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# MAI WAH SOCIETY

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*Preserving and Interpreting Butte's Asian Heritage Since 1991*

2011

## Bringing Kwan Home

*Butte and Virginia City* - After an absence of sixty-five years, an irreplaceable part of Butte's history is making its return to the mining city. The Montana Heritage Commission, created in 1997 to manage and preserve the former Bovey Restorations properties in Virginia and Nevada City, has been working with Butte's Mai Wah Society for more than a year to broker the return of an extensive collection of Chinese material culture. On Thursday afternoon December 23, 2010 the Montana Heritage Commission made the loan official. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to Butte!

Purchased by Charles Bovey in 1946 these items were the remaining inventory and personal items in Butte's Wah Chong Tai Company and Mai Wah Noodle Parlor. Their departure from The Mai Wah building in 1946 marked the final exodus of Butte's Chinese population. They represent a range of items from clothing, spices, and herbal medicines, to retail furniture and household religious items. Much of the retail merchandise is "new old stock" with many grocery items represented. Of

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## Chinese New Year 2011

The Year of the Rabbit started off in Butte on February 5<sup>th</sup> with what has been known as the "shortest, coldest, loudest" New Year Parade. Several hundred participants gathered to follow the Mai Wah Dragon through the streets to the crackle and blast of thousands of firecrackers; setting off firecrackers is thought to help drive away evil spirits.

In Western cultures the dragon is often looked at as an enemy; however, in Asian cultures the dragon is thought to be benevolent, and, in fact, is used to bestow blessings on businesses along the parade route. It takes a number of volunteers to heft the dragon through the streets of Butte. Many of the volunteers wore red, which is considered an auspicious color and the predominant color used in Chinese celebrations. Some volunteers carried drums, whistles and gongs which they beat enthusiastically. At the end of the parade everyone was invited to a final fireworks blast in front of the Mai Wah Museum and a snack of hot chocolate and cookies.

The Mai Wai Society would like to thank the following businesses which received blessings for Chinese New Year 2011 (see page 3):

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particular interest is Kwan Gung a personal or familial Chinese war-god and protective idol. Kwan arrived in Butte with much celebration more than one hundred years ago.



Other significant items are the variety of original retail furnishings in the old Mai Wah Noodle Parlor and Wah Chong Tai buildings at 17 Mercury Street, the heart of Butte's historic Chinatown. The loan consists of more than 2,500 objects and is believed to be the largest loan of this kind in Montana's history. These items have direct historical ties to Butte. In exchange the Mai Wah Society will assist the MHC in the construction of a historically accurate exhibit of Chinese Culture in Alder Gulch c. 1870. The general purpose of the loan is for research and education

### **Processing the Artifacts**

Since the loan agreement many artifacts have been moved to Butte including a number of crocks, boxes, and tins which have been cleaned at Butte Silver Bow Archives and moved to the Mai Wah Museum. Numerous smaller items are still being stored at the Archives while being sorted, cleaned and catalogued, and the original cases remain in Nevada City until the

logistics of moving them can be sorted out. Montana Heritage Commission members Marilyn Ross, Kate McCourt, Kate Hampton, and John Ellingsen, among others have been instrumental in helping this project move forward. ♦

## **Chinese Dance and Music Recital**

An award-winning performance troupe, including many national, provincial and municipal competitions across China, from the Academy of Music of Northeast Normal University presented a free "Chinese Dance & Music Recital" Tuesday, March 22, in Butte at the Maroon Activity Center. The recital was presented by the Mansfield Center's Confucius Institute at the University of Montana-Missoula, and was co-sponsored by the Mai Wah Museum and Butte Central Schools.

The program included a traditional Chinese music ensemble, Yangko and ethnic dances, tai chi and martial arts, and a Chinese calligraphy and painting demonstration. The recital was part of the Confucius Institute's efforts to promote greater appreciation of Chinese culture in Montana.



