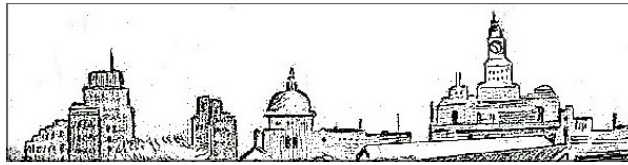


## The Power of Books for an Old Tientsin Hand.

Following Pearl Harbour, it was no small humiliation for the British, American, Belgian, and Dutch civilians living in China to be rounded up and thrust into prison camp by the all- conquering Japanese.

The first camp for me was Pootung, across the river from Shanghai. And it was no fun. The buildings were derelict concrete godowns abandoned by British American Tobacco Co as being no longer fit for storing tobacco. Not so, according to the Sons of Bushido who thought it a perfectly good place in which to cram fifteen hundred men from all walks of colonial life.



View of Shanghai skyline sketched by Pootung inmate Arthur Seddon,  
by courtesy of his son John Seddon of West Vancouver.

As our prison days went by, and we'd had our fill of gazing at the Bund skyline, so near and yet so far, boredom became our chief enemy. An escape was to curl up in a cot with a book. How magically that transported us into another world! I had brought in with me *The House of Exile* by Nora Waln, which someone had stuck in my hand at Tientsin East Station just as the Japanese boarded a group of us on to a train bound for Shanghai.

That book captivated me, not only because Miss Waln had been an upper school teacher at Tientsin Grammar School when I was in lower school, but also for the slant it gave on China's anti-foreign sentiment of which I was unaware until I realized that my knowledge of China was largely limited to life in the foreign concessions whereas Nora Waln knew what it was to be part of a traditional Chinese family isolated from foreign influence.

I was half way through it for the second time when the old fellow in the cot next to me, a decorated Sgt Major gassed in WWI and twenty five years later still gasping for breath at night, begged it off me. It didn't interest him, and he returned it forthwith.

For safety's sake I put it under the folded overcoat I used for a pillow. You never could tell, with so many people milling around it could easily disappear. There was that big burly Australian who owned a pint-sized porcelain mug in which he could get more than his fair share of soup. He kept it on a narrow window sill about four feet above his cot. To protect it from disappearing he hung a sign from it saying: "I piss in this." What a commotion when someone added the words: "I piss in this too!"

When word got around that the Camp Library was calling for books people had brought in with them I headed off for the place. The orderly array of volumes on the shelves amazed me. There were classics, novels, biographies, school texts, verse. I was mov-

ing about the place uncertain of how to find an easy-to-read novel when a bespectacled gentleman of middle age stood in my path and offered in frightfully lah-di-dah English, “Can I help you find something you might like? Oh, but I see you’ve already got a book.” I shook my head. “No, Sir, I’m donating this.” He took my *House of Exile*. “Jolly good! Champion! Beautifully written. Well, if you like works on China, take this.” And he thrust at me *My Country and My People* by Lin Yu Tang.



Hard to believe that those dreary dank go-downs boasted a library.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that it was no dry scholastic treatise. Rather, in pleasing English prose it further opened my eyes to the Chinese viewpoint of the foreign presence. But the author pulled no punches in blaming the Chinese themselves for the country’s backwardness, for their failure to modernize, for their lack lustre defence against Japanese aggression. Without realizing it at the time, my real education was taking root right where I was, behind Japanese barbed wire.

One day there was a sign on the camp notice board that caught my attention. *All are invited to hear a talk given by Arthur Croall Hyde Lay, Acting Commissioner, Chinese Maritime Customs Service, Hankow.* I knew my father had worked for Customs before WWI. Here was an opportunity to learn something about the kind of work he did.

I got early to the mess, which doubled as a lecture hall, and so had myself a front seat. I recognized the speaker right away. He was none other than the helpful gentleman of the library. He began by spouting off such a battery of names of three generations of his family who had held senior posts in Customs that none sank in except for one, his granduncle – Horatio Nelson Lay – which sounded so clownish how could it not stick with me? We were told that it was this Horatio Nelson Lay who started Customs off on its successful path. It was he who forestalled the inroads of corruption so prevalent in Chinese government departments. It was he who as the first Inspector General of Customs organized its personnel into In Doors and Out Doors Staff. The In Doors complement, the management, mostly made up of Gentlemen of England, would be preponderantly British, while the Out Doors people, the examiners, tidewaiters, appraisers, boatmen, clerks were a

mixture of different nationalities of which, to my surprise, the British (which included the Irish at the time) were only a small minority. What about the Kennedys, Macaulays, O'Sheas, Dudleys, Halls? I had only one non British pal whose father was in Customs, and he was Sidney Fuller, American.

