

Family plans visit to grave of man killed here 58 years ago

By **MELISSA ST. AUDE**
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A killing that occurred nearly 60 years ago in Silver City still haunts members of one Montreal-area family, and next week they'll drive to Memory Lane Cemetery to put those ghosts to rest.

On a Sunday morning in January 1945, while at work, Yat Lim (also known as Charlie Mah) was injured during a fight in Barker's Café on Bullard Street.

He died the following day, leaving a widow and four small children in China.

On Dec. 8, Lim's two surviving daughters, Shau Kan Wong of Montreal, Canada, and Lili Wilbert of Sacramento, will for the first time visit their father's grave in Silver City.

Three of Lim's granddaughters will also make the trip.

"My mother never knew her father," said Grace Wong, Lim's granddaughter. "He left his family in China when she was very young. He went to Silver City to make a life for them, and planned to send for his family once he was settled. This will be a chance for my mother and her sister to see their father's final resting place, and also to see the town where my grandfather had

hoped to raise his family."

Grace Wong's mother and father immigrated to Montreal before she was born. Other members of the family moved to California.

Wong said she learned about her grandfather's slaying only a few years ago, when her grandmother mentioned it.

"This murder was a family secret. It was never discussed. Even now, we don't know much about it, other than my grandfather was killed. Now, my mom and her sister want to know what happened. They want to visit their father's grave and hope to find out why he was killed," she said.

When Lim died, an entire village in China felt the blow, according to Wong.

After his death, Lim's children did not have money to go to school.

"The money that he sent home supported his family and the village," Wong said. "After he died, there was no money coming in. They

were forced to live off only what they could grow. It was very difficult."

The details surrounding Lim's death are sketchy. His death certificate states he died as a result of "violence to the skull."

An article in the Silver City Enterprise, dated Feb. 1, 1945, reads "Charlie Mah (Yat Lim) of Barker's Café, fatally injured early Sunday morning in a fight in Barker's Café, died Monday morning at Silver City General Hospital."

George McMichaels and Roy L. Mahoney were arrested and charged with manslaughter.

A week later, the charge against McMichaels was upgraded to murder.

A coroner's inquest, held the following Tuesday, stated that Lim "came to his death by reason of injuries received when he was struck and knocked to the floor by one George F. McMichaels, said fall resulting in a fracture of the skull,



YAT LIM

causing his death."

Lim was 30 at the time of his death. A newspaper account describes him as being "well known in Silver City's Chinese colony," and "being interested in Barker's Café, where he had worked for many years."

McMichaels appeared in District Court in September 1945, accused of "assaulting Yat Lim with his fist and with force and violence knocking (the victim) upon and against a floor of hard substance, to wit: a tile floor, inflicting a mortal wound in and upon the head of (the victim)."

A jury was given three choices in the case against McMichaels: guilty of second-degree murder, guilty of manslaughter, or not guilty.

The jury returned a verdict of not guilty. Justification for the verdict is not available in court records. Mahoney was one of the witnesses called by the defense.

Court records for the manslaughter charge against Mahoney could not be found.

There were no newspaper accounts of the case past February 1945, when the charge against McMichaels was upgraded to murder.

"We're not sure why he was

killed," Wong said. "We'd like to know if these men who killed him were customers and what provoked them. It would be nice to have closure on this."

Although the visit to Silver City will be a first for Wong's mother, sisters and aunt, Wong has once before visited the area and tried to locate the grave.

A producer for "Court-TV," she was in Albuquerque several months ago on assignment and took a few days off to drive to Silver City.

"I went to the cemetery and couldn't find the gravestone," Wong said. "I took pictures of all the graves with Chinese characters on them and asked my uncle to help me identify which grave was my grandfather's. I also went to the library in Silver City and asked around, but could not find much information about my grandfather's death."

She added her mother and aunt are looking forward to paying a long-overdue visit to the grave and exploring the town where Lim lived and died.

As a way of paying tribute to Lim, they will bring incense and food to leave on the grave, Wong said.