The Confucius Institute has provided much needed support in the Mai Wah Museum's efforts to "re-stock the mercantile" with the artifacts from Nevada City and Virginia City. ♦

## MONTANA SHARES



The Mai Wah Society is a proud member of Montana Shares which is a partnership of 42 Montana based non-profit organizations. Individual nonprofits generally can't take part in workplace type giving campaigns unless they are a part of Montana Shares or a similar umbrella group. Montana Shares acts as an administrative mechanism through which donors can make payroll contributions to the group(s) of choice. In addition, Shares provides raises public awareness of the need for and benefits that nonprofits in Montana provide. The diverse collection of organizations across the state provides small nonprofits like the Mai Wah with wide support and visibility. Montana Shares holds all member organization to strict accountability standards, ensures that donations go to group of choice and that 85% of all donations go to member groups. Donations can be made through workplace campaigns or as individuals through credit card donations or by directly to Montana Shares. For more information go to [www.montanashares.org](http://www.montanashares.org) or call 442-2281. There is also a link on the Mai Wah web page [www.maiwah.org](http://www.maiwah.org).



We would also like to acknowledge Montana Cultural Trust for their support of Mai Wah operations.

These businesses' red envelope donations will ensure prosperity through the coming year for themselves and the Mai Wah. They included:

Butte Silver Bow Courthouse  
MIS Office  
Lisa Wareham Photography  
Julian's Piano Bar  
Jade Studio  
Main Stope  
Hilltop Market  
Bad Beaver Bikes  
Insty Prints  
Phoenix Building  
Quarry Brewery  
Butte Weekly  
Jenny Peterson – Royal Skin Care Treatment  
Silver Dollar Saloon  
Whitehead's Cutlery  
Silver Bow Properties  
NorthWestern Energy  
Butte Silver Bow Public Library  
Hennessey Market

In 2009, Reader's Digest named the Butte Mai Wah Chinese New Year Parade one of the six most interesting processions in America. 2012 will be the Year of the Dragon.

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*Join the Chinese New Year Celebration 2012  
Saturday, February 4, 2012  
Parade starts from the Courthouse at 3pm.*

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## MAI WAH SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT: Jane Faight  
VICE PRESIDENT: Elizabeth Ramsey  
SECRETARY: Debbie Bishop  
TREASURER: Richard Gibson  
MEMBERS: Bob Brock, Robert Edwards, Jim Griffin, Lindsay Lambrecht Mulcahy

## THE MAI WAH SOCIETY

<http://www.maiwah.org/>

### BECOME A MEMBER!

Join today! Your membership has many benefits:

\$100: Newsletter, free museum admission, 15% gift shop discount, \$5 discount on t-shirt purchase, guided tour of museum for 10 people

\$50: Newsletter, free museum admission to member, two museum passes, \$5 discount on t-shirt purchase

\$25: Newsletter, free museum admission to member and two museum passes

To join send payment to Mai Wah Society,  
P.O. Box 404, Butte, MT 59710.

Mai Wah Society  
P.O. Box 404  
Butte, MT 59703

[www.maiwah.org](http://www.maiwah.org)

## Book Signing

Born in Boston in 1928, Flora Wong moved to a tiny village in Southern China with her family in 1936 at age seven. During the Communist Revolution, Flora escaped China through an arranged marriage in 1947. She and her husband, Charlie Wong, owned and operated Wing Shing Grocery on Main Street in Helena, Montana.

Wong has written about these experiences and more in her book *Long Way Home*. In November Wong did a book reading and signing at the Mai Wah Museum.

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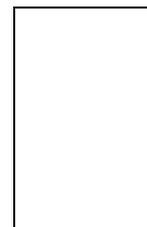
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*“... a story of an authentic, ordinary person facing extraordinary challenges – the story of one Chinese Montanan’s long way home.” Amazon*

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More than 50 guests attended the event, including a number of Flora’s grandchildren. Signed copies of the book are available through the Mai Wah. ❖



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