The speaker further told us that his grand uncle Horatio Nelson enlisted in the Shanghai Volunteer Corps at the time of the Taiping Rebellion, and during the do-or-die defence of the city he was so seriously wounded he had to be shipped to England for treatment. While he was gone, his place as Inspector General was taken over temporarily by a gentleman from Northern Ireland, Robert Hart, a consular staff member specializing in the Chinese language who had transferred to the customs service. And Hart proved himself so worthy a stand-in that he was asked to take over as top man. As its new Inspector General, he moved to Peking where his talents and capability did not disappoint either the Chinese or British Governments. When Horatio Nelson recovered from his wounds and was back in China ready to pick up where he left off, he was brusquely set aside.

When the speaker closed with "Any More Questions?" I longed to ask if he could tell us something about the duties of the Outdoor Staff, the examiners and appraisers, of which my father was one, but my question could wait. I didn't fancy having fifty pairs of eyes fixed on me. I could always ask when one on one at the library.

But the opportunity never presented itself. The camp was agog with the news that there was going to be a transfer to other camps, and one of them was Lunghua at the opposite end of Shanghai from us, and where, incredibly, females were not only present but outnumbered the males. To get on the transfer list was like asking for the moon. But get on it I did. Talk about Irish luck! Halfway through September 1943, seventy of us marched to the wharf and got on a launch that took us across the river. On the Bund side we boarded buses that took us around Shanghai to the bombed out campus of Lunghua College. There at the main gate a cheering crowd of Lunghua beauties welcomed us in. How my head went reeling!



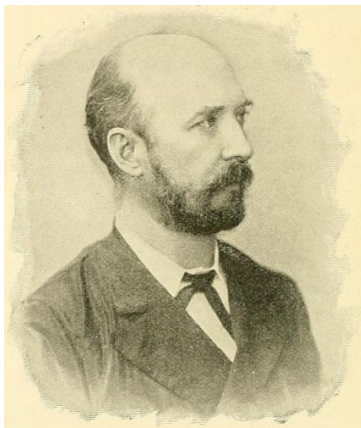
A match in progress on Lunghua's full size soccer pitch.

What a welcome change, the wide open spaces, the larger tastier food portions served by charmers – blonde, brunette, redhead! I don't think there was a single one of us who regretted the move. With so much going on, playing guitar in the dance band and taking my place on the full size soccer pitch, my mind was off books. But eventually I went in

search of the camp library which I found as impressive as its Pootung counterpart. The librarian who came forward to help me was a most attractive young lady who introduced herself as Mrs Elfreida Read. When I asked her if there was anything on the life of Sir Robert Hart, she took me to a shelf where there were several books on the man. Randomly, I picked out *Sir Robert Hart – The Romance of a Great Career*.

Details from the book have long gone from memory, but impressions of Sir Robert remain, albeit vague or maybe even derived from other material that had come to me over the years. But of course any of Sir Robert's achievements that affected me personally like his founding of the Chinese Lighthouse Service had a better chance of being etched in my memory. I have only to think of "Lighthouse Point, Peitaiho Beach," when an image conjures up of a blue uniformed lighthouse inspector taking a look at my rod and line and calling out: "Fishing for Whiting?" Of course, Whiting simply do not exist in Peitaiho's waters, so he had to be one of those lighthouse officers from the UK.

*The Romance of a Great Career* by Sir Robert's niece, Juliet Bredon, told how as Inspector General of Chinese Maritime Customs he expanded its services and substantially



Portrait of Sir Robert Hart  
per Wikimedia Free Press

increased its collection of duties, which he saw to it were directed into the coffers of the Imperial Ching rulers and not into the pockets of corrupt officials. For that and for his many other achievements on behalf of China during the forty-five years of faithful service he received a wide range of honours such as the title Mandarin (senior position in China's civilian government). Finally, towards the end of his career, the grateful Ching court elevated him to the very highest degree of Mandarin, one signified by a ruby button affixed to the crown of his formal court cap.

