

Calgary



# Chinatown

## Historical Context Paper

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# About

The Chinatown Context Paper was prepared in 2018-2019 by Marilyn Williams, Jeanie Gartly, and Kerri Rubman. The Paper forms part of a Chinatown Heritage Project that also includes a Places of Interest List (POIL), the evaluation of a number of properties from the POIL for Calgary's *Inventory of Evaluated Historic Resources*, and collaboration with the Calgary Heritage Authority's project "Heritage Buildings Could Talk."

## Context Paper

A **Context Paper** is a powerful starting point for a community heritage project. It lays the groundwork for future heritage activities by identifying the significant cultural and historical themes, cultural practices, institutions, events, and people associated with the area. This paper characterizes how the community has been shaped by its geography, natural and pre-contact history, town planning influences, land use and transportation patterns, and trends in building styles and design. It also provides a thematic framework that covers important historic associations; themes; activities; economic, social, and political movements; and significant eras of development<sup>1</sup>. This document will serve as a reference and framework for evaluating the community's heritage resources and selecting its places of interest and heritage values. Finally, it can inform activities in other disciplines such as the preparation of area redevelopment plans, cultural plans, and community projects. This context paper draws on a wide range of historic sources, secondary sources, and references that are documented in the bibliography.

## Places of Interest List

A **Places of Interest List (POIL)** is a list of existing properties that may possess heritage value. That is, they may represent significant individuals, landmarks, themes (including significant eras), activities, cultural practices, events, institutions, or architectural styles and design, or possess other types of heritage values for the city and/or the community. A wide variety of places have been considered to represent Chinatown: commercial, residential, and institutional buildings; green spaces; streetscapes of architectural interest; and structures such as historic signs and bridges. As the context paper was being developed, places of interest were identified and prioritized for research and potential inclusion on the City of Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources. Both the context paper and POIL were informed by site visits to Chinatown during their preparation.

## Site Evaluations and Statements of Significance

**Individual site evaluations and Statements of Significance (SOS)** identify the heritage value, character-defining elements, and integrity of a single resource and follow the City of Calgary's evaluation processes. The research at this stage is much more in-depth than the context paper—both for the property and for its historic associations—and draws on primary sources such as building permits, early tax assessments, directories, and historic title searches.

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<sup>1</sup> In developing the major themes for this community, the local, provincial, and national thematic frameworks are also considered.



# Historic Themes

This context paper opens with a description of the Chinatown community, and following that, each section represents a significant theme in its development. Chinatown is distinct from all other Calgary neighbourhoods in that it was shaped—like all original Chinatowns across Canada—by onerous federal immigration regulation. Four key themes capture the story of the Chinese community surmounting seemingly insurmountable obstacles, with the help of their community leaders and traditional Chinese organizations, to establish a cultural “home village”:

## **Chinatown 1885–1910 in Calgary’s Frontier and Early Settlement: Developing in the Shadow of the Head Tax**

1885–1901: The First Chinatown and the Smallpox Riot

1901–1909: The Second Chinatown Location

## **Our Current Chinatown 1910–1922: Its Origins and through the First World War and Post-war Recession**

## **Dark Times in Chinatown 1923–1946: The Exclusion Era, the 1930s Depression, the Second World War**

## **Post-war Chinatown 1947–1966: Decline in the Era of Selective Entry**

The early evolution of the land before it became Chinatown, and how it was shaped by nature and early use, is addressed in these theme/subthemes:

## **Chinatown Pre-1875: Nature and First Peoples on the Banks of the Bow**

## **The Early Settlement of Chinatown’s Present Location 1885–1910**

Two themes capture the solidarity and spirit displayed to survive urban renewal and roads infrastructure proposals—the demise of many of other Canadian Chinatowns at the time—and, arising from that, the collaboration and planning that created an enlivened and revitalized Chinatown:

## **1967–1974: Preservation and Promotion of Chinatown**

## **1975–Early 1990s: Chinatown’s Revitalization**

The final three themes cross all eras of Chinatown’s development:

## **Merchants and Businesses of Chinatown**

In addition to an effective community voice for redevelopment, and the essential role of kinship and benevolent associations, the third factor critical to the survival of Canadian Chinatowns was ensuring a strong commercial sector. This theme explores the unique and specialized businesses found in Chinatown, Chinese traditional cultural practices such as Chinese medicine and cuisine, and the trend from the mid-20th century to also cater to non-Chinese visitors.

## **Community Life: Chinatown as a Social, Recreational, Cultural, and Spiritual Home Village**

This theme discusses cultural and intellectual life, new organizations for women and families, and the development of spiritual and educational institutions as well as eldercare and social housing.

## **Chinatown’s Architecture and Streetscapes**

This theme describes how the community displays its evolution of architecture and public places over time, including the significant changes in the built environment as a result of Chinatown’s revitalization period. It is important to note that, in addition to style or design, many of the buildings discussed in this section also possess heritage value due to their historic associations and themes.

The listed historic themes each have heritage value in their own right. As well, other heritage values may be associated with each section. Some values are overarching and apply to many or all themes such as the symbolic value associated with the resilience and solidarity of Calgary's Chinese community that enabled it to overcome obstacles, and the institutional value of the traditional kinship organizations. These "Heritage Value Statements" are indicated at the end of each section. A context paper ties the historical associations and significance to *place* and explains which aspects of the built form display or are evidence of certain heritage values. Therefore, each theme includes the relevant "Character-Defining Elements" and/or potential historic resources that are associated with it. Where material evidence no longer remains, potential interpretive sites and subjects have been identified for future interpretive plaques, signage, artwork, or murals.

Throughout this paper, "insert" sections also describe certain significant people, locations, and institutions in additional detail. These sections—indicated by a red border—provide further context and discussion than is possible in the main text.



# Description

Chinatown consists of approximately 49 acres bounded mainly by the Bow River on the north, Macleod Trail on the east, mainly 2 Street SW on the west, and 3 Avenue SW to the south, with a bump-out extending one block south along Centre Street South and two blocks east across 4 Avenue SE. The community boundaries also include the eastern portion of Prince's Island.

While in easy walking distance of the downtown core, Chinatown is separated from it by large buildings unrelated to Chinatown that create visual as well as cultural borders. In particular, a substantial government building (Harry Hays Building, 1974–78) now fills two blocks on the east. To the west and south are mainly high-rise office blocks. While these surrounding corporate and government offices restrict Chinatown physically, they also may aid it economically by providing nearby customers for its restaurants and services.

The major thoroughfare of Centre Street South goes through the middle of Chinatown. On one hand, this divides the neighbourhood in two. On the other hand, it also provides easy access to it, as a much-used north–south car and bus route. A key transportation feature is the Centre Street Bridge. This landmark Beaux-Arts structure provides a grand entrance into Chinatown from the north. The current bridge dates from 1916. It replaced a privately owned toll bridge, built in 1907 by land developers and investors to promote development north of the river. The nearest major east–west thoroughfares are 4 and 5 Avenues. The nearest C-Train station (Centre Street) is three blocks south. A concentration of Chinese businesses has also developed along Centre Street north of the Bow River, essentially creating a northern extension of Chinatown.



Chinatown boundaries, 2018. [City of Calgary]

