



ADVERTISE IN THE BUY LOCAL SECTION



Become part of a **PROVEN, AFFORDABLE MARKETPLACE** for your business that encourages local spending while giving small, independent businesses a fighting chance. The RN&R launched our “**BUY LOCAL!** **HOME GROWN NORTHERN NEVADA**” section in 2008. It is the longest, continuously running **BUY LOCAL!** campaign in the market.

**FOR ADVERTISING RATES AND INFORMATION,
CONTACT YOUR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE TODAY.**

(775) 324-4440

RN&R
Reno News & Review



“Silk and Rust” is one piece in Giannecchini’s exhibition.
PHOTO/JERI CHADWELL

In spirit The Celestials

Sue Fawn Chung started teaching at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in 1975. The author and historian has been a member of National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Nevada’s Board of Museums and History. In her book, *The Chinese in Nevada*, produced in collaboration with the Nevada State Museum, Chung discusses the lives of Nevada’s 19th century immigrants and the roles they played in their respective communities.

Chung explains that when Chinese people first began arriving in Nevada in the 1850s and settled near Genoa and Dayton, no one really imagined that a few decades later they’d constitute nearly nine percent of the state’s population.

Many people know the huge role Chinese laborers played in building the transcontinental railroad, but Chung’s book explains that they also worked in other construction fields as well as industries like mining, ranching, sheepherding, logging, medicine, merchandising, gambling—and their restaurants and laundries could be found throughout the state.

But according to Chung, anti-Chinese legislation—like the Chinese Exclusion Act, a federal law signed by President Chester A. Arthur on May 6, 1882 that prohibited all immigration of Chinese laborers—had a devastating effect on their population during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.

According to Nevada Humanities’ Online Nevada Encyclopedia, by 1890, the Chinese population in Nevada was less than 3,000, “but they remained the most

numerous of the foreign-born. Ten years later, the Chinese had continued their retreat, with only 1,276 still living in the state. Chinatowns that were flimsily built of dry wood became easy victims of fire, too often caused by arson. Today, remnants of the Chinese experience in nineteenth-century Nevada are rare and typically restricted to archaeology.”

Today, according to the American Immigration Council, China is still among the top five countries from which Nevada residents have emigrated, but Chinese people make up only 3.1 percent of the state’s population.

As the Online Nevada Encyclopedia points out, there’s not much left in Nevada that speaks to the experiences of the state’s early Chinese immigrants—but another resource are the archival collections of photos of Chinese immigrants kept in museums around the state. It was these that artist Joan Giannecchini used to create the exhibition *The Celestials: Chinese of the Old West*, now on display at the Northwest Reno Library.

In the book *Women Artists of the Great Basin*, Giannecchini explained to author Mary Lee Fulkerson that she wanted to use digitized archival photos of Chinese immigrants to give them a place in the state’s history and bring to mind the hardships, loneliness and uncertainty they faced.

According to Fulkerson’s book, it took Giannecchini seven years to complete the exhibit, which attempts to give a sense of Chinese immigrants’ emotions, thoughts and ideas. Giannecchini started by creating the type of shadow boxes common to dioramas—but the artist’s are made from materials like wood and metal she found scattered around the ghost town of Tuscarora, where she lived.

The boxes are filled with additional found materials accompanying digital images of Chinese immigrants printed on materials like paper transparencies, silk and vellum. LED lights that shine from the bottom of the shadow boxes create a ghostly effect in the photos, whose subjects’ eyes seem to follow viewers as they move past them. The exhibition is on display through Feb. 28 and is well worth a visit for anyone curious about some of the forgotten people from Nevada’s past. □

The Celestials: Chinese of the Old West is on display at the Northwest Reno Library, 2325 Robb Drive, through Feb. 28.