I had only been in Lunghua five and a half months, hardly time to settle, when I was summoned to the office of the gentlemanly Commandant Hayashi. Had he discovered that I had been one of the gang that had raided the Japanese chicken coop on New Year's Eve? Nothing of the kind. He totally astonished me by saying that in times of war families should be together therefore it was incumbent on him to transfer me to Weih sien Camp up north in Shantung Province where my mother was interned.

When I returned the Robert Hart book to the library and Mrs Elfreida Read and I said our good-byes, little did we know that we were to meet up half a century later in Canada's city of Vancouver as fellow members of the organizing committee for the Old China Hands reunion being held there. By then she had become a published writer of repute. Her books: *Time of Cicadas*, *Guns and Magnolias*, *Congee and Peanut Butter*, which dwelt on her upbringing in China and life in prison camp, were widely acclaimed.

It took more than a ride on a Shanghai bus to get me to Weih sien. Along with a group of Shanghai Italians who had sworn allegiance to the new Badoglio Government, therefore



committing themselves as enemies of Japan, we spent two-and-a-half harrowing days in an overcrowded train carriage before we got there. But once through the camp's ceremonial gateway and led through a maze of lanes and picturesque courtyards I knew I could not have done better. Best of all I was reunited with my mother. It was good to see her so actively chatting away in her pure Peking Mandarin with Mad Mac the Tientsin piano tuner, or in German with Rhinelander, Amelia Finlay, or in French with her long time friend Philomena Springaerd Cox.



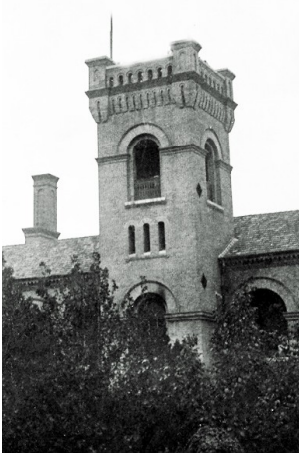
After school hours, students do their homework and adults get special education

Being a camp school teacher (French) she lost no time in drumming into me the importance of keeping up with my studies. In pre-internment Shanghai I had made a start on memorizing Chinese characters, and to that end I was greatly assisted by the excellent two-volume set, *Aldrich's Practical Chinese*, given me by that most generous lady from Hankow, Terry O'Driscoll. But then in Pootung Camp that effort petered out. What little spare time available to me there I spent reading for pleasure. Now in Weihsien things were different. Because my official job as kitchen stoker called for long shifts – 3:00 am to 6:00 pm, I worked only one day in three. Free for two whole days! What an opportunity to laze about doing what I wanted! One book I remember enjoying was *Young Man with a Horn*, about the life of that exciting cornet player of the 1920s, Bix Biederbecke. And I eagerly took up Father Raymond de Jaegher's kind offer to help me through newspaper Chinese, a form of abbreviation used by the Chinese press to shorten headlines and text.

Just as in my earlier camps, internees were invited to attend lectures given by experts on a variety of subjects. Here in Weihsien the speakers were mostly faculty members of Peking Universities. One of them, Father Jean Martin, a Benedictine and noted Sinologue, reminded us that we must not forget the good Belgium had wrought on China such as the construction of the Peking Hankow rail line and the creation and operation of Belgian Tramways in Tientsin.

<p>COMPAGNIE DE TRAMWAYS ET D'ECLAIRAGE DE TIENTSIN. 天津電車電燈公司 <i>Tien-tsin-t'ien-ch'ê-t'ien-teng-kung-szu.</i> 2, Via Ermanno Carlotto, Italian Conc. Société Anonyme, Siège social : Bruxelles. HEAD OFFICE : Haesaerts, J. M., <i>General Manager</i> Leclercq, V., <i>Sub-Manager.</i> Courtois, F., <i>Engineer</i> Dirickx, F., <i>Secretary</i> Pourbaix, L., <i>Assistant Secretary.</i> Springaerd, J. B., <i>Chief of the Bureau for Chinese Affairs.</i></p>	<p>Potopaiëff, G., .. <i>Consumers' Service Staff :</i> Springaerd, P., <i>Inspector</i> Mertens, F., .. Vissers, P., .. Barbier, G., .. Vassilieff, V., .. Lézérovitch, E., .. <i>Meter and Testing Staff :</i> Paternoster, R., <i>Inspector</i> Artemieff, B., .. Zlokasoff, A., .. TRAFFIC DEPARTMENT : Clercq, G. De, <i>Superintendent.</i> Gevels, C., <i>Assistant Superintendent.</i> Mathieux M <i>Inspector</i></p>
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Belgian Tramways! Hadn't it been in then news of late? Did we not hear that seventy of its senior administrative staff and their dependents who had escaped internment all these



