**Whose Been Working on the Railroad** – slide notes

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| Slide 1 | No notes |
| Slide 2 | About a hundred years after the Northern Pacific was constructed, Gary Weisz of Sandpoint, Idaho, developed a keen interest in the history of the Northern Pacific. Gary worked for the NP and later the Burlington Northern. He had the opportunity to survey much of the grade from the Flathead Indian Reservation westward into northern Idaho. Using metal detectors and some limited surface scraping, he was able to relocate the railroad work camps. He kept meticulous notes and photographs and kept the collections from the individual sites separated. In the 1990s, Gary worked with several professional archaeologists to compile his research and collections. Most recently, Gary provided valuable information to Chris Merritt which Chris was able to incorporate into his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Montana. Gary is currently working with graduate student Rachel Stokeld of the University of Idaho who has been recording railroad construction sites in northern Idaho. Incidentally, Gary provided great assistance and encouragement to the various teams that worked on the Sandpoint Archaeology Project sponsored by ITD. For this presentation, he graciously loaned me the Asian coins recovered from several NP Chinese Labor Camps so that I could compare and contrast them with the Sandpoint assemblage and other coin data provided by a dear colleague, Margie Akin of the University of California at Riverside.In the spirit of the IAS, where avocational archaeologists like Gary, work hand-in-hand with professional archaeologists, we dedicate this presentation and hope you find it informative. |
| Slide 3 | As is well documented by many scholars, Guângdöng Province was the part of southern China where most of the Chinese immigrants came from. Coins that were in circulation were both individually carried over to America by the Chinese and were imported by the Chinese trading companies for sale or distribution to the Overseas Chinese populations living and working in the American West. Chinese coins were not used as money by the Overseas Chinese but had other functions. Some of these coins were left behind as the labor camps moved on with the progress of the so-called “front.” Vietnamese coins, for a brief time, circulated widely in southern China to alleviate a coin shortage. They were accepted and circulated alongside Chinese minted coins. A particularly well preserved zinc Vietnamese coin recovered from the Last Chance Railroad Camp site in Montana is shown here. |
| Slide 4 | Now for a brief lesson on reading Asian coins. Chinese coins are called *wen*, Vietnamese coins are called *dong*, and Japanese coins are called *mon*.The four characters on the obverse side of a Manchu Dynasty *wen* are read as pairs. The right and left characters are always the same and are translated as “current treasure” or “current coin”. The upper and lower characters vary and provide the ruler’s reign title. In the example illustrated (at top) the ruler is Kāngxī (1662-1722).The characters on the reverse are written in Manchu and indicate the mint where the coin was cast. The character on the left is standard and translates as “*boo*” or coin. The character on the right varies and names the specific mint. In the example above the indicated mint is Peking.In our abstract, we used the term “rich archaeological record.” As you’ll see in the next slide, we are not engaging in hyperbole. In his ***Chronicles of a Northern Pacific Veteran***, former NP worker Daniel McLaughlin wrote in 1930: |
| Slide 5 | ***You would never hear of any serious trouble arising among the different groups of men employed in different classes of work on construction. On the front the different groups of men were kept separate; for instance, bridge men had their own camps, cooks, and sleeping quarters; teamsters and track men likewise. Board and sleeping accommodations were very good.***But more useful are But more useful are Gary Weisz's recollections of what the former Chinese railroad construction camps looked like:***The distribution of recovered artifacts at the various construction camps along the Northern Pacific right-of-way suggests the Chinese, in most cases, were segregated from the Euromericans in their off duty camping areas, in most cases the Chinese areas of occupation are littered with broken porcelain rice bowls, porcelain tea or liquor cups (though not numerous), and Chinese earthenware containers are also present with very little European or American stoneware.*** Finally, Gary Weisz tells us:***Fishplates (flatbars) for fastening the rail ends together were commonly used as grates over stone hearths for cooking. Chinese and United States coins are commonly found together suggesting that the Chinese coins were lost rather than thrown away. Coins, both Chinese and U.S., are usually recovered from dwelling areas (tent platforms) rather than randomly scattered about.***A quick glance at the items Gary collected from the surface of the Taklamakan Chinese Labor Camp, just recently assigned the trinomial 26SA0598 by the Montana SHPO, reveals a broad array of work-related artifacts. Notice also the domestic assemblage represented by food and beverage storage containers, ceramics related to food serving and consumption, ammunition for firearms, and items related to after work recreation. Taklamakan and other Chinese labor camps yielded many artifacts related to opium consumption.  |
| Slide 6 | Let there be no mistake. The Chinese worked especially hard. We know from many documentary sources that the most dangerous and strenuous drudgeries were assigned to the Chinese and for their efforts received significantly less compensation than paid white workers.Ponder for a moment the surname carved into this pick axe head. Perhaps something as simple as establishing ownership of a work tool. Perhaps something more. Maybe an expression of Chinese identity in a foreign land far away from home. |
