



HERITAGE
CALGARY

Chinatown Walking Tour



Canton Block (1911)
Page 3

Cover image: Canton Block, ca. 1910.
[City of Calgary Corporate Records,
Archives]

Chinatown Sites

- 2 Centre Street Bridge
- 2 Chinese National League (Ho Lem Block)
- 3 Chinese Masonic Hall
- 3 Canton Block
- 4 Canton Block Extension
- 4 Chinese National League Building
- 5 Jade Palace Restaurant Sign
- 5 Linda Mae Block
- 6 Chinese United Church
- 6 Chinese Cultural Centre
- 7 Sien Lok Park

Calgary's Chinatown neighbourhood is situated in the northern section of downtown Calgary, along Centre Street.

Originally, Chinatown was closer to today's Stephen Avenue, where it was set up by 50 Chinese pioneers looking for work. When the Great Fire of 1886 occurred, the original Chinatown was lost. The current location of Calgary's Chinatown was determined in 1910, but very nearly did not get built. A delegation of Chinese Calgarians led by Ho Lem, went to the city to discuss relocating as the new CPR station would need the second iteration of Chinatown demolished.

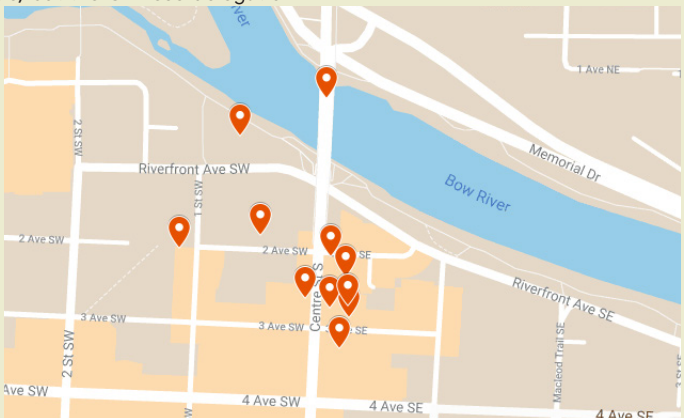
It took a long and hard fought battle, but the Chinese delegation

was able to convince the city to allow them to develop a lasting Chinatown.

Since its establishment in 1910, Calgary's now permanent Chinatown has grown to support a diverse community in the face of adversity. In the 1960s, as the freeway and car culture became the preferred means of transportation, the City put forward a plan to build a freeway through downtown called the Downtown East-West Penetrator. The plan would have demolished much of Chinatown and Eau Claire, but thankfully failed thanks to an organized community organization named Sien Lok, the namesake for Sien Lok Park.

Calgary's Chinatown

There is no starting point on this tour. Pick a building to start on the map and explore!



Centre Street Bridge 118 Riverfront AV SE - Beaux Arts - 1915

The Centre Street Bridge is historically significant as the second oldest bridge to span the Bow River in Calgary. Completed in 1916, it replaced the original Centre Street Bridge which dated from 1907. The Centre Street Bridge has long served as one of the main links between downtown Calgary and areas north of the Bow River. For much of its early history the bridge also accommodated two street car lines in addition to automobile and pedestrian traffic.



The Centre Street Bridge is also architecturally significant as the most elaborate and ornamental bridge to span the Bow River in Calgary. Its

graceful arched spans, classical balustrades, cantilevered balconies, and kiosks contribute to the beauty of the concrete bridge. The paired kiosks at each end of the bridge are surmounted with massive lion sculptures, which symbolize the British Empire, and are modeled upon those at Trafalgar Square.

Chinese National League (Ho Lem Block) 109 2 AV SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1911



The 1911 Chinese National League (Ho Lem Block) is a two-storey brick building situated between two similar sized buildings along 2 AV SE in Calgary's Chinatown community. The building is a rectangular design in the Edwardian Commercial style and features a smooth red brick façade with symmetrically placed upper windows, a central curved entranceway, pressed metal cornices.

The Ho Lem Block is associated with the beginning of the Chinese National League movement in Alberta. The Chinese Nationalist League is one of the oldest

and most important Chinese institutions, which dates back to 1911 when Chinese revolutionary leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen visited Calgary as a part of his North American fundraising tour. Dr. Sun Yat-sen became the first provisional president of the Chinese republic in 1912.

Chinese Masonic Hall 107 2 AV SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1912

The Chinese Masonic Hall is significant as one of the early buildings constructed by Chinese immigrant owners to establish Calgary's current Chinatown. After the Chinese were pushed from two other locations by economic and social pressures, several Chinese businessmen built the Canton Block, where they could be owners not tenants. Other Chinese-owned buildings went up nearby, enabling Chinatown to take root.