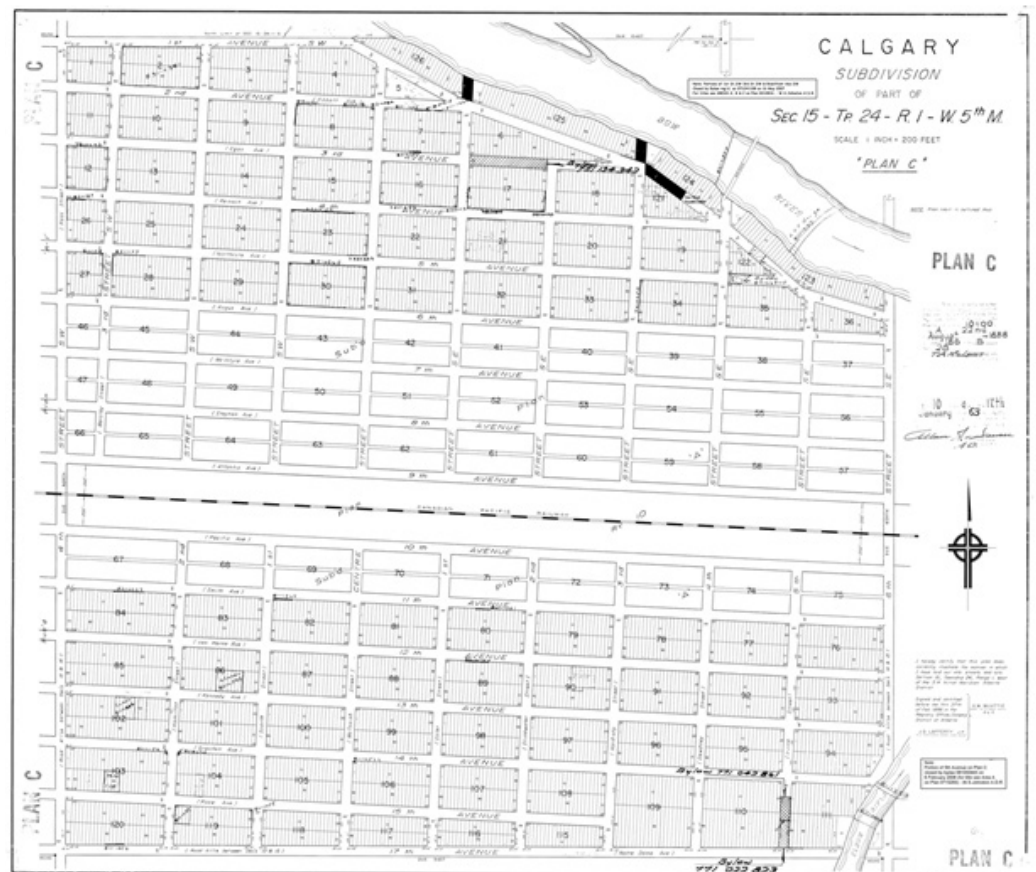


3 AV SE from Centre Street South, terminating at the 1974–78 Harry Hays Building (background), 2018. [City of Calgary]



Centre Street South, from 3 AV S, and the Centre Street Bridge, 2018. [City of Calgary]





Subdivision plan for "Plan C" also showing location of "Plan A" dated 22 August 1888. [Government of Alberta Spatial Information System]

Using the Alberta Township Survey System, today's Chinatown is in the northern part of Section 15. When Township 24 (where Calgary later developed) was surveyed as part of Dominion Land Act of 1872, opening new land to homesteaders, odd-number sections were reserved for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). However in 1882, the federal government stipulated all of Section 15 and some land north of the Bow River as reserve pasture land to support the Mounted Police headquarters at Fort Calgary in adjacent Section 14.

The town of Calgary first took root in Section 14 near the Fort, and the CPR was expected to locate its mainline depot there. When the CPR declared its intention to build its depot in Section 15 (and threatened to move it even farther away from the settled area if denied), the government was pressured to give up its claim to Section 15. The CPR's land company subdivided Section 15 and began selling lots in 1884, first almost entirely along today's 8 and 9 Avenues near the new depot. An 1888 survey map of "Plan C," where Calgary's Chinatown is located, shows it subdivided in a grid pattern mainly with 25-foot by 140-foot lots.

# Chinatown Pre-1875

## Nature and First Peoples on the Banks of the Bow

Chinatown sits on land south of the Bow River that is generally flat with a gradual slope toward the river—an area that has historically been prone to flooding. Dams built upstream in the 1930s have helped manage this occurrence over time, but the area was badly affected by the Calgary flood of 2013.

Mature trees remain near the river, especially just north of Riverside Avenue SW, as well as on 2 Avenue SW behind Wai Kwan Manor and at the Centre Street South and 2 Avenue SW entrance to Sien Lok Park. The view across the river is of a steep escarpment filled with grass and trees, now with single-family houses and apartment blocks at the top.

The city of Calgary is situated in the traditional territory of the Niitsitapi and the people of Treaty 7—the Blackfoot people who have lived here from time immemorial, as well as the Stoney Nakoda and the Beaver people (Tsuut'ina). Archaeological finds indicate human habitation in the Calgary area going back some 12,000 years. Calgary is part of the traditional Blackfoot territory that stretches from the northern Montana to southern Alberta foothills and adjacent plains.



Glenbow Archives NA-2065-1

Blackfoot encampment along the Bow River, ca. 1900–1903. [Glenbow Archives NA-2065-1]



The southern bank of the Bow River today: Sien Lok Park, 2018. [City of Calgary]

Calgary, especially along the Bow and Elbow Rivers, was an important encampment area for nomadic peoples whose way of life centred on following the migratory patterns of the buffalo, their main source of sustenance. The banks of the Bow River provided a welcoming environment for these people and for the animals they hunted. This was a winter grazing area for buffalo, where the fast-flowing Bow rarely froze, the high river bank provided protection from winds, and warming chinook winds mitigated the winter cold. Calgary also offered one of the best river-crossing places for many miles. On the north shore of the Bow, the escarpment just east of today's Centre Street was a lesser-used buffalo jump site. Into the early 20th century, the Bridgeland/Riverside area, across the river and a bit east of today's Chinatown, was still being used as a camp site by Indigenous groups.

# The Calgary Indian Friendship Centre in Chinatown



The Calgary Indian Friendship Centre's notable architecture, ca. 1983. [Guimond 1984, p. 114]

The Calgary Indian Friendship Centre was located in or near Chinatown (depending on community boundaries) from the 1960s through the 1990s. During that time the centre evolved and developed through the commitment of numerous agencies and individuals. The Calgary society was first conceived around 1960 as an informal club with non-Indigenous and Indigenous members. In 1964 the Local Council of Women, with Grace Johnson as vice-president, helped to establish the Calgary Indian Friendship Society. She served for many years on the new society's executive. Based on similar centres across Canada, the CIFIC was a hub for Indigenous social and cultural activities, recreation, and social services and was especially valuable to students and newcomers to Calgary. Other significant individuals involved with the centre were early directors Lawrence Whitney and Andrew Bear Robe.

The first centres were in a series of early-20th-century houses in or near Chinatown. Later the site of one of these houses—140 2 Avenue SW—became the location for a 1978–80 purpose-built centre designed by Architect Gordon Atkins. Grace Johnson was also actively involved in the fundraising and construction of this new centre. The two-and-a-half-storey brick building had sloped-glass curtain walls on the First Street façade. The site was landscaped with three carved wooden poles in terraced planters. The building was demolished in 2017 after being vacant for many years. Today a single remaining wooden pole recalls this important cultural hub.



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## Heritage Value

- ◇ Chinatown's setting on the south bank of the Bow River has symbolic value for its long-standing and continued use, across centuries and cultures, for shelter and survival, cultural and recreational activities, and currently also commemoration (with the Sien Lok Park sculptures, to be described below).

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ Chinatown's setting on the south bank of the Bow River with views to the natural-area escarpment on the opposite riverbank.
- ◇ Green space along the riverbank on the northern part of the community, now preserved as parkland, with mature trees north of Riverside Avenue SW, along 2 Avenue SW , and at the entrance to Sien Lok Park.
- ◇ Green space on Prince's Island.

## Interpretation Opportunities

- ◇ Signage and/or activities focused on the historic and ongoing usage of the riverbank. Interpretive signage at the former site of the Calgary Indian Friendship Centre<sup>1</sup>, at 140 2 Avenue SW.
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<sup>1</sup> See *Twenty Years Anniversary of Calgary Indian Friendship Centre 1964–1884, 1984*.

# Chinatown 1885-1910 (Calgary's Frontier and Early Settlement)

## Developing in the Shadow of the Head Tax

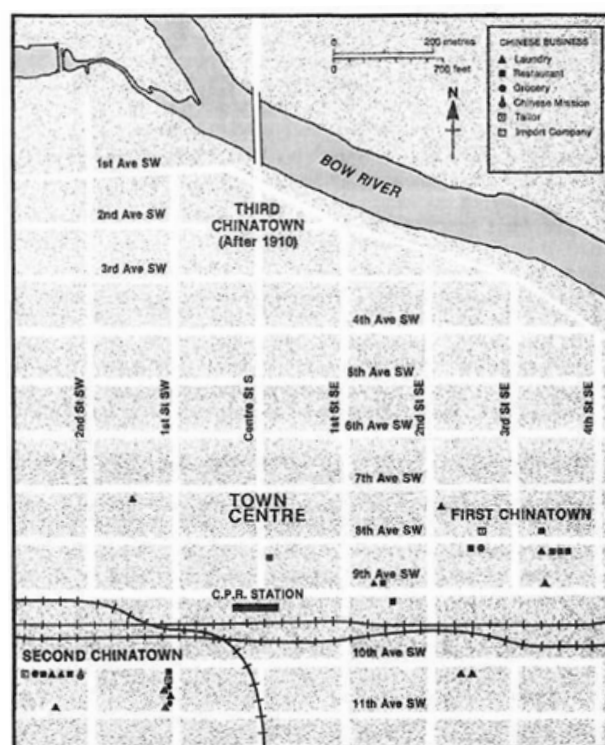
There have been three Chinatown locations in Calgary, all of them situated in the original Calgary townsite incorporated in 1884, and near the town centre. When the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) confirmed that their main east-west line would extend through Calgary along the Bow River, some early developers anticipated the town centre would be in today's Inglewood. However, after completing their transcontinental line through Calgary in 1883, the CPR decided to build their station (which in practical terms would dictate the town centre) west of the Elbow River in section 15. They were granted that land in 1884 and registered the middle part of section 15 as the gridiron subdivision of "Calgary Plan A."

