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Year of the Yang

of the Yang



The Year of the *What?*
Ring in the Chinese New Year February 19.

BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

First, the controversy. If you google *Chinese New Year 2015*, you'll find the date it begins—February 19. But its designated symbol? Among the 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac, the eighth symbol is a bit tricky. Its Chinese name is *yang*, which translates to an assortment of cloven-hoofed ruminants. Just don't jump to conclusions and call them sheep.

"Although it symbolizes caring and compassion, many are afraid those born under the *sheep* will prove too weak for a cruel, unforgiving world," according to Thehumanist.com.

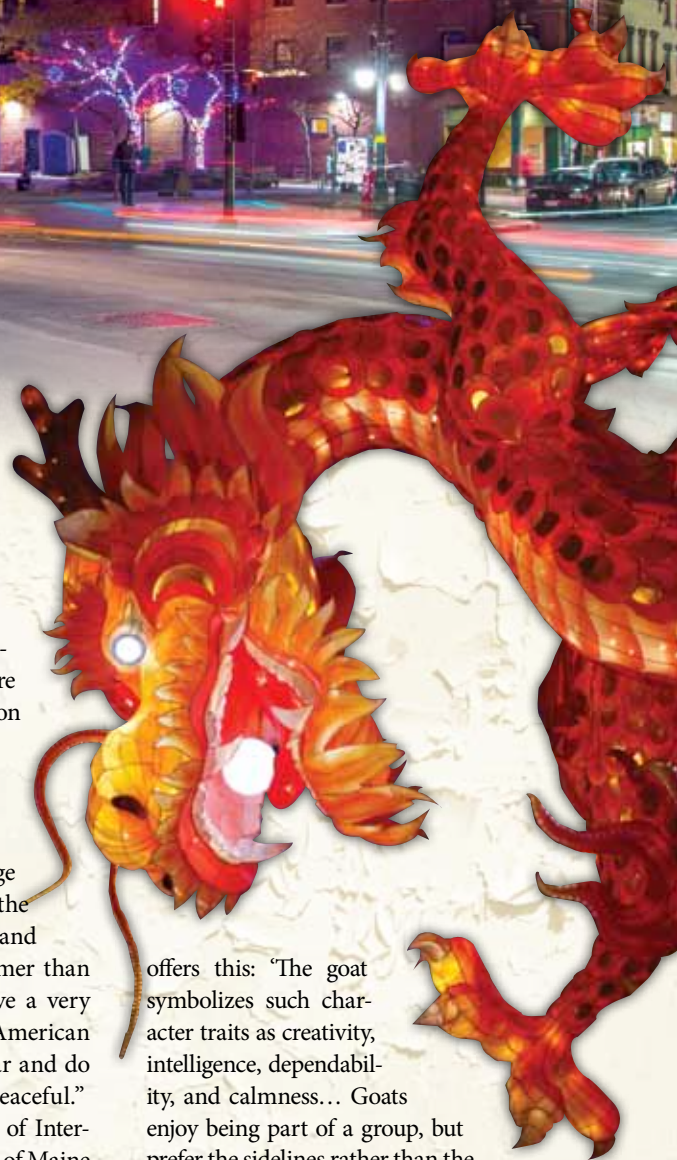
"No one wants a baby born in...the dreaded Year of the Sheep," according to the *Washington Post's* Asia & Pacific correspondent William Wan. "Sheep are meek creatures... Babies...will grow up to be followers rath-

er than leaders." Wan provides evidence that some Chinese women are even making drastic contraception plans to avoid giving birth in 2015.

But opinions vary. "The Year of the Sheep should be peaceful and [in] harmony," says Jing Zhang, director of Maine's Chinese Language and Culture Center (CLCC). "In the year, people will be very healthy and friendly; the weather will be warmer than other years; and farmers will have a very good harvest. I hope Chinese and American people will be even closer this year and do more together to make the world peaceful."

