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“Verily the Road was Built with Chinaman’s Bones”: An Archaeology of Chinese Line Camps in Montana

Christopher W. Merritt · Gary Weisz · Kelly J. Dixon

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Abstract Transcontinental railroads conveyed information and resources that fueled the Gilded Age’s quintessential financial and political corporate corruption and related social inequalities. Construction of the transcontinentals required massive numbers of laborers who lived in temporary “line camps” along the railroad grades. A sample of spatially and ethnically segregated Chinese line camps along the transcontinental Northern Pacific Railroad in the Rocky Mountains of north-western Montana provide historical and archaeological examples of the Gilded Age’s pervasive racist mistreatment of the Chinese, culminating in Chinese exclusion laws.

Keywords Overseas Chinese · Gilded age · Railroad camps · Northern Pacific railroad

Introduction

On August 22, 1883, the Northern Pacific Railroad (NPRR) drove the last spike to complete transcontinental mainline at Independence Creek, Montana Territory (Fig. 1), which lay about 50mi (80 km) west of Helena, Montana and about 30mi (48 km) west of the Continental Divide (*New York Times* 1883b; see also Taylor 2010). A group of Chinese, advancing from the west, competed with predominantly

Without the Chinese railroad workers the Northern Pacific would probably not have been built for a long time, since manual labor out here is hard to find (Mohr 1884, p. 175)

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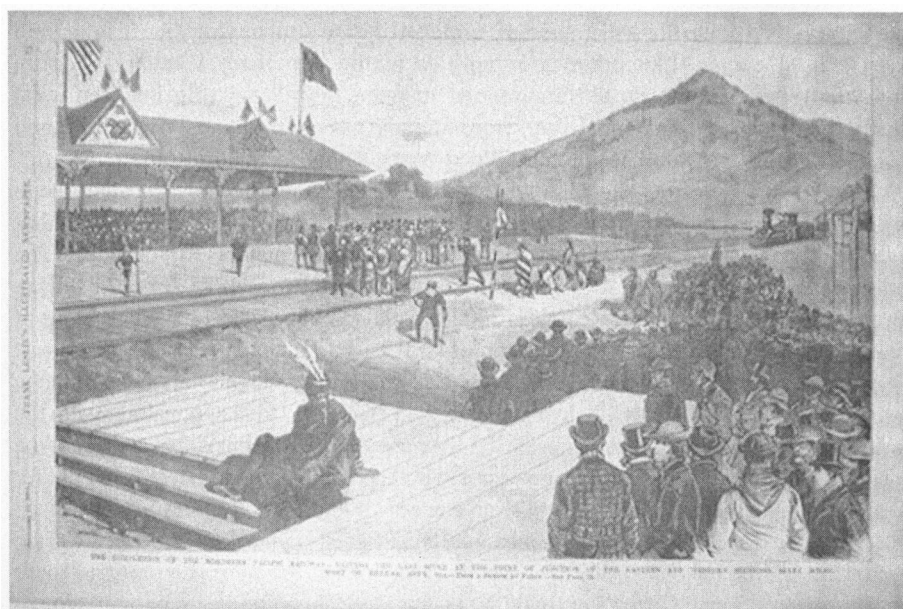


Fig. 1 *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* featured this illustration depicting the Northern Pacific Railroad's Last Spike Ceremony, September 22, 1883

Irish and Slavic laborers from the east to finish the last mile of track (Lindau and Trautmann 1985, p. 65). While the winner of the race was ultimately the westward-advancing European crew, this was one snapshot among many of the culturally cosmopolitan nature of labor during the Gilded Age. Although there are several mainstream historical publications discussing the NPRR's construction and its transnational labor forces (e.g., Lewty 1987; Renz 1980; Smalley 1883; Taylor and Taylor 1999, 2002), the Chinese contribution has yet to be investigated, let alone completely understood. According to Pegler-Gordon (2006), there was an intentional historical omission of the Chinese contributions from the literature in the 1800s, and this may have [unintentionally] influenced recent research on the NPRR. The relative absence of the Overseas Chinese in period illustrations and historical accounts associated with railroads in the American West (e.g., Beebe and Clegg 1958; Sonnichsen 1930; but see Reinhardt 1970, pp. 48–52; Wood 1968, pp. 32, 79) is ironic given the significance of their role in the construction of the NPRR, as well as other great transcontinental railroads (e.g., the Central Pacific Railroad) in Gilded Age America.

Transcontinental railroads were essential to the nation's burgeoning information and transportation networks and connected the two major strains—financial and political—of Gilded Age corporate corruption (White 2003, p. 23). The railroads carried natural resources from the American West to factories in the eastern US, and they swiftly conveyed information and various lavish goods, such as oysters chilled in refrigerated cars, from coasts to remote, rugged camps deep inland. The Gilded Age's association with factories in the northeastern United States and a culturally diverse industrial working class, mostly recent immigrants from Europe, cannot be understated. Yet, the era is just as easily associated with railroads across the American West, which similarly required massive numbers of laborers, including Irish, Italians,

and Chinese. Archaeological traces of some of the accompanying line camps still exist. These camps, like other communities in the American West, provide an opportunity to examine, in a “fine-grained manner, the relationship between local interactions and conflicts and larger economic and social structures” (McGuire and Reckner 2002, p. 54) making up the Gilded Age’s social inequalities and tensions.

White (1985) describes the completion of the NPRR as the first large scale force to bring American capitalism to the Pacific Northwest, which in turn created new labor relations that shaped the region’s social and economic history for decades. The employment of Chinese, and later Japanese, workers on the NPRR brought to the forefront what McGuire and Reckner (2002, p. 54) describe as “local manifestations of class formation and struggle.” The division of NPRR labor, based largely on ethnic lines, hindered the workforce’s ability to effectively alter working conditions and pay during the construction of the railroad. Only by excluding the Chinese workers and making them the focus of militant and legislative actions in the 1880s and 1890s, did unskilled laborers of the Pacific Northwest’s railroads form a new class-based cohesive group to effectively fight for better working conditions, pay, and other grievances (White 1985, pp. 266–267).

During the 1893–97 economic depression, labor unrest permeated every level of the United States, with many focusing their negative attentions on the railroad systems and their wealthy owners. Jacob Coxey’s army of the unemployed found no better pool of sympathizers than the people of Montana, where the NPRR abused their land grants for mineral exploitation (White 1985, p. 270; Jensen et al. 1995). After the NPRR refused to take hundreds of unemployed men and strikers to join Coxey’s march on Washington DC, supporters broke into the roundhouse in Butte, Montana and stole a train, heading eastward to join their compatriots. Other members sharing the Coxey sympathies traveled the NPRR, running Chinese and Japanese laborers off their jobs. Indeed, the railroads are but one example of the ways in which labor unrest played out in the context of the era’s culture of inequality, particularly amid a complex colonialist backdrop. Robbins (1994) draws attention to the ways in which the American West can be viewed as a colonial region where capital from the eastern United States and Europe supported “industrial statesmen,” who controlled the laborers bearing the brunt of the economic hierarchy defining the era. Similarly, Shackel and Palus (2006) draw upon W.E.B. Du Bois’s (1935) description of the Gilded Age, underscoring how it was a time when “industrialists dominated the transportation networks, natural resources, and economic base for much of the nation, frequently through subsidy from the federal government, if not from purchased politicians” (Shackel and Palus 2006, p. 828). This social, political, economical, and environmental network can be directly applied to the context of the Chinese working and living in the American West, where the extraction of natural resources set up the foundation for those at the top of the Gilded Age’s economic food chain. The railroads provided the major transportation network for the period, emblematically and literally supporting the intricate network noted above, serving as a means of linking the two American coasts “to move more people west and natural resources safely and profitable to markets back east” (Chang 2003, pp. 53–54; see also Foster 2000; Gutman 1976; McGuire and Reckner 2002).

Despite the role of Chinese laborers constructing those transportation networks and recovering those natural resources making up the Gilded Age’s economic base, this was an era in American history that was pervaded by racist mistreatment of the Chinese, culminating in Chinese Exclusion laws. While railroad companies supported

the continuation of open immigration, it was for the best interest of the bottom line, and not the Chinese worker. Because the western United States suffered from a constant shortage of labor, exploitation of Chinese labor was viewed as a necessary step by both railroad companies and many politicians in order to complete the nation's transcontinental railroads (Chugg 1997; Dirlick and Yeung 2001, pp. 356, 370; Sassen-Koob 1982, p. 69; White 1993, pp. 291, 338). Thus, the archaeological remains of railroad construction camps have much to reveal about the lives of those who helped build the lines that made headlines and that made—or enhanced—fortunes of the railroad magnates. Moreover, these remains have the potential to help us understand, and ideally, restore, the nuances and challenges of being Chinese in America, specifically the American West, during the Gilded Age.

Here we present what is known about the history and archaeology of Chinese line camps along the NPRR in northwestern Montana, confessing to readers that there is little to no archaeological or historical evidence describing the specifics of their line camps in that region and that the archaeological remains have yet to be thoroughly surveyed, let alone analyzed. Colleagues at the University of Idaho are now beginning their own research on line camps west of the Montana border, with hopes of tying together a larger image of the Chinese contribution to the NPRR and the American West. After summarizing the necessary historical context, we examine general archaeological signatures of ten line camps to kick start a research agenda dedicated to studying Chinese labor along the NPRR, and ideally, along other railroads connecting the American West with the rest of the US, as well as the rest of the world. Although we are only able to offer preliminary interpretations about a relatively small section of the NPRR at this time, it appears that the spatial layout of the line camps, as well as artifacts related to foodways and leisure activities, are suggestive of the ways in which the tensions of *both* social class and intercultural contact between Chinese and non-Chinese laborers structured the material—and environmental—conditions of life in these isolated camps.