Block 23 Tower

years were put on a train bound for Shanghai whence they were barged up river to camp C at Yangchow? Strange how the Belgians were getting so much in the news. There was that scary episode right here in Weihsien when at midnight someone climbed the tower at Block 23, the tallest building in the camp, and rang the camp bell. There was hell to pay, for the Japanese had turned that bell into an alarm to warn their garrison at Weihsien city of any uprising by the internees. The outraged garrison commander and embarrassed camp commandant took it out on the internees. At one a.m. everyone including those with babes-in-arms were obliged to line up for roll call. And we were to stay there until the culprit was handed over. At nine a.m. our ordeal came to an end. There had been two culprits, and with great courage they turned themselves in, confessing that they had rung the bell in jubilation for VE Day. One of the two was Bobby Grandon, Irish, who had served with the French Foreign Legion in Indo-China and the other “CN” Baeten was a Shanghai broker from Belgium.

We would have laughed it off as one more crazy rumour had we been told that by VE Day – May 8 1945 – we had only three more months of incarceration ahead of us. Why should we know, the war hardly touching us? True, the vapour trails from B29s 40,000 feet up on their way to bomb Manchuria or Japan had been appearing with greater frequency. And once a maddened guard ran wildly here and there firing his Mauser pistol up at the sky. Then, suddenly and astonishingly, it was indeed all over. The Americans dropped their Atomic Bomb, and the Japanese called it quits.

The chief thing on everyone’s mind was to start life over. And that we did, all going our different ways. I went from China to Australia to England to New Zealand to Canada, settling in its west coast city of Vancouver.

By that time Vancouver already had a good representation of Old China Hands of which some were Tientsin friends and some I had palled up with during internment in Shanghai. From Weihsien, now nicely settled in the Marpole District of Vancouver, were George and Philomena Spingaerd Cox and their grown-up children Kenneth and Angela. George turned out to be a keen angler, and many’s the Saturday we’d be camped on the shore of the Nickomekl River, strip casting for the big one.

In June 1966, after spending ten years founding two high schools in South Vietnam, the Reverend Father Raymond de Jaegher dropped in on a visit to Vancouver. At the time of the Japanese surrender he had gone up high in our esteem when we learned that not only did he organize the one and only escape from camp, but he also kept up a steady flow of information passing between our camp leaders and the escapees lodged in the hills with a guerrilla band. Now he was once more in the limelight with his notable book, published by Doubleday – *The Enemy Within*.

Here is Father de Jaegher on his 1966 visit to Vancouver standing between George Cox and the popular Canadian camp doctor in Weih sien, Guy Chan.



It was also in 1966 that I finally convinced my mother to fly out to Vancouver to meet our growing family of two girls and two boys. As I knew it would, her sudden outbursts in Mandarin startled our young ones, but they soon got used to her flamboyant ways. Anyhow the pressure was off. Mother was so overjoyed at meeting up again with her close friend Philomena Spingaerd Cox that I agreed to Philo's suggestion that she spend a week with her when the two could yak away in French to their hearts' content.



This photo taken outside the Cox's apartment shows from left to right: Mrs Borioni, a dear Tientsin friend of both my mother's and Philo's, my mother, Philo, and myself with sons Jeremy and Tim.

Came the 1970s when we true blue Old China Hands began to hold reunions in various cities of North America, Europe and Australia. What a jolt of pleasure it gave when we came face to face with someone from our youth! At San Francisco there was that wonderful moment when I stood before my Boy Scout Patrol Leader Brady Hovey. And taking a seat opposite me at the reunion's Chinese banquet was my close Tientsin pal, Charlie Wolter. We've kept close in touch ever since, exchanging news and photos. Not too long ago, he asked if I knew the girl in one of his photographs taken in Tientsin during the war. Her name, Renée Spingaerd, sounded familiar, but I couldn't place her.



Renée Spingaerd

I began to miss George and Philo at our local China Hand lunches, and that surprised me until I heard that George had been admitted to Shaugnessy Veterans Hospital. What a shock when I saw him there barely able to lift his head! However, that gave me some forewarning of his death when it happened a few days later. But how totally unexpected it was when Philo followed George not long after! At her Requiem, the organist's rendering of *O Esca Viatorum* tingled every nerve in my body. Forty years must have gone by since I last heard the lovely notes of that sweetest of hymns sung by Sisters of the Sacred Heart during Benediction service at their hospital chapel.

