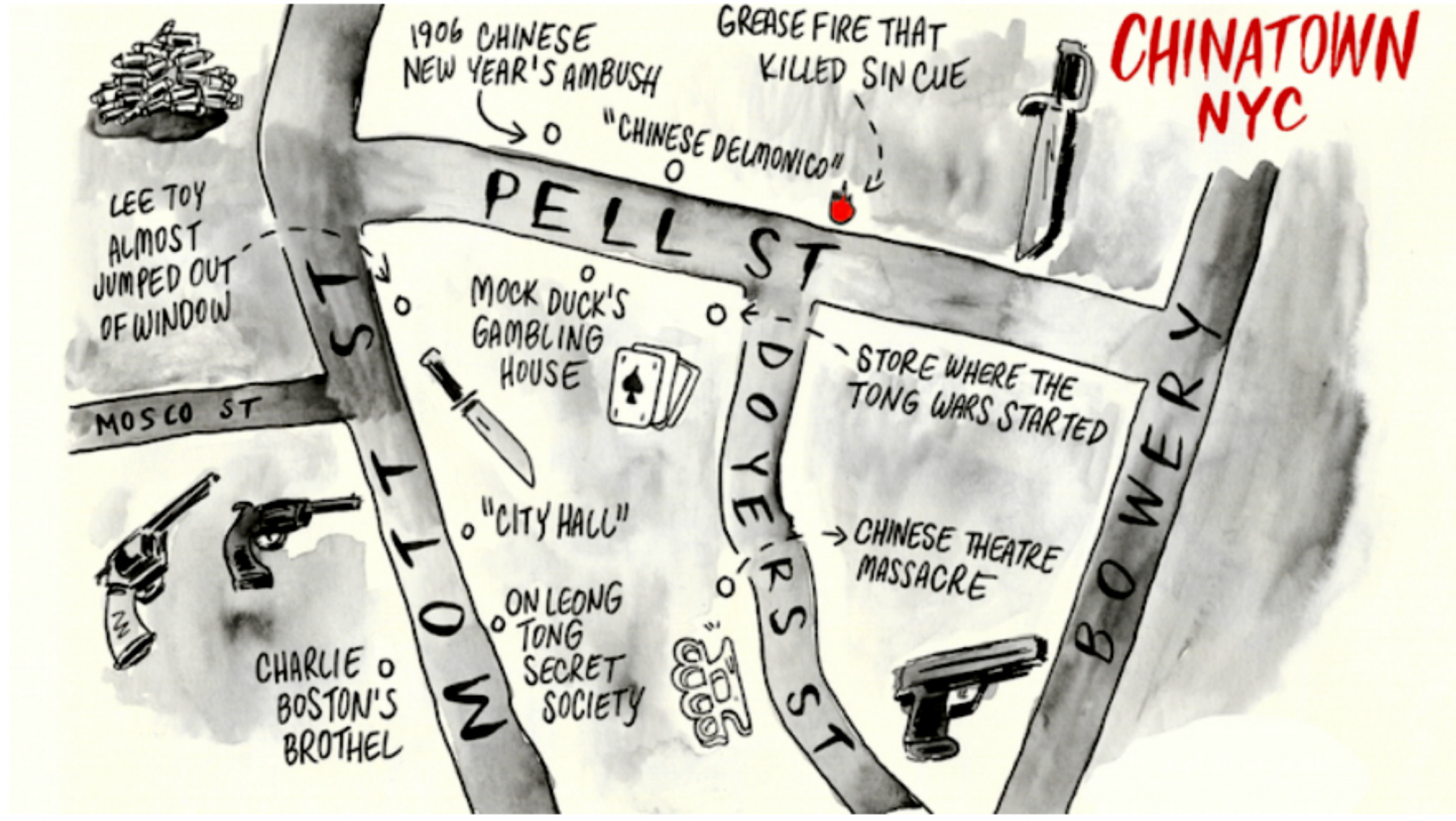


The Nasty, Little-known Turf Wars of Chinatown, NYC

By SCOTT D. SELIGMAN
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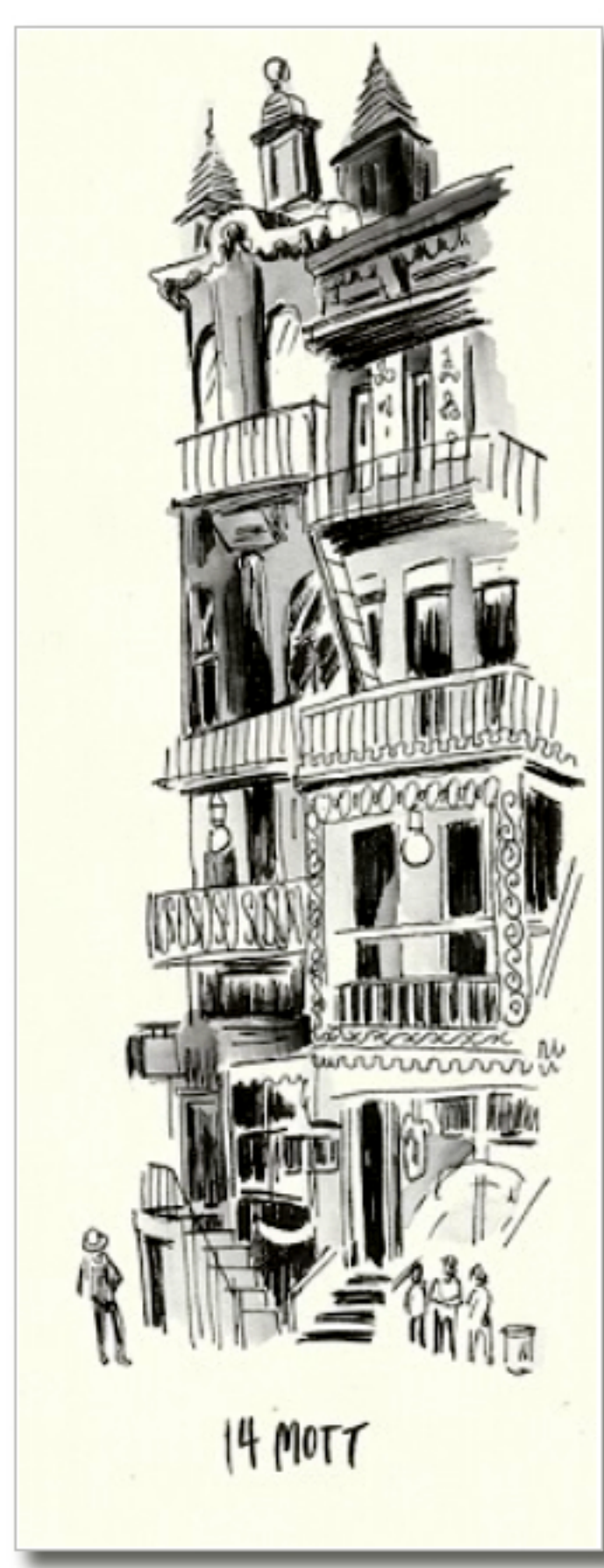
Illustrations throughout this piece are inspired by Scott D. Seligman's *Tong Wars* © Nathan Gelgud

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The heart of New York's Chinatown is exactly where it was a century ago, and many of its old buildings have compelling tales to tell. While the four celebrated tong wars fought in Chinatown ended in the 1930s, echoes of the battles remain. A quick walk through Chinatown today reveals some of those stories.

EDITOR'S NOTE:
Scott D. Seligman is a writer, a historian, a retired corporate executive and a career "China hand." He is the author of *Tong Wars: The Untold Story of Vice, Money and Murder in New York's Chinatown*. For Signature, and accompanied by illustrations from Nathan Gelgud, Scott walks us through the streets of crime-ridden Chinatown a century ago.

Take a stroll up Mott Street from Chatham Square.



Mott was considered the territory of the On Leong Tong, a secret society, and until 1921, 14 Mott was its headquarters.

