



Lue Gim Gong 1858–1925

*From Lung On Village, China, to North Adams, Massachusetts, and
DeLand, Florida (Courtesy Mary Kathryn Green McCarthy)*

Lue Gim Gong, Horticulturist

An early morning mist shrouded Lung On Village. But Lue Gim Gong, afraid it was not enough to hide his escape, dared not leave the added shield of high grasses for the dirt path. Mud clung to his cloth shoes, dew drenched his cotton jacket and pants, and he shivered with cold and fear. His departure from the same village sixteen years earlier had been quite different—a blaze of sunshine and noisy farewells. Then he had been a boy of thirteen with a hunger for learning that neither his mother nor the village schoolteacher could satisfy. Now he was a sick man past his prime, a thief stealing his family honor. And only the knowledge that each step was taking him closer to “Mother Fanny” gave him the courage, the strength, to press on.

Lue had met Mother Fanny when he joined her Sunday school class at Calvin T. Sampson’s shoe factory in North Adams, Massachusetts. A year earlier, Sampson had broken a strike of the nation’s largest and most militant union, The Secret Order of St. Crispin, by bringing in 75 Chinese workers from San Francisco. There were fewer than 100 Chinese in the eastern states, and the crowd that met “Sampson’s Chinese” at the station on June 13, 1870, was almost as curious as it was angry.

Taking no chances, however, Sampson hired thirty armed constables who cordoned off the train platform and shielded the Chinese (almost all teenage boys) from hurled stones as they marched the few blocks to a one-story building behind the factory. This building would be their home for the duration of their three-year contracts—and their prison during the first few weeks, when it was too dangerous for them to leave.

As Sampson had intended, his recruitment of Chinese workers broke the union as well as the strike. While the Chinese worked in the assembly and pegging room, more than 200 nonunion workers, most of them new immigrants from Europe and Canada, were hired to replace the Crispins in other areas of the factory. The following year there were no protests when Sampson brought in fifty more Chinese workers, among them Lue Gim Gong, or Lue, as he came to be known.

Sampson’s idea of hiring Chinese workers was not original. The May 1869 issue of *Hide and Leather Inter-*

est, a journal for manufacturers, had urged the creation of a national organization of employers to import immigrant labor, particularly Chinese, as strikebreakers. The editor of the North Adams newspaper agreed, but noted in an editorial on July 15, 1869: “We should exclude the Mongolians from this country altogether, or give them the rights of humanity after we have permitted them to come here. . . . Christianize and citizenize the Chinese by the touch of human kindness, and we shall succeed, for never yet did Christian effort fail.”

The town’s Methodist and Baptist ministers therefore organized a Sunday school to teach the Chinese to speak, read, and write English. They also taught simple arithmetic and “plenty of religion.” Lue’s teacher, Fanny Burlingame, came from a family of staunch Baptists. Forty-four years old, she was a brilliant mathematician and botanist and had been educated at the Wesleyan Young Ladies’ Seminary in Macon, Georgia. She was, however, restricted by ill health to living at home and tutoring college aspirants in a little schoolhouse her father, a successful merchant, had built for her in their garden.

Struck by Lue’s bright eyes, inquiring mind, and keen intelligence, Fanny quickly singled him out from her other Sunday school students. She extended his lessons from Sunday afternoons in the factory workers’ dining room to evening sessions in her little school. Then she began to bring him into her home.

In his village, Lue had worked with his mother in the orange groves, where she taught him how to cross-pollinate blossoms and graft stock. In the Burlingame gardens and hothouse, he worked with Fanny’s father and eldest sister, Phoebe, testing, eliminating, and replacing poor stock. Lue’s parents had only been able to send him to the village school for three years. Under Fanny’s tutelage, he completed the equivalent of at least a high school education. Not surprisingly, while most of the other Chinese left North Adams after their contracts expired, Lue remained.

By then his relationship with Fanny had evolved from teacher and student to mother and son, and he was calling her Mother Fanny. Still working at the shoe factory, he spent all his free time at the Burlingame



Usually, taking a Chinese child into a white family was considered an act of Christian charity, and no one questioned these informal adoptions. Chinese couples who took in non-Chinese children, however, often had them taken away by the authorities. George Lee Reynolds was a month old when a Chinese couple in Portland, Oregon, adopted him. "I don't know who my biological parents are, so I think I was pretty lucky," he said. "{My mother} dyed my hair, dyed my eyebrows to make me look Chinese. But she couldn't do anything about my blue eyes! {And} there were do-gooders, you know, prying into our affairs. They tried three or four times to take me away from my foster parents, to stick me in an orphan's home. But somehow my foster father had some kind of proof." (Courtesy Christine Richardson)

house, the YMCA reading room, and the First Baptist Church, where he was baptized. He also cut his queue and adopted Western clothing and manners.

