

## FEATURE

# The 1886 Chinese Expulsion is Remembered

“Shameful Moments,” the 1886 Chinese expulsion in Seattle, was remembered as more than 100 marched from the docks to Seattle’s International District.

By Nancy Bartley

For decades, the 1886 expulsion of Seattle’s Chinese workers was a little-known part of city history

They were rounded up and marched down the hill to the docks, and when the captain of the ship refused to take the Chinese immigrants who worked in this new city, the angry white settlers passed the hat to collect enough money so the captain would take the Chinese away to San Francisco.

On Saturday, February 12th, 2011 more than 100 Chinese Americans and their friends tried to change that by making the symbolic reverse journey — from the docks, uphill, through the Chinatown International District’s ornate “welcome” gate.

A golden dragon circled and bobbed. Drums thundered, and slowly the procession made its way along the streets. As the cold wind seeped through clothing and scarves, and it chilled fingers and noses, spectators snapped photos. Others stared.

The Chinese Expulsion Remembrance event marked the 125th anniversary of one of the darkest times in Seattle history. It’s only the second time the incident has been formally remembered. The first was 25 years ago, on the 100th anniversary of the expulsion.

By calling attention to the 1886 event again, the organizers hope those events of the past will never be repeated with a new generation of immigrants.

As event Chairwoman Bettie Luke said before the march started: “This kind of dislike for people who are different and questioning who is a real American has me alarmed.”

She said her great-uncle worked as the Seattle mayor’s houseboy at the time of the

expulsion. And even though it was a horrific event that ended with the city under martial law, “many people have never heard about this,” she said.

Midway through the march, King County Executive Dow Constantine addressed the marchers.



ALAN BERNER / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
With the Stars and Stripes she'll carry in the Chinese Expulsion Remembrance march, Susan Lee Woo waits at the foot of Washington Street near the waterfront docks in Seattle for participants to gather. They walked to Wing Luke Museum in Chinatown International District.

“We gather to remember a shameful moment in our history,” he said. The Chinese were treated in this manner “because they were immigrants. We march so this crime against our community is never forgotten. The ... fear they must have felt as they marched these streets toward the waterfront ...

“We need to remember the lessons of the past, that an injury to one is an injury to all,” Constantine said.

The expulsion in Washington had its roots in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which Congress passed at the behest of labor unions who wanted to get rid of what they believed was competition from Chinese laborers, according to information from the Washington State History Museum.

The Chinese who emigrated to the West Coast before the act were mainly from southern China, where war, famine and persecution killed millions.

During the time of the Seattle-area expulsion — which led to 350 Chinese being forced from their homes — three Chinese hop pickers were killed and three others wounded in Issaquah.

Many in Tacoma were forced from their homes and put on a train bound for Portland. In Oregon’s Hell’s Canyon, on the southeastern edge of Washington State, 31 Chinese men were murdered.

A few years after the expulsion, the Chinese were welcomed back. Their labor was in demand after the Great Seattle Fire in 1889, when the city needed to rebuild.

Many at the march had painful memories of growing up in a city where ethnic differences were not embraced.

“We used to wear buttons saying, ‘Chinese’ to distinguish us from the Japanese at the time of World War II,” said Dahlia Marr, 80,

who grew up in Seattle, and on Saturday walked carrying a sign commemorating the expulsion.

As a child, she was not allowed to swim at Colman Pool in West Seattle because it was designated for whites only. Now her granddaughter is on a high-school swim team and competed at the pool, a poignant moment when Marr went to watch.

“This is an important part of American history,” said William Huie, who brought his three children to the march.

“Today is especially significant in light of anti-immigrant sentiments today — like the roundup of immigrants in Arizona,” said John Chen Beckwith, who was at the front of the march.

As the marchers passed beneath the ornate gate welcoming them to the International District, the smells from bakeries and dim sum shops drifted from open doors, and children in Chinese New Year dragon costumes bumped into each other and peeked out of costume dragon heads.

There was a feeling of homecoming. Marcher Vi Mar applauded the International District as “one of the best areas in Seattle to visit” and said the gate — with its messages of welcome in Chinese inscribed on the structure that was built in 2008 — is the most beautiful and sturdy gate of any Chinatown she’s seen.

“When we come here,” she said, “we’re coming home.”

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