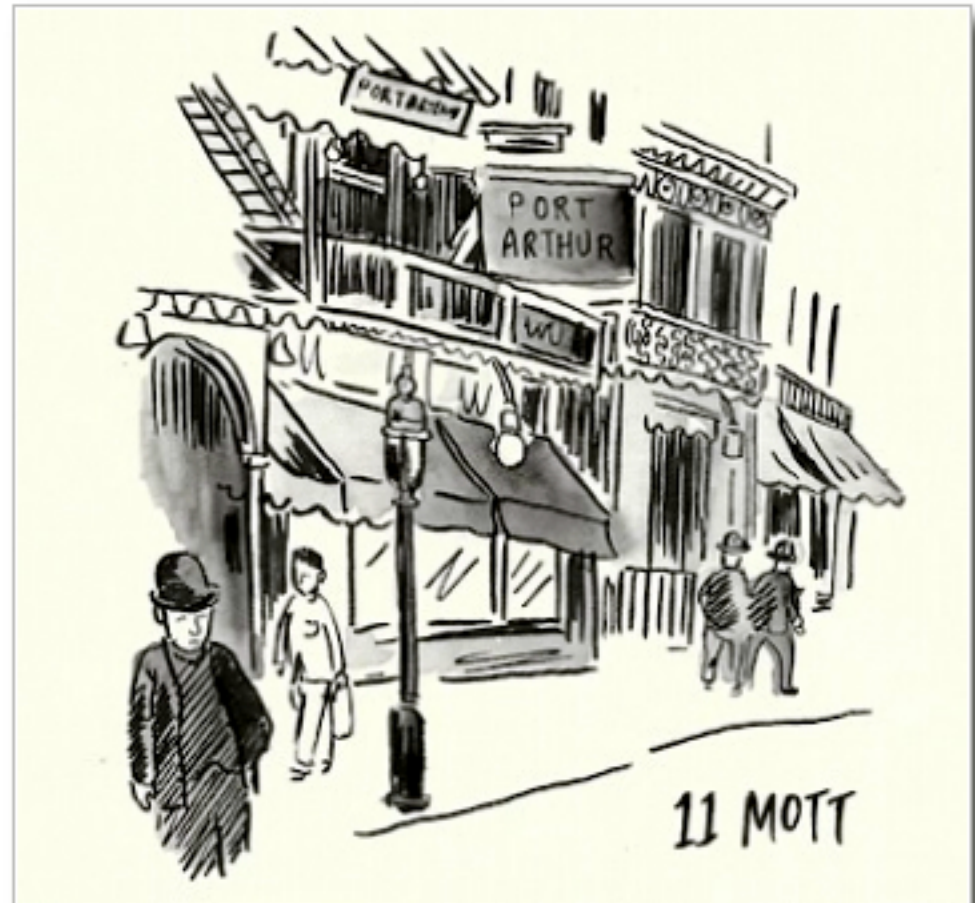
There Tom Lee, its head and the putative "mayor" of Chinatown, caucused with his lieutenants to plan attacks on the rival Hip Sing Tong. The Hip Sings actually tried to blow it up in 1912.

Next door at 16 Mott was Chinatown's "City Hall."

This became the home of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in the 1880s, and was also the site of the "Joss House," where the Chinese went to worship and seek divine intervention in a life event or good fortune for an evening of gambling.

Across the street at 11 Mott, Hip Sings planted a bomb in 1912 that narrowly missed blowing up "Big Lou" Hoa, then the On Leong president.

Upstairs was a well-known brothel run by On Leong drug lord Lee Quon Jung, a.k.a. "Charlie Boston," who served eighteen months in a federal penitentiary for running a nationwide opium smuggling syndicate.



Lee Toy, an On Leong fugitive wanted for the beating of a Hip Sing, nearly leapt out of an upstairs window at 28 Mott in 1894 when the Hip Sings ratted him out to the police.

They arrested him, but only grudgingly, because they were being paid off by the On Leongs.

Across the street at the Church of the Transfiguration, Hip Sing Ing Mow was shot at point blank range in 1908 as an Assistant District Attorney looked on. His crime was that he was suspected of being a police informant.

Now take a right on Pell Street, which was generally understood to be Hip Sing territory.

32 Pell was the site of a 1906 Chinese New Year's Eve ambush. The Hip Sings wanted to clean up unfinished business before a truce came into force in the lunar new year. Their gunmen mowed down two On Leongs.