Then, in 1886, he was diagnosed as consumptive. It was thought that walking backwards up the hill just outside of town could cure the disease. But Lue had watched Fanny's youngest sister die from consumption despite the walks. Hoping his life might be prolonged in the warmer climate of southern China, he went back to Lung On.

He found the village and the age-old beliefs intolerable. One of Lue's brothers, who had also been to America, had brought back a water pump. By pumping water uphill, he had been able to plant orange trees where only wild grass had grown. But when the trees came into bearing, the farmers in the next village had complained that the trees blocked their *fung-shui*, wind and water, and they had razed the grove. Lue's brother accepted the judgment. Lue could not.

Nor could he understand his mother's insistence that he marry. To him, taking a bride and fathering a son when he knew he was sick and could soon be dead was wrong. But his mother saw only the need for a son to make offerings to Lue's spirit. Ignoring his protests, she sought the help of a matchmaker and selected a bride. Lue had passively observed the betrothal agreement and exchange of gifts, but on his wedding morning, he finally took action, stealing away from the village under cover of the pre-dawn mist.

For the shame he brought on his family, Lue's name was struck from the family register. Years later, Lue sent his mother a letter of apology and \$500 for his betrothed who, according to custom, would not have been able to marry anyone else. But there was no reply, and his name was never restored.

Lue is, however, included in the official Burlingame genealogy as Fanny's adopted son. While Lue was in China, Fanny had joined her sister, Cynthia, and brother-in-law, William Dumville, in DeLand, Florida, where they owned five acres of orange groves. Wintering there eased Fanny's asthma and the symptoms of consumption that had surfaced shortly after Lue's departure. She arranged for him to join her.

For the next few years, he managed the orange grove and acted as manservant to Fanny's brother-in-law, who was sick with "creeping paralysis." After William's death in 1889, Lue and Fanny continued to winter in DeLand and summer in North Adams. He worked entirely in the groves, conducting citrus experiments and managing the additional property Fanny and Cynthia purchased.

Though Lue was supposed to be a part of the Burlingame family, his precise status was nebulous, even awkward. Lue acted more like a servant than an adopted son, passing out refreshments at parties and building fires at picnics. "While it did not make him one of them, he was among those present," one acute observer concluded.

Tolerated by the Burlingames' friends, Lue was held in scorn by Chinese in North Adams and nearby Boston; they dismissed him as a poor farmer living off missionary kindness. While it was true that Lue received no salary, he did work, and so long as Fanny was alive, he was secure, for no one doubted their mutual devotion. But when she died in 1903, he was cast adrift.

Fanny's sisters refused to acknowledge Lue's claim to Fanny's share of the Burlingame estate. In the wrangling that followed, Lue calculated his wages for seventeen years of service. The final settlement gave him \$12,000 and Cynthia's and Fanny's property in DeLand. It was a bitter victory, however, as he had to agree never again to return to North Adams.

Cut off from both his adopted and birth families, Lue sought to create his own. Seven years before Fanny's death, she had hired a young Swedish woman, LaGette Hagstrom, as companion and personal maid. LaGette, a pretty, blue-eyed blonde, charmed all who met her, including Lue. When he returned to DeLand a man of property, he proposed marriage.

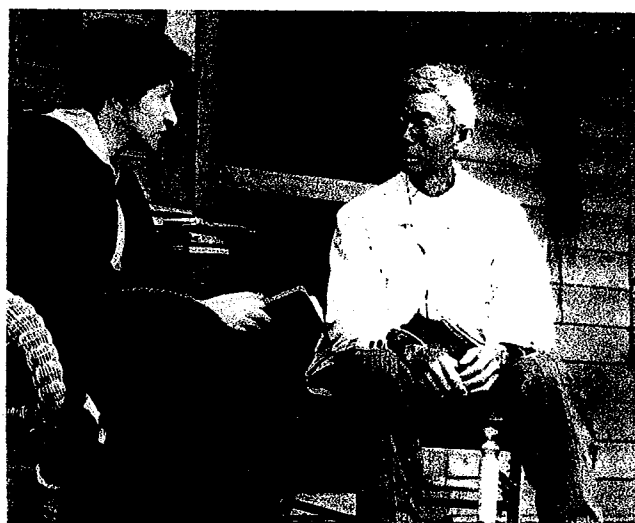
Whether LaGette refused him or her father denied permission is not known, but there was no marriage. Nevertheless, LaGette permitted Lue to deed his newly acquired property to her. This included the land the Burlingame sisters had deeded him and an additional piece he purchased for \$4,000 shortly after his return from North Adams, 115 acres in all. Then, on December 4, 1906, the morning of her wedding to an old family friend, LaGette deeded the property back to Lue. She died unexpectedly seven months later.