Chinese Labor and America's Transcontinental Railroads

Charles Crocker, Construction Chief for the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR), commented in 1864 on the potential for hiring the Chinese to help construct the CPRR, posing the question: "The Chinese made the Great Wall, didn't they?" By 1868, the CPRR had hired 4,000 workers, two-thirds of which were Chinese (Kraus 1975, pp. 42–45; Lake 1994, pp. 188–190; also see <http://cpr.org/Museum/Chinese.html>). On May 10, 1869, the CPRR's and the Union Pacific railheads met at Promontory Point, Utah, where the golden spike, representing the completion of the United States' first transcontinental railroad, was driven in to cheering crowds. A crew of Chinese and Irish workers laid the last ten miles of track, completing their task in just 12 h. Yet the most famous, that is the most widely-circulated, historical photo of the event, entitled, "Workmen," does not show the Chinese laborers; yet, to their credit, the CPRR's online museum features the only known photo showing the Chinese laborers, "Chinese at Laying Last Rail UPRR." The Chinese's important role has since been recognized by the CPRR with an extensive online exhibit, but their place in the Northern Pacific's (NPRR's) history is relatively unknown (but see Landreth and Condon 1985; Merritt 2010; Reinhardt 1970, pp. 48–52).

The stories of Chinese railroad laborers, cramped in boxcars on the very lines they laid while traveling from isolated camp to another, more isolated, camp are certainly varied and complex throughout the American West's network of railroads. Because historical accounts do not appear to exist for the NPRR, the context for our inquiry here is based on general information about Overseas Chinese research and the transnational economic, demographic, and cultural "webs" that have bound US and Chinese communities since the middle nineteenth century (cf. Voss and Allen 2008, p. 19). Given the historical reality of the immigration of Chinese men and exclusion laws, the Chinese labor force in general was a bachelor society (Yu 2008, p. 160). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was approved during the last stages of the NPRR's construction, and was in place as the last spike was driven into place at Independence Creek, Montana Territory, on August 22, 1883. Railroad companies unsuccessfully lobbied to kill the Exclusion Act in Congress; the measure was supported unanimously by powerful Labor Unions because it prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States. By the late 1880s and early 1890s, the NPRR and other large railroad companies began to import of Japanese immigrants to fill the labor gap required for maintenance and construction (Ichioka 1980; White 1985, pp. 276–277).

The NPRR line in the region examined herein runs along the rugged Clark Fork River Valley, draining the Rocky Mountains in western Montana and northern Idaho; the Clark Fork flows northwest until it empties into Lake Pend Oreille, northern Idaho. The construction moved eastward, from the "mushroom town of tents and shanties strung along the hillside" (Oliphant 1926, p. 216; see also Landreth and Condon 1985, p. 135) at Cabinet Landing near Lake Pend d'Oreille. A period description of the construction corridor presents images of the Clark Fork River Valley undergoing rapid environmental transformation:

For more than 20 miles workmen are seen digging, chopping, lifting, blasting, cursing, and shouting. Trees are crashing down, earth is flying from countless shovels and huge rocks are being riven and scattered from all sides. As the construction train moves slowly forward, the observer begins to realize some of the difficulties of railroad building in the Northwest. This is about the way it is done: The line having been laid, surveyed, and staked, parties of white men, hundreds in a gang, proceed to mow down the forest. The trees are felled with surprising rapidity...and a broad swath, 200 feet wide, is opened up through the forest. The trees are immediately trimmed, cut into lengths, and rolled out of the way, when other gangs of men attack these logs and split them into ties. Now comes another party of white men who proceed to dig about the roots of fallen trees: a keg (sometimes two) is placed under the tree stump, a fuse attached, earth thrown about it and tamped down, a light attached to the fuse and the stump is blown up. The white men pass on and now come the China-men, thousands of them. They proceed under the direction of white bosses or "herders" as they are called, to level the earth, throw up a roadbed, carry ties from a construction train, or from teams close by, and lay them in place. Other gangs of Chinamen follow on a gravel train and finish the new-laid track...the Chinese are mostly newly imported coolies. They live in tents furnished by the company and live in gangs of from 50 to 100 (*Helena Independent* 1882).

History of the NPRR

The Chinese rail line construction camps along the Clark Fork River date from the 1880s, but the political and economic vision of transcontinental railways began decades earlier. Discussions of a northern route for a transcontinental railroad began in the 1850s, building off the expeditions of Governor Isaac Stevens and completion of the military road by Lt. John Mullan (Clinch 1965, pp. 324–325; Renz 1980, p. 13). Throughout the 1850s, plans and proposals circulated evenly for northern, southern, and central routes for the nation's first transcontinental railroad, with a compromise reached in the early 1860s, which established the central route and led to the creation of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroad. After completion of the Central Pacific Railroad in 1869, northern states renewed their interest in completing a route tying the industrial centers of America with the rich natural resources of Washington, Oregon, and Montana Territories. President Abraham Lincoln signed the 1864 Pacific Railroad Act granting 60 million acres of public domain land to a newly formed Northern Pacific Railroad, the largest such allotment in United States history (Renz 1980, p. 19; Smalley 1883, pp. 116).

The early years of the NPRR were fraught with mismanagement, financial distress, and outright fraud; thus only a few miles of track were laid before the 1870s. After several earnest attempts to begin construction—and with most of the work completed on credit—the NPRR extended its rails from Minneapolis, Minnesota to Bismarck, North Dakota Territory on the eastern front, and from Tacoma to a few miles east of Kalama, Washington Territory on the western advance by 1873 (Daniels 2000, p. 55; Smalley 1883, p. 196). However, the NPRR's lead financial backer, Jay Cooke & Company, collapsed after advancing too much funds to the railroad, triggering the Panic of 1873, the Gilded Age's first nationwide economic downturn (Clinch 1965, p. 325; White 2003, p. 29). The depression of the 1870s significantly slowed construction of the NPRR, with the rail only extending a few miles beyond Bismarck in 1879, 6 years after reaching the city (Renz 1980, p. 65).

From 1879 to completion of the NPRR in 1883, the story is dominated by the role of Henry Villard, who acquired Presidency of the company through all the means common to Gilded Age corruption: financial bribery, political allies, and foreign capital backers (see White 2003). Henry Villard assumed the Presidency of the NPRR from Frederick Billings in 1881, via manipulation of stocks and bonds, generating renewed vigor to complete the nation's second transcontinental (Renz 1980, pp. 75–77). By 1881, the NPRR extended from Minneapolis to the Montana/North Dakota border on the eastern front and from Kalama to Walla Walla, Washington on the western front (Lewty 1987, p. 84). But within less than 2 years from President Henry Villard's ascension, an unprecedented expenditure of labor and capital closed the gap between the fronts, though such endeavors ultimately bankrupted the NPRR by 1884.

To power the frenzied completion of the northern transcontinental line, Villard and others working for the NPRR used the labor model used by the Central Pacific over a decade earlier—the use of Chinese workers in lieu of other unskilled immigrants—a strategy which cut the Central Pacific's labor cost by over one-third (Wroblewski 1996, p. 6). A *New York Times* editorial discussed the need for Chinese labor, arguing that it was “impossible to build railroads here without them, and the failure to secure as many as can be used....makes it difficult to push work as fast as railroad managers

wish” (*New York Times* 1882, p. 3). In a speech to Philadelphia investors in May of 1882, Villard placed full credit for the recent prolific progression the NPRR firmly on the backs of Chinese labor (Renz 1980, p. 89).

In 1879, there were just over 300 Chinese working on the NPRR, largely in the area of east-central Washington Territory, and most were Central Pacific Railroad construction veterans (Lewty 1987, p. 52). The NPRR paid Chinese immigrants \$1.00 per day in 1879, which was actually the same rate or less than the veteran workers would have received on the CPRR construction in the 1860s at \$1.00 to \$1.25/day (Richardson 1869, p. 462). American born, unskilled laborers and immigrants from European countries received \$1.50/day, with skilled workers making \$2.50/day. Significantly, in a particularly desolated and inhospitable portion of the NPRR line in eastern Washington Territory, Chinese laborers successfully won a strike against the company for a raise of 50 cents, as no white workers could be solicited to grade the hot and barren terrain (Lewty 1987, p. 117). A similar attempt by 2,000 Chinese working on the Central Pacific Railroad in 1869 resulted in a strike for wages comparable to their Euro-American co-workers; however, this strike failed (Boswell 1986, p. 361).

As the NPRR line approached the Idaho/Montana border, the numbers of Chinese workers steadily increased, and by 1881 there were 656 on the grade between Spokane Falls, Washington Territory and Lake Pend d’Oreille, Idaho Territory, representing over 71.5 % of the workforce (Renz 1980, p. 82). These numbers, however, pale in comparison to the thousands of Chinese rushed to the front in 1882–83 to push the NPRR to its completion. After slowing at Cabinet, Idaho Territory in mid-1882, estimates suggest between 2,300 and 2,600 Chinese workers encamped at the rough-and-tumble front town of Cabinet Landing (Lewty 1987, p. 93; Renz 1980, p. 84). The Clark Fork Division of the NPRR, which stretched from Lake Pend d’Oreille to Missoula, Montana Territory contained some of the most difficult terrain of the entire construction, and required significant blasting and grading (Figs. 2 and 3), and thus more cheap labor. Section Foreman J.L. Hallett relied heavily on Chinese labor, and although he allegedly cared little about their living conditions, he agreed to moving saloons and brothels to follow the advancing crews throughout Western Montana. Montana’s press nicknamed the crews, and their entourage of unsavory characters working along the Clark Fork River as “Hallett’s Army,” and cautioned local residents, businesses, and residents of the Flathead Indian Reservation to be wary of the impacts of the transient, Vice-Ridden work camps on local communities. As crews left Cabinet Landing under the direction of J.L. Hallett in spring of 1882, front towns moved continually eastward, spending only a few weeks to a few days in one location. By July of 1882, reports estimated that there were now between 3,900 and 4,000 Chinese on the NPRR line in Western Montana (*New Northwest* 1882a, p. 3; Lewty 1987, pp. 94–95), representing over twice the entire Chinese population of Montana recorded in the 1880 census at 1,736 (Merritt 2010, p. 131).