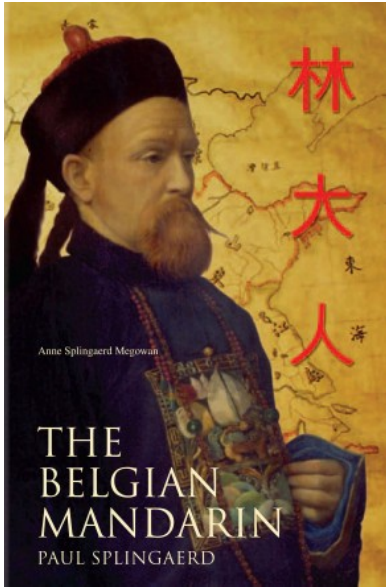


Father Palmers  
in Weihsien.

In relentless succession, those of George and Philo's generation were leaving the scene. When my mother died in London, England, I flew there to attend her Requiem Mass held at Our Lady of Halle Church in Camden Town. After Mass when the celebrant came down from the altar to speak to the family I gazed at him in utter amazement. Even Charles Dickens himself could not have thought up so far fetched a coincidence, for I was staring into the face of one of the Belgian Samist Fathers my mother knew so well in Weihsien Camp. I would like to declare right here and now that it was Father Albert Palmers, but knowing how my memory plays tricks with me these days, it could have been Keymolen or even Hanquet.

Regrettably, by the year 2000, our Old China Hand reunions petered out, but we still had our precious books. And there was no end of them telling of the interesting, sometimes fascinating story of the foreigner in China. In 2009, our postman at the front door handed me a package whose return address showed Angela Cox to be its sender. The wrapping paper torn off, I was holding a book on the life of the Belgian Mandarin, Paul Spingaerd. I saw that the author, Anne Spingaerd Megowan, was second cousin to Angela, both being Paul's great granddaughters. Just thumbing through the book further sharpened my interest. I spotted in a descendants' chart that Anne's mother was Mary Anderson, sister to Johnnie Anderson, a household name in our family for having been a sports contemporary of my oldest brother Patrick. Here was a golden opportunity to see how Charlie Wolter's friend Renée fitted in. And sure enough I saw that she and her sister Christine were also great granddaughters of Paul Spingaerd.





When I randomly flipped to a page that had five portraits on it, I saw that they belonged to the first Scheut Mission to arrive in Mongolia. Scheuts! How could I ever forget the Tientsin Scheuts and their procurator Rev Father Dieltiens! Throughout the 30s my mother directed the choir that sang at their church on rue St Louis. In appreciation they rewarded the choir every December with an eye-boggling feast at their headquarters on rue Favier. How I stuffed myself on chocolate cake and éclairs and meringues and ice cream!

When I got into the book itself, I found it to be deeply researched and engagingly written. It presented facts that substantiated what Father Martin had told us in camp, that Belgians had been responsible for doing a great deal of good in China. And I could see now that much of the good had been at the hands of the amazing

Paul Spingaerd. I learned that back in the 1860s, Paul's three years with the Scheuts had gained him a fine working knowledge of the geography of Inner Mongolia. And also that he so thoroughly mastered the Chinese written and spoken language that the renowned geologist and explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen hired him as a guide and interpreter for his four year mineral exploration of China's interior. It was in Shanghai in 1872 that von Richthofen presented his findings on the extensive coal seams that he and Paul had discovered in several provinces. That was the moment when Paul came under the favourable notice of China's Viceroy, Li Hongzhang. However, he was not to receive official recognition from the authorities for another nine years.

But on the tour of the provinces he had made good connections with such major British firms as Jardine Matheson, and it was they who showed him how to set up as a trader. And nowhere could he have found trading more fruitful than the region he was so familiar with – Inner Mongolia. He knew its vast deserts, its mountain ranges, its nomadic peoples, its chief trading commodity, wool – the wool of the Bactrian camel.

