



Name in English: Lue Gim Gong
Name in Chinese: 劉錦濃 [刘锦浓]
Name in Pinyin: Liú Jǐnnóng
Gender: Male
Birth Year: ? - 1925
Birth Place: Waangwu Village, Toishan, China

The "Citrus King"

Profession (s): Horticulturalist

Education: No known education

Contribution (s): Inspired by the stories of his uncle about the riches to be found in America, Lue Gim Gong (Lue being his family name) begged his parents until they allowed him to accompany his uncle back to the United States. He was only about 10 years old (his actual birth year has never been established.) He stayed in San Francisco for awhile then worked his way across the country, finally arriving in North Adams, Massachusetts to work in the shoe factory of Calvin Sampson.

It was in North Adams in 1870 that Chinese workers were first brought to the East Coast as strikebreakers by Calvin Sampson. He wanted to break the embryonic labor union in his shoe factory but couldn't find the white workers willing to do it. Sampson's actions, and the efforts of other factory owners to bring more Chinese in to keep wages low and unions out, created immense fear and hatred against the Chinese all across the East Coast. Chinese factory workers had to move in groups protected by armed escorts when they traveled and generally stayed close to their workplaces to avoid being attacked by angry whites. The fear and anger of white workers on the East Coast created by this incident is one of the factors that led directly to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Ironically, by 1873, factory owners like Sampson were complaining that the Chinese were turning out to be as bad as the white workers; going out on strike wanting better pay and working conditions and militantly refusing to be exploited. Some of them even tried to form their own labor unions.

Although parts of the immigrant population of Scots and Irish in North Adams stood against the Chinese, many parts of the establishment were friendly towards them. The First Baptist Church took it upon themselves to educate the Chinese workers in English and turn them into good Christians. Seventy five church volunteers took up the task. Among them was Fanny Burlingame, the distant cousin of the American diplomatic minister to China, Anson Burlingame, who became Lue's teacher and close friend. When she learned of his intelligence and his skill with plants, she asked him to live with her family to tend their garden. Lue converted to Christianity in her Sunday school and

Burlingame helped him become an American citizen in 1877. She eventually adopted him as her son.

When most of the other Chinese left Massachusetts in 1880, Lue stayed on in North Adams as a shoemaker. When he became ill with tuberculosis around 1885, he was nursed by Fanny Burlingame.

In 1885-1886, Lue went back to his native village in China to see his mother but perhaps also with the intention of dying there as he'd been told he only had a year to live from the tuberculosis that had already destroyed one lung and affected the other. But he found that the many years of life in America had changed his outlook and attitude. Villagers considered him strange and complained that his agricultural experiments were disrupting the spiritual forces in the area. To top off his sense of estrangement his parents arranged a marriage for him despite his protests. On the morning of his wedding, Lue was nowhere to be found because he'd fled back to the United States. His outraged relatives removed his name from the family temple rolls, thus symbolically removing him from existence. Lue never came back.

Lue was advised to move to the South for the warmer and healthier climate. Fanny Burlingame suggested he move with her to the winter home and land she owned with her sister in DeLand, Florida, the center of the state's citrus growing area. At that time oranges and grapefruits were small local industries that made little money because the fruit spoiled quickly before they could reach major markets and were prone to frost damage. In the winter of 1894-1895, for example, the freeze destroyed 95% of orange crops, including that on the Burlingame property.

In 1903, Fanny Burlingame passed away leaving no will. Her sister, knowing of Fanny's intentions, left the DeLand home and grove to Lue along with \$12,000. This was an enormous sum for that era that would be equivalent to about \$7 million today.

In the winter of 1904, another freeze wiped out most of Florida's orange crop once again. Lue began experimenting, eventually developing a frost resistant orange in 1909 that grew later in the season and ripened in summer to avoid the frost. It was also sweet and could survive long distance travel thus creating the opportunity for a nationwide business. The "Lue Gim Gong" orange, a variety of the Valencia orange, won the Silver Wilder Medal of the American Pomological Society in 1911. Lue also developed a new grapefruit, sweet apple, cherry currant, and a greenhouse peach that could be ripened in time for Thanksgiving to make numberless peach pies since then. Lue Gim Gong became known as "The Citrus Wizard." Lue's orange and his other citrus developments made it clear that citrus crops could become a major industry for Florida. In 2008, the Florida citrus industry made about \$9 billion, the orange industry alone producing over 200 million boxes annually.

In 1913, Ransom Olds, the founder of the auto company, Oldsmobile, bought undeveloped land just northwest of Tampa, Florida. He established what became known as the city of Oldsmar and asked Lue to help develop the agricultural area of the city. One of the city streets was named Gim Gong Road in Lue's honor until 1994 when

the name was changed. In 2004, another city street was named Gim Gong Road to continue the honor.

Never all that good a businessman, Lue was oftentimes swindled by unscrupulous people. To market the Lue Gim Gong orange he signed a contract with an agricultural company that promised to pay a percentage to Lue for every orange tree they sold. The company then sold the seeds that grew into orange trees instead and pocketed the money. Lue never made much money off of his agricultural discoveries and was naively overgenerous. He ended up having to rely on friends to pay his taxes and help him keep the orchard that he ended up depending on for his entire living. Still, he was a respected Christian and held popular prayer services in the gazebo behind his home every Sunday until he died in 1925. The Lue Gim Gong Memorial Garden located there now features a gazebo with Lue's bust in it.

Lue Gim Gong had a favorite saying:

"No one should live in this world for himself alone, but to do good for those who come after him."

External Links:

<http://himmarklai.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/01-H.M.Lai-Lue-Gin-Gong-Wonder-Grower-07.11.73.pdf>

<http://www.delandhouse.com/gazeboLIF.htm>

<http://paulwmarino.org/lue-gim-gong.html>