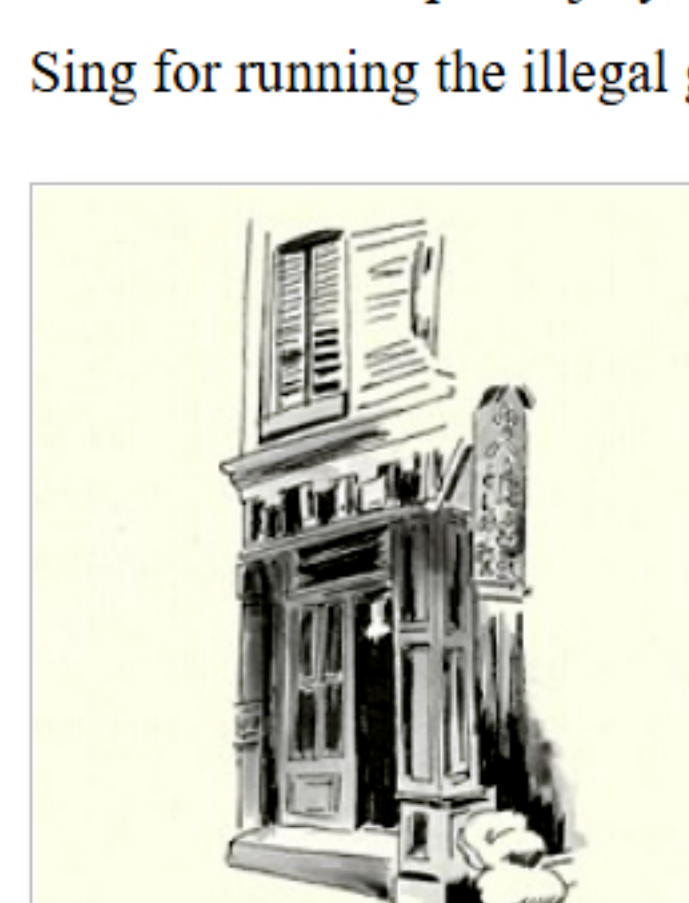
24 Pell used to be the site of Mon Lay Won, a.k.a. the "Chinese Delmonico" restaurant, and it's where Ko Low, the national president of the Hip Sing Tong, met his maker in 1922.

He was gunned down as he emerged onto Pell Street on the arms of two women. Ko Low's death was the result of a personal grudge, however, and the rival On Leongs were exonerated.

At an earlier structure on the site of 21 Pell, the On Leongs did their best to decapitate the Hip Sing Tong. Gunmen invaded a gambling house run by Hip Sing heavyweight Mock Duck and executed the tong's president and vice president.



Mock Duck escaped injury, but served a term at Sing Sing for running the illegal games.



The store at 19 Pell, at the corner of Doyers Street, is more or less where the first of the four tong wars got its start in 1901.

