IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

BOISE CHINESE NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATIONS
(Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

Number 720 1971

Although you may not be ready to celebrate again so soon, January 27 [1971] is New Year's Day--Chinese New Year, that is based on a complicated calendar. This holiday has always been both a festival and a religious observance, with many symbolic objects that are both fascinating and very foreign to most of us.

The Idaho State Historical Society is fortunate to have in its photograph collection several fascinating pictures of the Chinese New Year's parade that took place exactly sixty years ago in Boise. There was considerable concern in 1911 that there might not be such a parade, because the city's Chinese colony had contributed so heavily to the 1910 Fourth of July parade that funds were hard to come by. (At least, that was one reason given; it was also rumored that two of the city's tongs, or societies, were feuding so badly that they were not willing to work on the parade together.) But whether they were caused by lack of money or by hard feelings, the community's problems were worked out and the parade was held. Indeed, the local newspaper reporter said, "Never before in the history of the local colony have the festivities been so elaborate."

People of Chinese ancestry came from as far away as Baker to the west and Pocatello to the east, and about 500 actually marched in the parade--which included a "coy looking tiger and the ferocious dragon," and two automobiles. The parade wound its way through downtown Boise, from the Chinese Masonic Temple on Idaho Street down 11th to Main, east on Main to 6th, north on 6th to Idaho, back across Idaho to 7th [present-day Capitol Boulevard], and down 7th to the joss house between Main and Front. There, religious ceremonies took place; meanwhile, in front of the joss house, the audience was treated to a theatrical performance in traditional Chinese style and examples of stylized sword play. Finally, the day wound up with huge banquets served to all members of the community in the Chinese restaurants.

One picture shows the head of the parade coming down 7th Street (note the unfinished Statehouse in the background), with boys carrying the United States and Chinese flags. Another is of the ferocious and ornate dragon, while still another we think shows the coy (and stylized!) tiger. Both creatures are shown as they were paraded down 11th Street. Back on 7th Street, still another picture gives some idea of the very ornate objects and costumes (most of which were shipped in from San Francisco at the very last minute) that were integral parts of the parade.

Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428