By 1885 Calgary's first Chinese citizens were settled in the town. Three years later the CPR subdivided the remainder of section 15 as "Plan C," also a gridiron community except for deep narrow lots along the river bank. The first two Chinatowns were situated in Plan A, and the third Chinatown in the very north central part of Plan C. It was a form of non-contiguous expansion, and all three Chinatown locations coexisted for a period.<sup>1</sup>

Following the 1858 Fraser River gold strike, the Chinese had first immigrated to western Canada to become miners and prospectors in British Columbia. Some had come from California where the earliest wave of North American immigrants had sought their fortunes in Gum Shan (Gold Mountain, an expression still used for North America) following the 1849 California gold rush; and others directly from Hong Kong. Most were seeking work to ensure the survival of their families, sending money to their home villages where many also hoped to retire if they acquired sufficient wealth. Later, a second wave of immigrants arrived, attracted by work on the CPR's east-west line in the early 1880s.

It was sadly commonplace in Canada at that time for all new immigrant groups to be subject to close-mindedness and discrimination, sometimes even violence, and the Chinese were no exception. But "their acceptance as full citizens of their adopted land was harder won than any other migrant group."<sup>2</sup> There had been a period of free entry during the earliest waves of migration, but in 1884 a royal commission was formed in response to agitation by BC politicians and labour leaders. Despite the recommendations of the commission for moderate legislation, a \$50 head tax was enacted in 1885 by the federal government—a significant hardship for the Chinese whose average annual wage was \$300 at the time, with only about \$43 remaining after living expenses. **The tax, which doubled in 1902 and increased tenfold in 1903, and other onerous restrictions, would last almost four decades. All three Calgary Chinatowns were established in its shadow.**

BC suffered a serious recession after the transcontinental line was completed in 1885. Unemployed Chinese workers faced extreme deprivation and were obliged to flee. Returning to China was an option for the few who could afford it (the CPR's contractor having reneged on his commitment for their return passage), others moved to BC's urban Chinatowns, and a few braved the trek east across the Rockies to the prairies.



Chinatown's three locations. [Chuenyan David Lai 1988, p. 88]

<sup>1</sup> David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), pp. 89-91; J. Brian Dawson, *Moon Cakes in Gold Mountain: From China to the Canadian Plains* (Calgary: Desellig Enterprises Ltd., 1991); selected Henderson's Directories; Paul Voisey, "Chinatown on the Prairies: The Emergence of an Ethnic Community," in *Selected Papers from the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, Annual Meeting 1975 and Annual Meeting 1976* (Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada: 1981), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> "Sojourners on Golden Mountain" in *Atlas of Human Migration*, ed. Russell King (Richmond Hill, ON: Firefly Books, 2007), p. 154.

## 1885–1901: The First Chinatown (Calgary Downtown Commercial Core/East Village) and the Smallpox Riot

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From 1885 Calgary's first Chinatown began to take shape. By 1888 residents were concentrated between 7 and 9 Avenues (mainly along 8 Avenue) between 2 and 4 Streets SE. Typical of early prairie Chinatowns, commerce was rooted in the service industry, which required minimal capital to become established. There were restaurants, a grocer and tailor, and a number of laundries. That year the incumbent Chinese laundries engaged in a brief price war in response to attempts by a new proprietor from Vancouver to capture market share with low prices. The newspaper coverage of the incident helped to establish the enterprising and competitive spirit of these businessmen in the minds of other Calgarians.

Calgary has the dubious distinction of being home to one of Alberta's worst episodes of anti-Chinese hostility, the 1892 Smallpox Riot. A Chinese resident, an employee in a laundry, who had recently returned from a visit to Vancouver, fell ill with smallpox in June 1892. Although authorities immediately took charge—burning the building and its contents, and quarantining the occupants outside of town—nine Calgarians contracted the disease, and by mid-August three would die. On August 2 four Chinese patients released from quarantine returned to Chinatown. In response, a mob of 300 men, many drunk since they had been watching a cricket match, descended on Chinese laundries, from which the workers had fortunately already fled. The mob vandalized the laundries, then moved on to a store where they injured two individuals. Shamefully, there was no response from town authorities to prevent the riot or provide assistance to victims. Fortunately the North-West Mounted Police stepped in: their barracks offered refuge, and for three weeks they patrolled the area day and night. Through the first decade of the 20th century there were many examples of racism and disrespect in the press and in the actions of municipal councillors. Anti-Asian lectures were held at the Opera House on some occasions.



Chong Lee's laundry at 9th AV and 5th ST E (formerly a school in 1884), date unknown.  
[Glenbow Archives NA-2314-1]

Despite these circumstances the first Chinatown continued to expand and by 1900 it included a 20-bed rooming house and the Kwong Man Yuen restaurant (815 Centre Street South, non-extant) complete with a community room in the back where many locals came to drink tea or Chinese whiskey. Clergymen offered the strongest support against prejudice at this time, and had also provided refuge in their homes during the riot. The first denomination to provide formal outreach were the Methodists, who offered religious classes from the 1890s, first held in a nearby Methodist church. These classes quickly took on the additional function of teaching English. Knox Presbyterian also offered English classes beginning around 1900.

Most immigrants came from the Sze Yap (Siyi in pinyin) or the "Four Counties" of Sun-wui, Toi-san, Yin-ping, and Hoi-ping (Xinhui, Taishan, Enping, and Kaiping, in pinyin) and to a lesser extent San Yap (Sanyi, in pinyin), the "Three Counties" of Sun-dak, Nam-hoi, and Poon-yue (Nanhai, Panyu, and Shunde, in pinyin), southwest of Canton in the Pearl River delta region. With the political and economic strife, along with frequent famine, in those areas, a new life in Canada had become a matter of survival to support their families and themselves. The immigrants were earners—males—who may have been married but did not bring over their wives and children. They did bring over other male family members, leading to an entirely male population by 1900 in the first Chinatown location. In general, they continued to identify themselves with the village, clan, and dialect of their origins, even after they emigrated, and, as in the agrarian social culture they had left, their social organizations were oriented toward kinship groups. Chinatown pioneers established the social institutions and traditional ways that were integral to community life in their homeland. But adaptations were required to meet their needs for their new surroundings: for sanctuary from discrimination; for a cultural enclave where they would find their language, diet, and customs; and for self-contained economic and social services necessitated by extremely long working hours.



A variety of groups were formed for various purposes. Four types of social organizations were established: the *fong* or *tong*,<sup>1</sup> clan associations, the *hui kuan*, and a few secret societies. The fong/tong comprised a room serving as headquarters for Chinese from the same locality, giving them a place to socialize; significant support was provided, including affordable accommodation and cooking facilities for newcomers, visitors, or those temporarily out of work. Clan associations were formed for members with the same family name and reflected the importance of the extended family and kinship systems in Chinese culture at the time. These groups undertook broader support, including legal and social responsibilities, for members than the fongs. They provided reading rooms and recreation for members in addition to housing, as well as caring for their most vulnerable members. The *hui kuan* were mutual aid societies that offered credit and loans, employment services, and dispute arbitration. Their members were typically from the same county or district, or spoke the same dialect. The final group originated from the secret societies that had been established in China—particularly in the Guangdong and Fukien (Fujian) provinces—to counter the imperial ruling dynasty.

Calgary's first known organization, formed in this period, was Louie Kheong's<sup>2</sup> community room operating a fong from the 1890s. Other organizations would form in future phases of Chinatown. The first activity for secret societies would begin in the years preceding the 1911 revolution in China. In addition, new fongs and clan associations would form after 1910, and the first *hui kuan* would be established in 1922. These institutions ensured that as Chinatown evolved, Chinese traditions and cultural heritage would be maintained. Their kinship orientation would strongly influence future settlement in the area since members would be supported in their efforts to act as sponsors and agents to bring their extended family.