*At this point I'll take the liberty of throwing in my own six-penn'orth of knowledge on China's wool trade. Anyone raised in Tientsin's Concessions is bound to remember the traffic flow of two-wheeled carts loaded with wool bales drawn by teams of coolies or mules or combined teams of both, heading for the hydraulic presses or screening, washing, and combing machines of Liddell Bros, Wilson & Co, Collins & Co, etc. It was common knowledge that wool was the mainstay of Tientsin's export trade, and never mind its source: Tibet, Mongolia, Ningshia, Kansu, it was all top quality, but the most prized was the lengthy gossamer undercoat of the Bactrian camel from Mongolia. At the time when the British Empire was at its zenith, the "British Warm" made from Mongolian camel wool was the coat of choice of the officer class. I can personally vouch for its protection against the frigid temperatures of the northern China plain, for I was once a proud non-officer owner of a British Warm.*



On Taku Road, coolies hauling their heavy load.

Paul prospered so well in his new line of endeavour that in only a year he was in a position to marry and settle down. His relationship with the Scheuts came into play and they brought to his attention one Catherine Li, a postulant teaching nun at a convent orphanage. Their courtship was brief. She accepted his proposal, and they married in 1873. Their children came in quick succession. By 1881 they had a thriving family of six: four daughters, a pair of whom were twins, and two sons.

That same year, the Ministers of Russia and China put their signatures to the Treaty of St Petersburg in which for the first and only time a foreign power was forced to relinquish territory it had wrested from China, in this case Russia's hold on the Ili River Valley, the stretch of land that had once acted as China's entrepot for the passage of goods on the ancient Silk Road. With Russian Customs officials now gone, it fell upon China to implement its own Customs service. Li Hongzhang wanted the very best man to head it up, and he needed no telling that the man to fill that position was the Belgian, Paul Spingaerd.



Here is a map of the border region between Chinese and Russian Turkestan that I drew for Nina Gmirkin, fellow student at TGS, who spent her early adolescence in Urumchi.

No doubt the offer to take up the reins of China's Land Customs (as distinct from Marine Customs headed by Sir Robert Hart in Peking) appealed to Splingaerd, for next we know he and his family pulled up stakes at their Inner Mongolia trading post and travelled at torturous pace along the camel track to far distant Suzhou (nowadays known as Jiuquan), the fortress town at the western extremity of the Great Wall and the starting point of the Hehsi Corridor of the fabulous Silk Road. The incorruptible Paul Splingaerd soon proving his worth was raised to the position of Mandarin. Over the next fourteen years Mandarin Splingaerd served China with distinction. Then in 1894 Viceroy Li requested that he take on new duties which required his presence in Urumchi, the capital of Sinkiang Province. His responsibilities there are not recorded but it is easy to guess that they were of a political nature, the Province sitting on a powder keg with Russia showing signs of wanting back across the border to the Ili River Valley, and the largest ethnic group, the Uighurs, who were not Han Chinese but of Turkic origin, threatening to declare their independence, the Chinese Moslems of the region having already risen in bloody revolt. So, before embarking on his journey across the Gobi to Urumchi, Mandarin Splingaerd despatched his family to the safety of Shanghai.

*Fifty years on i.e. in the late 1920s, the same dangerous conditions prevailed in Sinkiang except that now it was not Imperial Russia wanting back into the Ili River Valley but the Bolsheviks, and not content to wait, they sent their death squads across the border. In fear of their lives, White Russians on the Chinese side of the border sought ways to get out. A schoolmate of mine at Tientsin Grammar School, Harry Bryantzeff Rose, authored an article for the school's magazine, "The Grammarian," telling how his family had crossed into China proper by camel caravan. Another Urumchi family, Mrs Gmirkin and her daughter Nina and sons Leonard and Vasia also escaped to Tientsin where the children too became fellow students at TGS. But their tale had a tragic twist to it, Mr Gmirkin sacrificed himself so that his family might get away.*



In TGS schoolyard: Harry, Desmond, and Leonard

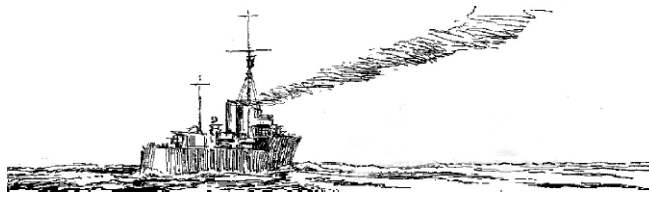
Only after a single year in Urumchi, accomplishing what had been requested of him by Viceroy Li, Splingaerd himself headed for Shanghai. In her book, Anne Megowan gives an account of the family reunion, which she illustrates with a splendid and rare photograph of that singular event.



