

CHIN LIN SOU

When: 1836–1894

Where: Born in China, settled in Denver, Colorado.

Why Important: Chin Lin Sou was a leader in the Chinese American community and a successful businessperson in Denver.



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Chin Lin Sou was born in 1836 in southern China. Chin heard stories of opportunities in the American West. He moved to the United States in 1859 to work on the transcontinental railroad.

Chin was fluent in Chinese and English. He was also over six feet tall! Because he was so tall, he was able to get a better job on the railroad as an overseer. The transcontinental railroad was completed on May 10, 1869. It meant better communication and travel for Americans. But it also meant the end of work for the Chinese laborers. Many, including Chin, left to look for work in gold mines.

Chin moved to Black Hawk, Colorado in 1871. He was one of the first Chinese immigrants in Colorado. Chin became a supervisor in a mine. Miners toiled all day and rarely found gold. As a supervisor, however, Chin earned good money. With the money he earned, he was finally able to bring his wife to Colorado. They had been apart for ten years! He became very rich when he discovered two profitable mines and sold them.

Chin and his family eventually moved to Denver. During this time, Chinese workers faced discrimination. Many Euro-Americans thought that the Chinese were stealing American jobs. Anti-Chinese violence erupted in many cities, including Denver. Using his fluent English, Chin tried to find jobs for fellow Chinese but it was difficult. In 1882 the U.S. government made it even harder. It passed a law prohibiting Chinese immigrants from becoming citizens, which meant they could not defend themselves in court.

Chin opened a successful trading company in Denver. The company imported food, clothing, and furniture from China. He became a well-known leader and was called the "Mayor of Chinatown." Chin fell ill and died in Denver on August 10, 1894. His children also became leaders in the Chinese community of Colorado. Many of his descendants still live in the Denver area. Chin was honored with a stained-glass portrait in the old Supreme Court room in the Colorado State Capitol.

Sources:

Adapted from "Chin Lin Sou: A Pioneer in More Ways than One." By Laura Perille, Colorado Historical Society.

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