

5. Clifford Perkins Describes Work as "Chinese Inspector" in Arizona, 1978

Tucson's commercial and professional establishments were operated primarily by Anglos, as were the firms catering to the expanding winter tourist trade and to the growing list of sanitariums built for health seekers. The restaurants and laundries, on the other hand, were operated almost entirely by Chinese brought into the country originally as laborers. Forbidden by law to own property or engage in commerce, their search for work had carried them away from the west coast. They were industrious and maintained gardens well past any area close enough to town to be considered by most citizens as desirable, and they provided most of the local residents with their fresh vegetables, chickens and eggs. Horse drawn, flat roofed wagons, with scales and brass scoops dangling from the tops, carried fresh produce, poultry and eggs to housewives every day.

These "Orientals" and their colony became a major focus of my activities a few days after my arrival [in 1910].

Chinese inspectors and Immigrant inspectors, working with Customs line riders, made it increasingly difficult for Chinese to get into the country via busy ports and populated areas, and as a result smuggling activities shifted to the sparsely inhabited sections of southern New Mexico, Arizona and California. By the time I joined the Service, few Chinese were coming in east of El Paso. Some continued to enter through gulf and west coast ports, but by far the greatest numbers were entering in the vicinity of towns on or near the Mexican border and, for a while, through Canada. This border phase of law enforcement, carried on by a comparatively small number of inspectors working twelve to fifteen hours a day, seven days a week, continued until about 1917, when the Service was faced with new problems arising from the passage of the Literacy Act.

After 1893 every Chinese alien was required to carry identification, including a photograph. Such procedures invariably led to forgeries and duplications. Photography in 1893 was rather rudimentary, and many pictures on certificates of residence faded with time. Also, most of the Chinese who were required to register were adults, since the immigrants up to that point had consisted almost entirely of males over twenty-one years of age. Eighteen to twenty years later, it was almost impossible to be sure the photograph on a certificate of residence was of the person presenting it. Copies of the originals, with photographs, were supposed to have been filed in the office of the U.S. collector of internal revenue of the district where the application was made, but records were sketchy. Additionally, the forms varied from one locality to another, so the fact that one document did not look exactly like another meant very little.

It was important to prove that a suspect picked up coming into the United States after a trip to China had actually been out of the country and was here illegally. Of course when he was apprehended at Tucson, Phoenix, or some other point near the border and was suspected of having just reentered the

Clifford Alan Perkins, *Border Patrol: With the U.S. Immigration Service on the Mexican Boundary, 1910-1954* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1978), 6, 9-11, 16-17, 19-21, 23-24.

country from Mexico, he was thoroughly searched and his clothing was examined. In some cases identifying marks were found, but the Chinese soon learned to remove all such markings. Strangely enough, it was sometimes possible to trap them by making a casual comment to them in Spanish. This they might answer unthinkingly, though they would not respond to questions put to them in English. This was not *prima facie* evidence, but it often served as a lever to cause a suspect to confess where he had been.

For a time the Service hired Mexicans in Nogales, Sonora, to photograph Chinese on their arrival by train from the south and, if possible, to take pictures of new arrivals living in Nogales. Such pictures were supplied to the Tucson and other border Immigration offices, where they were filed by approximate age, shape of face, and body type. This reference material was often useful in establishing the fact that apprehended Chinese had been in Mexico as recently as a few weeks or months previously.

We also arranged to have pictures taken in Tucson of persons suspected of illegal entry from Mexico and sent to ports and agents on the border for referral to residents and officials in or near Mexico. In a number of instances we were able to secure witnesses who could swear in court that the alien had been in Mexico on a certain date. Bringing witnesses in from Mexico to testify in court had to be discontinued after a couple of years, however; they got to making a good thing of it since they received money to cover their expenses up and back. Their credibility suffered when one witness identified our Chinese interpreter, maintained in the office full-time by the Service, as a man he had seen getting off a train in Mexico.

With only ten inspectors to cover Tucson and the surrounding countryside for forty or fifty miles, we were on duty twelve to fifteen hours a shift, seven days a week, alternating from days to nights and back every two weeks. My room was close enough to the depot so when a passenger train was due I could clean up a little before putting on my uniform without wasting too much time, but there was many a day when one more change of clothing would have finished me with the Service. Sometimes, in addition to inspecting two or three passenger trains, we opened as many as three hundred freight cars on a shift, regular loaded freights usually having from fifty to sixty cars and empties as many as seventy.