Paul, now no longer under Viceroy Li's direct orders, still had more to give China. After a failed attempt by Belgian engineers to win the contract for building and operating a railroad connecting Peking to the major Yangtze river port of Hankow, he joined the negotiating team and through his superior expertise in creating bids that would best catch China's eye, Belgium won the contract against stiff opposition from rivals Britain, Russia, and the United States.

Further honours now befell Paul both from his grateful Belgian monarch and from Li Hongzhang who saw to it that he was raised to the highest rank of Mandarin as identified by a ruby button attached to the crown of his formal Mandarin cap.

So amongst the Foreign Devils attaining the highest rank of Mandarin we can include Robert Hart and Paul Splingaerd. In retrospect, how could this not seem anomalous at a time when Europeans had reached the height of their land grabbing in China? Surely Westerners could not expect to continue as lords and masters in their concessions under the protection of their special treaty rights! Surely they knew they faced ouster and the record of their 80 year hegemony wiped clean! It could only be a matter of when.



One can say that the event that marked their ouster occurred in 1948 when Britain resorted to her age old and well proven practice of sending a boat up the river, in this case *HMS Amethyst* which raced up the Yangtze to quell some disturbance or other. Rather than knuckle down, the Chinese reacted with force, and it was only through sheer luck that His Majesty's sloop was able to fight its way back to open sea. Soon after followed the Korean War, a bloody conflict by any standard, when China took on the might of the United States, the British Empire, and their European allies, and fought them to a standstill.

Soon, foreigners were indeed being ousted. Where there had once been over a hundred thousand of them in Shanghai, Tientsin, Peking and other Treaty Ports there were now only a few dozen individuals. What did remain was the evidence of their hundred year presence in China, the office towers along Shanghai's Bund, the banks and trading houses on Tientsin's Victoria Road, and cemeteries thick with foreign graves.

In London there appeared a notice in the press put out by the Peoples' Republic stating that cemeteries in the various port cities were being emptied and that if upon receipt of a request giving particulars of a grave site and the fee for its disinterment, the remains would be duly despatched to the requestor. I thought of my father's grave, shown here at Shanghai's Bubbling Well Road Cemetery, but knowing also that I could never be sure whether any remains I received were actually his, I put the matter aside.



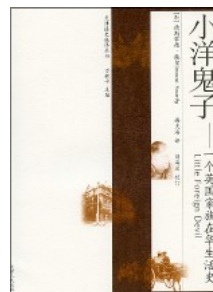
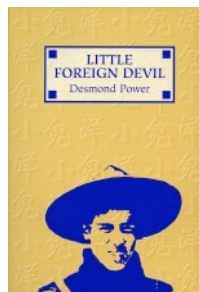


I was not given the opportunity to change my mind, for soon this is what the cemetery looked like when it was turned into a Peoples' Park, all graves, crypts, monuments, and mausoleums gone. The only reminder of its former stateliness was the lovely boulevard of trees, now hugely overgrown, that ran from the entrance way on Bubbling Well Road to the chapel and office standing at the centre of the hallowed ground.



I needed no further reminder that the foreigner was anathema in China's eye when in 1967 fierce anti-foreign riots broke out in Peking's British Legation. Everyone expected Mao's legions to march on Hong Kong, but they stopped short of that, and resorted instead to vilifying Britain and the West. They spread word that it was the Foreigner who introduced opium into China that Foreigners were criminals, and those who purported friendship with China the worst kind of hypocrite.

For decades I continued holding this to be China's view of the West. And even when I was there in 1984 I kept alert for signs of antagonism. But I encountered none. At least on the surface none showed. Rather, I met with smiles and friendly rejoinders to my 1920s Mandarin. And that gave me the impetus to proceed with the idea that had been pressing on me, which was to write about the place of my upbringing. After much interruption including such obstacles as trying my hand with a novel, my biography *Little Foreign Devil* came out. Its audience was the Old China Hand and his or her descendants now spread far and wide across the globe. It never occurred to me that anyone in mainland China might have any interest in the work. So how astonished was I when one of the largest publishing houses in Tientsin sounded me out for the book's Chinese language rights. I made a few minor changes to their publishing contract following which they translated and published the work. Its cover is shown here alongside my English version's.



However, it did occur to me that my acceptance by the Chinese was due only to my being such a small-fry bit player during the time of the foreign overlordship. For sure the major players, especially those who had been favourites of the Imperial Government, including Mandarins Hart and Spingaerd, were to remain ostracized, their names eradicated from the nation's scriptures.