Fast-moving grading and track-laying crews created a problem for the NPRR supply chain as contractors providing room and board raised their fees to workers from \$4 to \$5 per week due to the difficulty of acquiring food and supplies. With the increase in board, European and American graders attempted to drive out all the Chinese from these advanced camps in hopes of being able to lower the price for their

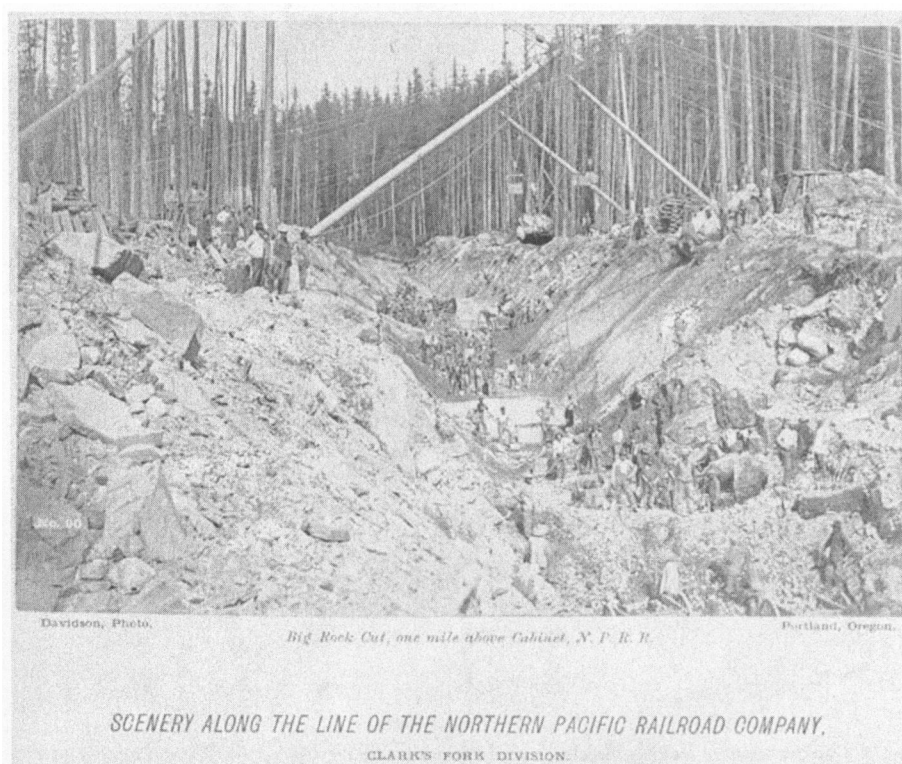


Fig. 2 Chinese and Euro-American workers cutting the NPRR grade just upstream from Cabinet Landing. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library

room and board by decreasing demand (Lewty 1987, p. 98). Order was eventually restored and the NPRR discharged many of the offending non-Chinese workers; however, other disgruntled workers simply left their jobs and searched for employment elsewhere (Renz 1980, p. 85).

By fall of 1882, the grading crews advanced to the western boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation, and sent Peter Ronan, Indian Agent for the reservation into a panic over the potential impacts of Hallett's Army. Newspaper reports indicated that, by November of 1882, there were now 6,000 Chinese and 1,400 non-Chinese laborers on the line, with "1,000 loose women and men hanging on as the ragged edges of this army" (*New Northwest* 1882b, p. 3). In order to appease Peter Ronan, the NPRR hired Mormon graders from Utah to complete the line across the Flathead Reservation, while many of Hallett's original crews discharged or sent back to Washington Territory to complete additional spur lines.

In June of 1883, Chinese crews were again grading, this time in the Hellgate Canyon east of Missoula, just as the eastern half of the NPRR pulled into Helena (Renz 1980, p. 98). NPRR workers were still finishing the boring of the Mullan Tunnel, the last major obstacle to cross the continental divide. The crews between the eastern and western fronts raced to reach the last spike location at Independence Creek, Montana Territory. A reporter from Germany described the last day of the race for completion, and noted that a group of Chinese, from the west, competed with

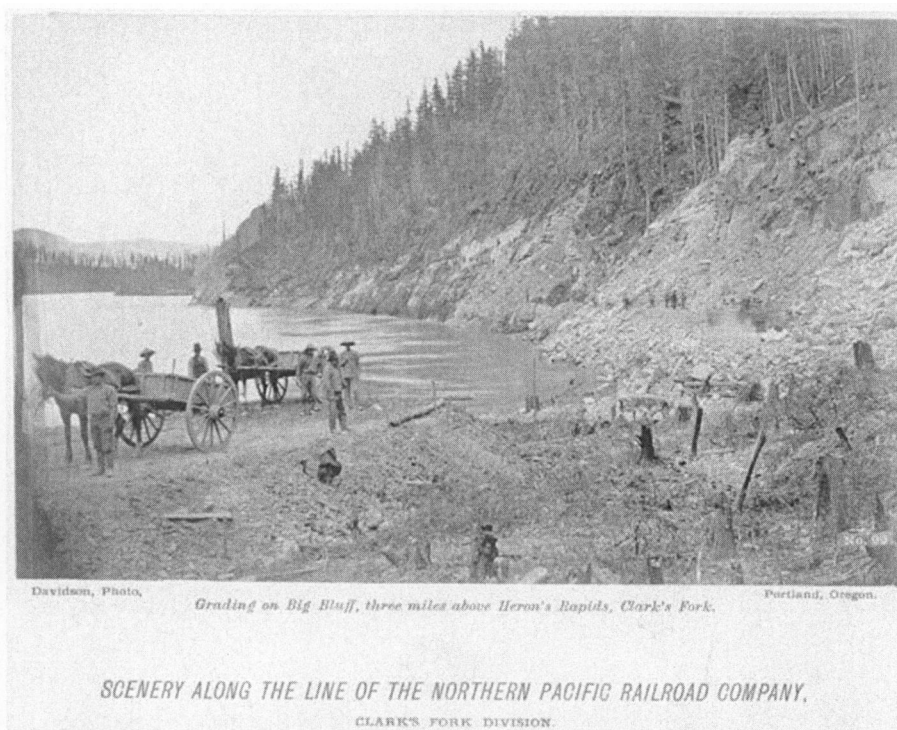


Fig. 3 Chinese laborers grading the challenging terrains along the Clark Fork River. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library

European and Euro-American laborers from the east to finish the last mile (Lindau and Trautmann 1985, p. 65) of the NPRR line.

Who would finish first? Rails slammed onto ties, taking their places as if by magic, and were fastened with spikes hit in a violent rat-a-tat-tat. Suddenly a wild, feverish howl! Breathless and bathed in sweat, sunburned and dusty fellows reached the goal and screamed and yelled and waved their hats. Victory from the east - the Caucasians! The Chinese gained the spot 5 min later (Lindau and Trautmann 1985, p. 65).

A *New York Times* (1883b) article describing the NPRR's last spike ceremony emphasized the distinguished guests who attended the ceremony and valorized the NPRR President Henry Villard. As seems to be the case with many historical sources and historiographic treatments (e.g., Renz 1980; Smalley 1883; White 2003) describing the NPRR, the focus is on the wealthy and powerful—as well as the media—instead of presenting the cultural milieu experienced and created by laborers. A subsequent abundance of historical information has allowed for a detailed examination of the history leading up to and the decadent travel (e.g., private rail cars) and ceremony associated with the industrialists' role in the NPRR's Last Spike event.

Nolan (1983, p. 9) states that there were dozens of photographers and newspaper reporters on scene for the final spike celebration, held on September 8, 1883; though no one captured any of the nearly 10,000 Chinese employed by the NPRR. The ethnic sanitation of the photographic and historical record of the NPRR is similar to the CPRR in 1869, where the Chinese did not appear in any of the official photographs

circulated by the Associated Press, though a photograph showing the Chinese laying the last rail was taken before the ceremonies (Pegler-Gordon 2006, p. 51). A painting by Amedee Joullin and commissioned by the NPRR of the final spike ceremony remains prominently displayed at the Montana State Capitol and depicts former President Grant, Henry Villard, Crow Indians, and other dignitaries, but omits the Irish and Chinese laborers that supplied the bulk of labor for the project (Lambert et al. 2002, pp. 50–52).

