

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### CHINESE MINING IN IDAHO

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Chinese miners began to come to North Idaho as early as 1864, in spite of white resistance to letting them enter the country. From modest beginnings around Pierce, the Chinese spread out over the territory, so that by 1870 the majority of Idaho's miners were Chinese. Decided cultural differences (including a major language barrier) set the Chinese apart from other miners; one of the results of these differences is that Chinese mining left traces still distinguishable from the patterns of various kinds of white mining. Regularly excluded from the mining camps as long as white miners, accustomed to higher wages, could work profitably, the Chinese employed hand labor on a scale the whites could not afford. Chinese miners hoped to save enough from their meager earnings to support their families in China and build up a retirement investment on wages the whites would not accept. They wound up with lower grade placers that did not appeal to white miners—or with ground full of boulders, or too far from water, or otherwise too difficult for whites to wish to work. Chinese miners also went to a lot of effort to clean up bedrock (in which heavy gold tends to work during placering operations) the whites did not bother with. White miners had to move and to pile large quantities of boulders. Yet they tended to use more power equipment and less hand labor than was characteristic of the Chinese. Neatly piled stacks and rows of boulders, each carefully hand washed in a time consuming process that white miners were less inclined to employ, often mark old Chinese placers. Differing both from dredged tailings and other traces of white operations, such remains of early Chinese mining may be seen around many Idaho placer camps where oriental miners of a bygone generation toiled countless hours to maintain the Idaho gold production in places that white miners had deserted.