

TRENT ALLEY (1970)

A 1972 Spokesman article by Cheney Cowles about the changing face of Spokane's Chinese American community identifies a shift among younger generations toward white-collar work. While this observation illustrates the popular model minority stereotypes of the time, it also points to how the community had started to move away from the Trent Alley neighborhood.



Trent Avenue looking east between Washington and Bernard. From Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture

Although Trent Alley was no longer the center of Spokane's Asian communities as it was earlier in the 20th century, the diverse businesses that remained reflected the remnants of an urban boom in Spokane fueled in part by immigrants.

EXPO '74

In the years preceding Expo, many Spokanites saw Trent Avenue as Skid Road, an area of town defined by the homeless and working poor. Expo '74 was seen as a way to reform Trent Avenue into a bustling corridor of commerce and urban beauty. A retrospective Spokesman article in 1979 described the run up to Expo as an "orgy of construction" defined in part by the demolition of the riverfront railroad tracks. Called a "Chinese wall" by King Cole and others, the term at the time indicated a barrier to social progress. While the riverfront renovation created a view of the falls now emblematic of the city, the changes brought about made the historic home to many Chinese and Japanese businesses unrecognizable in a similar manner as the construction of Union Station, which was built atop Spokane's original Chinatown. With the demolition of buildings along the north half of the block where Auntie's stands, the last enclosed vestige of Trent Alley disappeared.



This aerial from 1972 shows the demolition of buildings on the corner of Trent Avenue and Stephens, which housed the last remnant of Trent Alley. From General Photograph Collection, EWU Archives and Special Collections

Today, the presence of the Chinese and Japanese American communities in Spokane looks much different. A handful of the Chinese restaurants in downtown have moved to east or north, a modern though aging Methodist Church helps carry the legacy of Spokane's historic Japanese American, and the Nishinomiya Garden in Manito Park, reflects the post-Expo efforts of Ed Tsutakawa and others.

REMEMBERING TRENT ALLEY



Sketch of Union Station, by Keith Oka. From 18 Sketches of Pre-Expo Trent Avenue, Northwest Room, Spokane Public Library

In the 1970s, commercial artist Keith Oka published a book of sketches depicting Trent Avenue before Expo. As the art director for the ad agency responsible for publicizing Expo, Oka's work helped give form to the ideas proposed by King Cole and other Expo planners. A Japanese American transplant from Seattle, Oka must have been well aware of how the fair he helped visualize would impact the historic home of Spokane's international district. Although Oka left no words about why he created the book, it presents an early attempt to preserve the history of Trent Avenue. More recently, United We Stand has promoted attempts to remember the Chinese and Japanese communities that inhabited Trent Alley through historical marker projects. While most Spokanites appreciate the natural beauty restored by the World's Fair, Spokane's renewal does not need to come at the price of burying the stories of those who lived in the footprint of Expo fairgrounds.

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EXPO REVIVAL

Searching for Trent Alley

Asian American Footprints in Downtown Spokane

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Walk along Spokane Falls Boulevard past the Davenport Grand toward Washington and along the parking lot in the shadow of the Parkade. In the first half of the 20th century, those blocks were the heart of Spokane's Chinese and Japanese communities.

This exhibit looks back at Spokane's early Asian American communities, their history in downtown, and the changes brought about by Expo '74. Highlights and excerpts from the full showcase are featured in this pamphlet.



Main Avenue Looking West from Howard. From Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture.

This exhibit is co-presented by



TRENT ALLEY

Today, Spokane Falls Boulevard ends where Trent Avenue begins. Prior to Expo '74, it was all Trent Avenue. For much of the 20th century, the stretch of blocks between Bernard and Howard along Trent was home to several Asian-run businesses. In particular, Trent Alley, which ran from Bernard to Stevens, became synonymous with Spokane's Chinese and Japanese communities. Shops, hotels, and offices had primary storefronts along the alley.