This building was the first headquarters of the Chinese Freemasons' Calgary branch, founded in 1911. The Chinese Freemasons started as a secret fraternal society promoting the overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty in China. Later less involved in Chinese affairs, the organization provided aid, social space, and activities for members as well as support for local arts groups and community projects.



Canton Block 1209 9 AV SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1911

Built in 1910-11, the Canton Block is the first building constructed and owned by members of Calgary's Chinese community. Once the Canadian Northern Railway announced in June 1910 that it was planning a route and a hotel impacting the second Chinatown, property values in that area escalated. As a result, landlords sold their properties, displacing Chinese tenants.



The red brick façade, storefront doorways with large display windows, upper floor symmetrical bays of rectangular windows, and a raised parapet with a pressed metal cornice along the width of the building are representative of a chosen western architectural style for the first building in Chinatown.

Canton Block Extension

218 Centre ST SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1911

Canton Block Extension is a brick-clad, two-and one-half storey, commercial and residential building located on the east side of Centre Street in Calgary's Chinatown. The Edwardian Commercial-style building features pressed-metal cornices and a single storefront with access to the upper storeys through a narrow door at the south end of the building.



The Canton Block is an important landmark for the community as it is Chinatown's first building owned and built in the community by Chinese residents. The Chinese community was established in the 1880s with settlement that occurred after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. A small Chinese community was first established on the corner of Centre Street and 9th Avenue East, but

moved to 10th Avenue and 1st Street SW circa 1901. They were forced to relocate again after 1910 when the Canadian Pacific Railway proposed construction of a hotel in the area.

Chinese National League Building

110 3 AV SE - Modern Classical - 1954

The 1953-54 Chinese National League Hall is a two-storey, concrete-block institutional building faced in ornamental Tyndall stone. This symmetrical, flat-roofed, Modern Classical-style building displays a centred front entryway with tall transom flanked by large, vertical 3-light windows and shallow, classical pilasters.

As one of Chinatown's notable mid-century buildings, the hall is also symbolic of the community's Post-War development following the repeal of the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act in 1946.



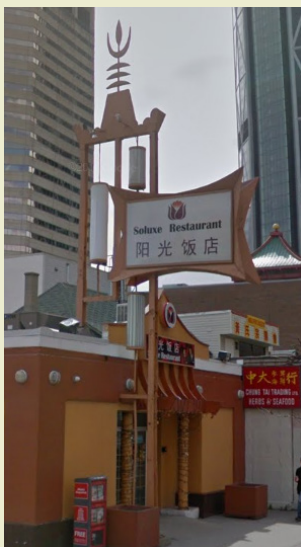
The Calgary Chapter dates to 1911 when Chinese revolutionary leader Dr Sun Yat-sen was hosted in Calgary during a North American fundraising tour for his Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT), which aimed to depose the Manchu dynasty.

Jade Palace Restaurant Sign

103 3 AV SE - Modern - 1960

The Jade Palace Restaurant business sign exemplifies the surge in popularity of Chinatown restaurants after WWII, reflecting more favourable attitudes by non-Chinese towards Chinatown and people of Chinese descent.

The sign is a fine and rare example of a Googie sign tower in inner-city Calgary, notable for combining Googie with Chinese-influenced elements: lanterns, a profile of a Chinese roofline, and a finial that evokes (but is not) a Chinese symbol. Chinatown's post-WWII restaurants were decked out to be attractive, "exotic" destinations for Westerners, with "oriental" features.



Linda Mae Block

233 Centre ST SW - Commercial - 1950

The 1950 Linda Mae Block is a two-storey, flat-roofed, concrete-block Post-war Commercial-style building. The upper façade has streamlined Moderne architectural detailing like the curved corner, smooth stucco wall, and coping along the roofline. The lower storefront level has a prominent corner entry and large storefront windows with kneewall below; non-original red brick veneer covers the original corrugated brick on the piers and kneewall.

The Linda Mae Block has person value for its associations with long-time owners Arline and CH Poon, community leaders known for their significant contributions towards preserving Calgary's Chinatown and traditional Chinese culture. The Poons built the commercial block, named for one of their daughters,

where they operated their well-known enterprises: the Linda Mae Café, Linda Mae gift shop, and Lotus Gardens restaurant. In 1913 CH Poon (1899-1971) became the first of his extended family to immigrate to Canada.



Chinese United Church 124 2 AV SW- Gothic Revival - 1953

The present Chinese United Church building, one of Chinatown's first post-World War II buildings, was constructed in 1953-1954 on a site immediately west of the Mission building.

The architect was Maxwell Bates, and the contractor was a man named Reed or Reid. Following the pattern set by the original Mission, the Chinese United Church accommodated both a sanctuary and a gymnasium.

