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# Local

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## Building offers city history lesson

Kong Yick yields treasures as it is renovated for Asian museum

A private groundbreaking ceremony will be held today for the future home of the Wing Luke Asian Museum in the East Kong Yick Building in the International District.

As construction crews begin renovation, they are peeling away layers of history at the building, revealing a peek into Seattle in the early 1920s, an era when Chinese, Japanese and Filipino immigrants arrived to make money and, in the process, build a city.

Crews have found family photos, murals and game pieces made of ivory. Shafts of light filter into every room through once-sealed window wells in the 60,000-square-foot structure.

"This building is like an American tenement building with the light wells," said Ron Chew, the museum's executive director. "This is one of the last untouched treasures left in the city."

Kong Yick was built as the cornerstone of a new Chinatown when 170 men pooled their resources in 1910. The building became a social center and hotel for single men working in the fish canning, timber, garment, railroad, agricultural and road construction industries.

Chinatown featured gambling in the "lottery house," spaces for family associations and about 100 rooms that likely housed more than one man each. Storefronts served as places to eat, gather and buy goods for men working thousands of miles away from their families across the Pacific.

The East Kong Yick Building shut down in World War II when the Japanese American family who managed it was held in internment camps. It reopened after the war but closed for good in the 1970s when the building couldn't meet the city's new fire codes.

The Wing Luke Asian Museum bought the brick building in September and raised \$17.1 million to renovate it, with a goal of bringing in \$23.2 million. The museum is expected to open in its new home in 2008.



Ron Chew, executive director of the Wing Luke Asian Museum, looks out a newly exposed window well in the East Kong Yick Building.



Girlie photos believed from around 1930 adorn a door of the East Kong Yick Building. Built in 1910, it was a social center and hotel for Asian immigrants working in the fish canneries and elsewhere.