After completion of the NPRR many of the Chinese laborers traveled back to Washington and Oregon, where their increased presence in the job market spurred the anti-Chinese violence of the mid-1880s in Tacoma, Portland, and Seattle. Others remained in Montana searching for job opportunities in laundries, restaurants, and other industries, bolstering the post-Chinese Exclusion Act population of the state to an all-time high by 1890 to 2,532 (Merritt 2010, p. 179). For others still, working for the NPRR was their last chance at personal prosperity, with accidents and murder ending their lives. Between 1879 and 1883, it is estimated that over 1,000 Chinese workers died while assisting in the construction of the NPRR, leading to reporters to note that “verily the road was built with Chinaman’s bones” (Helena *Independent* 1884, p. 3). Lewty (1987, p. 96) notes that as the backbone of the NPRR construction effort, the Chinese suffered most from the work as they were killed in falls, explosions, and some even from scurvy due to poor diet afforded them on the front. Some of the most dangerous work was the blasting of rock faces between Cabinet Landing, Idaho Territory and Missoula, Montana Territory (Hagerman-Benton 2007, p. 13). Many of the Chinese who died were buried in simple, unmarked graves along the grade (Fullerton 1961; Helterline 1984, pp. 33) in order to prevent slowing the construction effort, and to allow for easier relocation and disinterment for shipment to China. Many more bodies were shipped to Missoula for burial, though the original cemetery now lies underneath a housing subdivision with bodies of these workers sometimes discovered during gardening or construction of buildings (*Montana Standard* 1972, p. 11).

Rumors of Chinese “coolie” or “slave” labor were common in the local and national presses, and the images of 135 Chinese men being loaded into an enclosed box car and hauled to front towns and camps present hazardous, inhumane scenes (Lewty 1987, p. 96). German journalist, Nicolaus Mohr, who was part of the NPRR’s Last Spike entourage, created a map of the NPRR’s transcontinental route (Fig. 4) and also described sights along the way, including in his observations yet another view of the life and work of Chinese laborers—one of the rare, relatively vivid presentations of a Chinese line camp in western Montana; this particular camp lay between the Jocko River and the Flathead River:

Of much greater interest here were the Chinese. Entire tent colonies of these unchristianized guests with their long braids stretch along the railroad. Today being Sunday, they ought to be somewhere taking it easy, but here they stood massed together in front of the station. Without the Chinese railroad workers the Northern Pacific would probably not have been built for a long time, since manual labor out here is difficult to find. Their tents or little huts are quite simple, but these people seem to keep themselves very clean; everywhere one looks their wash is waving in the breeze. For us they were really curious

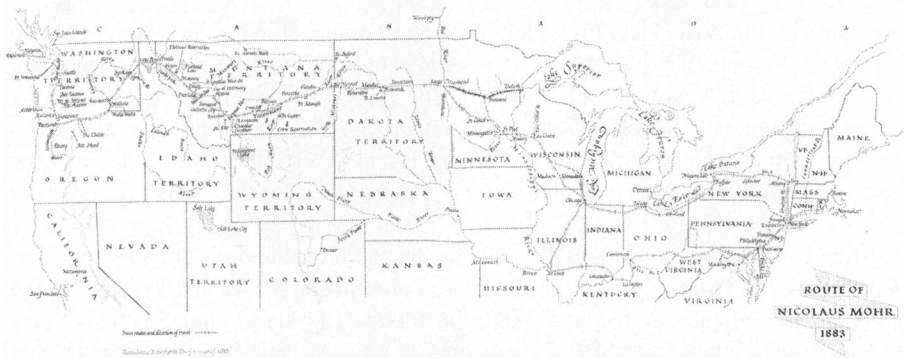


Fig. 4 Map of route taken by Nicolaus Mohr during the 1883 Last Spike Celebration, that closely follows the NPRR line from St. Paul, Minnesota to Seattle, Washington (Mohr 1884)

creatures, but their appearance as well as their bearing indicates that they are mentally gifted. Yet it is safe to assume that these sons of the empire represent the lowest classes of Chinese people. We saw quite a few scrofulous, sick faces. They say that the Chinese have some kind of mange. One hardly sees any brawny men, but even in the most sickly, one meets a sympathetic face. Their clothing consists mostly of pants and a cape or overcoat, usually made of blue cotton. The long braid on their otherwise shaved head, and the slanted eyes are very pronounced. In strength, they do not compare with either the Irish, the Yankee Americans, or the Germans; but they are persistent, diligent, and reliable souls, for they drink no liquor whatsoever. I have not been able to find out to what extent opium smoking goes on out here in the wilderness (Mohr 1884, pp. 175–176).

Typical of non-Chinese, nineteenth-century descriptions of people from various reaches of the globe, this excerpt is packed with racist remarks. Nevertheless, Mohr gives the Chinese credit for their role in the completion of the NPRR, refers to them as “mentally gifted,” and, significantly, presents a snapshot of the “clean” and orderly ambience of at least one line camp. These observations, along with archaeological sites discussed below, remind us that the Chinese line camps were segregated from the other laborers camps along the NPRR. Collectively, this information provides a platform to discuss the material remains of these camps that survived the harsh, fluctuating climate of the Rocky Mountains in western Montana.

Overseas Chinese Archaeology of the NPRR’s Front Towns and Line Camps

Despite the significance of the NPRR to the local, regional and national history, there are relatively few formal investigations of the integrated historical and archaeological nature of this topic. These include the work of an avocational archaeologist and one mitigation project under the auspices of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, with subsequent revisits in the 1990s and 2000s, Weisz (2003) documented, collected, and photographed the archaeological remains of nine Chinese line construction camps along the NPRR grade

in northwestern Montana. Landreth and Condon (1985) examined the NPRR Front Town known as Cabinet Landing in northeastern Idaho as part of a mitigation project. Thus, we have evidence from ten archaeological sites (Table 1; Fig. 5) from which to begin our inquiry.

These ten sites exhibit some general similarities. First, they are all relatively oblong, linear camps along river valleys; of course these traits go in hand with grade requirements of railroad construction. Also keeping with the expectations of the railroad construction context, the sites all have tools (e.g., an iron spike maul, chisels, wedges, mattocks, fish plate) and numerous horseshoes and hardware fragments from draft animal tack. However, the material culture signature of these camps, outside these items required for work, bifurcate down ethnic lines based on the presence or

Table 1 Archaeological sites associated with the Overseas Chinese and the NPRR between Cabinet Landing, Idaho and Perma, Montana

Site name	Initial occupation	Size	Features	Chinese only
Cabinet Landing, Idaho	June, 1882	1 Mile (1.6 km) East/West by ½ Mile (.8 km) North/South	Tent Platforms, Foundations, Trash Dumps, Rock Cuts	No
West Noxon	1882	½ Mile (.8 km) East/West by 600' (182 m) North/South	None, disturbed by reservoir	Yes
Submerged Noxon	1882	200' (61 m) East/West by 200' (61 m) North/South	None, disturbed by reservoir	Yes
Thompson River	1882	½ Mile (.8 km) East/West by 500' (152 m) North/South	Tent Platforms, Old Grade, Graves, Trash Dumps	No
West Weeksville	1882–1883	500' (152 m) East/West by 500' (152 m) North/South	Dugouts, trash scatter, some disturbance by historic home	No
East Weeksville	1882–1883	½ Mile (.8 km) East/West by 500' (152 m) North/South	Tent Platforms, Trash Dumps	No
East Eddy	1882–1883	400' (121 m) East/West by 150' (46 m) North/South	Artifact scatter	No
“Last Chance”	1883	1 Mile (1.6 km) East/West, 1/3 Mile (.5 km) North/South	Tent Platforms, Trash Dumps, portions disturbed by seasonal flooding	No
“Fu Sang”	1883	2/3 Mile (1 km) East/West by 750' (228 m) North/South	Tent Platforms, Dugouts, Blacksmithing, Trash Dump	Yes
“Takmalakan”	1883	½ Mile (.8 km) East/West by 500' (152 m) North/South	Tent Platforms, Dugouts, Hearths	Yes
Perma Bridge	April, 1883	½ Mile (.8 km) East/West by 800' (243 m) North/South	Possible Tent Platforms, disturbed by recreationalists and Railroad activity.	No

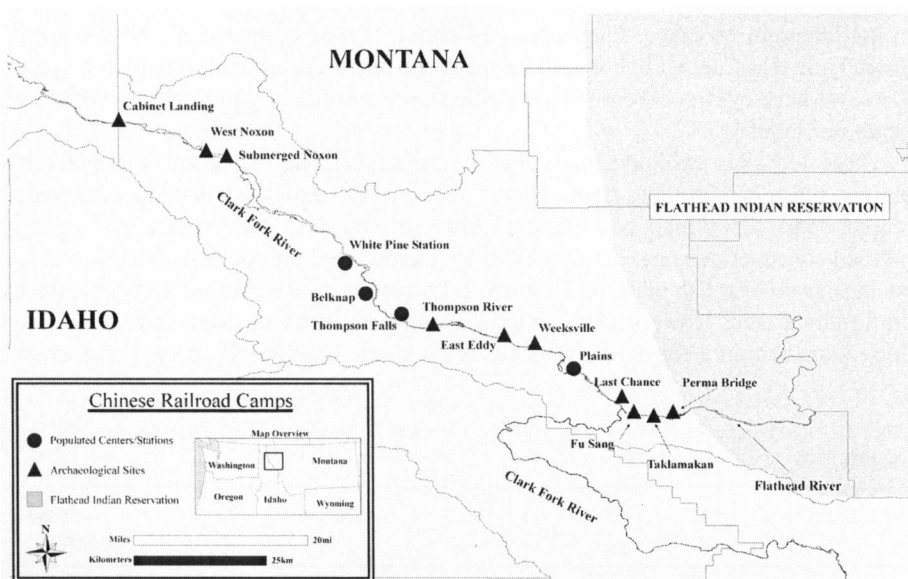


Fig. 5 Map of the Northern Pacific Railroad along the Clark Fork River and Flathead Rivers in north-western Montana, with Chinese line camp locations noted

absence of Chinese workmen. Chinese ceramics, in the form of rice bowls and liquor or storage containers, are well-represented in some camp locations and likely reflect occupation by this population. Imported Chinese ceramics are commonly found on various types of Chinese sites throughout the American West (e.g., Allen et al. 2002; Felton et al. 1984; Fredlund et al. 1991; Greenwood 1978; Hattori et al. 1979; Hunt-Jones 2006; Wegars 1993). Artifacts indicative of opium use appear at all eight of the sites examined, such as opium cans, lamps, and pipe bowls; such paraphernalia represents poignant reminders of the presence of indulgence—and perhaps escape—that existed among the laborers during their free, or leisure time. The archaeological remains of Weisz's nine recorded line camps, and two others recorded by other archaeologists, are briefly summarized here, starting with the Front Town of Cabinet Landing on the Idaho-Montana Territorial border.

