

### Whites, Indians Mourn For Wong Sing, Pioneer Fort Duchesne Merchant

The rise from rags to riches is a predominant American theme, and there probably is no better example of man's will to succeed than that of Wong Sing of Ft. Duchesne, who was killed recently when the truck in which he was riding overturned six miles north of Park City.

Wong was more than a successful man, he was an institution, and his neighbors and friends in Duchesne and Uintah counties, Indians and white alike, are mourning his death.

Shortly after his death a large assembly of the tribe agency superintendent of Fort Duchesne, in a tribal council, and the victims of Wong Sing were extolled and his passing mourned.

Wong Sing established himself in Fort Duchesne in 1873.

A Canton man he made his way to San Francisco and started for the interior. He finally arrived at Pikes and set out for Fort Duchesne. His journey extended over a week.

At that time there were two troops of cavalry and a company of infantry stationed at the fort.

Wong Sing, upon arrival built a primitive laundry on the banks of the Uintah river where it runs past the fort, and started business. The soldiers welcome the innovation and Wong Sing had plenty to do but as his laundry prospered he began to lay the foundation for his career as a merchant.

He obtained a supply of chinaware which he sold to wives of officers and to scullers in the region.

Wong Sing's knowledge of English was limited when he arrived at Fort Duchesne and there were some words of this language he never mastered. When he came in contact with the Utes however, he mastered their language together with that of other tribes of Indians, until it was said he could converse in the redmen's idiom with greater proficiency than most of the braves.

While Wong Sing was toiling in his laundry, a pair of enterprising troopers rented a room at the Ft. Duchesne hotel and opened a poker game.

"Wong was a dead game spool," declared W. D. Tembrock, 83, a veteran of the Black Hills campaign who was closely associated with Ute's early military activities. When that game started Wong had his first real chance to get ahead.

"The soldier used to try to read his face but he could hold four aces and never bat an eye. A lot of the boys became obsessed with the idea of beating Wong and a lot of them did on occasions but no one ever saw him bat an eye, win or lose."

Mr. Tembrock, whose connection with quartermasters corps took him in wagon trains over practically all of eastern Utah, was a close friend of Wong Sing, and although he lived several miles from the latter's store, paid him a visit at least once a week.

While the poker game flourished Wong Sing started a restaurant and later set up a little store on the grounds of the fort, and set out to annex the Indian trade. His dealings with the Utes so pleased the natives that within a short time he enjoyed their entire patronage.

Wong Sing's success as a trader aroused the cupidity of several white men, who arranged to have him excluded from the government property, so they could set up a larger fiber store.

"They kicked Wong off the government land," said Mr. Tembrock, "and freighted in a fine supply of goods, but it didn't do them any good. As soon as they built and stocked their store it caught fire and burned to the ground."

Determined to continue his commercial activities Wong purchased a few acres of land a mile and a half northwest of Fort Duchesne across the Uintah river and built a small store and a reputation for integrity. As his reputation grew and his range of acquaintances widened Wong started shipping his goods far beyond the limits of eastern Utah.

His growing business demanded additional space and as the need arose Wong would build another addition to his store.

The zenith of Wong's business career was reached from 1877 until 1890. At that time he employed 8 clerks. He operated a furniture store, a general merchandising store and a meat market and served as agent for machinery and other firms. During this period his store contributed from \$50,000 to \$70,000 worth of stock.

When the department set in Wong went to the store but ended up on credit policy.

When a hard pressed rancher asked for the money which to pay a bill of goods Wong Sing would not do it. It is not my policy to extend credit but you need the money, so take them.

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## WHITEL INDIANS MOURN FOR WONG SING, FORT DUCHESNE MERCHANT

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Wong's friend, Tembroeck cast an interesting light on Wong's credit policy.

When Wong first started up, he said he thought everyone was as honest as himself. A number of incidents however thought it was cute to tick him. I remember one family that used to let a man Randlett stay. They would drive up to my place and tell me they were on their way to Wong's and ask if they could buy something for me. I would give them a list of goods. I wanted and the money to pay for them. Then they would buy the good for me charge it to their account and pocket the money. They were just that much ahead because they didn't ever intend to pay Wong.

After a few experiences of this nature Wong altered his point of view toward his fellow men and purchasers paid cash—or in a few cases while Wong was convinced of their responsibility—paid every thirty days.

For many years Wong substituted calendars to his customers and friends. The Indian motif was always carried out in the calendar, and the distribution served to portray the extensiveness of his operations.

Dr. F. A. Pritchard in charge of emergency conservation work for western states, commented on Wong Sing's calendars.

Wherever there are Indians in the west you can find Wong Sing's calendars. I have seen them on the Kluane reservation on the Fraser river at Fort Hall Camp, Jack on the Flathead reservation at the Sacaton agency in Arizona at Shiplock N. M., and at a hotel in Glacier national park.

Wong Sing enjoyed a wider acquaintance among western Indian

than any other individual, he declared.

Superintendent L. W. Page of the Fort Duchesne Indian agency also was loud in his praise of Wong Sing.

He was the only individual I ever met whose personal check was accepted as cash by the postoffice department.

If I wanted a double record of a transaction, and would attempt to purchase a postal money order with my personal check the postmaster would tell me to exchange my personal check for one of Wong Sing's and the transaction could be made.

Wong Sing was one of the greatest characters I have ever met.

Superintendent Page continued: Every government official who was connected with Fort Duchesne, or with the Indian service who me Wong Sing, listed him among their valued acquaintances. Just a few days before Wong Sing's death, he received a letter from General Hugh L. Scott. Wong mentioned receiving the letter in a casual manner, and said it was written by my friend, General Scott.

When Postmaster Geo. A. Wilson at Ft. Duchesne was asked regarding Wong Sing's high rating with postal authorities, he said it is unusual for the postoffice department to honor personal checks, but Wong Sing's checks have always been regarded the same as cash not only here but in the Salt Lake accounting office.

I can recall many occasions when it was necessary to transfer three or four hundred dollars to Salt Lake. Instead of sending the money, we would turn it over to Wong Sing accept his personal check and forward the check to Salt Lake.

There was hardly a month went by that this office did not handle

at least \$900 in Wong Sing's personal checks.

Wong Sing's efforts were not entirely devoted to business.

He conducted welfare work in a practical manner among the Indians of Uintah Basin, and assisted them in their business transactions. He took motion pictures of many interesting tribal customs and many of his films were loaned to government officials in the Indian service. He also took motion pictures of many natural resources of the Basin and the display of these films has attracted many scientific men to the basin. When the Uintah Basin Industrial Convention was organized for the purpose of informing the outside world of advantages offered in the basin, Wong Sing stood sturdily behind the enterprise and assisted in every manner.

"He was a fine fellow and he lived a fine life," said Mr. Tembroeck, his friend for 45 years, "but I think he would rather have gone the way he did than to linger and wither in old age. Besides he'll never die in the memory of Uintah Basin residents."—Tribune