To date, very little evidence exists about Trent Alley. The cases in this exhibit bring together materials from a number of different institutions in Washington about the Asian American communities living in and around Trent Alley.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Spokane, Spokane County, Washington. Sanborn Map Company, Vol. 4, - Jun 1950

CHINESE IN SPOKANE (Pre-1879 - Present)

In an 1879 issue of the Palouse Gazette, a columnist describes towns north of Colfax. He lists a "Chinese wash house" amongst the list of amenities available in Spokane. During the late-1800s, Chinese settlers in the area filled numerous roles as laborers, entrepreneurs, miners, and farmers. Like many other Chinese immigrants to America at the time, early arrivals to Spokane came from southern China fleeing famine and political unrest. Also similar to many Chinese immigrants of the time, those who settled in Spokane faced rampant discrimination and unfair treatment under the law. The Trent Alley neighborhood, where many Chinese Spokanites lived, helped insulate them from the threat of physical and economic violence in the broader city.

As Spokane developed and the Chinese American population increased, city business leaders constructed several frame structures in the area between the current location of Rotary Fountain and the Red Wagon. The placement of these buildings were intended to separate Chinese residents and businesses from the central portions of the city further west. Over time, the Chinese neighborhood spread south, encompassing the area around Trent Alley. The old Chinese enclave north of Trent was eventually demolished to build Union Station, which opened in 1915.



New Chinese Republic parade float in Spokane, circa 1912. From E. T. Hawk Photograph Collection, EWU Archives and Special Collections

Ah Yen (1878-1918)



Attestation on behalf of Sue Ah Yen, 1895. From the Chinese Exclusion Act Records at the National Archives in Seattle

Sue Ah Yen arrived in Spokane by 1878. Around that time, he set up a mining camp near Metaline Falls where other Chinese miners worked the area paying Ah Yen half their proceeds. While the mining operation ended by 1890, Ah Yen continued to operate as a well-known merchant in Spokane until his departure to China in 1918. Over the forty years Ah Yen spent in Spokane, he ran a number of shops specializing in Asian goods with his wife Gee.

Because of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which passed into law in 1882, travelers from China endured close scrutiny. Upon one attempt to re-enter the United States, in 1903, Sue Ah Yen was admitted into the country with the help of witnesses who could attest to Ah Yen's claims that he was a merchant of good standing in Spokane.

NOODLE GRILL (1936-2000)

In the early-20th century, a handful of Chinese restaurants in Spokane were called "noodle grills". One restaurant advertising itself as the Noodle Grill opened its doors above a penny theater on 520 1/2 W Main Ave in 1909. Years later, a different restaurant by the same name opened a few doors down on 512 W. Main Ave. The Leong family ran this restaurant from 1936 to 2000. Chou "Joe" Leong started the business after fleeing political persecution from his hometown, Toishan, China. Due to the immigration laws of the time, he had to leave his wife, Kon, and son, Dick behind. The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, allowing Kon and Dick to join Joe stateside in 1949.

The business transitioned into a new building on the corner of Sprague and Crestline in 1971, where it ran for another 30 years.

Flavors of the Orient

Chief Jack Louis fries Egg Roll, Dick Leong prepares food.

THE most extravagant restaurant in Spokane has an oriental theme—see outside example in Treacher's to San Francisco. The chef here, Dick Leong, has been preparing eating place specialties on small fare you see try right here in Spokane.

There are many fine chop chop restaurants in the Island Square, places operated by good Chinese cooks. But if you always order chop chop, these water or pork noodles you are really wanting out on a wonderful adventure in foreign dining.

Now if you order one of the "combination" plates you get little bit of the best of these Chinese chefs—their skill at preparing low-cost, good-tasting Chinese specialties—yes, dishes that you might be served in faraway Hong Kong or Hawaii.

For an adventure in exotic foreign eating order a group of "house" specialties the way, time you dine out at a Chinese restaurant. Let your waitress, or the owner himself, help you choose dinner. Unless you're a dyed-in-the-wool meat lover, steamed vegetables and green salad with a spicy ginger sauce, garnished with long slices of green onion.

Bacon Shrimp Roll
The Bacon Shrimp Roll contains a well-seasoned minced shrimp filling rolled up in a bacon strip, butter dipped and fried. It's accompanied to the table with that special "hot" mustard and onion wedges.

