

## Motel owner featured in Chinese documentary

### Film honors Chinese-American railroad workers

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Local businessman Larry DeLeeuw usually maintains a low profile minding his two motels and rental properties around Lovelock. Unknown to many residents, however, the amateur historian has recently attracted attention, at least in Asia, for his efforts to preserve an almost forgotten part of local history.

Since DeLeeuw arrived in Lovelock more than ten years ago, the California transplant has renovated various properties, including the Lone Mountain Chinese Cemetery near Lovelock. After county officials approved the project, volunteers assisted him with the clearing of brush and debris, plus fencing the land where an unknown number of Asians are buried in mostly unmarked graves.

Although there are no names, some of the graves are marked with artifacts such as stones, metal crosses and weathered wood, which remained in place and untouched during the renovation.

DeLeeuw installed traditional funeral pyres and a prominent overhead sign at the entrance to the Chinese Cemetery next to the county's official Lone Mountain Cemetery. In the 1800's, Chinese railroad laborers and other Asians were segregated as second class even in death after they helped to build the transcontinental railroad that still carries people and freight through Pershing County.

In addition, DeLeeuw installed the Frank Chang Memorial Museum visible to the public through a garage window at his Cadillac Inn Motel. Named for a deceased local resident and military veteran, the collection includes bowls, coins and other artifacts salvaged from remnants of Lovelock's Chinatown before the buildings were demolished to make way for the I-80 freeway.

"I didn't know when I originally got here about the Chinese Cemetery until I talked to Frank Chang who was in a rest home," DeLeeuw said. "Because I had worked on other Chinese burners before in Marysville, I asked the cemetery board if it was all right if we cleaned up the local cemetery."

Chinese funerary burners are brick ovens used to burn sacrifices like money or clothing meant to accompany the dead into the afterlife.

DeLeeuw now invites Asian-Americans, local dignitaries and residents to an annual spring celebration of Ching Ming Day at the Lone Mountain Chinese Cemetery. Traditional ceremonies involve incense, firecrackers and offerings burned in honor of the deceased. As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, DeLeeuw explained his religion has a strong tradition of ancestral remembrance.



Local businessman Larry DeLeeuw demonstrates a traditional Chinese incense ceremony honoring the unknown dead buried at Lone Mountain Chinese Cemetery he has worked to restore west of Lovelock.

"The thing is the Mormons are interested in our ancestors and we do a lot of work for the dead in our temple," he said. "Genealogy and work that needs to be done our ancestors are part of our beliefs so it was a natural fit to be interested in the Chinese, because nothing much was done for them here."

On the Internet, DeLeeuw's name pops up on various tourism and news websites. His museum qualifies as a "quirky roadside attraction" worth a visit, according to [www.RoadsideAmerica.com](http://www.RoadsideAmerica.com).

"The Frank Chang Memorial Museum is a small collection of artifacts paying tribute to the Chinese people who panned for gold and helped to build the railroad. It became Larry DeLeeuw's obsession about ten years ago," the online tourist guide reads.

DeLeeuw's fascination with Chinese-American history, and the Asian immigrants who have long since disappeared from Pershing County, is considered eccentric by most residents and community leaders.

To a team of Chinese film-makers, however, DeLeeuw is more than just a curious individual. They found DeLeeuw during their research for a documentary on Chinese workers who helped to build the American railroad. In the film, which includes a DeLeeuw interview, the narrator expresses surprise at finding a Caucasian man with a deep interest in preserving the heritage of Chinese-American history and culture.

"It's good to recognize the Chinese. They are just as important as anybody else is in the world," DeLeeuw later explained. "We all think of ourselves as being more important somehow."

As a result, DeLeeuw is featured in "Memories of the Golden Spike," a documentary on the work by Chinese laborers to blast tunnels through the Sierra Nevada and complete the cross-country railroad. In the film, DeLeeuw lights incense and bows his head to demonstrate a traditional Chinese ceremony.

In August, DeLeeuw and his wife Carol were honored for their contribution during the film's debut screening in Los Angeles. The documentary could be viewed by millions of Chinese citizens, and could generate tourism economically beneficial to Lovelock and Pershing County, DeLeeuw believes.

"If this gets to be famous because of this movie, you might have a Ching Ming Day here where they bring busloads of people from San Francisco or Sacramento," DeLeeuw said. "I rebuilt a burner in Marysville, and while I was working on it, a bunch of people came out just to see the Chinese cemetery in Marysville. They were curious about how it was being portrayed or exposed or remodeled."

DeLeeuw has donated copies of the film to the local library, chamber of commerce and museum, along with other agencies along the I-80 corridor. It could also be aired locally on K14KQ, the local Public Broadcasting Station. Channel 14 Media Specialist Shelly Nee said written permission from the film-makers is needed to broadcast the three-part documentary narrated in Chinese with English subtitles.

DeLeeuw said the Chinese workers deserve recognition for their contributions to American society.

"It's an important part of our history and it needs to be remembered," he said. "The sacrifices of the Chinese, who were very hard workers and good citizens, and they weren't treated very well, but then a lot of groups weren't treated well. That's part of the history of the growing of America."

Along with the cemetery and DeLeeuw's museum, Lovers Lock Plaza in downtown Lovelock is based on the old Chinese tradition of installing a lock and throwing away the key to guarantee eternal love.