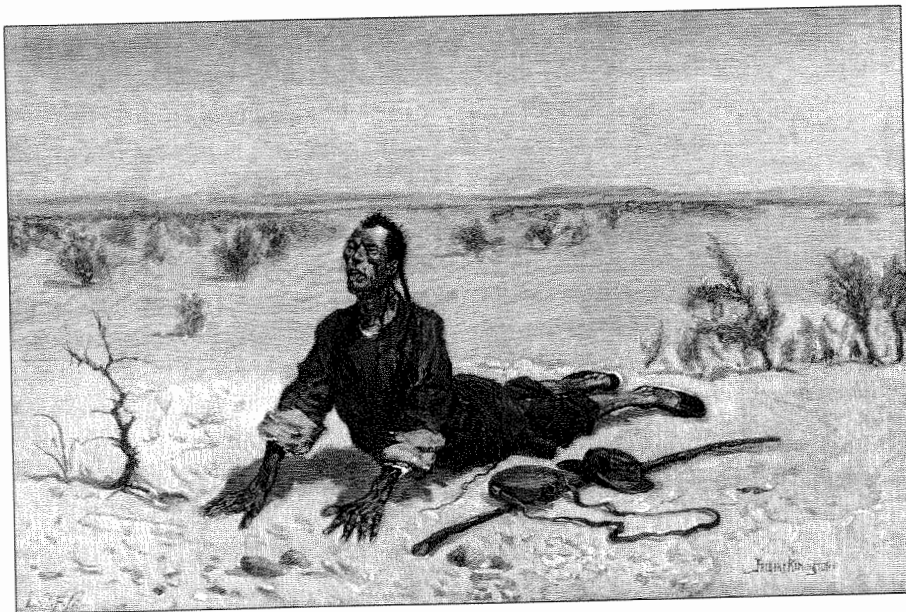
Chinese attempting to reach inland cities undetected hid in every conceivable place on trains: in box cars loaded with freight, under the tenders of the locomotives, in the space above the entryway in the old passenger cars, in staterooms rented for them by accomplices, and even in the four-foot-wide ice vents across each end of the insulated Pacific Fruit Express refrigerated cars, iced or not. We also had to check the passenger cars in the depot for travelling Chinese, making a record of their names, where they had boarded, their destinations, and any documents they carried. The information was then verified with the conductors to be sure it was correct insofar as they knew it. They were familiar with our work and told us right away whenever they had seen a Chinese board the train at a small station, especially if it had been on the side of the car away from the platform or under other circumstances that might indicate he was being put aboard by smugglers.

Entering the United States by wagon or on foot through that country was a hazardous, lonely proposition, and must have been a bewildering experience to

the majority of Chinese who made the attempt. They had made a long and no doubt miserable ocean voyage; they had to learn a new language, become proficient at unaccustomed work in a foreign land, adapt to different customs, clothing and surroundings. About the time things became familiar, the aliens would be put aboard a mechanical conveyance they probably had never seen before. It would carry them north through uninhabited, barren and sometimes mountainous country and leave them in a sun-baked town of drab adobe buildings.

Nobody wanted them; few people made any attempt to understand them; and detection would make futile all of the effort and money expended. Mexican railroad section hands seldom would help them because they did not want anyone around who might get them in trouble; the native Indians seemed to resent their passage through the harsh land; and uniformed officials who knew the country were sent out on horseback with guns to catch them. It was little wonder so few of the Chinese we apprehended gave us trouble and so many appeared to be almost glad they were going to be sent back to China. Often it was hard not to feel sorry for some of them, even though enforcing immigration laws was our job. They had come so far, and their wants were so few in a land of so much opportunity. I did not know it then, but there would be many times when I would be caught between the natural inclination to help another human being and my responsibilities as an officer, and guided by the conviction that it is far easier not to take the first wrong step than the second.

6. Frederick Remington Depicts Suffering of Chinese Migrant, 1891



Frederick Remington, "Dying of Thirst in the Desert," *Harper's* 82 (March 1891): 522.