The Chinese United Church has remained a notable institution in Calgary's Chinatown. The Church board retained ownership of the Mission building and converted it into a rooming house for students and senior citizens. It was demolished in the 1970s and replaced by Oi Kwan Place, a senior citizens' home.



Chinese Cultural Centre 197 1 ST SW - Postmodern - 1992

The 1992 Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre is a prominently located landmark building in Chinatown. The rectangular, four-storey building includes Classical Chinese architectural design principles. The scored concrete and stucco façade is highlighted with the central pagoda-style roof feature topped with a gold knob and covered in layered blue tiles with exposed



multi-colour concrete supports. Modeled after the Hall of Prayers of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, the interior features a circular highly artistic Great Hall with three concentric floors, four ornamented columns and a detailed ceramic tile ceiling with several rows of circular transparent window blocks. Da qing Square provides a gathering place on the west side of the building.

Sien Lok Park

100 Riverfront AV SW - Leisure - 1982

Sien Lok Park is symbolic of the survival and flourishing of both Calgary's Chinatown and the downtown riverbank, which avoided destruction during the 1960s era of downtown urban renewal and 'parkway' projects that threatened the existence of Chinatowns across Canada. In Calgary this began with the 1963-64 Downtown Redevelopment Plan proposed by the CPR and City to move the railway to the south bank of the Bow River, and build a parallel 8-lane parkway.

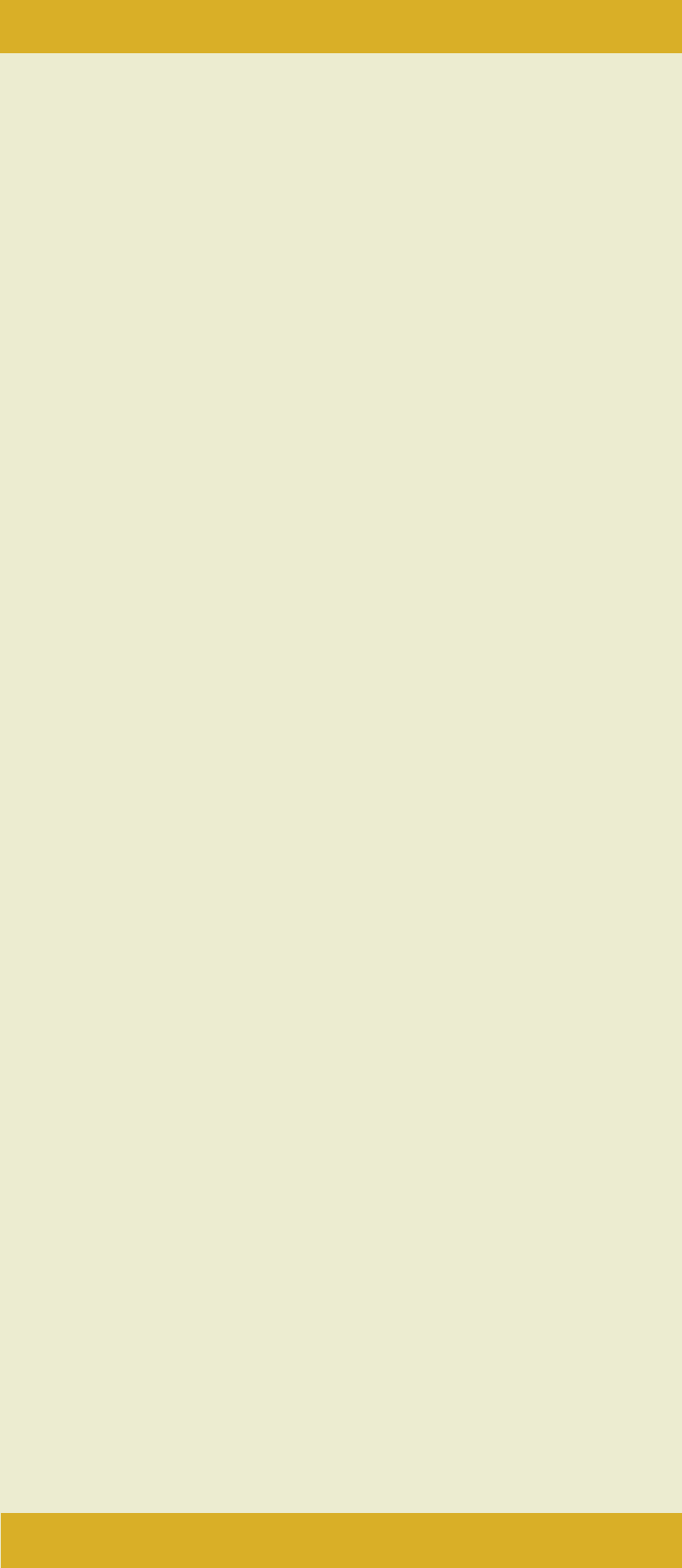
The park possesses institution value for its association with Sien Lok, its namesake, and other Chinese societies for over five decades. During revitalization in the 1970s-80s, Sien Lok played a role in the riverbank areas' transition from light industrial to recreational use.

