



Chinese in the Warren Mining District

Lawrence A. Kingsbury
Heritage Program
USDA Payette National Forest



Gold was discovered in Warren's Meadow in 1862. In 1869, the Euro-American miners voted to invite the Chinese to the Mining District. Independent Chinese mining companies leased or purchased claims at this time. Between 1869 and 1891, several Chinese owned companies entered the district and hydraulically placer mined the claims. Gold nuggets averaged in size to a grain of rice. Most of the recovered gold was fine flour gold. It is estimated that about \$15,000,000 in gold was removed from the Warren Mining District.

The Chinese population in the district varied yearly and seasonally. Many of Warren's Chinese wintered in places where the weather was milder than Warren, such as Portland, Oregon. The mining season opened in late spring when the snow was melting, and water was plentiful for using hydraulic mining methods. Water was moved via ditches, these ditches are still visible on the Warren landscape and can be seen at the Chinese and Warren Cemeteries. Depending on the availability of water, hydraulic mining lasted for about 10 to 12 weeks.

The United States Census records for the Washington Precinct (known as Warren today) lists 355 Chinese in 1870, 393 in 1880, 22 in 1900, 6 in 1910. The 1890 census record is not available. The true Chinese population figures are probably higher than the records indicate. Census tallies were taken between the months of April and July. In the 1870 and 1880 census records, Chinese residents represented more than half of Warren's total population.

Not all Chinese returned to their homes in China. Some stayed, and made Idaho their home. The last of the Chinese who at one time lived and worked in the Warren area included Ah Toy, Ah Sam (Jung Chew), Ah Kan, and Polly Bemis. In 1892, Ah Toy and Ah Kan were business partners, "packers," and operated a string of 16 packhorses. In 1918, Ah Toy was the proprietor of the Idaho Hotel, in McCall, and probably left Idaho before the 1920 census was taken. Ah Sam was the mayor of Warren at one time. He died in 1933 in Warren and is buried in the Warren cemetery. Polly died in 1933 in Grangeville. In 1989, Polly was exhumed and reburied next to her Polly Creek home adjacent to the Salmon River. Ah Kan died in 1934 at the county hospital and is probably buried in Grangeville. Ah Kan was the last of the miners from the Gold Rush Chinese of the Warren Mining District. The Chinese residents significantly contribute to the story of Warren and their footprints remain and are preserved on Idaho's landscape.