## Louie Kheong (ca. 1871–1939)

Pioneer Louie Kheong (aka Luey) is considered the patriarch of Calgary's Chinese community. He arrived in Calgary in 1894 and is believed to be the city's first Chinese merchant. He established the Kwong Man Yuen store in Chinatown's first location and provided a community room in the back—functioning as a fong—in the 1890s. He also protested the treatment of his compatriots in a letter to the Calgary Herald pointing out that China treated Western missionaries and businessmen well. In 1905 he became the first Chinese Calgarian to bring his wife over, and the couple shortly became parents of the first Chinese-Canadian baby born in the city. Kheong was one of the businessmen who built the original part of the Canton block in Chinatown's third location (200–210 Centre Street SE, extant). Among his many leadership roles, Kheong was life president of the Sue Yuen Tong Society, and president of the Chinese Masonic Lodge, the lodge's Dart Coon Club, and the Calgary Chinese Refugee Society. 450 persons attended his funeral, about 100 of them non-Chinese.



1911 image of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's (centre of middle row) visit to Calgary with Louie Kheong on his left and George Ho Lem on his right. [Calgary Albertan, 25 January 1912]

<sup>1</sup> The terms fong and tong are generally interchangeable. The term fong translates to "room" and could be used to indicate a smaller organization compared with a tong. This paper will employ the terms that were used in the corresponding source documents.

<sup>2</sup> Note that Louie (雷) may have been his surname.

## 1901–1909: The Second Chinatown Location (Beltline)

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By 1901, discouraged by discriminatory behaviour and regulation, only 63 Chinese remained in Calgary, 1.5 per cent of the population. However there was still a need to expand from their first location to meet commercial and residential needs, so a second Chinatown developed just south of the CPR main line mainly between 10 and 11 Avenues, and 1 and 4 Streets, around a nucleus of Calgary's first Chinese Mission at 215 10 Avenue.

The first activity for secret societies began at this time, in the years prior to the 1911 revolution, with the formation of the CKT (Cheekungtung or Zhigongtang), a North American organization that represented the objectives of China's Triad Society (aka Heaven-and-Earth or Hung League) to replace the ruling Manchu dynasty with Ming descendants. There is a known gathering of several hundred members in 1908; after 1911 CKT chapters in Alberta were called Chinese Freemasons, and the Calgary chapter was called the Chinese Masonic League of Calgary, which also had an inner lodge, the Dart Coon Society or Club. In 1905 the Louie, Fong and Kwong clan association was formed in Calgary, later formally established in 1926 as the local chapter of the worldwide Sue Yuen (Soo Yuen) Benevolent Association (遯源堂) founded in 1846, in Kaiping County, China, for the Louie/Lui/Lei (雷), Fong/Kwong/Kuang (龐), and Fong/Fang (方) families. In addition to the organizations based on the four types of indigenous Chinese institutions, there were also political organizations open to all clans and localities. One was the Chinese Empire Reform Association formed in 1906 at a gathering at Wing Kee's hall; by 1910 there were 200 members. Another political organization, the Chinese National League or Kuomintang (國民黨 KMT), would be formed in 1911. Louie Kheong served as president for the Empire Reform Association, the Dart Coon Club, and Sue Yuen. During the 1900s, two other persons would also have great influence in Chinatown, George Ho Lem (何榮禧) and Thomas Underwood.

By 1904 Calgary was experiencing its first major construction boom, and its white population over the next decade—and similarly the Chinese population<sup>1</sup>—increased correspondingly. The second Chinatown location developed with the same types of businesses, but with more laundries and grocers, an import company, and a row of dwellings.

When the Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) proposed a new hotel and rail line for this area, the property owners took advantage of the increased property values and sold the land, expelling their Chinese tenants who were then obliged to move in 1910. By this time the population in the two Chinatowns was nearly 500—the largest in Alberta—and there were also Chinatowns in Lethbridge, Edmonton, and Medicine Hat<sup>2</sup>. 1910 would also bring the first indications that the intolerant, garrison mentality displayed by many whites in Calgary was beginning to moderate in these urban areas.



Photographs from a 1912 fire in Chinatown show how business operators' living quarters were generally located behind their businesses to facilitate their long work hours. No examples of this architecture remain in Calgary. [Glenbow Archives PD-39-182]

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<sup>1</sup> At that time approximately one-third of the Chinese population lived in the second Chinatown location, and the rest in either the first location or elsewhere in the city.

<sup>2</sup> Calgary's Chinese population reached 485 by 1911.

## The Chinese Missions, James Herdman, and Thomas Underwood

The first important organization to make an appearance besides the traditional organizations was the Chinese Mission. When it was established teaching English was its most important function but over more than a century it would provide spiritual, recreational, and community services. Dr. James Herdman came to the Calgary area in 1885 to assist the Presbyterian Church in the area; in 1887 he became minister of Knox Presbyterian Church. As the Superintendent of Home Missions for the Presbyterian Church, the Chinese Mission was his most important project. Under his leadership his congregation turned their attention to helping the early Chinese community. He was memorialized by James Short, a member of his congregation, for changing Short's views on the Chinese—from antagonistic to supportive. Short later served many Chinese clients in his legal practice.



Thomas Underwood, ca. 1903. [Glenbow  
MA-2631-1]

Thomas Underwood (1863–1948) was a well-known contractor, business investor, and local politician who served three terms as alderman and two terms as mayor. He had emigrated from England in 1883, and after working as a labourer he was employed on a CPR construction gang, which gave him the opportunity to befriend Chinese labourers and gain an appreciation for what their crews had endured. By the end of the 19th century he had established a well-known building firm in Calgary.

In 1901 the efforts of the clergy to expand their outreach and English classes to Chinese residents had been hampered by the intolerance of some of their congregation members, necessitating separate premises for this purpose. Earlier, Dr. Herdman had recruited Underwood, who was very involved with the Baptist Church and also motivated to improve Chinese–white relations, to help him. Underwood offered affordable space in one of his buildings, and later that year built a 2-room wood-frame building; shortly after, at his own expense, he built a two-storey, wood-frame Chinese Mission with classrooms and boarding rooms. Herdman and Underwood, who had sided with the Chinese through the smallpox riots, would also have to stand down many threats against the mission. Volunteers taught English classes every night except Sunday at the new missions. Many community leaders, including Ho Lem and Kheong, would learn English there. Underwood constructed his 1905 Western Block (originally Underwood Block, 1001 1 Street SW) and adjacent 1907 Calgary Gas Co. Workshop (209 10 Avenue SW), both extant, next to the Mission.



## George Ho Lem [何林] (1870–1960)

George Ho Lem, a notable Calgary businessman and possibly the best known of all the leaders of Calgary's Chinese community, immigrated to Vancouver in 1901. He was soon attracted to Calgary by the Mission's free English classes. It took six months to obtain a job washing dishes but from there he became a cook and eventually opened his own enterprise, the Belmont Café. In addition, he became involved in the laundry business and established a wool-knitting mill in the area. After 15 years he was able to repay the \$500 loan for his head tax, and raise an additional \$500 so that he and his wife could reunite. He was the first Chinese individual to join the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Manufacturer's Association. In 1911 he erected the Ho Lem Block (109 2 Avenue SE, extant). Ho Lem played a major role in the Chinese Mission and later with the Chinese United Church (124 2 Avenue SW, façade extant). He erected the 1911 Ho Lem Block (109 2 Avenue SE, extant), which later became the building for the Chinese National League, for which Ho Lem served a term as president. In 1923, following the passage of the Exclusion Act, Ho Lem represented Calgary in a delegation of Canada's Chinese leaders who travelled to Ottawa to protest. His sons Frank and George Jr. were also advocates for the Chinese community.

### The Early Settlement of Chinatown's Present Location

Before the third Chinatown location was established in 1910, there had been settlement for several decades in the area which was just a few blocks west of the city's birthplace, Fort Calgary, at the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers.<sup>1</sup> By the 1890s, the area within the boundaries of today's Chinatown were partially developed and contained the southeast corner of Peter Prince's Eau Claire-Bow Valley Lumber Co. in the northwest (Prince's residence was just south of Chinatown on 4 Avenue), and one of the area's earliest buildings, Hull's Terrace, and adjacent tennis courts in the south.

