

YesterYear

Billie Kee

Awhile back I wrote an article about Lombard and in that article I mentioned the owner of the Lombard hotel – Billie Kee, a native of China.

Billie came to Montana when he was just a boy and worked for many years as a servant for Senator and Mrs. Thomas Carter in Helena. The Senator and his wife saw potential in the boy and sent him to night school where he quickly learned to read and write English.

He was an eager student and developed quickly and soon gained a reputation for being “the cleverest Chinaman that ever came to Montana” (according to the Broadwater Bygones).

He was thrifty as well as smart and hardworking. He saved the money he earned and started a small hotel in Lombard. The town and the hotel/restaurant grew with the coming of the Jawbone railroad line that eventually reached from Lombard to Lewistown.



Lombard cica 1907. Billie Kee's Hotel is visible about
The center of the picture.

Billie Kee worked hard, saved and made wise investments. He grew to be quite wealthy. He sent to China for a “little foot” (a Chinese woman of aristocracy) to be his wife. The wedding was attended by many prominent people in Montana.

He was very well known in Lewistown where he did a lot of business and even owned stock in a Lewistown Bank.

When the Millwaukee Rail Road bought out the Jawbone, Billie saw the beginning of the end for the future of Lombard and sold the hotel.

He always wanted to return to China as a wealthy man and get involved in Chinese governmental affairs. His wife did not want to return to China; but, Chinese women did not have a lot of control in their lives. Billie sold out everything and returned to China with over \$100,000 worth of gold.

Billie Kee was a staunch Republican and a follower of Sun Yat Sen, the first president of the Chinese Republic. However, Sun Yat Sen did not stay in power and Billie fell out of favor with the next administration.

Very little is known about what exactly happened between Billie and the Chinese government but he eventually was found guilty of treason and was beheaded.

Billie probably should have listened to his wife!

The information about Billie Kee all came from the Broadwater Bygones which is available at the Broadwater County Museum. Visit the museum and talk with curator Linda Huth to learn more about Billie Kee or to learn more about Broadwater County history.