

Henry Akan (Tsu Chee Kan)



My great grandfather, Henry Akan (Tsu Chee Kan) (1875-1935), had five wives, of whom three and a half were Chinese. This wedding photograph of my great grand parents was taken in Trinidad about 1900.

My great grand mother, Rebecca Agnes Martin (1874-1955), was born in San Fernando and was the daughter of John (Ah-Chow) Martin, a Chinese businessman, and Margaret Augusta McCaddin (1837-1901) who was born in Antigua of Scottish missionary parents. Rebecca Agnes had four siblings, none of whom married a Chinese. Through these siblings, I am related to the late Max Richards, and the Martin clan.

Henry Akan came from See Ah Kee (now written as Shi-Qi) village in the Chung Shan (Zhong Shan) territory of Canton. He was brought to Trinidad by a cousin, Robert Achow (Tsu Kwai Fan).

Henry Akan opened several shops around Trinidad while keeping in touch with his business contacts in Hong Kong and using them to supply his shops. He eventually acquired five wives. The first wife (or Tai-Tai, meaning Big Wife) is only known as Little Foot by my family because she had bound feet. She was left in China to look after his mother. Rebecca Agnes Martin was therefore his second wife.

In 1909, on a visit to China to see his family, Henry took a young girl, Tai Koo, as his third wife and brought her to Trinidad. It was to cause my great grandmother to leave the house and although they eventually reconciled, the marriage changed. At this time, Henry also started a family with a seamstress from Tacarigua, Antonia Hymenes (probably a corruption of Jiminez). She had four children with him, two sons and two daughters.

Rebecca Agnes was known as Ah-Poh (grandmother) in later life. She had six children, a son, Henry Gaston (Tsu Man Piu) who was named after his father, and five girls, including my grandmother, Carmen Victoria, who married Alexander David Lee, a cocoa merchant and businessman.

In 1922, Henry Akan returned to China, taking Tai Koo and 2 of this 3 sons, Henry Gaston Akan (Tsu Man Piu) (1902-1940), Cito Akan (Tsu Man Chan), a son in law, John Akow, and two grandchildren with him. There he took up with a "sing-song" girl called Soong Nai. My grandmother said that she killed him, as she had tuberculosis which he contracted and died.

As Henry sickened, he sent for his youngest son, Eric Akan (Tsu Man You) to visit him. He also moved from the crowded village to Macao where the sea air was said to be healthier. Within weeks, he was dead.

The Trinidad family lost touch with the Cantonese relatives during the war. In 1984, my father on his visit to China, was able to find a cousin, the sole survivor of the family of his uncle, Tsu Man Piu, in the village of See Ah Kee (Shi-Qi).

source:

Facebook post ... from Tricia Lee

Robert Lee to Angelo Bissessarsingh's Virtual Museum of Trinidad and Tobago

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