| Slide 7 | We know from work carried out by Keith Landreth and others at Cabinet Landing that days of hard work were followed by nights of recreation. While the drunkenness and debauchery of white laborers living in tent-city labor camps along the front are well known, in recent years, archaeologists are taking more interest in the behavior of the Chinese. We want to avoid the cliché that these railroad labor camps were only moving dens of vice – at least in the popular image of the white work force. Being an informed audience as this, suffice it to say that we know there are many deeper cultural meanings and practices associated with opium and gambling taking place in the labor camps of the Overseas Chinese. |
| Slide 8 | To many of us, there is nothing new here. By now, many archaeologists have become familiar with the large caches of Chinese and Vietnamese coins found in the deposits of the Los Angeles Chinatown. Certainly glass, metal, and ceramic objects preserve well in the exposed sites of the Pacific Northwest. Something to consider, and look for, if fortuitously preserved in fragmentary form, are carved wood bamboo money. We know that the Portland-based Chinese trading companies supplied traditional dietary foods to feed the Chinese labor force working on the NP. We also know from research conducted in California that certain Asian coins were imported for use in gaming. Perhaps further research will reveal and more completely describe the imported goods carried along the front by the moving general store that supplied the Chinese labor force. Would it be surprising that bamboo money might have been available for purchase? |
| Slide 9 | Now, here ***is*** something new….These discs were cut from opium tins presumably to be used as game counters or markers. The opium brand label from an opium tin survives on one of these discs. It is possible that it might have served as a counter or marker of higher value since all of the other discs were cut from undecorated or unmarked opium tin body panels.As you’ll see in the following slides, Asian coins were plentiful at the Chinese Labor camps and seemingly sufficient to meet the needs for gaming pieces. Perhaps these played a special role as items that could cover or hide numbers or symbols on a game board.At the very least, this is an interesting adaptation of empty opium tins for use in some form of gaming activities. |
| Slide 10 | As this slide shows, we have an exceptionally old coin from the reign of the first Qing dynasty emperor. To give you an idea how rare Shùnzhi coins are in American archaeological sites, only 11 have been tabulated thus far in the Asian coin assemblages reported to Margie Akin and myself; four of those coming from Sandpoint or NP Chinese labor camps in Idaho or Montana. In comparison, 133 Kāngxī and 200 Qianlong coins are reported thus far from American archaeological sites. Research reported elsewhere has suggested that older coins retained talismanic value and were reserved for use in traditional Chinese medicine.Like Vietnamese *dong*, for a brief period of time in Southern China, Japanese *mon* were circulating alongside Chinese *wen*. Only 13 Japanese *mon* have been reported in the American archaeological site assemblages reviewed by Margie Akin and myself; and five of those 13 are from the Last Chance site.Why five Japanese *mon* were left behind as a small group next to a former tent platform is not known. Why were no *wen* or *dong* included in this little group? Was the owner having bad luck in gaming and decided to cull out the Japanese *mon* and leave behind his bad luck as the labor camp picked up and moved on? |
| Slide 11 | Here are the coins recovered from West Noxon, Montana.The zinc Vietnamese coins are in the lower left hand side of this slide. The remaining coins are Chinese.And, what’s this???? |
| Slide 12 | Look at what we have here. In the upper left hand corner of this slide is a Kāngxī *wen* perforated for the likely purpose of being sewn onto a garment, strung into a talisman, or suspended in some fashion for some undetermined reason. The images to the right are modern examples of how Chinese coins have been perforated and/or suspended for talismanic or decorative purposes. As you can see in the next slide, these small perforations in the Kāngxī coin make it stand out as something special or unusual in the otherwise normal unaltered condition of Asian coins found in American archaeological sites. |
| Slide 13 | The coin data from the Northern Pacific Chinese Labor camps contributes to a growing compendium of Asian coin data. Not all available data has been incorporated. Some sites have yielded but a single isolated Asian coin. As we track down other collections, we will add to this growing database. Recent archaeological work in The Dalles, Oregon by Eric Gleason and Jacqui Chueng recovered Asian coins – we hope to get the opportunity to examine them soon.We believe there are unidentified or unanalyzed Asian coins residing in repositories and museums that can be added as well. |
| Slide 14 | To wrap up, we’ll take you on a brief tour of some of the Northern Pacific Railroad work camp sites and some of the Asian and non-Asian coins recovered from the surface.This slide shows coins found at 10BR###, the labor camp located at Dukes Island in Middleton Slough in Bonner County, Idaho.Yes, those are U.S. silver coins – Seated Liberty half-dime on the left and a Seated Liberty Half-Dollar on the right. Clearly, Chinese workers would not discard such coins – 55 cents would have made up about half of a typical day’s wages working on the railroad. |
| Slide 15 | And here are some views of the Chinese labor camp locality at the Denton Slough Signal 988. 10BR###. Rachel Stokeld and her colleagues are currently preparing site record forms for this and other sites (the temporary site number is shown).  |
| Slide 16 | Again, we see accidental loss of U.S. and Canadian silver coins. We surmise that the Chinese coins, though having no monetary value in America, were accidently lost.  |
| Slide 17 | Finally, a photograph of Gary. Gary’s been working on the railroad for many years and we are glad that he did!Many professional archaeologists and avocationalists are benefiting from his meticulous research and field surveys.May the IAS continue to support the important contributions of avocational archaeologists.Thank you! |