Lynne Eustis, assistant director of International Programs at the University of Maine Farmington, polled visiting Chinese faculty and students in residence there. "Most agree we'll call it the Year of the *Goat*. One professor

offers this: "The goat symbolizes such character traits as creativity, intelligence, dependability, and calmness... Goats enjoy being part of a group, but prefer the sidelines rather than the center." Another professor suggests we go with the Chinese name, "The Year of the Yang, because Yang can mean sheep,



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goat, ram, or lamb. Yang represents kind-heartedness, peace, and fairness.”

“The Year of the *Ram* is also known as the year of the goat or sheep,” says Cindy Han, of the **Chinese and American Friendship Association of Maine (CAFAM)**. “The Chinese word yang translates to any of those animals. We choose the ram because it sounds impressive.”

ON TO THE PARTY

“Lions dance and ribbons twirl!” at CAFAM’s festival is February 7 at the Westbrook Performing Arts Center, says Cindy Han. “There will be performances of traditional Chinese dance by students of the CAFAM Chinese school, plus music, martial arts, crafts, demonstrations, and a variety of delicious Chinese food.” CAFAM claims to put on Maine’s premier Chinese New Year celebration, and this year they’re teaming up with the **Confucius Institute at USM** to host the event. Adults, \$6; children, \$4; 471 Stroudwater Street, Westbrook, westbrookpac.org/cafam-chinese-new-year

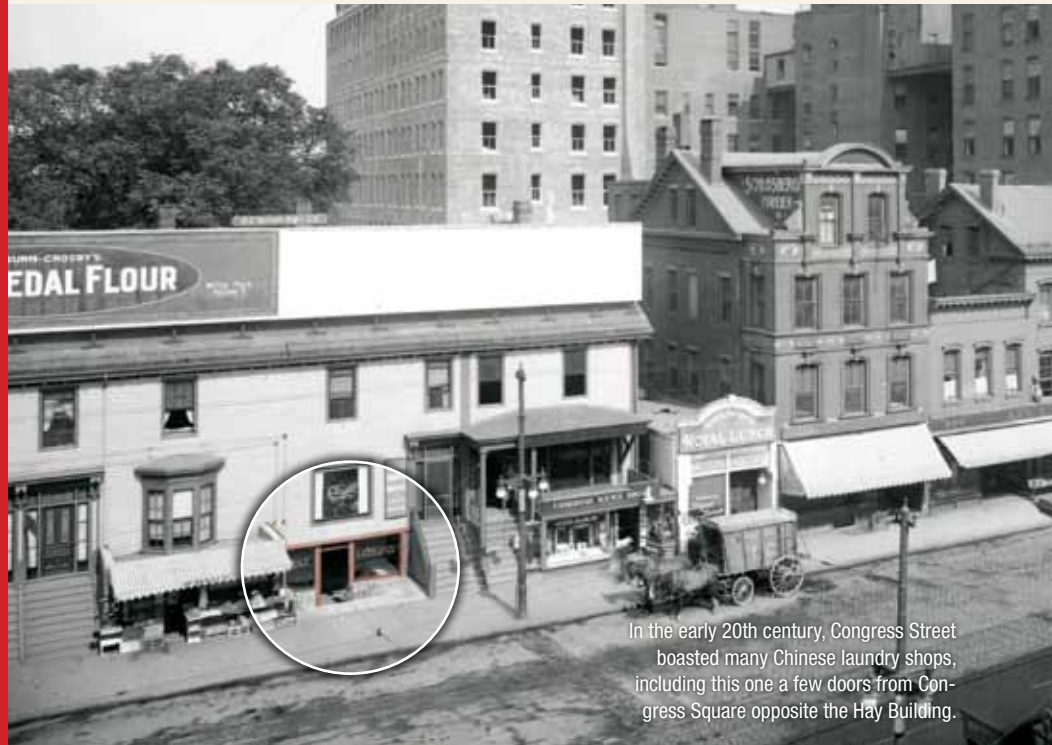
“The Lunar New Year begins February 19. It’s traditionally celebrated for at least one week,” says Han. “Customs range from lighting firecrackers to scare off evil spirits to gathering with family to eat foods that symbolize good fortune, including fish, dumplings, and sticky rice treats.”

