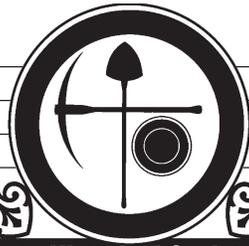


This month's theme:  
**The Chinese in Idaho**



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The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

# PROSPECTOR

February, 2006



## The Chinese in Idaho

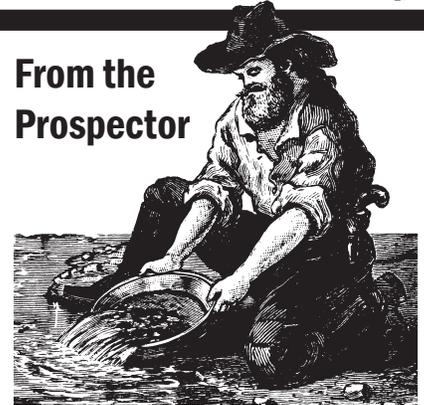
Walking the streets of any major city in Idaho today, it's hard to imagine that at one time our state had a large Chinese population. Idaho has changed a lot in the past few centuries. Over the last 200 years many different people have passed through our state. The gold rush of the 1860's brought a large group of miners to Idaho and many of them were Chinese. Like many prospectors, most of the Chinese started out by mining in California. Some were successful, but the majority of the miners didn't strike it rich there. When word got out that Idaho had lots of gold, they packed up the few

belongings they had and headed northwest. Early boom towns like Pierce, Placerville, and Idaho City all had large Chinese populations.

The Chinese had a very different culture from many of the other miners who had European backgrounds. They ate different foods, enjoyed different styles of music, and practiced religious customs that were new to America. Because of this, the Chinese sometimes stuck together and kept to themselves. This community spirit is not unusual. People often feel more comfortable around others who speak the same language and have the same background. Even today, in cities like New York and San Francisco, there are large neighborhoods named for

*Continued on next page*

### From the Prospector



### Howdy Prospectors!

The mining boom of the 1860's brought people from all around the world to what is now Idaho. One of the distant countries people traveled from was China. It might not be obvious today, but early Idaho had a large Chinese population. Most early Chinese settlers came here to find gold, but they quickly branched out to other occupations. Since they brought their language, food, and other important parts of their culture with them, they added diversity to our cities and made the state a more interesting place to live. I hope you enjoy this month's issue!

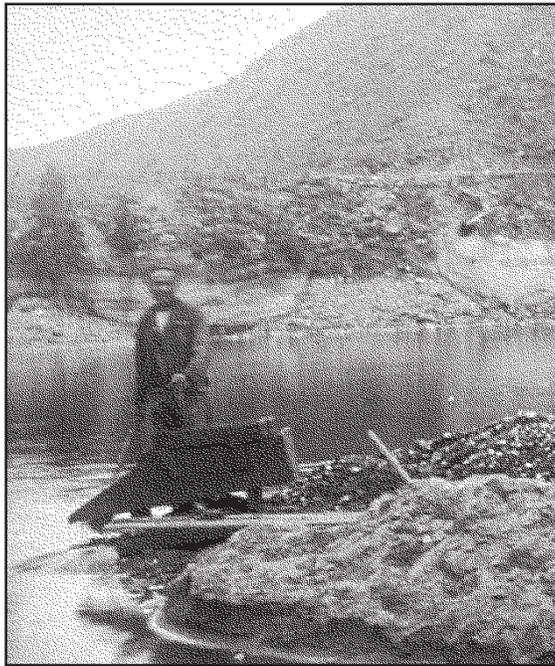
*Lucky Noah*

# The Chinese in Idaho Continued

the historical majority of people who lived there, like “Little Italy” or “Chinatown.” You may be surprised to know that not too long ago many of Idaho’s cities, including our capital, Boise, had its own Chinatown. In order to stay happy far from home, the Chinese carried on the practices and activities of their native culture. Sometimes they even created formal organizations for this purpose.

One of the most important of these activities was their religion and worship. Of course, there weren’t enough Chinese men here to build any large temples like the ones in China, but smaller buildings served the same purpose. These buildings were called joss houses. They served as much more than just a place of worship. They also served as places where the men would gather for activities, meetings and other social events.

As the Chinese settled into their new homes, many of them pursued other types of work instead of the hard labor of mining. Chinese merchants played a big part in the development of many of Idaho’s



*A Chinese miner using a cradle rocker*

towns. They operated stores and became respected members of the communities. Some of the successful Chinese merchants had a hand in building temples. One of the places where this happened was Boise.

In the 1880’s many Chinese residents of Boise Basin mining towns like Idaho City and Placerville moved to the nearby city of Boise. The population of Boise’s Chinatown grew from 175 in 1880

to around 500 in 1900. Many Chinese decided to make their permanent homes in the capital. Boise provided good economic opportunities and many of the residents of Chinatown opened their own businesses. These businesses served both the Chinese people and the non-Chinese population. In Chinatown there were butchers, barbers, restaurants, herb doctors practicing traditional Chinese medicine, blacksmiths, and laundries. The concentration of Chinese in one area of Boise allowed them to maintain their native customs and traditions, including celebrating holidays like the Chinese New Year.

Not everything was as great as it sounds, though. Throughout this period, the Chinese had to deal with a lot of people who did not approve of them or the things they did. This is an unfortunate part of American history, but is something that we should always remember. Negative stereotypes, or the way we think about people based simply on their culture, religion, or way they look, do not accurately describe the

character of any person, and they are not very nice either. The best way to avoid stereotyping is to get to know the people and understand their differences. The Chinese who lived and worked in the mining camps and cities of Idaho contributed both to our states growth and to our cultural history. Idaho today is a more interesting place because of the Chinese who made our state their home over 100 years ago.

