

San Francisco Public Library Celebrates the Life of a Pioneering Chinese American Industrialist in New Exhibition

***Chinaman Tycoon: The Life and Times of Lew Hing (1858 – 1934)* features material from the Lew and Quan Family Papers and the collections of the San Francisco History Center**

SAN FRANCISCO, October 4, 2024 - The San Francisco History Center at San Francisco Public Library presents an exhibition *Chinaman Tycoon: The Life and Times of Lew Hing (1858 – 1934)* on view October 4, 2024 – January 2, 2025. The exhibition follows the 2022 publication of a book of the same title by Roland Hui, local historian of the San Francisco Chinatown community.

Lew Hing arrived in San Francisco in 1871 at the age of 12. He lived most of his life in America during a time of intense anti-Chinese sentiment. During his life, Chinese were segregated; not allowed to testify in court or eligible for naturalization; excluded by law from immigrating or denied reentry (1875 Page Act, 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, 1888 Scott Act); required to carry a certificate of residence/registration on their person in public areas from 1892 to 1943; not allowed to own land, and the only ethnic group other than Native Americans subject to a pogrom.

The exhibition traces Lew Hing's rise, and the breaking of racial barriers, to become a pioneering industrialist, banker, shipping magnate, hotelier and real estate developer. Upon his death in 1934, *The New York Times* titled his obituary thus: "Chinese Immigrant Boy Became Noted Captain of Industry on the West Coast." On the 90th anniversary of his death, the San Francisco History Center presents a retrospective of his life through selected original documents and artifacts from the Lew and Quan families, augmented by the collections of the San Francisco History Center.

Much of the history of Chinese in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries dwells on the laws which discriminated against the Chinese, or the role of the Chinese in building the transcontinental railroad. Little is known of other aspects of the life of Chinese during that time. Author Roland Hui traced Lew Hing's life, detailing his trials and tribulations as the first Chinese American to break into fields previously reserved for whites. Hui concluded his book: "So that is the story of Lew Hing, the first Chinaman industrialist tycoon on American soil, decades before it was ever thought possible. History did not produce another Lew Hing, a welcome reflection that society had become more progressive. But his inspiring life story of breaking stereotypes and challenging social barriers should not be forgotten."

The Lew and Quan family papers and artifacts comprise the only known group of original items revealing the life of a prominent family of the early Chinese community

in the San Francisco Bay Area. Lew Hing was involved in more than thirty businesses as an owner or active partner and another twelve as a passive investor, conducting business and personal affairs in both English and Chinese as his business empire was domestic and international. This exhibition displays documents mainly related to his domestic businesses, which are in English.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

Chinaman Tycoon: The Life and Times of Lew Hing (1858 – 1934)

October 4, 2024 – January 2, 2025

Main Library, 100 Larkin Street, San Francisco History Center Exhibit Space, 6th Floor

FREE

Information: [SFPL.org/sfhistory](https://sfpl.org/sfhistory)