

How did the Ben & Mae Ong arrive in Gilbert?

Ben Ong was born in **May 17, 1912** (Canton, China)

Youngest of 3 children.

His dad was a well educated teacher. 1st Editor and Chief of Chinese Times.

He arrived in the US (though Angel Isl) when he was **18** (Sponsored by Wing F Ong, State Senator).

As Ben got off the ship and walking on the pier, met his dad for a brief time. That was the last time he said his dad. His dad was going back to China to be with his wife.

Ben work as a cook on the railroad for awhile.

Moved to Gilbert in 1936.

Work the Eddie and Edith Dong (which owned Liberty Market).

Mae Hoo Quong was born in **Feb 14,1922** (Loomis, Calif).

The middle of 9 children.

Grew up on a fruit farm.

Her dad was Fruit Farmer and Buddist priest.

How did they met?

Ben went to CA to look for a wife.

Ben and Mae were **married in 1941.**

They came back to live in Gilbert.

Joycelyn Marie Ong was born in **March 19, 1942** (Southside Hospital, Mesa)

Went through the Gilbert School System and graduated from GHS in 1959.

Benton Lim Ong was born in **October 25, 1946** (Southside Hospital, Mesa)

Went through the Gilbert School system and graduated from GHS in 1964.



How did Ben & Mae Ong acquire Liberty Market?

Dad worked as **clerk and butcher** for the Dongs.
The Dongs **opened Liberty Market on 9/15/1936 for $1,500.**
Purchased Liberty Market from the Dongs in **1943** (Worked for **7 years**).

Old Store

Half the size (south side of the center line).
Dirt parking lot (north side of center line).
Coke Cola painted the south was with their advertisement every couple of years.
Old **yellow truck** with "Liberty Market" painted on the doors that Dad used to deliver groceries .
Brickwall was rediscovered with Dave during the remodel for the restrauant.
Wooden floors (had to oil them).



Old picture of my Dad and sister Joycelyn **hangs near the bathrooms** of the current Liberty Mkt now (1945).









Old house

2 bdrm, 1 bath.
Wooden structure.
Built behind the store (where the patio is located now).
Painted white, then green (Mom liked green).











When did Liberty Market remodeled?

Remodel was complete in **1958.**

The plan was to **double the size** of the main store.

Build in **2 phases** (couldn't shut down and had to keep the old store operational).

1st phase – to build on the dirt parking lot.

2nd phase – to remodel the old store.

The **"Liberty Market" neon sign was designed by Mae.** It costed was around **$5000** in 1958.

Mom said the "i' with the dot didn't standout, So, she **designed it with a "star"** instead.

Only the **northside was neon to cut the cost.**

Southside was **painted** pink and green.

Streets

What is now Gilbert Rd was named **Main St.**

Gilbert Rd was **outside** the **downtown area.**

The North street was named **1st St.**

Liberty was on **1st and Main** (96 N Main).











By the side entrance, my dad's name and date was written on the cement. My name and age was next to his. It's still there.

GRAND OPENING SATURDAY



LIBERTY MARKET INVITES PUBLIC TO ATTEND OPENING

The new Liberty Market, owned by Ben and Mae Ong, will celebrate the completion of the new structure with a grand opening, on Saturday, May 24.

Free baskets of food will be given away at drawings held at 30 minute intervals throughout the day. There will be orchids for the ladies and ballons for the kiddies.

Free delicacies including ice cream cones, milk, coffee and pastries, will be served throughout the day.

This opening will culminate years of dreaming and planning for a new super-market by the Ongs.

They have been in the grocery business at the corner of Main St. and Second St. for the past 15 years.

The new store space is 50'X65' with a warehouse at the rear 25'X45'. Construction is of concrete block, with the entire front of plate glass on a low base of red brick. The same red brick is used in an outdoor corner planter.

The entire space is lighted by flourescent light, with indirect lighting in the canopy at the front of the building.

The interior is finished in a soft mint green, with the new islands and shelving in a harmonious shade.

A completely new market serving counter occupies a space at the rear, with the stair to the mezzanine glassed in office leading from this area.

The south wall space is devoted to shelving for canned goods, is a number of the center islands. The north and a portion of the west walls are devoted to cooled and frozen boxes where vegetables, frozen foods, dairy products etc. are displayed.