At the **University of Maine in Farmington**, “We’ll hold Chinese New Year events February 11 at the Olsen Student Center dining hall,” says Lynne Eustis. “It’s free and open to the public. Beyond delicious, traditional food prepared by our visiting Chinese professor and students, we’ll have Chi-

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY CHINESE AND AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION OF MAINE (CAFAM); COLLECTIONS OF MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY(2)



Tiny dancers perform at the Chinese and American Friendship Association's annual celebration in Westbrook.



In the early 20th century, Congress Street boasted many Chinese laundry shops, including this one a few doors from Congress Square opposite the Hay Building.

nese calligraphy, mahjong, paper-cutting, and painting displays along with traditional music." UMF is celebrating 25 years of exchanging students and faculty with schools in Beijing and Shanghai. "This year, Hui Liu from Beijing University of Technology [is in Farmington, teaching] Chinese language and culture classes." umf.maine.edu/international/news-and-events

The Chinese Language & Culture Center of Maine will celebrate the new year February 8 at 53 Cumberland Street, Bangor; and February 28 at 340 County Road, Westbrook; with "traditional Chinese holiday food, performances, dragon dance, firecrackers, crafts, and door prizes," says Jing Zhang. There will be "a Chinese New Year parade in Bangor with dragons, band, Chinese and American flags, and cars." bangorchinese.com

FEAST DAY

"We're celebrating at **Bao Bao** and at **Tao Yuan**," says chef Cara Stadler of her restaurants in Portland and Brunswick. "Chinese New Year is dumplings, so at Bao Bao we're going to run special, fun ones we don't usually make—from the 19th through the weekend. We'll celebrate on the 19th at Tao, and then on Sunday the 22nd—which is when we serve formal, coursed family dinners from 4 p.m. from different regions of China—we'll incorporate the Chinese New Year celebration."

"Come see us," says manager Tiffany Tang at the **Golden Lotus** on Congress Street. No matter your zodiac, "You'll love our special menu." ■

Washed, Dried & Folded

Once upon a time, Portland was a thriving hub of **Chinese laundries**. Fortune did not shine upon them.

BY GARY W. LIBBY

Sam Lee, a 14-year-old Chinese boy, arrived alone in Portland in 1877. He was among the first Chinese men to call Portland home. He opened what is believed to be Maine's first Chinese hand laundry at 532 Congress Street, now the site of the Maine College of Art campus. His laundry had the generic name "Chinese Laundry." He was soon followed by several more countrymen who engaged in the laundry business.

An October 7, 1878, article in the *Portland Daily Eastern Argus* reports five Chinese laundries in Portland employing 15 Chinese

men. The 1880 census enumerates eight Chinese men in Portland, all of whom were laundrymen. As early as 1882, some of Portland's laundrymen visited Augusta to see if they could make arrangements to open laundries there. In 1885, the *Daily Kennebec Journal* noted, "Chinamen are coming into the State in larger numbers than usual. Several Chinese laundries have opened in the larger cities." Eventually, nearly 30 Maine cities and towns had Chinese laundries.

In China, men did not engage in the laundry business. In the United States, a combination of racial discrimination, need for the service, and the small capital investment necessary to start up a business resulted in a large proportion of Chinese men becoming laundrymen.

All of Portland's Chinese laundrymen lived at their laundries, which usually consisted of two rooms. The most vivid description of an early Maine Chinese laundry appears in the *Portland Daily Eastern Argus* in 1889, describing the Wah Lee Laundry



In January 1903, Maine laundrymen formed the Maine Laundrymen's Association to fix uniform prices for doing laundry and to provide a social outlet. Even though there were about 100 Chinese laundrymen in Maine at that time, none was asked to join this Association.