Shy and diffident, Lue withdrew into himself. Instead of attending services at the First Baptist Church, he prayed alone in his grove. There were visitors, of course, neighbors and business acquaintances, but his only real companions were his two horses, which he called his children. Increasingly lonely, he threw himself into his work.

During his first winter in Florida, there had been a severe freeze, and Lue began experiments to develop an orange that would withstand sudden cold snaps. As described in the *Proceedings* of the American Pomological Society, Lue pollinated Harts Late with pollen from what was believed to be a Mediterranean Sweet tree.



LaGette Hagstrom's sisters and brothers and their friends were all welcome at Fanny Burlingame's, and they are pictured here with grove owners and northerners summering in DeLand. Lue Gim Gong is standing with the horses, Fanny is the elderly woman in the dark dress and cape, LaGette is third from the left in the front row, and the man she later married, Per Ekman, is first from the left in the back row. (Courtesy Ruth Hagstrom)



After Fanny's death, Lue no longer attended the services at the Baptist church. Instead he created a prayer garden in his grove. All visitors to Lue's grove were invited to this chapel, where he offered all-comprehensive, nonsectarian prayers for the good of his visitors, the country, and mankind, with a humble plea at the very end that God would help him to live for the good of others. Many people in DeLand today remember attending these services and also just stopping by to visit with Lue on his porch. (Courtesy Dr. Chih Meng)



Repeated falls from ladders while picking fruit and a series of accidents between 1904 and 1911 crippled Lue to the point where he needed crutches to walk. His horse—thirty-one and blind—followed him around the grove by listening for his whistle and then putting her nose to the ground to track his exact location. (Courtesy Him Mark Lai)

From the seeds that resulted, he raised twelve trees. Then he budded fifteen trees with this variety.

The oranges produced were good sized, full of juice, and hardy, enduring frosts with no apparent damage. The fruit was also capable of hanging on a tree through the rainy summer, allowing it to be held off the market until oranges were scarce and the highest price could be secured. Tests in 1909 proved the new orange's excellent shipping and keeping qualities, and growers hailed it as the year-round orange Florida needed to become competitive with the California citrus industry.

The prestigious Glen St. Mary Nurseries arranged to propagate and sell the finished trees. Lue's understanding was that he would receive a ten-cent royalty for each Lue Gim Gong tree *propagated* during the next four years. However, the written contract stipulated payment only for the trees *sold*. According to the nursery's sales brochure, "The contract price for the variety we believe far exceeds the price paid for any other orange or for any other fruit ever propagated in America." Lue claimed he received a mere \$200, and he accused the nursery of deliberately holding off sales until the term of years expired.

Since Glen St. Mary Nurseries sold finished trees rather than budwood, a delay between the signing of the contract and the initial sales would have been unavoidable. The nursery might also have held up sales for marketing reasons. In the interim, testimonials from reputable growers were gathered and the Lue Gim Gong orange was submitted to the American Pomological Society for consideration for the distinguished Wilder Silver Medal, which it won in 1911, the same year the variety was finally marketed.

Controlling the budwood from which the trees were propagated was also difficult. As the nursery's proprietor, L. L. Taber, Jr., put it, "We did pretty well for about two years in controlling the Lue Gim Gong—after that it was a free-for-all," with people grafting other trees from stock purchased from Glen St. Mary Nurseries and even stealing grafts from Lue's grove. Though Lue lived up to his contract scrupulously—selling budwood only to the nursery—he unwittingly contributed to the problem by giving away budwood.

When well-known citrus grower William Chase Temple, impressed by the hardiness of the new orange, wanted to buy budwood for his own groves, Lue would not sell him a single bud. Instead, he offered to give him all he wanted for experimental purposes. Temple, not wanting to be under obligation, refused. While talking, he discovered that Lue had no Chinese ginger plants, so Temple sent him some from his own garden.



Selecting Ripe Oranges and Grapefruit in Lue Gim Gong's Citrus Groves, DeLand, Florida.

LUE GIM GONG'S CITRUS GROVES

Oranges, Grapefruit, Tangerines, Mandarins, Satsumas, Lemons, Etc.
And the "Lue Gim Gong," An All Year-Round Orange and Grapefruit. Shipped From DeLand, Florida.

We spare no expense to make this fruit good. It is not picked from the trees indiscriminately, but is selected according to ripeness. Every orange is examined and wired or banded to remove dirt or other impurities, and they are carefully graded before packing. The fruit in each box is of uniform size and wrapped in Hammerschlag waxed paper, such as is used for wrapping butter and candy. We have used this paper since 1888, and find that it tends to preserve the fruit and also to prevent those which are decayed from injuring any with which they may come in contact.

Our boxes are made by the W. A. Merryday Co., of Palatka, Fla., especially for us—are extra heavy and of the best quality and make.