Cabinet Landing, Idaho

By June of 1882 construction efforts of the NPRR slowed at the Idaho-Montana Territorial border due to the steep and rocky Clark Fork River Gorge. NPRR supervisors established a sprawling encampment on both sides of the Clark Fork River, just west of the gorge, and at this point over 5,000 workers massed in the summer and fall of 1882. The camp at Cabinet Landing was divided along “class,” or socioeconomic lines, with the supervisory personnel (engineers and inspectors) and their families living in a “quiet, clean, and orderly” camp on the north side of the Clark Fork River, while the laborer camps were placed on the south bank of the river near a landing, supply roads, and a warehouse (Landreth and Condon 1985, p. 135). Further segregation existed along cultural lines, with the Cabinet Landing labor camps—and labor

activities—segregated between Chinese and non-Chinese (i.e. Irish, Italians, and Euro-Americans).

The Chinese workforce of the NPRR grew from under 1,000 to over 2,600 at the newly established “Front Town” of Cabinet Landing (Renz 1980, p. 84). Steamboats carried the laborers across Lake Pend d’Oreille to the nearly lawless town of Cabinet Landing. Due to the organic nature of the settlement, the town reflected a vernacular landscape of nineteenth century labor, with spatially segregated areas based on socioeconomic class and ethnicity (Landreth and Condon 1985, pp. 136–137). Where once there was nothing but a quiet, sublime mountain valley, there sprang up—almost overnight—a sprawling tent and shanty encampment spread along both sides of the Clark Fork River with dozens of saloons, brothels, dance halls, and any multitude of gambling houses catering to both Euro-American and Chinese workers. Cabinet Landing boasted all the services to support the large population, including Chinese exports; in fact, the largest store carrying Chinese goods in the camp was operated by a Euro-American entrepreneur (Renz 1980, p. 84). By spring of 1882, workers had blown out the rocky gorge and graded a railroad line into Montana Territory, thus eliminating the need for Cabinet Landing, which soon became a ghost town as crews moved forward.

Cabinet Landing is the only NPRR camp that has been the subject of systematic archaeological excavations; the proposed construction of fish hatchery on the site required the investigation (Landreth and Condon 1985). Landreth and Condon (1985) discovered a clear spatial segregation of sheet refuse, particularly between Chinese and non-Chinese tableware, in the remains of the labor camps at Cabinet Landing. Narrowing their analysis to include artifact types associated with domestic activities, specifically materials representing food preparation and consumption, Landreth and Condon (1985, pp. 106, 143) observed that, of the 46 bowls recovered at Cabinet Landing, 32 were of Chinese manufacture and clustered in an area distinctly separate from the 14 Euro-American food serving vessels recorded.

Historical information about Cabinet Landing provides proxy evidence of the Chinese being separated in both the workplace (e.g., Helena *Independent* 1882) and in the labor camps accompanying the construction of the NPRR in this region (e.g., Landreth and Condon 1985, p. 135; Oliphant 1926; Stapp and Longnecker 1984). In terms of the pluralistic character and accompanying spatial segregation of railroad encampments, Cabinet Landing, shares a pattern with most of the intact archaeological sites recorded between the Montana border and the Flathead Indian Reservation. The information we have about these sites are presented below, in the order of the railroad’s advance from the fading front town at Cabinet Landing.

Noxon Line Camp (and Submerged Noxon)

Moving southeast of the Idaho-Montana Territorial border, NPRR crews continued to blast and grade the treacherous Clark Fork River Gorge. Advanced crews constructed a wagon road to the small settlement of Thompson Falls, Montana, which would help allow an expedient construction of the line to Missoula, Montana, now just under 200mi (323 km) distant. Small, impermanent encampments like the Noxon and Submerged Noxon line camps dotted the Clark Fork Division of the NPRR grade

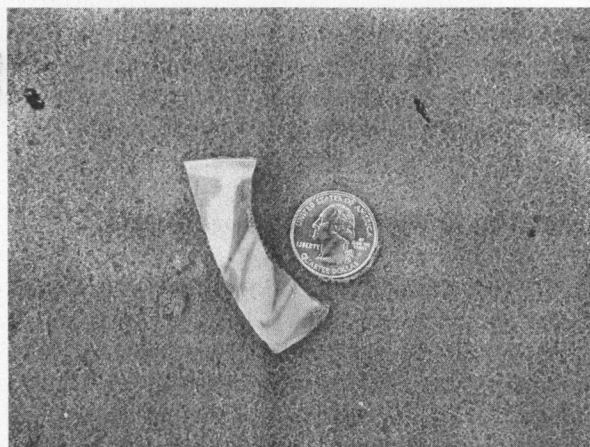
as work progressed ever eastward, with the larger, front towns, such as Thompson River and Last Chance (see below), established as supply points. By the 1950s, the NPRR moved the line to the north side of the Clark Fork River, and the old grade and encampments were inundated by the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir which runs from Noxon, Montana westward, nearly to the Montana/Idaho border. The Noxon line camp is located less than 100 ft (30 m) from the old NPRR grade, while the Submerged Noxon site would have been farther from the railroad but closer to the Clark Fork River, possibly for easier access to local fish. At Cabinet Landing, newspaper reporters noted that the Chinese NPRR workers lined the Clark Fork River fishing for suckers, chubs, and lake trout (*Spokane Falls Chronicle* 1882), and they likely continued this strategy as they proceeded along the river.

The two archaeological sites near Noxon are visible only during periods of low water in the reservoir. During investigations in the 1970s, Weisz (2003, pp. 135–138) discovered tools (e.g., railroad spike maul), Chinese and Vietnamese coins, opium pipe bowl fragments, and a scattering of Chinese ceramics at both locations, including “Bamboo” style bowl fragments (Fig. 6) and at least two varieties of brown-glazed stoneware utilitarian vessels. Even with the handful of objects Weisz observed, there is a relative paucity of archaeological materials at this site, likely a result of both the impermanence of the camp and disturbance by the reservoir since its construction in the 1950s.

Thompson River

As both Chinese and Euro-American crews pushed rapidly up the Clark Fork River Valley, the NPRR and its supply contractors established new “Front Towns” like Cabinet Landing first at Rock Island and then at Thompson River by late 1882 (Renz 1980, p. 84). Located approximately 5mi (8 km) east of modern Thompson Falls, Montana, the Thompson River camp, also called Ashleyville, stretched longitudinally along the NPRR grade for nearly a half mile. A former US Forest Service employee located the shallow, rock-covered empty graves of Chinese workers, who died in this

Fig. 6 Rim fragment of a “Bamboo” style bowl from the West Noxon line camp, found eroding from the beach of the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir. Photograph by C. Merritt, 2010



stretch of the construction, at this line camp (Fullerton 1961). According to Helterline (1984, p. 33), there were numerous 1 ft (0.5 m)-deep graves along the NPRR right-of-way. At Heron, most of the Chinese who died during construction were buried in an orchard, while at Noxon they were interred near the Clark Fork River. In the 1920s a local resident discovered several Chinese graves on a gravel bar on the north side of the NPRR line near Noxon. Just before completion of the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir in the 1950s, many Noxon residents exhumed Chinese bodies from a cottonwood-shaded plot near the NPRR depot, and reinterred them in the city cemetery on Pilgrim Creek (Leeson-Vanek 1996, p. 117).

Other archaeological remains include over a dozen clearly visible tent platforms that line the terrace overlooking the Clark Fork River, with the natural topography actually creating a buffer between the Chinese encampment on the east end of the bench and the Euro-American camp to the west. A historic homestead likely disturbed the majority of the Euro-American encampment at Thompson River, but there is enough archaeological evidence to show that the Chinese received the most topographically difficult and mosquito-rich campsites at this line camp.

Weisz (2003) noted a diverse assemblage of archaeological materials, including Chinese and Vietnamese coins, Bamboo bowls, Chinese utilitarian brownware, opium can fragments, opium lamps, ammunition, and evidence of a blacksmithing and/or farrier operation on the Chinese side of camp. Blacksmithing was a necessary and ubiquitous activity at most line camps. Other artifacts provide indirect evidence about meal-taking. For example, a nearly complete meat cleaver of American manufacture suggests that at least some of the Chinese or Euro-American groups had access to fresh meat, which was either transported down the newly completed railroad line or acquired from local ranchers. Historical sources provided additional context for this object, indicating that Duncan McDonald and Charles Allard, Sr. furnished supplies of fresh beef to the NPRR construction camps, with the cattle butchered as needed at the construction camps (Bergman and McAlear 1994, pp. 45–46).

