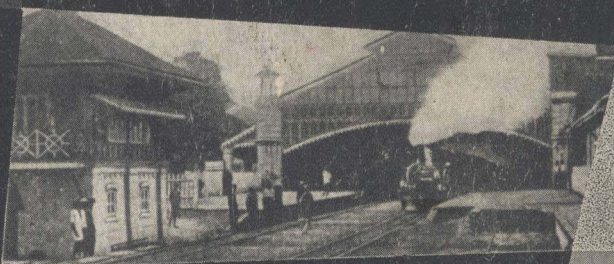


J. M. GULLICK



# The Story of

Early



Kuala Lumpur



THE STORY  
OF  
EARLY KUALA LUMPUR



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J. M. GULLICK



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## PREFACE

This book has been written to tell the story of the rise of Kuala Lumpur from a small and remote trading post to the period when it became the capital of the newly established Federated Malay States.

During much of this period from 1857 to 1895 the history of Kuala Lumpur is inseparable from the story of its greatest Capitan China, Yap Ah Loy. I have made full use of the late S. M. Middlebrook's biography of Yap Ah Loy (published as Part 2 of Volume XXIV (1951) of the Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society). I am grateful to the Hon. Editor of the Journal for permission to use this and other sources published in the Journal. For the Malay history the main source has been Sir Richard Winstedt's History of Selangor (JMBRAS XII (1934) Part 3). Material about the ordinary life of Kuala Lumpur in the latter part of this book has come mainly from the Selangor Journal and from the records of the Selangor Government. Mr. Ng Seo Buck's article in Part 1 of Volume I of the Journal of the Malayan Historical Society (1954) and Mrs. Stratton Brown's reminiscences published in the *Malay Mail* in July, 1954, and broadcast over Radio Malaya in 1955 have also provided some period detail.

For the illustrations and maps I am mainly indebted to Dr. C. A. Gibson-Hill. He has allowed me to use some of his own superb photographs and also some older photographs which he found for the Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society. Acknowledgement is also

made with thanks to the Director of the Raffles Museum, the Yap Clan Association and to Raja Ayoub bin Raja Haji Bot, M.C.S. for permission to reproduce photographs and portraits.

J. M. GULLICK

Kuala Lumpur,  
September 1955



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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE COMING OF THE MINERS

ONE day in 1857 a flotilla of boats could be seen setting off from Pengkalan Batu—the Stone Jetty—which is now called Klang Town. It was a party of eighty-seven Chinese tin-miners setting off on an expedition up the Klang River into the interior of Selangor.

The boats used for these journeys would take ten men each and a load of provisions—or thirty men without any cargo. For this trip they were loaded with sacks of rice, jars of coconut oil, with tobacco, gambier, spirits and opium in chests. There were hoes, axes and other tools, baskets for carrying earth. They took weapons for their protection—muskets, gunpowder, knives and spears. Each man too had his personal bundle or box containing his spare clothes and his few other possessions in the world.

Upstream they poled their clumsy boats along the silent, empty reaches of the winding Klang River. On either side jungle and swamp came down to the water's edge. The gravel of the river bottom showed clear in the shallows through the green water.

Here and there along the river bank they came on a small settlement of a few flimsy houses. These were villages of traders and miners, mostly Sumatrans—but a few of them Chinese. The houses stood at the water's edge, built of jungle poles with roofs of atap. The sparse population of that empty country clustered along the river bank because the river was the only highway through the jungle, the main road into the heart of Selangor.

Up the river, past Bukit Kuda, Damansara and Petaling, went the boats, laboriously poled against the stream at the

rate of five to ten miles a day. The men in shorts, a blanket or some other tunic, their heads shaded by the broad-brimmed Chinese wicker hat, took their turn at poling. During their spells of rest they squatted on the cargo and chattered to each other. They were in good spirits. They had little idea where they were going but it was an adventure into a new country. Miners, mainly Sumatran immigrants, had been there before them. But few had stayed long or made a success of their venture.

In one of the leading boats travelled the Chinese headman of the expedition and the Malay agent of the chief of Klang. They knew better the history of mining in the Klang valley. Twenty years before, the old Sultan Mohamed had risked and lost a large sum of money in trying to open up mines along this river. It was borrowed money and the Sultan had been hard pressed to keep out of the hands of his creditors among the merchants in Malacca. His nephew, Raja Juma'at, had taken over responsibility for the old man's debts. In return the Sultan had given him a grant of the district of Lukut (near the modern Port Dickson) and he had become fantastically rich from the success of the mines of Lukut.

Now Lukut was paying its debt to Klang. Raja Juma'at himself was the mind who had planned the expedition on which they were now travelling. His brother, Raja Abdullah, had become chief of Klang a year or two before. The two brothers persuaded Chee Yam Chuan and Lim Say Hoe, merchants of Malacca, to risk more money in a search for the tin along the upper reaches of the Klang River. Thirty thousand dollars borrowed in Malacca was the mainspring of this venture.

