

Big Country-March 26,2025

LEWISTON – Representatives from Lewis-Clark State College and the Nez Perce County Historical Society (NPCHS) met at the Center for Arts & History (CAH) on Wednesday, March 26, to sign a memorandum of agreement to transfer the Beuk Aie Temple collection to NPCHS.

The agreement was made in close consultation with the Beuk Aie Temple Advisory Committee and at the recommendation and request of NPCHS.

“It has been LC State’s honor and privilege to serve as the custodial home and caretaker of this important part our community’s history and Chinese American heritage for over three decades,” LC State President Cynthia Pemberton said. “This is important history that must be preserved for future generations, and we are grateful to the Nez Perce County Historical Society for its keen interest and expertise in doing just that. Transferring the temple to NPCHS will preserve its quality care and allow increased public access to this important historical collection.”

The Beuk Aie Temple consists of artifacts from the Lewiston Chinese Temple, which was razed in 1959. With the discovery of gold near Pierce, Idaho, in the 1860s, thousands of miners, including those of Chinese descent, rushed to the area. Most of the Chinese men who came to the area were from the Taishan district of China’s Guangdong Province. They brought with them their religion, a form of Taoism that combined elements of Confucianism and Buddhism with traditional folk practices and mythology. In 1890, a temple was built to serve as their house of worship. The temple remained for 69 years.

When LC State acquired the historic First Security Bank in 1991, it became home to the Center for Arts & History. Shortly after obtaining the building, the Beuk Aie Temple Society offered to contribute the temple artifacts to the Center. Extensive restoration and cleaning of the century-old artifacts began shortly thereafter and the Beuk Aie Temple was dedicated in October 1994. The three-room exhibit on CAH’s second floor remained open until a fire forced its closure in 2009. The exhibit was reopened in 2013.

The Beuk Aie Temple exhibit contains cooking utensils, mining implements, and other items that chronicle how the Chinese made their living, along with the temple. The exhibit's main feature is an elaborate altar carved with dragons, phoenixes, pomegranates, and Chinese characters.

In 2021, LC State and NPCHS entered into a joint cooperative agreement to better support the preservation of the Temple. This agreement covered display, accessibility, preservation, maintenance,

storage, and established an advisory committee. In 2024, the advisory committee conducted a thorough assessment of the exhibit and identified the need for additional renovation and updating.

“Currently the NPCHS has a certified curator, has doubled the size of its campus, and is prepared to manage all aspects of the Chinese community’s history,” NPCHS said in its letter of request to LC State.

NPCHS has always featured exhibits that pertain to the area’s 1860s Chinese influence and ongoing Chinese American heritage. The Beuk Aie Temple artifacts are expected to greatly expand upon and complement existing artifacts and displays.

This isn’t the first time that LC State and NPCHS have worked together to preserve history and manage collections. In 2011, the college donated its Henry Talkington Collection to NPCHS and its museum has maintained Talkington Collection interpretive displays ever since.

NPCHS estimates it will have the Beuk Aie Temple altar ready for display by June 1. The rest of the Beuk Aie Temple exhibit will be displayed in a new, separate building after it is constructed on the museum campus.