East Eddy/East Weeksville

By January of 1883, crews had pushed the NPRR grade well past the small town of Horse Plains, Montana and the new, contemporaneous front towns of Weeksville and Eddy sprang up. Weeksville was initially established as a logging camp for the NPRR, but as the grade approached the small settlement, additional boxcars were moved to the site to house the roving saloons, boarding houses, and brothels. Montana Territorial newspapers nicknamed the front town as “Bloody Weeksville” due to the number of murders and vigilante actions occurring in the sordid camp (Helterline 1984, pp. 30–32). In February 1883, vigilance committees in Weeksville lynched 10 perpetrators of crimes, ranging from murder to theft, as a demonstration of collective justice that was intended to quell further violence in the camp (*New York Times* 1883a, p. 3). Eddy, on the other hand, was a much smaller encampment that was used for a shorter time. Eddy subsequently avoided the infamous reputation that Weeksville developed.

At both the Weeksville and Eddy encampments, there were separate, that is, segregated, living areas for Chinese and Euro-American workers, with the east side

of both camps apparently reserved for the former. Weeksville and Eddy camps both stretch along the NPRR grade for upwards of 1/2–2/3mi (.80–1.1 km), respectively, with most of the features located between the railroad and the Clark Fork River. Dr. Carling Malouf and Dr. Duane Hampton of Montana State University, now the University of Montana, conducted limited test excavations in West Weeksville. Even though Malouf and Hampton were working in the non-Chinese section of Weeksville, they recovered an iron wok fragment located close to the river bank; woks tend to be indicative of Chinese foodways, or at least have been found on sites known to be occupied by Chinese laborers (e.g., Fredlund et al. 1991; Merritt 2010; Ritchie 1986; Smith and Dixon 2005). The presence of this wok on the west, Euro-American side of the camp cannot be explained, but may be the result of anything from Chinese cooks working in the Euro-American camps, the river's seasonal actions, people moving artifacts from one part of the camp to another, or incorrect provenience information in Malouf and Hampton's records. Weisz's (2003) investigations of the east side of both camps found tools, evidence of firearms, as well as tools and other artifacts that suggest the endurance of Chinese foodways, Chinese and Asian commerce in general, and opium culture. These objects include "Bamboo" style rice bowls, fragments of Chinese utilitarian stoneware, opium cans, an opium pipe saddle, and a smattering of Chinese and Vietnamese copper coins.

Last Chance

By late February 1883 Hallett's Army arrived on the doorstep of the Flathead Indian Reservation, with the NPRR construction headquarters now located in Horse Plains, Montana. Approximately 8mi (1.3 km) east of Horse Plains, near Paradise, Montana, a force of nearly 8,000 railroad workers camped along the banks of the Clark Fork River for the last time. From this "Last Chance" camp, the remaining stretch of the railroad completed by Hallett's Army would follow the Flathead River. The aptly named camp "Last Chance," represented the final location for those employed by the NPRR to acquire alcohol, engage in gambling, and pursue prostitutes before entering the dry Flathead Indian Reservation (Renz 1980, p. 95).

Unlike many of the other front towns, the archaeological assemblage of Last Chance contains no evidence of opium and only limited material relating to alcohol use, which might indicate the company's effort to control the behavior of Hallett's Army before reaching the reservation lands. As discussed earlier, spatial patterning of the archaeological assemblage indicates that the main Euro-American encampment was located on flat terrain closer to the town of Paradise, while the Chinese materials cluster on the far eastern edge where the terrace chokes down between cliff and river.

Fu Sang/Taklamakan

From the Last Chance camp, Weisz located two additional NPRR campsites, seemingly dominated by Chinese material culture, though no historical information exists to provide a clearer picture of the camp demographics. While separated by over a mile, these small camps, named by Gary Weisz at discovery in the 1980s, are located

on some of the only slices of flat, hospitable terrain between Paradise and the Perma bridge constructed over the Flathead River, and likely served as satellite camps for Chinese graders and blasters working out of Last Chance. These two sites share similar archaeological assemblages, site structure, and environmental conditions. Weisz discovered at least 20 tent platforms at Fu Sang, located on a small bend in the Flathead River (Fig. 7), with all artifacts suggesting a Chinese occupation. Whereas Euro-American railroad workers had the option of partaking in the room and board offered by contractors, the NPRR provided canvas tents to the Chinese workers (Landreth and Condon 1985, p. 165). Even though the last chance to acquire alcohol was located several miles to the west, in addition to the “usual” refuse in the form of Bamboo and utilitarian brown wares, coins, tools, and ammunition, there was a significant accumulation of opium smoking paraphernalia located at both of these satellite camps, including opium lanterns, brass opium cans, and pipe fittings (Fig. 8). This suggests that the workers took action to provide their own forms of recreation in these isolated areas, despite the distance from the front towns with their vice-ridden amenities.

Perma Bridge

J.L. Hallett’s control of the Clark Fork Division ended at the crossing of the Flathead River near the modern town of Perma, Montana. Grading and track laying crews reached the Perma Bridge crossing in April 1883, establishing a large encampment on the western bank of the Flathead River. According to Renz (1980, p. 96), Hallett’s



Fig. 7 View of at the Fu Sang line camp location along the Flathead River. Several rows of tents lined the dry and rocky area between the NPRR grade and the river, with tents arranged perpendicular to the water. Photograph by G. Weisz, 2006

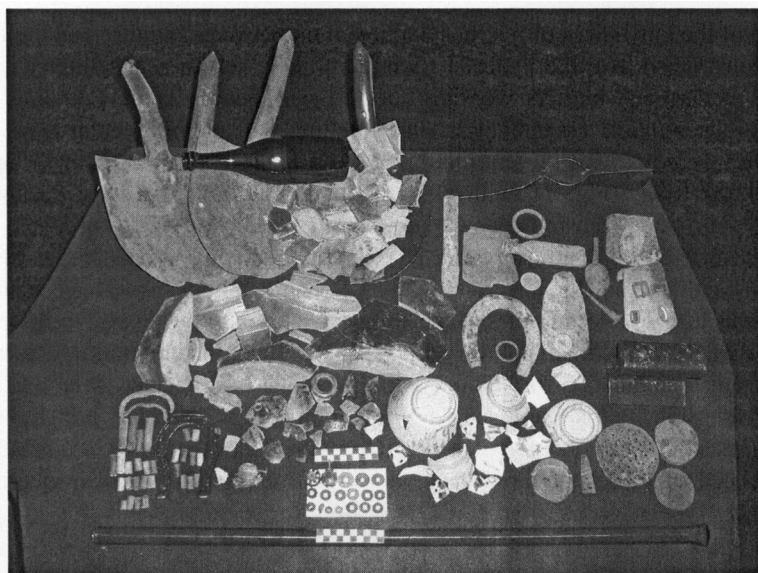


Fig. 8 Artifacts recovered from the Chinese encampment of Taklamakan by G. Weisz during the 1970s, showing the diversity of cultural material including shovels, rock drills, shell casings, “bamboo” bowls, utilitarian Chinese brownware, opium cans, and other materials. Photograph by G. Weisz, 2011

Army had shrunk to include 900 Chinese and 800 Euro-American laborers by the time they reached Perma Bridge. Due to the concerns of Flathead Indian Agent, Peter Ronan, the NPRR imported a large contingent of Mormon crews from Utah to complete the construction effort across the reservation. From this point, many of the Chinese and Euro-American workers boarded boxcars and headed westward over the freshly completed tracks to assist with the completion of the NPRR, specifically in southern Washington Territory.

Intensive recreational use of the Perma Bridge area has led to the loss of many surface materials and diminished the overall integrity of the site itself. Nevertheless, along the western edge of the Perma Bridge encampment, Weisz (2003) observed surface artifacts associated with other Overseas Chinese line camps (e.g., Bamboo ware, utilitarian brown ware, Asian coins, opium cans), as well as those indicative of the work at hand (e.g., railroad fish plate, horseshoes). Modified artifacts discovered at the Perma Bridge encampment include six game counters (15–20 mm across) cut from the remains of brass opium cans (Fig. 9). Archaeologists discovered additional examples of modified opium can counters at Chinese mining camps in California (Felton et al. 1984, pp. 69–70) and in southern New Zealand where (Ritchie 1986, p. 387) describes them as game counters or pan weights.

Onward to the Last Spike

While most of the NPRR’s Chinese crews were sent west, back to Washington, some Chinese crews still worked in the vicinity of Missoula and points to the east. In the windswept Hellgate Canyon, east of Missoula, Montana, Chinese crews apparently

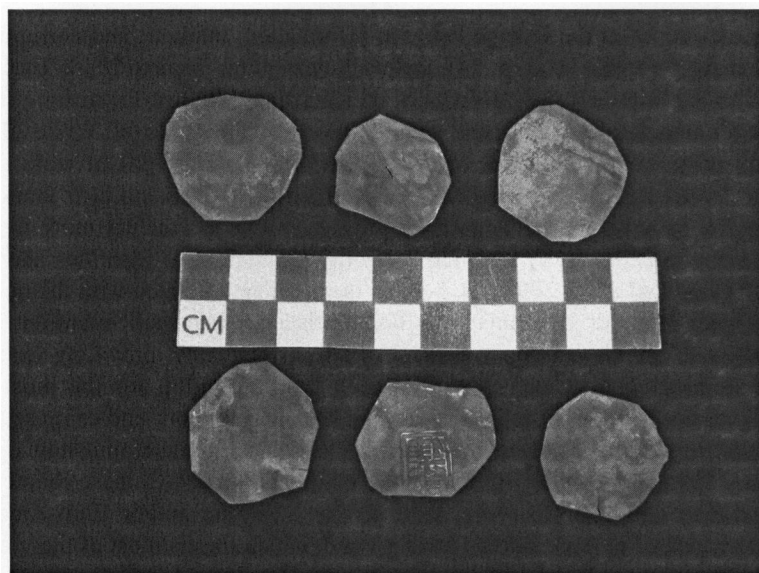


Fig. 9 Brass opium cans likely modified as gaming pieces or counters. Photograph by G. Weisz, 2011

did most of the grading east, towards the area of the final spike. It is unclear from historical records if these laborers were former members of Hallett's Army or if they acquired locally from Missoula's relatively large Chinese community. There is no known archaeological evidence of Chinese line camps located between Missoula and the final spike because of the lack of any cultural resource inventories occurring in the railroad's privately owned right-of-way in that area.