After several days travelling up the river from Klang the miners in their boats came to the confluence of the Klang and Gombak Rivers. This place is now the heart of Kuala Lumpur. Then it was probably empty and deserted. At most there may have been a small cluster of

traders' houses. Beyond this river junction it was difficult to move the heavy boats when fully loaded, as the water of both rivers became too shallow. Here, then, the miners clambered ashore up the muddy banks, unloaded their stores and supplies, made them up into head-loads and moved off in Indian file into the jungle. A few miles farther on they came to the place which was later called Ampang (because of the miners' dams), on the outskirts of modern Kuala Lumpur. They began to prospect for tin.

The tin for which they sought was buried treasure and hard to find. Several feet below the surface there might be a layer of coarse black gravel or glistening sand, or even small nuggets. This was tin ore. But how to be sure of the place where the tin ore lay buried? Chinese miners, ever superstitious and strangers in the country, were glad to rely on the skill of Malay magicians (pawang). Malays had been mining for tin in a small way for centuries and might be presumed to have established relations with the genies of their country.

First, then, the magician, clad in the black tunic which only he might wear, instructed the miners in building an altar to the spirits. Then he prayed. In his prayers he stood with his left hand on his hip, meanwhile waving a long piece of white cloth in his right hand, calling upon each hantu or spirit by name. Next he walked slowly to and fro with a switch in his hand which served as a diviner's wand. From its vibration he knew the spot where the tin lay. There the miners dug a small pit or shaft down into the soil until they found the tin, if tin there was, at a depth of six or even ten feet. By the success of this test they knew that it was safe to begin mining.

Before starting to mine, however, they built themselves a single large dwelling-house—a "kongsi hut"—and they erected runnels to bring the flow of water which they needed to work their mine waterwheel. All this we shall describe in a later chapter. With these preparations

completed they began to open up their mine by enlarging their trial borehole. As they cleared the ground and dug down, the water collected in holes and hollows. There was their death. Mosquitoes multiplied and spread the germs of malaria—a sickness of which they knew neither the cause nor the cure, though it was familiar enough. Fever was always worst on a newly opened mine. So it was at Ampang. Each day several more men went down with fever, lay rambling in delirium for a day or two, and then died. Within a month of their arrival all but eighteen of the eighty-seven pioneers of Ampang were dead.

To Raja Abdullah at Klang this news was the signal for a renewed effort to obtain the tin which he now knew was within his reach. One hundred and fifty more men from Lukut, travelling light in five boats, came up the river to take the places and live on the supplies of those who were dead. As the mine became established the death-rate dropped. In time smelted tin came down the river and Raja Abdullah could send it to Malacca to pay his debts.

The prosperity of the new mines was the cause of a regular traffic along the Klang River. Boats came up the river with supplies for the mines and took back tin. The landing-point at the upstream end of the river route was on the bank of the Klang River where the modern Embankment now meets Old Market Square.

Traders came up from Lukut attracted by stories of the success of the mines. First of these traders to arrive was Hiu Siew. He brought with him as his partner a mild-tempered little man called "Ah Sze Keledok"—"Sweet Potato Ah Sze"—who had in the past been a prospector for tin in Selangor. While still at Lukut these two had had dealings with a Sumatran trader, Sutan Puasa, already at Ampang. Sutan Puasa persuaded them to try their luck at the new mines. So they came and set up a trading-store at the place where the supplies were landed from the boats for the last lap overland to the mines. They made a



clearing a little way back from the landing-place on the dry ground, perhaps on the line of what is now Cross Street. From their store a track ran down to the river bank. This was the beginning of Kuala Lumpur—in about 1858 or 1859.

## CHAPTER TWO

### YAP AH LOY ARRIVES IN KUALA LUMPUR

\* KUALA LUMPUR soon became a thriving trade settlement, sending supplies up to Ampang and sending tin back to Klang. Hiu Siew, the founder of the village, became its first headman. In those days a Chinese headman of an important village took care to be on good terms with the Malay chief of the district. As recognition of his position as headman the chief allowed him to have the title of Capitan China. With the help of his friend Sutan Puasa, Hiu Siew obtained recognition from the chief of Klang as the first Capitan China of Kuala Lumpur.

• In his work as headman Hiu Siew was assisted by a man called Liu Ngim Kong who had come from Lukut to join him in Kuala Lumpur. When Hiu Siew died in 1862 Liu Ngim Kong succeeded him as Capitan China or headman of Kuala Lumpur. The late Capitan's relatives naturally did not like the title and position going to an outsider. They were all the more dissatisfied because some of the property of Hiu Siew was taken over by Liu Ngim Kong. Disputes of this kind were common enough.

Liu Ngim Kong in his turn had need of an assistant, and so he sent for a young friend of his named Yap Ah Loy to join him in Kuala Lumpur. Yap Ah Loy is to be the main figure in our story. He had been born in 1837 in the Kwangtung Province, a Hakka Chinese of poor family. At the time when he grew up many young men were going abroad to foreign countries such as Malaya. The adventure began for Yap Ah Loy and others with promises of fortunes to be won. To Yap Ah Loy's village of T'am Shui in the prefecture