In 1902 Silas A. Ramsay lived opposite Henry Clayton on 1 (Osler) Street East; Ramsay served three terms as alderman and one term as mayor, and is the namesake for the Ramsay community. The south part developed more quickly, the northern area likely being inhibited by the floods of June 1897 and July 1902. By 1905 a wooden retaining wall had been built along the south bank of the Bow, and there was a tannery near Riverfront Avenue. Immediately south, between 4 and 5 Avenues, notable buildings included the James Short School and Old Central School, a curling rink, and the Jewish library (only the cupola of the James Short School remains of these sites). In 1905 the closest bridge across the Bow River was the Langevin (today's Reconciliation) Bridge at 4 Street East, but there was the Fogg's Ferry crossing at Centre Street. By 1911 the area, especially to the south, would be almost completely built out with all types and uses of buildings.



Calgary Chinatown area 1889 (prior to becoming Chinatown), with terrace housing on Centre Avenue (right foreground) and the original Central School just behind. [The McCord Museum]

<sup>1</sup> Chinatown community's boundaries shrank when land was expropriated to construct the Harry Hays complex.

# Hull's Terrace

(including Home Confectionery)



## Chinatown's Earliest Building

*Picturesque Calgary brochure, Glenbow Archives, 1900-03*

Like many buildings in Chinatown, the Hull's Terrace site has evolved over time and offers a story of adaptive re-use and continuous service, in this case for more than 130 years. Constructed by at least 1887, the two duplex terrace houses are the earliest building in Calgary's Chinatown, and the only (partially) remaining buildings that pre-date the establishment of this Chinatown location in 1910. The Hull's Terrace site had two main phases: During the first phase, the two duplex terrace houses served as residential-commercial facilities built and leased by William Roper Hull, mainly serving non-Chinese residents and businesses until the First World War when its Chinese occupants gradually increased. Its second phase began in 1924 when, still under Hull's ownership, continuous brick storefronts were built in front of the duplexes which would house Chinese businesses and traditional societies, including what would become the Wong's Affinity Association. In the latter part of this phase, from 1949, Chinese owners involved with the association acquired the site, the most notable being Luey DoFoo who—together with his son Paul—also operated Home Confectionery from the storefront at 312 Centre ST S.



Left and right: Hull's Terrace, including historic duplexes ca.1887, storefronts ca. 1924, and altered roofline. [City of Calgary, 2018]

## Construction by William Roper Hull during the Gold Age of Ranching

The Hull's Terrace duplexes were erected by WR Hull at the outset of Calgary's golden age of ranching (ca. 1886-1906), a vital industry for Calgary that enabled the city to grow in the late 1880s and early 1890s and to develop an industrial economy. Hull played a substantial role in the industry at that time. He was also involved in all aspects of the real estate business including holdings, building development, loans, rentals, and insurance; it was likely that he had the duplexes constructed as rental properties.

Hull used architects Child & Wilson for his building projects until 1889 when Child moved from the firm, and after that he employed Hodgson & Bates (where Wilson moved in 1905), so the Hull's Terrace duplexes may be examples of Child & Wilson's early buildings. The duplexes were built in the Queen Anne Revival Style. A historic image of the north duplex shows an exuberant roofline displaying roof cresting, hipped and shed dormers, and hipped end gables with very tall chimneys. Detailed craftsmanship is evident in the woodwork, such as decorative posts and fretwork on the front veranda, the multi-light windows (some with pediments), and wooden roof shingles.

Terrace buildings (a row of identical or very similar, adjacent, often attached units with separate entrances) evolved as a way for modest homes to project a grand exterior, while reducing building and maintenance costs. Such homes made it affordable for ranchers and rural landowners to also have an urban presence, with a notable example in Calgary being John and Alexander Dafoe's 1910 terrace. While commonplace in Britain and popular in Ontario, terraces (called row houses in North America) were considered controversial in Alberta and rarely built before the 1970s, since, although their shared party walls reduced costs, they also caused problems like reduced privacy, ventilation, and light. The issues with party walls in larger terrace buildings may be why two detached duplexes were chosen for the first buildings on the Hull's Terrace site. Early-20th-century residents included stonecutter William McDowall, and real estate agents Charles Lane, Gilbert Murray, and William Lawrie who occupied three units.

The lands containing Calgary's current Chinatown had abundant open space when the Hull's Terrace duplexes were constructed, and the four lots immediately south of the duplexes were used for recreation in the 1890s. By 1911 there was a brick-veneer auto garage on the east two lots of Hull's property. The west two lots were sold after his death to Texas Co. of Canada by 1929, and a year later the garage became the Sunshine Service Station. Texas Co. acquired the east two lots by 1937 and expanded the garage to become Sky Chief Auto Service, which by the 1950s was marketed as a Texaco Service Station.

Born in England, William (WR) came to Western Canada with his brother in 1873. After they established themselves in stock-raising and meat packing, WR moved to Calgary in 1886 to expand the business which would become the first large-scale, vertically integrated meat business in the province. In addition to owning butcher shops, an abattoir, and other ranches, in 1887 WR Hull leased and later acquired a former government supply farm near Midnapore for ranching and irrigation farming. Referred to as Hull's Irrigation Farm, it was later named the Bow Valley Ranch when he sold it to Patrick Burns. Also around 1887 he built the Hull's Terrace duplexes.

By 1893, 10 per cent of Canada's cattle exports were from Calgary and district, and Hull was a major contributor to that. He continued to expand his agricultural business until 1902 when he sold his holdings to Patrick Burns. WR was also prominent in real estate and development from the time he moved to Calgary. Extant buildings he commissioned include the Alberta Block, Grain Exchange, and Bow Valley Ranch house. In addition he was a founder of the Calgary Brewery, president and founder of Metals Ltd. manufacturing, and also a noted philanthropist. In 1988 he was designated as a National Historic Person by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

## William Roper Hull

(1856-1925)



William Roper Hull around the time he built Hull's Terrace, ca. 1882–1887. [Glenbow Archives]

### Chinese Businesses and Institutions

By 1920 the Kee Loung confectionery occupied the unit at 310 Centre ST, and in 1924, the year before Hull's death, six attached brick storefronts were constructed in front of the duplexes. The businesses had access into the duplex units from the rear of the storefronts. For the following three decades Chinese businesses occupied the storefronts, and the duplexes continued as residences, mainly for Chinese residents. Businesses included: Kee Loung & Co, Oriental Tailors, the Tai Wo restaurant, and Deong Bros tailors through the 1920s; and Dun Dan barber, Up to Date tailors, Heeley L Wong tailor, Canton Cafe, and Central Coffee Shop (later Central Confectionery) through the 1930s, most continuing into the 1940s. Louie On's tailor shop spanned all three decades and he became a part owner of the building—together with Luey DoFoo, Albert Wong, and Eddie Mah—in 1949. Resident Luey DoFoo, who ran his business in the storefront at 312, will be discussed further.

Today's businesses include the Chung Tai Trading at 306 Centre ST, Haixiang Chinese Herbal Medicine at 308, Dagu Rice Noodle restaurant at 310, and Hing Wah Imports at 312 (which has also included a post office for at least two decades).



