



Photo: Yukon Archives, Whitehorse Star Ltd. fonds: 82/563, cs928 #12.

Bruce Sung in October 1969.

BRUCE SUNG

Businessperson took big chances that paid off

By Hidden Histories Society Yukon

The person responsible for opening the Yukon's first supermarket was born in Vancouver's Chinatown, in 1915. The oldest of eight children, Bruce Sung dropped out of high school in Grade 10 and took to hanging around pool halls, recalled his son, Bob Sung, speaking at an event organized by the Hidden Histories Society Yukon. He said his dad's comfort taking risks aided his success.

"He had a really high threshold for gambling, and I think that's what gave him his business acumen," said Bob.

Bruce's mother's family imported Asian foods, and his first solo business venture was catering for the U.S. military in Prince Rupert, B.C., during WWII. After, he formed Sun Pacific Holdings, supplying fresh California produce to Vancouver. Columbia Caterers was another venture, feeding road-building gangs and miners in the Yukon (including those at United Keno Mines in Elsa and Canadian Tungsten Mines near Watson Lake) and northern B.C. He also operated restaurants in various places around B.C.

"The Sung family is equated with food," said Bob. "From an industrial to residential to [a] personal thing."

When Whitehorse became the territorial capital, in 1953, Bruce saw more opportunity. Although he never lived permanently in the Yukon, he owned several businesses here between the '40s and '70s, including

Tourists' Services, which included a restaurant, coffee shop, lounge, Northern Caterers, and Dianne Hotels.

Bob thinks the North offered his dad more cultural acceptance than southern Canada. Bruce grew up in the era of the *Chinese Exclusion Act*, a 24-year period between 1923 and 1947 when people of Chinese origin were not permitted to enter Canada and Chinese people already in Canada were required to register and carry photo identification.

"Whitehorse and Yukon have been very important for the Bruce Sung family. If it wasn't for here, he wouldn't have been as successful," said Bob.

In Whitehorse, Bruce became business partners and close friends with Jim Smith. Together they ran Tourists' Services and, in 1957, boldly opened the territory's first supermarket. The store sourced fresh produce from Bruce's uncle's warehouse company in Vancouver, meat from Edmonton, Alta., and dairy from Fort St. John, B.C.

Bob says his dad was so focused on his businesses, he was often away. One time, when Bruce was home with his family in Vancouver, Bob complained about his father never being around. Although this feedback was not well received at the time, Bob got to make three trips to Whitehorse with his father in the following months, just to be with him.

Bruce sold Tourists' Services in 1967 and enjoyed a comfortable retirement. He died in 2005. **Y**

Hidden Histories Society Yukon researches the stories of Black and Asian people who have contributed to the economic, cultural, and social development of the territory.