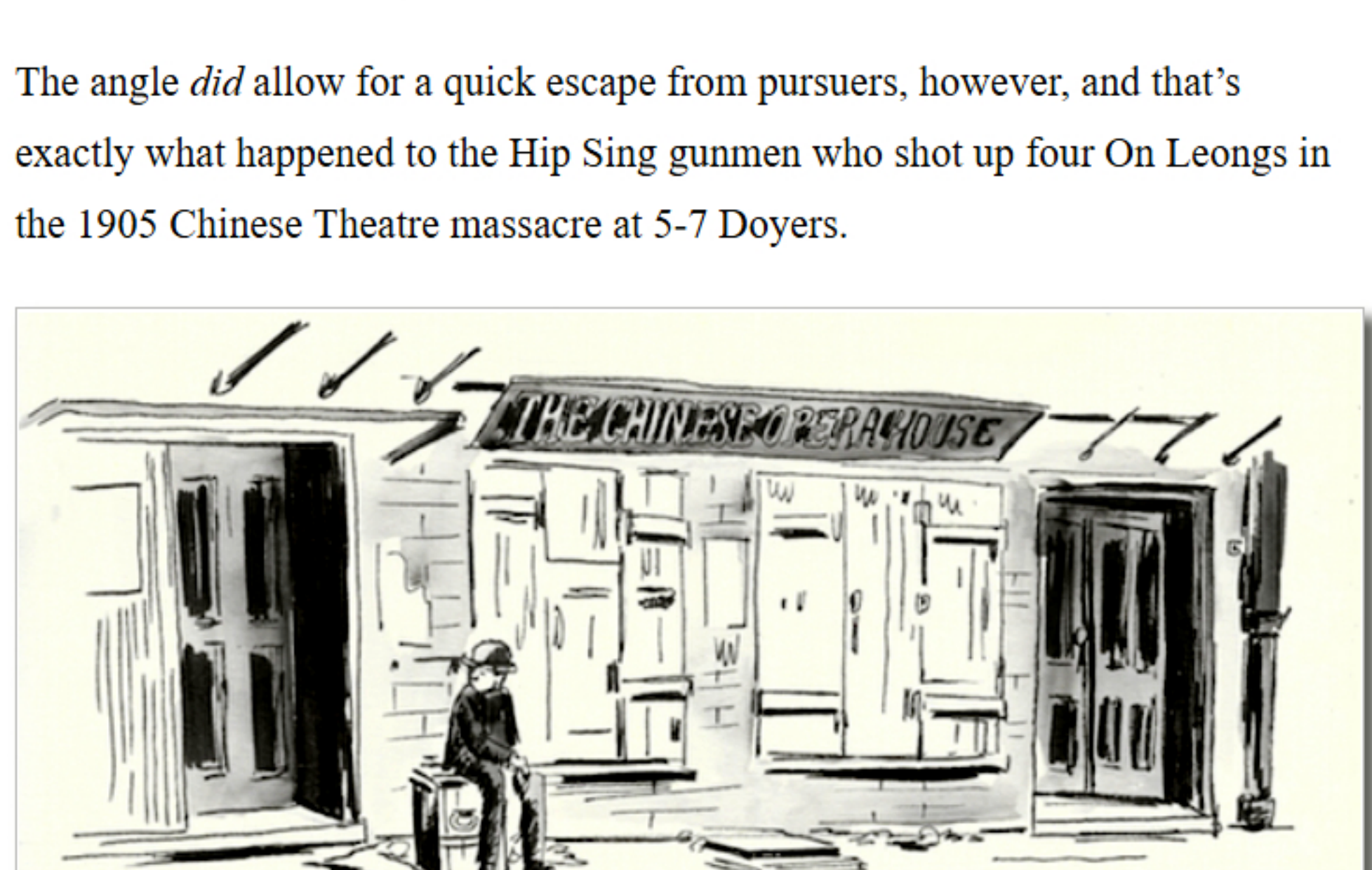
Gunmen were waiting across the street for Sin Cue, who had played a role in the murder of a Hip Sing, and his friend Ah Fee, who was slated to testify as an alibi witness, to emerge from the shop. The two were pursued up Pell Street and Ah Fee was killed in the fray.

They didn't get Sin Cue then, but he didn't have to wait long. He was eliminated later that month across the street at 16 Pell, victim of a suspicious grease fire at the Hung Far Low Restaurant. The authorities believed the fire had been an accident, but the On Leongs knew better.

Now head down Doyers Street, considered neutral territory. (But that didn't mean bad things didn't happen there.)

The crook in Doyers Street, which obstructs the view from one end to the other, has traditionally been known as the "Bloody Angle" of Chinatown. But the popular image of two tongs lining up and staging "rumbles" there à la *Gangs of New York* is a false one; that just doesn't seem to have occurred.

The angle *did* allow for a quick escape from pursuers, however, and that's exactly what happened to the Hip Sing gunmen who shot up four On Leongs in the 1905 Chinese Theatre massacre at 5-7 Doyers.



It was a surprise attack launched during a performance, and it evoked vicious retaliation from the On Leongs.

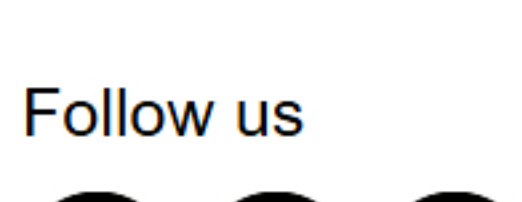
It's actually quite remarkable, in a city of constant change, that Chinatown today still stands precisely where it was back then, and that many of the very buildings in which the early residents lived and toiled, and tong men fought and died, remain to this day.

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