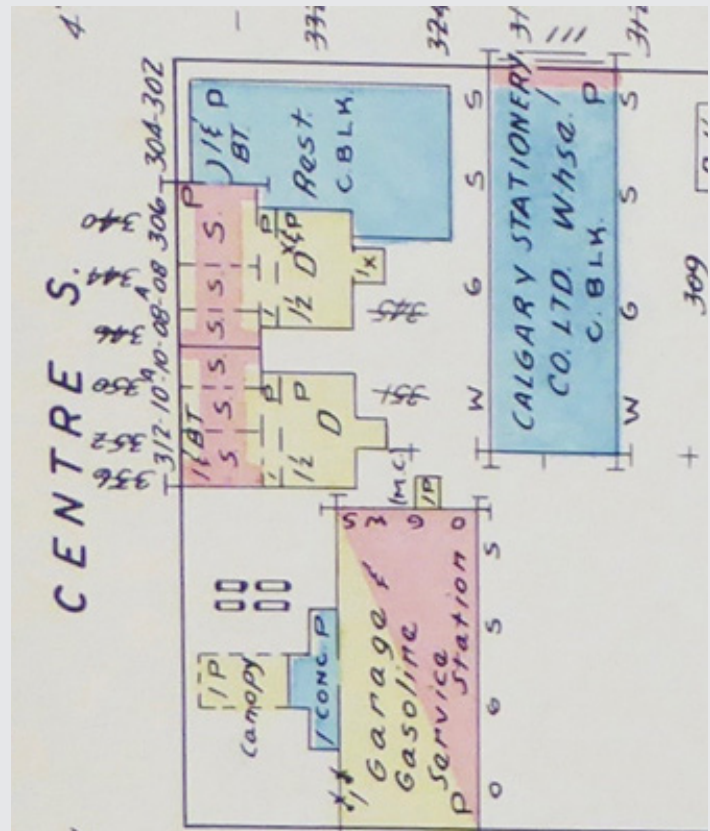
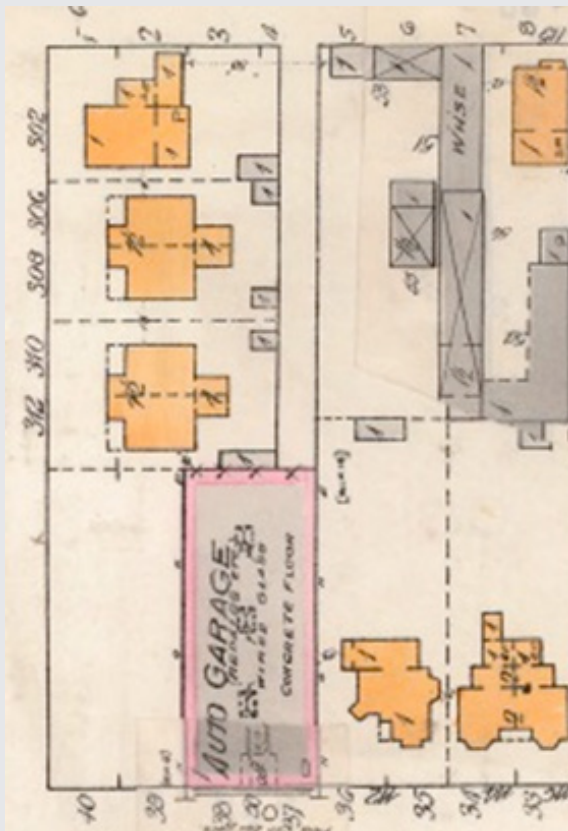
Chinese societies also occupied the new storefronts. From 1931 the Wong Wun Sun Club (aka. Wong Wun Sun Society) was located at 308. The organization was formed in 1927 to support Calgary's Wong Kong Har Tong, a society that dates to 1910 when the King Har Inn was set up to assist clansmen staying in the area or immigrating to the city from China, and to offer them social activities. Luey Choau (later named Luey DoFoo, who would become an owner of the building) was the Wong Wun Sun Society's president in 1930. The group was formalized by members Po Sham and Cheng Kwan in 1931, the year the society moved to the storefront at 308. In 1967 the society combined with the

Wong Kong Har Tong to become the Wong's Affinity Association, and in 1995 a Women's Group was formed for female members. The 1949 acquisition of the building had facilitated ownership by the society. In later decades the Wong's Affinity Association undertook a number of renovations: minor alterations in 1982, more extensive upgrades in 1989, and a rear extension in 1993. Another institutional tenant was the Chinese National League, which occupied 310a in the first part of the 1930s in addition to its 2nd AV location.

Glenbow Archives NA-2645-46



Terrace with storefront addition, ca. 1968. [Allison Jackson, Glenbow Archives]



October 1911 and May 1961s maps showing Hull's Terrace and adjacent buildings.

## Home Confectionery and the DoFoo Family

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The DoFoo family were long-time, well-known Chinatown residents, closely associated with Hull's Terrace as a place of business and residence—starting with Chinatown pioneer Luey DoFoo.

In 1949 Luey DoFoo, recently owner of the Empire Cafe at 227 8 AV, became a part owner of Hull's Terrace. That same year, he started Home Confectionery in the storefront at 312 Centre ST, with his son Paul, newly returned from working in China, and daughter-in-law Lilian. The extended DoFoo family long shared a home in a portion of Hull's Terrace, behind the storefronts, where Paul and Lilian raised four children.

Home Confectionery was a Western-style grocery store that also carried Chinese products, catering to both downtown non-Chinese patrons and Chinatown residents. The store became a community gathering place, where the DoFoos provided translation services and other help and support to new immigrants as well as to many others. Both Chinese and Canadian traditions were honoured at the store, which was fully decorated for holidays.

Luey DoFoo owned all of the Hull's Terrace site by 1969. Paul, with Lilian and with Luey into his senior years, ran Home Confectionery for 34 years—7 days a week, 364 days a year, from 8:00 am to midnight—until he retired in 1983 at age 70. Paul had inherited the property from his father in 1975, and owned it until his death in 2018. (The name Home Confectionery continued to be listed in city directories at 312 Centre ST through 1991, likely in error, along with Hing Wah—identified then as a book store, now as an import store—which still occupies that space).



Home Confectionery in front of a remnant portion of the original Hull's Terrace.  
[Provided by Dofoo family]

## Chronology of Alterations

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- ca. 1887 - two identical detached duplexes were built side by side to present as a terrace fronting Centre ST on a site with 8 deep lots (orientated to the avenues)
- by 1911 - auto garage erected on southeast corner and wood-frame home erected on north 114' of site
- 1924 - six flat-roofed, one-storey continuous brick storefronts erected in front of the duplexes, with internal access to them
- 1929 - site reduced: sale of southwest corner (lots in front of the garage) to Texaco
- 1937 - site further reduced: sale of southeast corner (garage) to Texaco
- 1941 - site again reduced: sale of north 114' to David Jones
- 1949 - terrace sold to Chinese owners
- ca. 1952 - non-specified "alterations" to storefronts likely related to new ownership
- ca. 1972-1975 - major alteration / redevelopment to half of the historic south terrace duplex
- 1982 - unknown "minor renovations" to complex
- ca. 1988-1991 - major alteration / redevelopment to half of the historic north terrace duplex, and other unknown renovations to complex
- 1993 - rear extension added to complex (appears to be on north side)

# Luey DoFoo [雷] (1880-1975)

One of Calgary's earliest Chinese immigrants, Luey DoFoo stayed on to establish strong family, business, and personal roots.

Originally named Luey Choau (Luey [雷] being the family name), DoFoo was the eldest son of a struggling farming family in Kwangtung, China, sent to Canada with borrowed money to improve the family's lot. He arrived in Vancouver in 1899, and worked as a family "houseboy" there, then as a ranch hand west of Calgary in what is now Camp Clem Gardner, before making his way to Calgary in March 1900. He settled in what was then Calgary's Chinese quarter (mainly between 10 and 11 AV and 1 and 4 ST SE), working at a Chinese restaurant owned by a cousin.

A hard-working entrepreneur, DoFoo soon had his own businesses, starting in 1905 with the Star Cafe at 302 8 AV SE (living behind it). In 1930 he established the Empire Cafe, an upscale and "up-to-date" restaurant, at 227 8 AV SE, which he ran until 1949, then sold. In the 1930s he was also proprietor of Mid-West Delicatessen, at 1206 1 St SW. In addition, from 1918 to 1928 DoFoo was the owner and manager of Canton Silk Company, one the city's top import and antique houses.

DoFoo had joined the Calgary Chinese Mission to learn English, and was one of its earliest Christian converts and supporters. He soon traded in his queue hairstyle and colourful Chinese clothes for western dress. He was a founder of, and eager recruiter for, the Chinese YMCA, established at the Mission in 1913. DoFoo returned to China to find a bride, bringing his new wife to Calgary in 1912. The couple had five children, all raised in Calgary's third and current Chinatown. DoFoo also paid for seven siblings to join him in Calgary.

In 1949 DoFoo became a part, and in 1969 full, owner of Hull's Terrace in Chinatown. There, in the storefront retail space at 312 Centre ST S, he founded and operated the grocery store Home Confectionery with his son Paul. Paul continued to run the business until 1983.

DoFoo had been an early member of the Calgary Horticultural Society since 1930, but could not fully embrace this interest until his retirement years. Starting at age 70, he devoted himself to cultivating a private garden behind his home and store, garnering numerous gardening awards, especially for his roses. A director and honorary life member of the society, he established a trophy for the best garden by a senior citizen.

For more about Paul and Lilian DoFoo, see page 42.



Albertan, 5 February 1968. [Glenbow Archives PA-2807-873]



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## Heritage Value

- ◇ Chinatown possesses institutional value for its unique kinship organizations—the fong or tong, clan associations, the *hui kuan* and secret societies—which enabled Chinatown to develop by sponsoring immigrants and supporting the new arrivals. They also ensured that as Chinatown evolved, Chinese traditions and cultural heritage would be maintained. The earliest Chinese associations predate the current Chinatown location: the 1890s Kwong Man Yuen community room fong, the 1905 Louie, Fong, and Kwong clan association, the 1906 Chinese Empire Reform political association, and the 1900s CKT (Cheekungtong or Zhigongtang) secret society and precursor to the Chinese Freemasons.
- ◇ Chinatown also possesses person value for its association with Louie Kheong, George Ho Lem, James Herdman, and Thomas Underwood, and their critical roles in fostering and protecting the early development of the community.