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VANISHING MAINE

at 128 Center Street. There the shop's owner and his employee lived and worked in a two-room space. The front room, where the customers were served, also functioned as the office (with an abacus, account book, camel-hair brushes, and India ink); ironing space; and the place to store the bundles of finished laundry. The rear room functioned as the actual laundry area; the sleeping and eating area; and, occasionally, as a temple for religious services.

Sam Lee had a long, prosperous, and somewhat checkered career in Portland. An acknowledged leader of Portland's Chinese community, he eventually changed his laundry's name to the Sam Lee Laundry and by 1894 had hired help and changed his business name to Sam & Company, with locations at both 564 and 588 Congress Street. He continued in the laundry business until 1894, when a new owner, Hen Lee, was listed as the owner of a single laundry at 588 Congress Street.

One Sunday evening in late August 1890, a Portland police officer claimed to have heard a racket coming from Sam Lee's laundry. The officer broke in the door and saw nine Chinese men playing fan-tan. The men quickly turned out the lights and kicked over the table, scattering the gambling paraphernalia before climbing out the back window. Sam Lee and another Chinese man hid under a counter. Because he did not catch the men in the act of gambling, the police officer confiscated the gambling materials but made no arrests. In September 1891, the police again raided the shop. Sam Lee and several other Chinese men were charged with illegal gambling and smoking opium about one a.m. on a Sunday. This time, the gambling involved playing poker. Apparently, a Chinese man who lost at poker went to the police station and complained. The police confiscated cards, money, pipes, and opium. Sam Lee pleaded guilty and was fined \$10 and his share of the court costs.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prevented Chinese laborers from entering the country and also prevented Chinese men who were already here from bringing their families to the United States. As a result, they lived isolated lives in a bachelor society—even in Portland, where they were most numerous. This can be seen in the 1894 obituary of 33-year-old Le Chow, who had not been seen for a couple of days. Another

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The last laundryman: By 1953, Chin Kow's Spring Street shop was the only one left in Portland.

laundryman, A. S. Chin, who was described as "the nominal head" of Portland's Chinese colony, notified the police, who went to Mr. Chow's York Street laundry. When there was no response, the police broke open the locked door and found Mr. Chow dead in the back room, lying almost naked on a couch with a roll of newspapers for a pillow. The doctor called to the scene attributed his death to heart disease with some indications of typhoid. His remains were shipped to Brooklyn, New York, for burial in one of the cemetery lots of the Chinese Six Companies.

Portland hit its peak number of Chinese laundries in 1917 with 28. That number ebbed and flowed until about the end of World War II, when technological change began to see the number of the Chinese laundries rapidly decline. Those who could afford it bought washing machines or switched to coin-operated laundromats. By 1953, Portland was down to its last Chinese laundry, located at 156 Spring Street. This closed in 1966 when the owner, Chin Kow, who had opened his laundry there in 1943, retired at age 83. He died at the Barron Center in 1969, bringing the story of Portland's Chinese laundries to an end. ■

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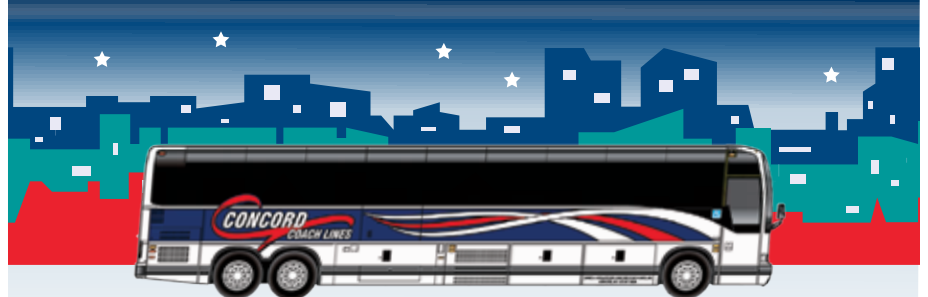
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