

Bunker, Eng and Chang ^[1]

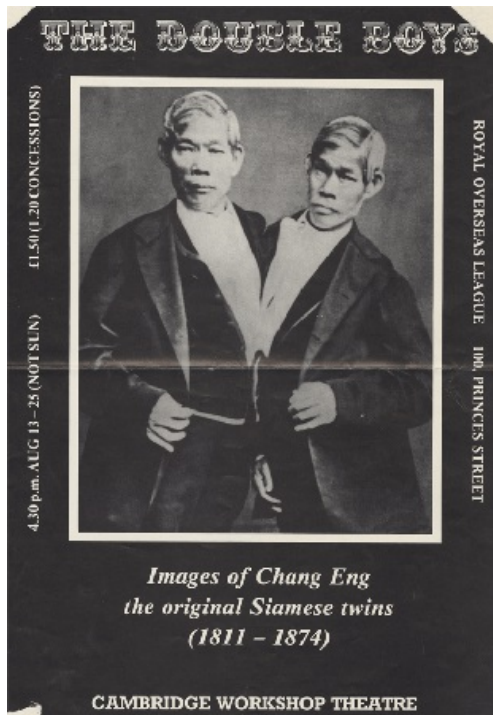
Bunker, Eng and Chang

by Darryl Traywick, 1979; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, February 2023

See also: [Bunker, Chang & Eng \(from Tar Heel Junior Historian\)](#)^[2]

May 1811–17 Jan. 1874

See also: [Millie-Christine McKoy](#) ^[3]



Chang and Eng Bunker. Courtesy of NC Archives.

^[4]Eng and Chang Bunker, the first conjoined (formerly known as Siamese) twins to receive world-wide attention, were born in the fishing village of Mekong, Siam (now Thailand), to unidentified parentage. Their nationality became the antiquated name for the birth defect in which two persons are physically joined together. Eng and Chang, unlike some pairs of conjoined twins, were physically able and had no disabilities except for a thick but pliable band of flesh connecting them at the chest. During their childhood the band became stretched enough to allow them to stand side by side with relative freedom of movement. The condition initially caused alarm and consternation among the villagers, some of whom feared the extraordinary birth as a harbinger of doom. Because of a determined mother and their own adaptability, the two boys grew up as normally as possible, even raising ducks to help support their family, and were gradually accepted by their community.

In April 1829, the twins met Scottish trader, Robert Hunter, and a New England sea captain, Abel Coffin, who persuaded the twins to go abroad with them. They arrived in Boston in August of that year, having acquired a working knowledge of English on the voyage. During the following eight years, they toured the United States and Europe, first under the auspices of Hunter and Coffin and later with P. T. Barnum. They drew large crowds wherever they went, performing feats of strength and dexterity. They also caused considerable stir among the medical profession, whose members never tired of conducting tests on them and speculating on the cause of and solution to their disability.

Eng and Chang, in their mid-twenties, gave up their original plans of returning to Siam. They decided to become naturalized American citizens, to break with Barnum, and to conduct their own shows. Upon learning that a surname was one of the requirements for naturalization, they accepted the suggestion of a bystander, Fred Bunker, that they use his name.

Touring on their own, the twins acquired considerable wealth but grew weary of life on the road. At the suggestion of [Dr. James C. Calloway](#) ^[5] of Wilkesboro, who met Eng and Chang in New York, they included Wilkesboro in their itinerary. They arrived there on June 7, 1837 and found the quiet little community and surrounding countryside much to their liking. Within two years they stopped touring and opened a general store in Traphill, a nearby community. They also bought some land and began raising corn and hogs.

Shortly after settling in Traphill, Eng and Chang became friends with two sisters, Adelaide and Sarah Yates. When it became apparent that a romantic relationship was developing among them, the community was outraged. Nevertheless,

they were married April 13, 1843, Eng to Sarah and Chang to Adelaide. Eng and Sarah had ten children, while Chang and Adelaide had twelve. A boy and girl of Chang and Adelaide, were born deaf and speech disabled. None of the other Bunker children were born with observable disabilities.

As their families grew, the twins found it necessary to establish separate residences. On March 1, 1845, they moved to nearby Surry County ^[6], where the twins purchased 650 acres. They built two houses about a mile apart on the same tract of land. The families of each of the twins stayed at their respective houses, while Eng and Chang took turns visiting every three days. They followed this pattern for the rest of their lives. The Bunker families' estates and homes were maintained by



Adelaide Bunker and Sarah Bunker married the twins. Courtesy of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Library, Southern Historical

the labor Collection.

^[7]of enslaved people. Eng and Chang are enumerated as the purchasers and enslavers of at least 18 people ^[8] until Emancipation in 1865.

The Bunker's statuses as enslavers politically aligned them to the cause Confederacy before and during the Civil War. During the Civil War, Chang and Eng's conjoined bodies became artistic and political symbols for the divided American nation. The motif of the "Siamese Twin" was often used to represent warring factions within political camps. Due to their disability, the twins could not fight in the war. Eng was drafted for the Union Army but could not serve. Their sons fought for the Confederacy.

After the Civil War and the Emancipation of enslaved laborers, Chang and Eng Bunker struggled financially. During the war, the majority of their assets went to the Confederacy and its cause. Additionally, Chang and Eng were now unable to profit from enslaved people and their labor as a result, their plantation was far less profitable. To recoup their fortune, they reluctantly decided to rejoin Barnum and tour once again. No longer having the exuberance of youth, they bolstered their spirits with the hope that while touring in Europe they could find a doctor who would separate them. Chang had become dissipated from drinking too much, and was losing his health; consequently, they were becoming irritable toward each other. Unfortunately, no doctor would touch them. They returned home in 1871, having accumulated money but having lost the last hope of separation, which had become the most important thing in their lives.

On the voyage across the Atlantic, Chang suffered a stroke and partial paralysis. He recovered partially, but from that time his health began to decline inexorably. It is remarkable that their families managed to endure the strain as well as they apparently did, considering the increasing severity and frequency of the twins' fights. On January 12, 1874, Chang was



Home of Chang and Eng Bunker. Courtesy of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

stricken with severe bronchitis, accompanied by chest pains. Library, Southern Historical Collection.

^[9]The condition grew worse, and he died in his sleep in the early morning of January 17th. Although there was nothing organically wrong with Eng, he was horrified upon waking to find his twin dead, thinking that he would soon follow: they had always regarded themselves as one, signing their names "Chang Eng," rather than "Chang and Eng." A doctor was summoned to

try to perform a desperate operation, but Eng died before he arrived. An autopsy conducted in Philadelphia led doctors to conclude that while Chang had died of a cerebral clot brought on by the previous stroke, complicated by pneumonia, Eng had actually died of fright. A partial examination of the connecting band, limited by the family's wish that it not be cut from the front, revealed that their lives were connected by a "quite distinct extra hepatic tract" and that an artery and some nerve connections ran between them; thus, Eng may have suffered from loss of blood from Chang's dying body.

They were buried in a common grave in the White Plains Baptist Church cemetery in Surry County. They were survived by their wives and all but one of their children.

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NC LIVE resources [19]

Resources in libraries [20] [via WorldCat]

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