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ No physical evidence of the first two Chinatowns remains. Likewise, little remains of the pre-Chinatown period apart from the 1880s Hull's Terrace, modified and encapsulated over the decades. Its current form can be explored as a resource, valued both for its early associations and for the way it has been used and evolved over time, or may more suitably as an interpretative site.

## Interpretation Opportunities

- ◇ Interpretation of Calgary's first Chinatown, ideally near the location of the Kwong Man Yuen restaurant and community room, Chinatown's first fong (815 Centre Street South, non-extant); and/or
- ◇ Interpretation of Calgary's second Chinatown location at the site of the first Chinese Mission at 215 10 Avenue. A good location is Thomas Underwood's commercial blocks that were adjacent to the mission, and that are still standing.
- ◇ Interpretation of Calgary's first and third Chinatowns using learnings from the 2008 East Village archaeological studies. Excavations performed in the East Village in that year revealed multiple examples of cultural artifacts that are representative of the historic Chinese populations in Calgary. Excavation EgPm-332 for two garbage dumps, dated roughly 1905-12, was a few metres west of a city garbage crematory on 5 Avenue at 6 Street East, and EgPm-334, believed to be either a dump or landfill material from the 1920s, was near the northeast corner of 5 Avenue and 4 Street East. Both were within a few blocks of Calgary's first and third (current) Chinatowns. In addition to finer tea cups, porcelain bowls, and spoons of Asian origin, smaller vials used for perfume and opium are also believed to represent historic Asian populations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Vivian, et al., "2009 Historical Resource Mitigative Studies East Village Development Area Final Report" (Permit 2008-009), Volume II Historic Site Investigations" (Calgary: Lifeways of Canada Limited).

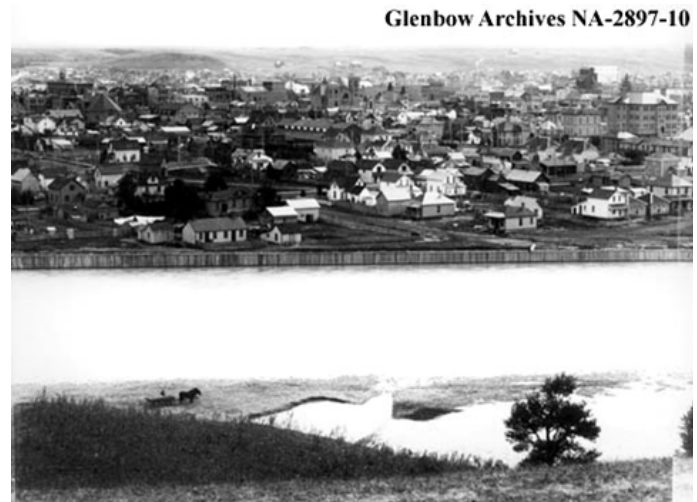


## Our Current Chinatown 1910–1922

### Its Origins and through the First World War and Post-war Recession

Once the Canadian Northern Railway announced in June of 1910 that it was planning a route and a hotel through Calgary in the location of the second Chinatown, property values in that area escalated. As a result, landlords sold their properties, displacing Chinese tenants for a third time. This provided the opportunity for the Chinese community to establish what would be the final Chinatown location at the foot of the Centre Street Bridge along the Bow River. A small group of successful Chinese businessmen purchased a piece of land for \$18,000 at the corner of Centre Street South and 2 Avenue; this initiative was the genesis of Calgary's current Chinatown and its, now long-time, history in this location.

A temporary challenge was encountered in October 1910 when Chinese Calgarians submitted building permits for the third and current Chinatown's first building, the Canton Building. A group of opposing citizens, citing reduced property values in the proposed area, demanded that any new Chinatown be located elsewhere and possibly segregated. Chinese Calgarians still faced racial discrimination as they attempted to purchase land and build their community. This became known as the Chinatown Relocation Issue of 1910. Given the protest, a temporary order to withhold building permits to the Chinese was issued. At that time, City Council set up a committee of commissioners, citizens appointed by the mayor and representatives of the Chinese community, to explore if Calgary's Chinese citizens should be segregated or permitted to go where they chose. Louie (aka Luey) Kheong, president of the Chinese Empire Reform Association of Calgary, Ho Lem, representing the laundry businesses, and Thomas Underwood, a former mayor of the city, were all part of the committee. While the Chinese community was open to looking at other locations, they noted that they would seek compensation for the purchased property on 2 Avenue and Centre Street South. Alternate locations that were explored included between 7 and 8 Avenues SW by Mewata Park and near Langevin (now Reconciliation) Bridge. There was a significant push at the time for segregation of the Chinese throughout areas of the city rather than the building of a Chinatown community. The committee all agreed at the start to eschew segregation and rather to focus on the appropriate location to establish the third Chinatown. All alternate sites were opposed, resulting in a decision to proceed with building a new Chinatown starting with the Canton Block location.



Calgary's third Chinatown location ca. 1914 viewed from the north side of the Bow River (note retaining wall on south side). Photographer E.B. Curlette. [Glenbow Archives NA-2897-10]



Chinese delegation meets with City Commissioners, 13 October 1910. [Glenbow Archives NA-2798-6]

During the time of the Chinese Relocation Issue, Louie Kheong shared his opinion with a letter to the editor in the 6 October *Calgary Herald*:

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*I take your paper and see that some people in Calgary area saying some bad things about my countrymen here. This is not right. The Canadian government has given us the right to live here and pay our debts. We want to do honest business in Calgary, same as all men, and, Canada's law will protect us. You send missionaries to our homes in China, and we use them good; also English business men. If my people are no good to live here, what good trying to make them go to Heaven? Perhaps there will be only my people there.*

*Thanking you for your trouble. I am, yours  
truly,*

Luey Kheong  
Chinese Merchant  
Member Chinese Empire Reform Association<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Brian Dawson, *Moon Cakes in Gold Mountain: From China to the Canadian Plains* (Calgary: Deselig Enterprises Ltd., 1991), p. 151.

Overcoming the Chinatown Relocation Issue of 1910 was the beginning of continued strong growth between 1910 and the early 1920s for Calgary's Chinatown. Chinese urban communities in Alberta all grew during this period, both in the number of Chinese residents and businesses. In Calgary, between 1911 and 1921 the Chinese origin population grew from 485 to 688, although the number of women only increased from 3 to 39 in this time period. The head tax, still in place, remained a formidable challenge.

The 1910 Canton Block created the foundation for the Chinese to further build a sustaining community that would offer residential and commercial developments, meeting places, and a boarding area for Chinatown. Many of the buildings at that time were designed in Western styles with Chinese motifs on the interior. The Canton Block was in the Edwardian Commercial style and initially provided eight shops with residences above, including living and recreation space for tong associations.

Other significant buildings during this growth period included the Flatiron Building (stores, restaurants and residence, non-extant), and the Ho Lem Block built by Ho Lem for his Calgary Knitting Mills business, which later became the Chinese National League. Single-family residences in Chinatown were built during this establishment period as modest homes typical of the working-class housing found in Calgary at that time. The larger of these residences housed clan associations and were known as the tong houses.



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



Calgary's second Chinese Mission (non-extant), ca. 1910. [Glenbow Archives NA-5111-1]

Significant during these initial building years was a fundraising visit to speak at the Canton Block in 1911 by Chinese revolutionary leader Dr. Sun Yat-Sen. A year later, he became the first provisional president of the Chinese republic and two years after this visit the Chinese National League was founded in 1913.

During the second part of this period of time to 1929, the majority of family associations were formed and played a significant role in the community and social structure of Chinatown. They provided a meeting place to socialize, sleep, and cook, all at an affordable cost to help those new to Calgary and looking for work. Other significant Chinese community needs were met through Thomas Underwood's financing to build Chinatown's third mission in 1911 and further when the Chinese Public School was founded in 1920.

1910 through 1922 was the most significant building stage for the current Chinatown in regards to establishing a strong foundation for the Chinese culture and community within Calgary. It wasn't until the 1923 Exclusion Act that Chinatown's growth began to slow.

