

## The Lue Gim Gong Tale

**T**here's an epilogue to the C. T. Sampson strike-breaking story; well, it's a tale of its own really, that of the strange encounter of Lue Gim Gong, one of the strike-breakers and Fannie Burlingame, North Adams spinster, teacher at the Sampson Sunday School.

The meeting between them did not evoke the national headlines that the strike-breaking did furnish would-be biographers with a welter of conflicting stories - many, if not most, the handiwork of Lue Gim Gong himself.

Some of the more colorful and imaginative ones have Gim Gong as a lad of 10 to 12, navigating a boatload of grown men from Canton to Hong Kong for passage to the U.S. and being elected first "President of the Chinese Republic" in a North Adams cow pasture under a chestnut tree.

Under a banner heading, "A Big Fake Story" The Transcript reprinted an interview of Gim Gong with a St. Louis reporter. In the account, Gim Gong claimed Fannie Burlingame as his natural mother, her pretty Swedish housekeeper as his bride, and his occupation as that of a wealthy merchant in North Adams. In other legends he was a graduate of Harvard and on a visit to his native land barely escaped being killed by his father for becoming a Christian.

Among the certainties are the Lue Gim Gong was one of C. T. Sampson's "Celestials" and that the New York Times was in error when it said that all of Sampson's Chinese workers had left by 1876. Accounts vary as to where they all disappeared, but the general practice was for the Chinese to return to their native country, richer than when they had left. Some, it is said, drifted to California, some went to Boston, others opened laundries in the South.

Lue Gim Gong stayed on and became a member of North Adams' First Baptist Church and YMCA in 1876, and a U.S. citizen in 1879. He was awarded the Wilder Medal of the American Pomological Society for his pollenization of a winter-hardy, multi-crop orange that bears his name. The orange proved to be a bonanza for the fruit growers, if not for Lue Gim Gong. He died in poverty with a statue of him and his horse unveiled post humously in the Florida Pavilion of the very last day of the N.Y. World's Fair in 1940.

Family records and remembrances add that he was a boarder in the Burlingame house on the Southwest corner of Church and Summer Streets and that there, in the famed garden and greenhouse that had been awarded many prize silver spoons from the Hoosac Valley Agricultural Society Fair, he experimented in hybridization under the tutelage of Fannie Burlingame. When the northern winters became too much for her health, she moved to DeLand, Florida, where Legette Hagstrom became her housekeeper and Lue Gim Gong managed the orange grove.

It is folklore that Chinese manners demand that the response to any question should be one that will please the questioner. Whether true or not, Lue Gim Gong was also in love with Legette and needed to gain her parents approval for his suit. His tall tales did not succeed, nor did he produce a change of heart when he deeded to Legette the entire orange grove given to him by Fannie Burlingame's sisters after her death. In 1907, Legette Hagstrom became Mrs. Ekman and on her wedding day deeded the orange grove back to Lue Gim Gong. In that same year, she died.

Alone and desolate, Gim Gong worked the grove, won the Wilder Medal in 1911, and developed a perfumed grapefruit. He became a colorful local character, followed about by a pet horse and rooster, and providing tourists with impromptu sermons from an orange crate pulpit.

Undoubtedly his story will seem a pathetic one to the many millions who accept orange juice as a daily fact of life. Only those who can recall the thrill of finding an orange in the toe of their Christmas stocking realize the victory that was Lue Gim Gong's in his creation of an orange for all seasons. I do not know how to measure the size of his victory or the value of this meeting of East and West, but I have tasted the candied peel of one of his perfumed grapefruits, picked from a surviving tree, and it was sweet.

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