*By Glenn Newkirk*



*A Chinese family of early Idaho*



# The Fun Page

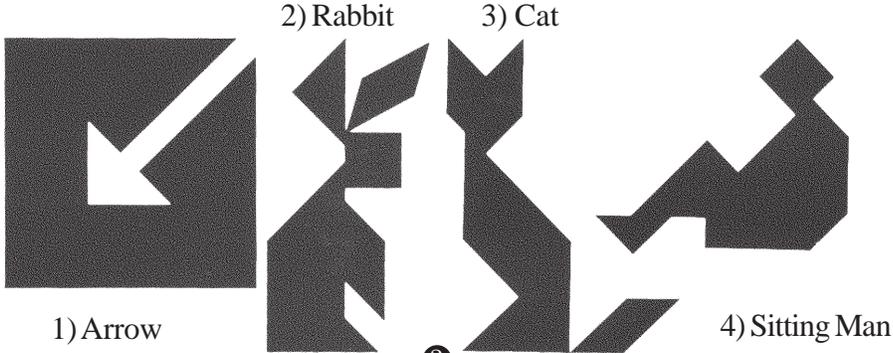
## Tanagrams

Tanagrams are Chinese puzzles that challenge you to make pictures out of a basic set number of shapes. Cut out the shapes

below and then try to arrange them to make each of the four pictures at the bottom. You'll have to use all seven shapes for each picture. Good luck!



**Can you make....**



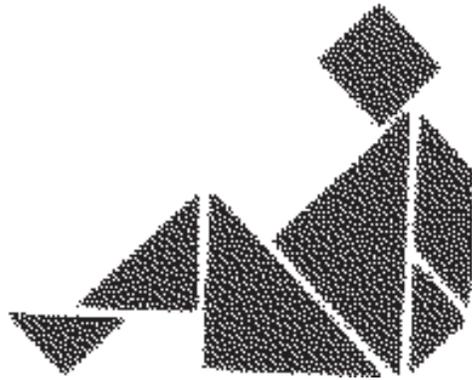
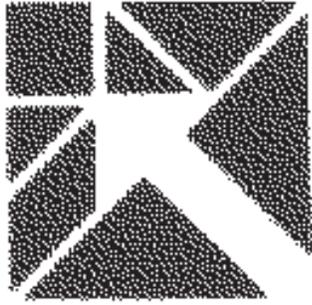
1) Arrow

2) Rabbit

3) Cat

4) Sitting Man

# Solutions





## Next Month's Activities

**W**ell, we've told you all we know about Chinese culture in Idaho, but we need your help so that we can learn more. Pick from one of the activities below or make up your own Chinese project and send it in to our Prospector Headquarters. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's issue. Remember to include your name, where you're from, and the name of your Prospector Chapter. We can't wait to see what you send in!

**Chinese Dragons:**

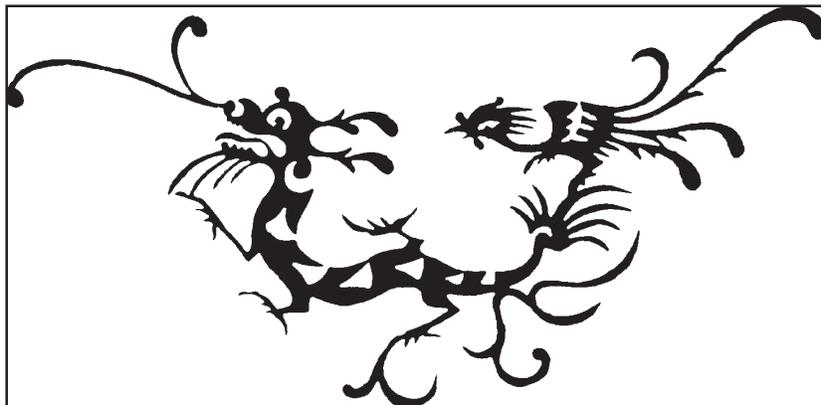
The Chinese Dragon is a mythical creature seen in many types of Chinese art and architecture. These fearsome beasts have long snake-like bodies, and ferocious claws and teeth. Their bodies are often covered with beautiful multi-colored scales. Look up examples of Chinese dragons in the library and on the internet and then draw us one of your own. If your dragon has a name or any special powers, re-

member to include a short description of it with your picture.

**Hometown History:** Almost every large town in Idaho had a Chinese population in the late 1800's. Still, as Idaho changes over time, it is sometimes difficult to see evidence of the early pioneers who helped

**Chinese Cuisine:** One of the cultural traditions the Chinese brought to Idaho was their food. Many Chinese residents of Idaho owned restaurants. In fact, it was reported that in the 1870's and 1880's all the restaurants in the town of Lewiston were owned by Chinese residents. Do you have a

favorite Chinese dish? Tell us about it and, if you can, include a recipe and picture to share with the rest of the Prospectors.



Send in your work by March 15<sup>th</sup> to:

build our state. Was there a large Chinese population in your town? Do some research at the local library or historical museum and write us a short report. How big was the Chinese population back then? Is there a big difference between the culture now and the culture back then? We can't wait to see what you come up with!

Prospector Club  
 Lucky Noah  
 Idaho State Historical Museum  
 610 North Julia Davis Drive  
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