Mr. Ong will be assisted in the market department by two butchers. There will be six clerks on hand to help the patrons and to man the two checking stands on the day of the grand opening.

About THE GRAND OPENING of LIBERTY MARKET ON THE 24th of MAY 1958

Grand opening was on **May 24, 1958.**

Free baskets of food at a drawing every 30 minutes
Orchids for the ladies and balloons for the kids.
Ice cream, coffee, and pasteries were served to all.





Why does Liberty Market look so different that the other store fronts in Old Gilbert?

In mid-1950s, the Chamber of Commerce decided to **modernize** Gilbert.
Ben & Mae were the **first to remodel.**
Other merchants were reluctant to modernize their store because of cost.
Chamber of Commerce then decided to do **western front** because it was cheaper.

Gilbert's "Golden Age" started in 1958.

Start of building and remodeling.
Population started to grow.



number 2 pencil, Pink Pearl Eraser, Medium weight art pad, and "Sharpie" felt-tip pen (water proof marker).

The Chesley family was enroute to the LDS Second Ward church for the baptism of the infant son

on a bombing mission in a fighter-bomber over Vietnam. He received two Purple Hearts and a Bronze



PARTY TIME-Mae Ong, center right, was the gracious hostess last Friday afternoon at an Afternoon Tea Party for her many friends and customers that "helped build wonderful memories that will last a lifetime" during the years that she a Ben operated the Liberty Market here. On Mae's left are Sam and Mary Bromert, new owners of the market. (Gilbert News photo).

Liberty Market was **sold in 1981** to Sam and Mary Bromert. Ben and Mae owned Liberty Market for **38 years** (from 1943 until 1981).



(One of the last family pictures taken in 2005)

Where are the Ben & Mae Family?

Ben passed in **Feb 13, 2006 at the age of 93** in Gilbert. (1936-2006=70 yrs)
Mae passed in **Jan 30, 2012 at the age of 89** in Gilbert. (1941-2012=71 yrs)
Joycelyn lives in Arcadia, CA.
ASU, BA in Education and MBA.
Professor at Rio Hondo College in LA.
Retired.
Benton lives in Seattle, WA.
ASU, BS (Business) 1968.
Seattle University, MBA 1976.
Boeing 37 years, Technical Fellow in Advanced Computing Technologies.
Retired.



I consider Gilbert as my **hometown.** Everybody that I met from Gilbert, I consider them to be part of my **extended family.**



In closing:

Imagine Gilbert **without the water tower.**

Imagine Gilbert **without that Liberty Market neon sign.**

I think **Gilbert would look very different.**

Other Historical Artifacts

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How to find time for your SPOUSE PAGE 3

Kids give darndest OLYMPIC answers PAGE 6



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The passing of a pioneer

Liberty Market owner cared for community for decades

By David van den Berg
DAVID.VANDENBERG@ARIZONAREPUBLIC.COM

Funeral services are scheduled today for longtime Liberty Market owner Ben Ong.

Ong, 93, died peacefully in his Gilbert home Monday, said his son, Benton, who described his father as a true pioneer of Gilbert.

Ong and his wife, Mae, owned Liberty Market, one of the town's stalwart businesses that is still operating in the downtown Heritage District, from 1943 to 1981.

See MARKET page 2

Ben Ong services

A public viewing is scheduled for 3 to 5 p.m. today at the Falconer Funeral Home, 251 W. Juniper Ave., Gilbert. A public service is scheduled for 5 p.m. And as per Chinese tradition, a dinner gathering after the service will take place. It is planned for a restaurant in Chandler



Gilbert Historical Museum

Ben and Mae Ong sit with their children Joycelyn and Benton. The Ongs were longtime owners of Liberty Market in Gilbert, which they purchased in 1943.

OPENING DAY IN GILBERT

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...dvertise in the Gilbert Republic Call 480.385.7569.

MARKET Longtime store owner passes on

Continued from page 1

"He was probably one of the longer surviving pioneers that was here in Gilbert," Benton said. "He was here when they only had 800 people in town. He watched the area grow. They had a lot to do with the growing of Gilbert."

Fifteen years after purchasing the store from Eddie and Edith Dong, the Ongs doubled the size and modernized the store in 1958, Benton said.