Wrong, wrong, wrong! How could I be so wrong! In 2009, in the city of Lanchow, Kansu Province, the nation celebrated the 100th anniversary of the construction of the first iron bridge to span the Yellow River, that wild river also known as *China's Sorrow* for the frequency with which it overflowed its banks sweeping away crossings, dykes, escapement canals, and catastrophically inundating vast tracts of the land. That the iron bridge being the first of the man made controls attempted through the ages to withstand the raging waters, its anniversary was to be treated as a major national event. Anyone who attended the 2008 Peking Olympics or watched the spectacle on TV is aware that the Chinese have more than enough know-how to produce the spectacular. And they showed what they could do at Lanchow with their massed drums and orchestras and flags and bunting and glorious fireworks displays.



Never mind that this colourful poster marking the occasion names the bridge Zhong Shan (a common epithet for the Republic of China's founding Father, Dr Sun Yat Sen), locals of Lanchow have all along called it and continue to call it the Spingaerd Bridge. And to their honour the celebration's organizers also let it be known that it was the Belgian Mandarin Paul Spingaerd who not only masterminded the project, but also carried out the difficult task of raising funds for it. And even though he died while the bridge was still under construction and a German engineering firm was called in to complete the work, the present Government of Kansu heaped honours on the Spingaerd name by sending out invitations to all his descendants they could reach. We show here a photo of eight of the invitation's recipients who were able to attend. Each is displaying a testimonial of honorary citizenship of the City of Lanchow granted by the Government in appreciation of Paul Spingaerd's historic achievement.



From left to right the descendants are: Gerald Keet of Thailand, Denis Keet of Malaysia, John Keet of London, Alan and Mrs Alan Keet of Singapore, Anne Megowan of Los Angeles, Frank Keet of Perth, and Angela Cox Elliott of Vancouver.

What an eye-opener for me the celebrations at Lanchow as told by Anne Megowan in her book! And cannot I say the same for the gems of knowledge in Nora Waln's book and Lin Yu Tang's and Juliet Bredon's? Even when a youngster books fired my imagination. I devoured all of my brothers' Zane Grey and wanted more. Not as often as I would have liked, my mother took me to the British Municipal Library which seemed always to be bathed in such eerie silence that I thought we were in the Holy of Holies. When the time came for her to register me as a borrower, I think the first book I chose was *Treasure Island*.

Here is the library building as I remember it, standing within the rich flower gardens of Victoria Park, only a stone's throw from the west side of Gordon Hall .



## Author's Comments

I offer apologies to my readers for sometimes using the English spelling of Chinese names according to their historical transliteration, namely, Peking, Tientsin, Hongkong, and sometimes according to the traditional Wade-Giles method: Kansu, Lunghua, Weih-sien, and sometimes in Pin Yin, the official method of present day China: Li Hongzhan, Zhongshan. Xiao Yang Guizi. It was not laziness on my part for not enforcing the spelling throughout to conform to a single method, rather I thought my audience, being Old China Hands, might be more familiar with the mixed spelling in use during their time.

## Acknowledgements

And I wish to record here my appreciation for the generous use of the material accorded me by friends and contacts.

John Seddon of West Vancouver, BC, for the sketch appearing on Page 1 that was created by his father Arthur Ernest Seddon while an inmate in Pootung Internment Camp.

Ron Davie of West Vancouver, BC, also an inmate of Pootung, for use of his photo of Pootung Camp's Red Tower building on Page 2.

Wikimedia Free Press for Sir Robert Hart's portrait on Page 4.

Charlie Wolter of Eugene OR for the photo of Renée Spingaerd on Page 8.

Anne Spingaerd Megowan of Los Angeles CA for permission to use information from her book *The Belgian Mandarin*, and to show the book's cover on Page 9 as well as the photos she obtained while in Lanzhou from *Gansu Daily Pictures* on Page 14.

Angela Spingaerd Cox Elliott for her emails describing her visit to Lanzhou and for the use of the photo of Father de Jaegher, her father George, and Dr Guy Chan on Page 7.

Tianjin Peoples' Publishing House for showing their cover of *Xiao Yang Guizi* (Little Foreign Devil) on Page 13.

Greg Leck of Bangor, PA, for use of his 1929 photograph of Tientsin Municipal Library on Page 15.