

SLOW  
DOWN

# Siamese Twins Exhibit

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**E**ng and **C**hang were born in the village of Meklong, Siam (now Thailand), on May 11, 1811, to Chinese parents. For their entire lives, the twins were connected at the chest by a cartilaginous band of flesh.

The two boys shared relatively normal childhoods in Siam—running, swimming, and playing with other children in their village. They helped support their family by gathering and selling duck eggs. Although their mother had nine children, all except Eng and Chang, a brother, and a sister died in cholera epidemics. Their father died when they were eight years old.

When Siam's King Rama III first heard about the twins, he feared that it was a bad omen, but the widespread interest in them eventually inspired the King to have the boys brought to his court in Bangkok for an appearance. When the twins were fourteen, they were schooled in appropriate behavior and then taken to the palace with their mother and sister to meet the King.

At the age of sixteen, the boys were once again summoned by the King—this time to be part of a diplomatic mission to Cochin, India. They traveled from their village back to Bangkok and then on to Cochin. After each trip, the twins came home with valuable gifts, which they sold, and then used the proceeds to further their family's duck egg business.

The trips spurred Eng and Chang's desires to continue traveling. On April 1, 1829, at the age of 18, Eng and Chang left Siam with the approval of their mother and the King. They traveled across the Pacific Ocean with British merchant Robert Hunter and an American sea captain, Abel Coffin.



*Eng and Chang posing with 18 of their children, and Grace Gates, the slave given to Eng and Sallie as a wedding present when they married in 1843.*

to spend time with them. They were examined by the most famous physicians both to analyze their conditions and to validate their conjoined state. By 1832, having fulfilled all the obligations of their contracts, Eng and Chang, who felt they were being compensated unfairly, declared their independence from their agents. Also in this year, they became acquainted with Fred and William Bunker while in New York. They became American citizens in 1839, and in honor of these close friends, they began



*Chang and Eng, the Siamese Twins, 1830. Huntarian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons, London, England*

The twins earned money for themselves and their agents by making appearances throughout the United States, Canada, Central America, Cuba, and across the Atlantic in Europe.

During their extensive travels, Eng and Chang became enormously popular celebrities. They also became more independent. They were tutored by their managers to help them become more knowledgeable and entertaining for those who could afford

using the surname Bunker in 1840.

In the late 1830s, at the invitation of a physician friend, Dr. James Calloway, Eng and Chang traveled to Wilkes County, North Carolina, for a hunting and fishing vacation to take a break from making appearances. They had amassed a considerable amount of money while on their own. After several months in Wilkes County they decided to settle there. A short time later, at the wedding of their friend Dr. Charles Harris, they met the Yates sisters. They built a home and married sisters Adelaide and Sarah Yates on April 13, 1843. The two families produced twenty-two children.

Eng and Chang moved to Mount Airy in 1845 seeking better and more prosperous farmland and the best possible education for their children. They were successful farmers and good members of the community. In addition to farming, they bought and sold land for profit and lent money to their

friends charging a little interest. In 1857 they built a second home and began their system of three days in one house followed by three days in the other—with each brother being the master in his own home. They observed this routine without exception until they died on January 17, 1874, at the age of 62.

Eng and Chang were loyal to the Whig party and the Confederate cause, each had a son who fought in the Civil War. They also opened their homes to Confederate soldiers who were traveling through the area.

Eng and Chang's bodies were autopsied at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia and then later buried together in the front yard of Chang's home. Sarah died in 1892 and was buried in an



*White Plains Baptist Church, Mount Airy, NC.*

unmarked grave on her and Eng's property, where many of the family's children and slaves were also buried. Adelaide died in 1917, forty-three years after the deaths of Eng and Chang. She had joined the White Plains Baptist Church and wished to be buried in the church's cemetery. Eng and Chang's bodies were moved from Adelaide and Chang's front yard and were buried together next to Adelaide's grave at the church, where all three remain.

Eng and Chang were fond of music and enjoyed playing the flute. They enjoyed reading poetry and romances. Alexander Pope was their favorite author along with William Shakespeare, Lord Byron, and others. They read to their families and to each other. Eng and Chang were the first Buddhists to enter this country. They brought with them a palm leaf manuscript - a Siamese Buddhist text - the first ever to reach the shores of America. Mark Twain wrote an essay about them in 1868. They were among the most famous people in the world during their lives and afterward. Because of them, the word Siamese is now synonymous with conjoined.

For these reasons and many more, Eng and Chang Bunker and their amazing story continue to fascinate the public and be of great interest to researchers in fields ranging from world history and cultures, religion, interracial marriage, Asians in America, medical research, medical ethics, and much more. They have hundreds of descendants who continue to host a reunion the last weekend in July each year here in Mount Airy.



*Double Headstone located in the cemetery behind White Plains Baptist Church.*



336.786.7998 | [www.surryarts.org](http://www.surryarts.org) | [antonia@surryarts.org](mailto:antonia@surryarts.org)