For part of the time the Ong's owned Liberty Market, the store offered delivery service in what Benton called a "little yellow truck with Liberty Market on the side."

Both in the store and in the community, Benton said customers were taken care of.

"He always helped out a lot of people in the store," he said.

Ben Ong was a big sports fan, his son said. On Saturday afternoons, father and son would listen to Arizona State University football games on a Philco radio, Benton recalled.

Benton went with his father to Phoenix Giants minor league baseball games.

Ben Ong's sports watching also included his son's games. Benton competed in high school basketball and baseball and summer league baseball, and said his father was there to root him on.

"He never missed any of my games," he said.

Ben and Mae Ong were active in the community.

Mae worked as a reporter and a photographer for the *Gilbert Enterprise* newspaper from 1966 to 1968. Both Mae and Ben were members of the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, and Mae helped found the Gilbert Promotional Corp., which runs Gilbert Days.

Benton and his sister, Joycelyn, graduated from Arizona State. Both children were products of Gilbert public schools.

Ben Ong was born in China in 1912. He came to the United States in 1929 to Angel Island, near San Francisco, and worked as a railroad cook for about a year before coming to Phoenix, Mae Ong said.

He started work at Liberty Market in Gilbert in 1936 and returned to San Francisco in 1941 and married Mae. Two years later, they both came back to Gilbert and bought Liberty Market.

"He loved Gilbert so much," Mae said. "He loved that little store, and he loved the people."

Ong is survived by his wife, Mae; son, Benton; daughter, Joycelyn; Benton's wife, Wendee, and their sons Benton Jr. and Byron; and by Joycelyn's husband, Norman Sakata, and their sons Mitchell and Steven.



Gilbert Historical Museum

Ben and Mae Ong ran Liberty Market, shown here in a 1956 photo, from 1943 until 1981. Ben Ong passed away Monday.

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LIFE REMEMBERED

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

Ida Straus: "We have been together for 40 years, and we will not separate now."

Refusing a place on a lifeboat, Ida Straus chose to stay aboard the sinking Titanic with her husband, Isidor. They perished together when the "unsinkable" ship slipped below the surface in April 1912.

Source: Famous Last Words (Workman Publishing)

Sunday: History & People
Monday: Life Moments
Tuesday: Life Remembered
Wednesday: History & People
Thursday: Arizona Diary
Friday: Traffic Alerts
Saturday: Making a Difference

Market owner watched Gilbert grow

By David van den Berg
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

One of the key figures in Gilbert's history, long-time Liberty Market owner Ben Ong, saw it grow from 800 people when he first hit town in 1936 to its current estimated population of 178,100.

Ong, 93, died peacefully at home Feb. 13, according to his son, Benton, who described his father as a true pioneer of Gilbert.

Ong and his wife, Mae, owned the grocery store, which is still a downtown Gilbert fixture, from 1943 to 1981.

"He was probably one of the longer surviving pioneers that was here in Gilbert," Benton said. "He watched the area grow. They had a lot to do with the growing of Gilbert."

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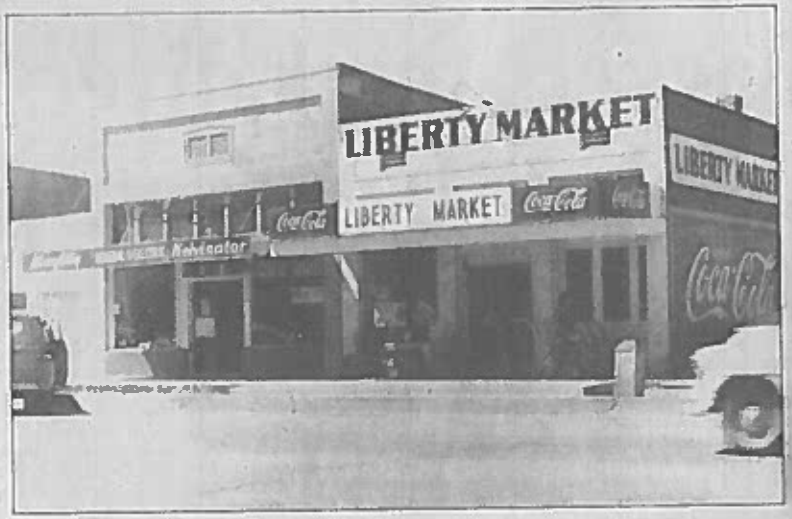
Ben and Mae Ong were active in the community.