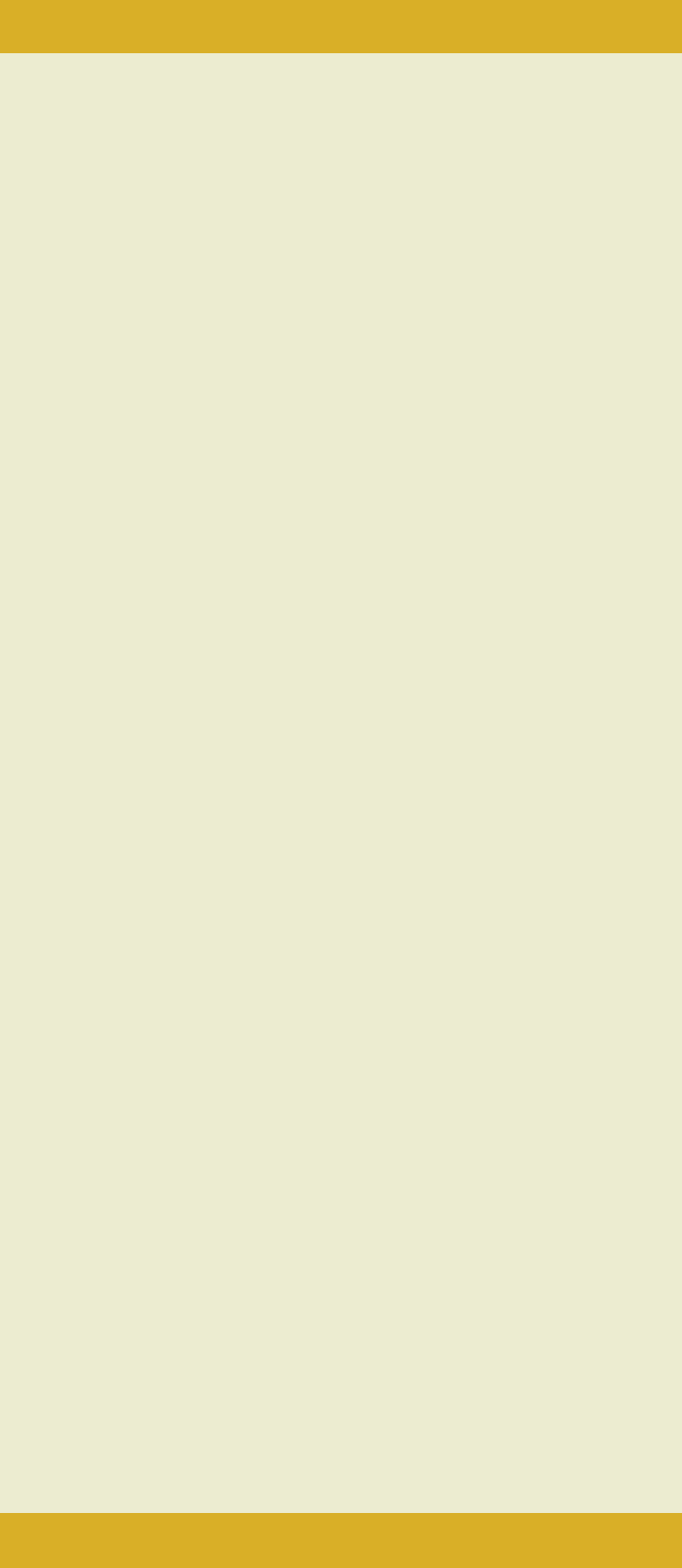


photo from mapio.net/pic/p-49701387

The park possesses institution value for its association with Sien Lok, its namesake, and other Chinese societies for over five decades. During revitalization in the 1970s-80s, Sien Lok played a role in the riverbank areas' transition from light industrial to recreational use. A 1976 Chinatown Design Brief recommended that the City acquire land near the river for green space, and a core group including Ho Lem successfully lobbied The City to purchase the land and begin work in 1979. Sien Lok raised funds for amenities like the terrace and pagoda entirely from some 700 individual donors. The park's red-brick entry arch and red metal benches and lampposts reflected the renewal of Chinatown's public realm.

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Heritage Calgary is a charitable Civic Partner of the City of Calgary that identifies, preserves, and promotes Calgary's diverse heritage for future generations. We believe heritage is a dynamic process by which identity is experienced, interpreted, and represented and we take pride in working with Calgarians to honour the fabric that we are all a part of.

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