There were a few Chinese settlements along the NPRR through the remainder of the 1800s and first two decades of the 1900s. Employed as track maintenance crews, the Chinese lived in wooden section houses at Noxon, Belknap, and White Pine, Montana. Belknap, a small settlement established along the NPRR line in northwestern Montana in the 1880s, had a Chinese laundry operating during the mid-1880s (Draszt 1998, p. 3); however, the entire town of Belknap was razed by the great 1910 fire that scorched millions of acres of Montana and Idaho. Fullerton (1961) collected an oral history that recounted the presence of Chinese section hands at the White Pine NPRR Depot through the 1910s (Draszt 1998, p. 71). The remnant foundations of the White Pine depot, along with the standing White Pine mercantile and a Chinese section hand "shack" are owned by private parties.

Discussion

Whether decaying foundations in mountain towns, Chinese coins lining a riverbed, tent platforms on a stream terrace, or horseshoes and Bamboo-design bowl fragments scattered in long lines along the Clark Fork River Valley, archaeological remains of the NPRR line camps in northwestern Montana represent the material vestiges of a time when capitalism arrived in the Pacific Northwest on board one of the era's great transcontinental railroads. The "history of the [NPRR and other] transcontinental

railroads...exemplifies the linkage between information, markets, and corruption in the Gilded Age" (White 2003, p. 24), and such corruption inspired Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's (1972) sketches which satirize the lust for making money and the era's associated opulence and greed for those on the inside (cf. White 2003, p. 26). Such schemes and affluence seem far removed from the grit of work camps where hard-working laborers sought better lives for themselves and their families.

We expect to build on the foundation presented here to conduct more in-depth investigations to better understand the "ongoing production of identities and communities" (Voss and Allen 2008, pp. 5–6) as these camps migrated with the railroad. We anticipate that the preliminary findings presented here call attention to the complexities of the Gilded Age's context of social inequality, providing examples of labor encampments where class formation [and struggle], for the most part, depended on one's cultural background and pervaded both work and camp settings.

It is necessary to make note of the fact that it is difficult to determine how distinct the Chinese line camps actually were without looking at the non-Chinese counterparts as comparative controls. However, most of the European and/or Euro-American camps were located at track side on level ground, which means most of these camps are either gone or very disturbed from subsequent railroad construction or agricultural uses. Thus, it was difficult to locate the Euro-American camp sites along the segment of NPRR line in northwestern Montana. So we turned our attention to the more well-preserved, Chinese line camps. When used in tandem with the historical sources describing the NPRR camp at Cabinet Landing (e.g., Landreth and Condon 1985), the archaeological record indicated that the line camps were clearly segregated along ethnic lines. While the Chinese line camps have a signature that likely matches those of other, European and Euro-American line camps (e.g., in terms of tools, draft animals, and ammunition), the former were distinct when it came to meal consumption and, possibly, leisure—both of which will be explored below.

The general overview presented here suggests that social and cultural inequality, divided along lines of institutionalized racism among the laborers, continually pressed the Chinese encampments onto the least desired campsites along the NPRR grade (e.g., topographically difficult and mosquito-infested areas, such as the Front Town at Thompson River). Their tolerance and reputation for living in relatively inhospitable conditions did, however, earn them credibility and power in at least one labor dispute: along one section of the NPRR line in eastern Washington Territory, Chinese laborers successfully won a strike against the company for a raise of fifty cents, since no white workers would grade in the hot climate and barren terrain (Lewty 1987, p. 117; see also Boswell 1986, p. 361).

Amid such harsh environmental settings, the material conditions of the Chinese camps emphasize foodways, folk beliefs, and leisure—all of which represent means to help balance a life of hard work (Table 2). At the ten line camps examined here (Landreth and Condon 1985, pp.106; Weisz 2003), Bamboo bowls dominated the ceramic tableware assemblages, as that style was cheaper than other available types (Sando and Felton 1993, p. 165), rendering an [albeit oversimplified] interpretation that underscores the lower economic status of these railroad workers (see also Wroblewski 1996 for another example of Bamboo ware's prevalence on Chinese line camps in Nevada). Furthermore, a rise in Bamboo ware prices between 1880 and 1882 at the Chinese store studied by Sando and Felton (1993) coincides with the

Table 2 Tabular accounting of artifacts, by type, discovered at the ten archaeological sites associated with the 1808s NPRR construction (information from Landreth and Condon 1985; Weisz 2003)

Class	Object	Cabinet Landing	West Noxon	Submerged Noxon	Thompson River	East Eddy	West Weeksville	East Weeksville	Last Chance	Fu Sang	Taklamakan	Perna Bridge
Tableware	Bamboo	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	
	Celadon		x									
	Four Seasons									x		
	Non-Chinese	x										
Utilitarian	Wide-Mouth	o		o		o						
	Globular											
	Spouted Jar	o	o	x	x	o			x	x		
	Liquor Jar	o	o		x			x			x	
Coins	Straight-Sided	o		x		o						
	Chinese	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
	Vietnamese		x	x	x		x	x	x			x
	Japanese							x				
Clothing	American			x				x				
	Buttons	x		x	x					x		
	Suspender	x		x			x	x		x		x
	Buckle	x				x				x		
Opium	Cans	x			x	x	x		x	x	x	x
	Pipe Bowls	x		x								
	Pipe Fittings											
	Pipe Saddle	x					x		x			x
Tools	Lantern Parts				x**				x		x	
	Maul			x								
	Pick				x		x		x			x

Table 2 (continued)

Class	Object	Cabinet Landing	West Noxon	Submerged Noxon	Thompson River	East Eddy	West Weeksville	East Weeksville	Last Chance	Fu Sang	Taklamakan	Perna Bridge
Firearms	Shovel	x					x			x		x
	Fish Plate				x						x	
	Saw Screw			x								
	Splitting Wedge				x		x		x			x
	Cleaver				x							
	Rock Drill						x	x	x			x
	Chisel						x	x				x
	Blasting Powder						x		x		x	x
	Pistol Casings	x			x	x	x		x	x	x	x
	Rifle Casings	x			x		x	x	x	x		x
Gaming	Shotgun Casings						x					
	Wei-Chi Piece				x							
	Tokens*						x		x		x	x
Alcohol	Champagne	x		x			x			x		x
	Beer	x		x								
Miscellaneous	Chinese Lock/Key				x				x			
	Chinese Wok											
	Tobacco Pipe cover	x								x		
	Chinese Medicinal	x										
	Horseshoes	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

*modified from opium cans
**Possible lamp modified from opium cans
O Undetermined Vessel

arrival of thousands of Chinese workers that supplemented the NPRR construction efforts before the institution of the Chinese Exclusion Act. This perhaps is an indicator of an increased demand for the cheaper ware, with a rise in price as a result. Chinese working on the Central Pacific Railroad in the 1860s preferred the “Double Happiness” pattern bowl, which was cheaper than “Bamboo” during that time (Sando and Felton 1993, p. 165).

Weisz (2003) also discovered a variety of Chinese and Vietnamese coins at sites along the NPRR grade in northwestern Montana, though the Chinese examples were better preserved due to their higher copper content. It is significant to note that Chinese and Vietnamese coins share highly similar phenotypic characteristics, and likely served the same function in Chinese Overseas communities, in Montana and beyond. Chinese, and likely Vietnamese and Japanese coins of similar size and shape, served several folk and religious functions in Chinese Overseas communities including gambling tokens, magical talismans, medicinal cures, and good luck charms (Akin 1992, p. 64; see also Farris 1979; Olsen 1983).

Opium paraphernalia was relatively ubiquitous across all of the camps examined. In some cases, even the opium cans were modified and likely re-used as gaming pieces. Despite the prevalence of opium-related objects in this sample of NPRR line camps, it is essential to underscore that, elsewhere we—and others—have emphasized the fact that not all Chinese used opium (e.g., Ahmad 2007; Dixon 1996; Merritt 2010; Mullins 2008; Voss and Allen 2008). Ahmad (2007, pp. 38–39) notes that a prominent physician in 1870s Wyoming linked the growth of opium abuse in Chinese and non-Chinese populations of the United States to the increase in industrialization in the American economy. The growth of opium addiction and legislation restricting its sale and importation, does coincide with America’s Gilded Age, and may be yet another consequence of rapid industrialization and its effects on those accustomed to a former, agrarian economy. Nevertheless, we wish to be guarded with interpretations that overemphasize the culture of opium use; however, we also cannot help but remind readers that it has been associated with relief from the physical and psychological pain of manual labor, particularly from the labor required to build the NPRR line through the Rocky Mountains. Opium, whether smoked or in medicinal tonics, was common in nineteenth-century America, and served a primary role as the most effective pain remedy on the market until the introduction of aspirin in the 1890s (Ahmad 2007, pp. 18–19).

Even though the NPRR work crews lost their “Last Chance” to supply with all manners of vice, the apparent abundance of opium-related paraphernalia increased at the Chinese camps of Fu Sang and Taklamakan. At Fu Sang alone, Weisz (2003) discovered at least two brass opium lamp cages, and a lamp wick holder manufactured from a re-used shotgun shell casing. The use of opium in these isolated line camps presents a dual picture of the use of the drug to alleviate the physical ills of manual labor, but also defiance of the rules of the Flathead Indian Reservation and the NPRR management. In addition, the discovery of manufactured gaming tokens at both Fu Sang and Perma Bridge provides evidence for the continuation of gambling—along with a salvaging ethic—within the confines of these Chinese encampments.

