a Chinese community with grocery and merchandise stores, laundries and restaurants.<sup>38</sup> Yee Sam Wing died at age 84 on 20 February 1927 in the Salt Lake City Hospital after surgery for a right strangulated hernia with general peritonitis. He was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.<sup>39</sup> There is a handwritten note on the death certificate that says "moved to China October 1936" so it appears his body was returned to his homeland.<sup>40</sup>



Sam Wing, about 1885, a prosperous merchant and mayor of China Town in Silver Reef, Utah (image from Hidden History of Utah, by Eileen Hallet Stone, 2013, p. 54).

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<sup>38</sup> Carter, "The Early Chinese of Western United States," 10:456.

<sup>39</sup> Utah Death Certificates, 1904-1964; Utah, Salt Lake County Death Records, 1849-1949; Utah Death Registers, 1847-1966; Utah Deaths and Burials, 1888-1946.

<sup>40</sup> Utah, Salt Lake County Death Records 1849-1949; Utah Death Certificates 1904-1964.

*Doorway was entrance to Sam Wing's drugstore.*



Sam Wing's drug store entrance (image from *Desert: Western Travel/Adventure/Living*, May 1966, p. 6).