No job of contract packing. This fruit not to be sold on condition but on its merits, and guaranteed to be good when received. As we would not wish to buy decayed fruit, neither do we sell it. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets." Matt. 7:12, and found in the teachings of Confucius. This is not any of the Lued but also in the sight of men." 2 Tim. 3:11. Faults I have, and mistakes I have made, but my intentions and aims are to be honest and honorable in all things or dealings and my will is good to encourage the right and discourage the wrong. If there are more honest and honorable and better ways to do business, even in my declining age, I am willing to learn. If any error address.

LUE GIM GONG

DeLand, Florida, or North Adams, Mass.

Lue's shipping label reveals his unique philosophy and manner of doing business. This picture of his grove was also sold as a postcard and printed on checks issued by banks in North Adams and DeLand. (Courtesy Dr. Chih Meng)



When Lue died, DeLand's leading citizens served as his pallbearers, and a death mask was made in preparation for a full-sized monument of "this truly great Chinaman." Money for the statue was never raised, but a bust was completed and unveiled at the Florida Pavilion during the 1940 World's Fair in New York. (Courtesy Him Mark Lai)

Touched by his thoughtfulness, Lue asked the grower he would accept a gift of Lue Gim Gong oranges as a token of his appreciation. When Temple said yes, Lue shipped him twelve oranges, each cut from the tree with a foot of precious budwood, enough to bud 100 branches.

As the number of Lue Gim Gong trees multiplied into the tens of thousands, Lue's fame spread. His belief that he had been wronged by Glen St. Mary Nurseries deepened, and when he developed the Gim Gong grapefruit (by crossing the common Florida grapefruit with the hardy perennial trifoliolate orange), he refused to sell the rights, giving away the budwood instead.

The crop from Lue's grove, in its prime, should have generated an annual income of approximately \$6,000, yet he could not meet his expenses. The thousands of visitors who came to see the "citrus wizard" each year always left with free samples. Also, while the industry in Florida was becoming more sophisticated, with growers marketing collectively through an exchange, Lue was mistrustful of relinquishing any control and refused to participate. And he was continually being cheated by unscrupulous independent distributors.

"Poor Lue defaulted 306 times by the American," he wrote the editor of the *Florida Grower*. "I not able stand no more. I must have the honest and honorable money to pay my bills. Helping poor solitary destitute Lue all alone in DeLand and in the world. God bless you all."

The editor published the letter in the January 31, 1917, issue, adding a plea of his own: "We are confronted with the lamentable fact that another American citizen has cheated the poor, helpless Chinaman, and I feel bitter humiliation that this should be a fact. I somehow feel a measure of guilt, of a sense of responsibility in this case; not so much as an individual as an American citizen."

Pointing out that the unpaid bill would be covered if 200 readers each contributed a dollar, the editor continued: "Let us give this meek and lowly man a square deal and make him realize that there is something more than mere words in the Christianity he has adopted from the white man. Do not delay, he needs the money and he needs it now. With Lue Gim Gong I say, 'God bless you.'"

Florida growers, though suffering losses from a freeze that winter, responded generously. Well over \$200 was collected. It was not enough; Lue was forced to mortgage part, and then all, of his property.

Still experimenting, Lue developed many unusual plant combinations in his garden, including a rosebush

that put forth seventeen different varieties in seven different colors, all from a single root. In 1921, the press widely reported his perfection of a unique, perfumed grapefruit. Twenty-one inches in circumference, the fruit resembled a shaddock. The sections were apparently too woody to eat, but a single grapefruit, when ripe, filled an entire room with its sweet, clean odor, and the skin could be made into a delectable crystallized candy and pickle. He also invented an all-purpose salve for treating a host of ailments including burns, skin diseases, mange, hemorrhoids, and nettle rash.

These creations did not bring Lue the money he needed, however, and his grove became so run-down that his crop in 1921 netted only \$1,400. The entire proceeds had to be applied to the interest on his mortgages; when the loans came due, he could not pay them.

The *Florida Grower* again came to his rescue with a scheme to raise \$6,000 through \$100 bonds. The De-

Land and North Adams newspapers also took up the cause. S. M. Moore, of the Tampa West Coast Realty Company, spoke for many when he wrote: "If the men who are interested in the citrus industry of this state, even in a small way, would consider just for a minute what a benefit this fine old man has been to the industry, surely everyone would subscribe \$100 or more to this fund. While it is an investment, with good security, it is also a debt we owe Lue Gim Gong. Let's don't fail to get up the entire amount necessary."

Donations—prompted by admiration, respect, and pity—trickled in from growers, strangers who had visited the grove, people who had known Lue in happier days in North Adams. The money saved his home and provided financial security for his few remaining years. But he had to wait for death—on June 3, 1925—to release him from the loneliness he had endured since Mother Fanny's death.