The dangerous nature of railroad construction in the Rocky Mountains, namely several blasting accidents, is discussed by Helterline (1984, p. 33), with one such incident “hurl[ing] an entire point of rock into the coolies’ campsite, killing and maiming upwards of 150 at one annihilating blow.” In June 1883, approximately 24

Chinese died and nearly 50 were injured when a construction train collided with a lumber train near Heron, Montana (*Spokane Falls Review* 1883, p. 1). According to the newspaper reports, over 80 Chinese laborers were sitting atop open flat-bed cars heading westbound towards Idaho when an unscheduled lumber train came around the corner, leading to a head-on collision. While graphic, the description of the incident highlights the harsh realities of NPRR construction as, “[m]en were torn to pieces, limbs were crushed to pulp, and bodies deformed beyond recognition” (*Spokane Falls Review* 1883, p. 1). Such events are somber reminders of the sacrifices made by laborers who were essential for the completion of the Gilded Ages’ transcontinental railroads—yet who were largely overlooked by those at the top of the social order.

Conclusion

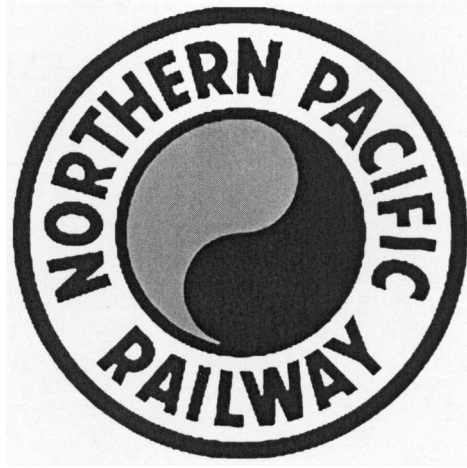
In 1893, the NPRR’s Chief Engineer Edwin Harrison McHenry visited the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, and noticed the Yin/Yang symbol at the Korean exhibit. Termed the Chinese Monad or the Diagram of the Great Extreme, McHenry presented the design to other NPRR officials the same year and the now-famous red and black symbol (Fig. 10) was officially adopted as the NPRR logo (Renz 1980, p. 206). Recognized as originating from Daoist traditions in China (Nielsen 2003, p. 227), the Monad symbolizes the contrasting and harmonizing forces of life, more commonly known as *yin* and *yang* (Cheng 2009, pp. 74–76). Adoption of the symbol did not come without issue, as a Japanese man in Seattle broke out the main window of the NPRR office in 1901, claiming that the use of the symbol as a corporate logo was abhorrent to its original religious meaning (Anonymous 1901, p. 24). While not chosen because of the Chinese labor in its construction, the adoption of the Chinese Monad for the NPRR is nevertheless emblematic of their efforts on the railroad. The NPRR construction required significant inputs of labor for its success, and the Chinese provided the bulk between 1879 and 1883. Gilded Age capital needed labor, and the Chinese immigrants needed employment, regardless of the physical and social cost of the construction, resulting in the symbiotic and reciprocal relationship as expressed through a Monad.

Over the four years of the NPRR’s peak construction phase, 1879–83, the Chinese contributed well over two-thirds of the labor on the entire line, potentially hitting a population of 10,000. It is clear that the NPRR was critical to the rapid economic development of Montana through the 1880s, and thousands of settlers used the rails over the next four decades to settle the state’s expanses. After completion of the NPRR, many of the Chinese workers left for the Canadian Pacific Railroad completed in 1885.

In the United States, much of the NPRR maintenance fell to Japanese laborers, exempted from the racially motivated Chinese Exclusion Act. For instance, Livingston, established as the NPRR’s major hub in south-central Montana, had three times more Japanese railroad workers than Chinese in 1900 (Merritt 2010, p. 174). The only remnants of the Chinese contribution left today are less than a dozen archaeological sites along the old NPRR grade west of Missoula to Idaho, and of course the grade, rails, and blasted rock faces that are a silent reminder to this history of thousands.

Perhaps far more than any other laboring element of the late nineteenth-century United States, the Chinese supplied the cheapest and most effective strong backs for the burgeoning railroad network including the Central Pacific, Southern Pacific,

Fig. 10 In 1893, the NPRR adopted the Chinese Monad or the Diagram of the Great Extreme as its logo



Northern Pacific, and even the Canadian Pacific, all completed during the Gilded Age. The growth of transcontinental transportation and communication lines were central to the remarkable and rapid industrialization of American society during the Gilded Age, but there were human costs to these accomplishments, with the Chinese bearing their own significant share. Without the influx of tens of thousands of Chinese laborers to grade, lay track, and blast mountainsides away, the railroad tycoon's legacy of the nineteenth century would not be what it is today (Fig. 11). Use and abuse of free—or transient—unskilled wage-earner laborers were key to the success of the NPRR, and all other transcontinental railroads during the Gilded Age. By the mid-1880s, the NPRR's continued mistreatment of unskilled workers awakened the Pacific Northwest's first formal class consciousness of the working poor, and led to region-wide labor militancy. Chinese immigrants, as the embodiment of cheap labor depicted in racist newspaper editorials and magazine articles (see Gyory 1998; Miller 1969; Tam 2002) were seen as destroying the ability of unions and other unskilled workers to fight for better working conditions, and absorbed most of the direct and violent attention of this new class consciousness.

The next two trans-Montana railroads, the Great Northern and Milwaukee, used a majority of Japanese workers in their construction due to the effects of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Railroad companies required cheap labor for construction and maintenance, and with the inability to acquire Chinese workers many managers imported Japanese labor by the thousands. Between 1891 and 1907, labor contractors working for a variety of American businesses, including railroads, helped to import over 60,000 Japanese laborers (Ichioka 1980, pp. 326–327). Completed in the 1890s, the Great Northern Railroad went across Montana's northern boundary and employed several thousand Japanese laborers, some with Chinese foremen, in addition to a significant number of Irish and eastern Europeans. The Milwaukee Railroad, Montana's first electrified railroad, used significantly less Japanese laborers than the Great Northern and was completed in the early 1900s (Ichioka 1980, pp. 325–326). Using the Chinese as symbolic straw men, modern America's burgeoning dominance over China's stagnant policies resounded in outcomes that included pitting the Chinese against other cultural groups viewed as non-white, such as the Irish. The final push of the NPRR in summer of

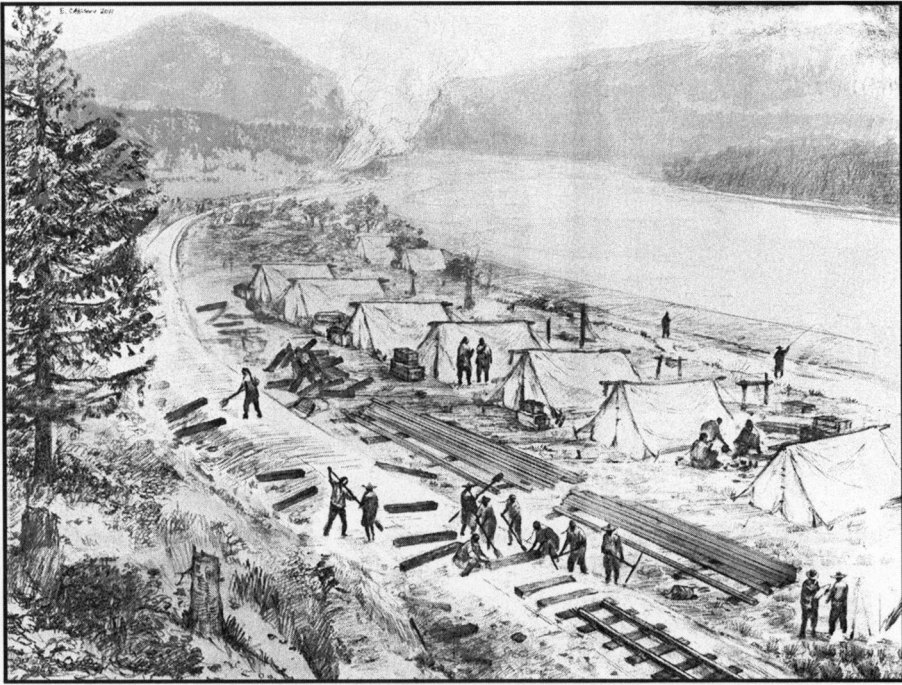


Fig. 11 Thousands of Chinese laborers worked and lived in camps like this while constructing transcontinental railways throughout the American West, but few historical images of such camps survive. This artistic rendition was created by integrating historical records and archaeological evidence to present a snapshot of work and life in the “Last Chance” Northern Pacific Railroad line camp along the Clark Fork River in northwestern Montana. Courtesy of Eric Carlson

1883 broke this symbolic battle down with Chinese advancing from the west as they competed with Irish/Slavic crews from the east. Even though the eastward-advancing crews “won” that day, the Chinese laborers were harbingers of a major contribution to the completion of this and other transcontinentals that united the nation. Amid the milieu of post-bellum race relations in the United States, the Chinese were one of the safest targets of racial stereotyping, bullying, exclusion, and exploitation. Proliferation of a European and American style capitalist system and its abuse of Chinese labor, both in physical stress and racist conceptualizations, is ironic, given that many of these same economic organizations esteemed by the West were modeled after those in China (e.g., Frank 1998), but so indicative of America’s Gilded Age.

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