Chicken Chinese Style (\$3.50), Bacon Shrimp Roll (\$3.50) and Water Chestnut Chow Yek (\$3.40). Of course there were several kinds of steamed rice, hot tea in those little Chinese teapots and little Chinese soups and little Chinese "desserts."

One fact that makes each dish a tempting delicacy is that each is "cooked to order" (though the wait is certainly never very long). Here's a description of our dinner:

Water Chestnut Chow Yek
You might say that Chow Yek is the "chop chop" family but not really. It's certainly not an understatement. It is a mixture of vegetables and meat in a just top thick gravy. However, the combination of flavors certainly lifts this dish out of the chop chop category. There's lots of meat, in very bite-sized pieces, celery, green pepper, onion, Chinese peas, mushrooms, spinach, and of course, in ours, a generous amount of water chestnut slices.

If you don't feel quite as adventurous or if you'd prefer not to choose from the many Chinese dishes, the Noodle Grill does have two very fine "Special Chinese Dishes." Both are served family-style and are for parties of two or more.

For \$2.50 per person you can have Wonton or Chinese Green Soup, Barbecued Pork with Vegetables, Barbecued Spare ribs, Fried Wonton with Sweet and Sour Sauce, Egg Roll and Rice, Fortune Cookies and Tea. The \$3.00 dinner includes the soup plus Chinese Sweet Pork with Rice, Barbecued Spare ribs, Fried Wonton with Pineapple and Bacon Shrimp Roll, and of course, Rice, Tea and Cookies.

Popular at luncheon and certainly easy on the budget are any of the combination dinner plates. Such a plate (15 cents) may include Steamed Chicken, Bacon or Pork Sausage, Egg Foo Young, Rice, Tea and Cookies.

The most popular plate (\$1.25) includes Pork Chow Mein, Fried Potatoes, Sweet and Sour Spare ribs, Fried Rice, Tea and Chinese Cookies. This kind of a menu is a good bet for fast-food—if you've never been to a Chinese restaurant.

Other Favorites
Though we've been priding the strictly "Continental" dishes, the Noodle Grill does not have less than 25 different kinds of chop chop, 25 different chow mein.

They also serve Pork Sausage, which many of you may recall as the dish that introduced you to oriental eating

"Flavors of the Orient," by Dorothy Dean, Spokesman-Review, November 9, 1958

JAPANESE IN SPOKANE (1918-1967)

Japanese migration to Spokane began in the 1880s in the wake of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Japanese reforms towards industrialization left many Japanese farmers feeling squeezed and helped spur international migration. Like the Chinese migrants who settled in Spokane before them, the early Japanese community in Spokane consisted largely of laborers, entrepreneurs in service industries, and farmers.



"Rally Day" photograph in front of the Grant Street Methodist Church. From Hirata Family Papers, Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture

During World War II, the Japanese American community in Spokane increased from roughly 300 to over 1000. While Japanese in Washington west of the Columbia were removed to incarceration camps, Japanese residents in Spokane were allowed to remain. Beginning in 1943 following the distribution of a "loyalty questionnaire," detained Japanese Americans could apply to leave the camps provided they settled in cities outside the exclusion zone, like Spokane. Over the course of the 20th century, the Japanese American population dispersed, with many moving near Grant Park or further up the South Hill.

LOGAN HOTEL (1890-1972)

Throughout much of the 20th century, Spokane was home to several hotels that serviced laborers from farms, mines, and timber camps. A number of these hotels were run by Japanese Americans, including the Logan Hotel on the northwest corner of Stevens and Main. By 1945, the Yamada family ran the Hotel. George Yamada, a Nisei, was a child when his family bought the Logan Hotel. He stated in an oral history, "you might kind of say we grew up in the alley system." Yamada recalls a handful of other Nisei who would play marbles and other games in the alley.



Logan Hotel, 1913 by Ryosuki Akashi. From Japanese Men and Their Enterprises. Shiosaki Collection, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture

The Hotel was run later by the Takami family starting in 1956. Their granddaughter Linda described her grandfather Ikuta making rounds in the morning before taking a coffee break with her. Ikuta Takami closed the hotel in 1966 and passed away the following year. The building was later demolished in 1972, joining lots to the north which had already been cleared by 1957.