Mae was a reporter and photographer for



GILBERT HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Ben and Mae Ong with children Joycelyn and Benton, owned the Liberty Market (right, in 1956) from 1943 to 1981. The market, at Gilbert Road and Page Avenue, was a fixture for the small town of Gilbert. Ben died this month.



from ASU. Both children were products of Gilbert public schools.

Ben Ong was born in China in 1912. He came to the United States in 1929 to Angel Island,

Two years later, they came to Gilbert and bought Liberty Market.

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A LIFE REMEMBERED

Liberty Market co-owner helped Gilbert grow

By John Stanley
The Republic | azcentral.com

Mae Hoo Ong came to Gilbert as a young bride in the early 1940s, when the dusty little farm town consisted of a little more than 800 people. Over the years, she developed one of Gilbert's most iconic businesses and saw her adopted hometown explode into a bustling community of nearly 210,000.


Mae Hoo Ong

Ong, who, with her husband, Ben, owned and operated Liberty Market for nearly four decades, died Jan. 30. She was 89.

"Everybody remembers her smile and how friendly she was," said her son, Benton "Benny" Ong. "My sister and I used to say that she took in a lot of strays, people who needed help or needed a job. She'd take people under her wing and help them out."

"She left a legacy," said Kayla Kolar, the executive director of the Gilbert Historical Museum. "Liberty Market is still Liberty Market and the neon sign out front that she designed still stands today. It's part of our history."

Ong was born on Feb. 14, 1922, in Sacramento but grew up in nearby Loomis. Along with her eight siblings, she spent much of her youth picking peaches, pears, plums, apricots, figs and grapes on her parents' 40-acre farm. Her father, according to Benton, was a Buddhist priest.

After graduating from Roosevelt High School in 1941, she married Ben F. Ong. It was an arranged marriage, Benton said, that lasted more than 64 years, until Ben's death in 2006.

Ben was born in China in 1912 and immigrated to the San Francisco area in the late 1920s. He worked as a clerk and butcher for Eddie and Edith Dong, who had opened Liberty Market on Sept. 15, 1936. The then-new building cost $1,500, according to Marji Scotten, a board member with the Gilbert Historical Society and longtime Gilbert resident.

In 1943, the Ongs purchased the tiny grocery store in downtown Gilbert. Today it is one of the town's oldest and most recognizable landmarks.


Ben F. Ong and his wife, Mae Hoo Ong, and their kids, Joycelyn and Benton, are shown in the late 1940s. The Ongs owned and operated Liberty Market in Gilbert for nearly four decades. ONG FAMILY

In a 2006 interview with *The Arizona Republic*, Mae recalled what a grind it was at first and how they struggled to make payments. Even then, though, the Ongs helped those in need.

"People could go in there and charge their groceries, and not with a credit card," Scotten said. "That's the way businesses did it in those days."

The Ongs persevered, paid off their mortgage and then took out a loan to renovate, remodel and expand the store, doubling its size, in 1958. That's when Mae designed the iconic neon "Liberty Market" sign, which still lights up the night in the town's Heritage District.

According to Gilbert restaurateur Joe Johnston, who bought Liberty Market in 2006, the sign originally cost around $5,000, an exorbitant sum in 1958. Trying to cut expenses as much as possible, Ong only used neon on the north side of the sign. The south side was just pink and green paint.

Johnston was adamant about keeping the sign when he converted the market into a restaurant.

"Liberty Market was part of my childhood and part of downtown Gilbert," he said. "It's one of the few buildings that have been the same. It's always been Liberty Market since Day One, so keeping that sign was kind of a big deal to us."

A LIFE REMEMBERED

A Life Remembered celebrates the lives of interesting people in Arizona who have recently passed away. To suggest someone, call Connie Sexton at 602-444-6843 or e-mail connie.sexton@arizonarepublic.com.

Montini 'Law & Order' and so on," he There were four other people beyond a reasonable doubt



(My 4th Grade Class – Teacher: Mrs Rose Divelbess)