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## Heritage Value

- ◇ Chinatown possesses event value for Louie Kheong, Ho Lem, and Thomas Underwood's leadership through the Relocation Issue of 1910 as this was instrumental in establishing the successes of building the third and sustaining Chinatown in its current location.
- ◇ Chinatown possesses event value for 1911 visit by Chinese revolutionary leader Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, who became the first provisional president of the Chinese republic in 1912 and was instrumental in the founding of the Chinese National League in 1913.
- ◇ Chinatown possesses symbolic value for the period of 1910 through 1922 as this was the most significant building stage for the current Chinatown, when a strong foundation for the Chinese culture and community was established within Calgary.

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ 1911 Ho Lem Block, 1910 Canton Blocks, and 1919 Chinese Masonic Hall—see Architecture section for character-defining elements of these buildings.

## Interpretation Opportunities

- ◇ There is an excellent opportunity for the placement of “alternative interpretation” (now practised in North America on campuses and historic sites to educate the public) at the park in front of the James Short Parkade, named for the former James Short School, near the cupola to present the alternate story of James Short. It is a good place to describe the 1892 Smallpox Riot and the Chinatown Relocation Issue of 1910, as well as Short's role in the latter.
- ◇ James Short, K.C. (1862–1942) came to Calgary in 1889 to work as the principal of the early wood-frame Central School for four years, when he left to study the law. He began practising in 1895 and was crown prosecutor for the Calgary Judicial District from 1901 to 1926. In 1910 he was hired to be the lawyer and spokesman for a group of citizens opposing the building of the Canton Block. Fortunately that group lost their cause. Also fortunately, Short was a member of the Knox Presbyterian congregation, where, through the efforts of the Reverend Dr. Herdman, he changed his views towards the Chinese. Short would later serve many long-time Chinese clients in his legal practice.
- ◇ The 1905 sandstone Central School built on the same site as the early wood-frame school was renamed the James Short Memorial Elementary School (demolished in 1969, but the cupola was saved by the Local Council of Women ) in 1938 to recognize Short's service on the school board from 1892 to 1914, including executive terms, as well as his service on other public boards. The James Short sandstone school is where Chinatown's first generation of children would have attended regular classes.



# Dark Times in Chinatown 1923-1946

## The Exclusion Era, the 1930s Depression, the Second World War

Anti-Chinese sentiments continued into the 1920s. This reached high levels in British Columbia, where the Chinese were seen as competing for limited manual labour jobs. Despite the prohibitive head tax, Chinese immigrants continued to enter Canada, with arrivals tripling from 13,000 in 1885 to 39,587 in 1921.<sup>1</sup> So the Canadian government imposed even harsher measures: the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, which essentially banned all immigration from China, with exceptions for students (later rescinded), merchants, and diplomats. The law also required residents of Chinese descent to register or else face a \$500 fine, one-year imprisonment, or both. It further allowed immigration officers to deport possible violators without the right of appeal.

Now the Chinese men who had come to Canada to support their families from afar had no hope of eventually bringing wives and children to join them. Nor could most afford to return to China, both because of the cost of the journey and because of their families' need for their Canadian income. Some men did go back to China to visit, especially to marry or see wives and family.

The society of "married bachelors" was now a fully entrenched, and seemingly permanent, reality in Calgary and in Chinatowns throughout Canada. The Chinese in Calgary were, overwhelmingly, an increasingly aging population of men born in China. That would be the norm until the repeal of the Exclusion Act in 1947, although Chinese immigration continued to be severely restricted even longer. In 1920 there were just 15 Chinese families in Calgary and about 39 (Canadian-born) Chinese children.<sup>2</sup> Some children were sent to China to be raised by relatives.

During the Exclusion Act years, Calgary's Chinese population dropped from a peak of 1,054 in 1931 to about 800 in 1941, less than half of whom lived in Chinatown.<sup>3</sup> Existing buildings deteriorated and very few others were built.

Several institutions formed or expanded during this era to support the local population. The Chinese Public School, established in 1920, taught Chinese language and traditions to the Canadian-born Chinese children. Classes were first held at the Chinese Mission, then in a two-storey house purchased next door. The school had to close during some years of the Depression, but reopened later and was officially registered in 1939.

The Chinese Mission had formed a YMCA, which organized a boys hockey team in 1928 (the first all-Chinese one in Canada) and a girls basketball team in 1929. The Mission also sponsored a Chinese Young People's Society, founded in 1932, and varied children's clubs. Two long-popular annual fundraising events originated during these years: the women's Chow Mein Tea in 1936, and the Young People's Society's Chinese Fashion Show in 1937. Originally non-denominational, the Chinese Mission became affiliated with the United Church of Canada in 1949.

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*"Claim More Spent on  
Dog In Pound Than  
is Allowed Indigent  
Jobless Chinese"*

*Calgary Daily Herald*  
9 January 1937

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese Immigration Act, Historica Canada (2017), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chinese-immigration-act/>, accessed 20 August 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Yee, *Chinatown: An Illustrated History of the Chinese Communities of Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2005), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), p. 90.

The chief entertainment for the Chinese men continued to be gambling: fan tan, mah jong, and other games played in restaurants and clubs, and the lottery that was run several times a day.

Several more family associations formed in these decades: the Mah Kam Gee Tong (precursor to the current the Calgary Mah Society) in 1919, the Sue Yuen Benevolent Association (primarily for descendants of the Louie, Fong, and Kwong families) in 1926, the Wong Wun Sun Society (precursor to the current Wong's Affinity Association) in 1927, and a Calgary branch of the Lung Kong Association (founded in San Francisco in the late 19th century) in 1937.



From right to left: Chinese Mission, Chinese United Church, Chinese Public School, n.d. [in *Communities of Calgary: From Scattered Towns to a Major City* (Century Calgary Publications, ca. 1975), p. 109]

The Shon Yee Benevolent Association, first organized in Vancouver in 1914 for people from the Zhong Shan region, had a Calgary branch as of 1922. The Yee Fung Toy Society, which was formed in 1920 to help new Chinese immigrants, provided financial support to the Chinese government during World War II, and has continued as an organization active in municipal and provincial politics. Calgary had its own Dart Coon Club, the inner lodge of Chinese Freemasonry, as of 1922.

During the Depression years, service and manual labour jobs were even more scarce, bringing greater economic hardship to Chinatown residents. The Chinese Mission would play a major role in Chinatown during these years. It housed about 50 jobless men initially and more later; its Mothers' Club served meals; and its Mission Circle led English classes and ran the popular Unemployed Men's Choir, which performed hymns in churches throughout the region. Business leaders also provided charity: offering cheap meals at restaurants (or free ones in exchange for dishwashing) and warm places to sleep beside the dryers in laundries. Although not well documented, the existing Chinatown associations almost certainly provided diverse aid.

Single unemployed Chinese men got \$1.12 a week in federal government relief during the Depression while whites received \$2.50. In 1936 that payment was dropped for 48 Chinese men who refused to go to a relief camp. In 1937, with help from the Communist Party of Canada, groups of unemployed Chinese men engaged in a series of protests demanding equal government relief. They picketed government offices, held a rally at City Hall, and demonstrated by blocking city streetcar tracks. Their relief payment was finally raised to \$2.12 per week. But several buildings housing the unemployed were shut down due to health issues, evicting more who went to sleep on the floor of Chinese Mission.



[Calgary Chinese United Church]



Calgary Daily Herald, 9 January 1937 and 8 February 1937.

It is worth noting that these protests exposed a schism between the working-class “bachelors,” who were willing to form an alliance with the Communist Party, and the merchant class, who were embarrassed by the protests and preferred to address the community’s social problems through existing Chinatown organizations and the Christian church.<sup>1</sup>

As these events and issues were publicized, non-Chinese Calgarians became increasingly aware of and sympathetic toward the Chinese men’s plight. Calgary clergy spoke out against the unequal treatment, and churches, charities, and corporations gave donations to the Calgary Chinese Mission. This marked a significant shift in the attitude of Calgary’s white majority toward the Chinese.

In 1937 Japan launched a massive military campaign in China, triggering the Sino-Japanese War. Chinese Canadians sent both money and fighting men to China. Canadians had sympathy for the Chinese cause. In 1937 the Pan-Alberta Anti-Japanese League was formed with headquarters in Calgary and branches in other cities.

During World War II, China and Canada were allies against the Japanese. Canadians were impressed by the Chinese population’s patriotism and fundraising. At least 31 men from Calgary’s Chinatown joined the Canadian military, including Diamond Quan (關), who was killed in battle. Frank Ho Lem (son of George Ho Lem Sr.), who had served in Currie Barracks as a small-arms instructor, became the first Chinese-Canadian commissioned officer.

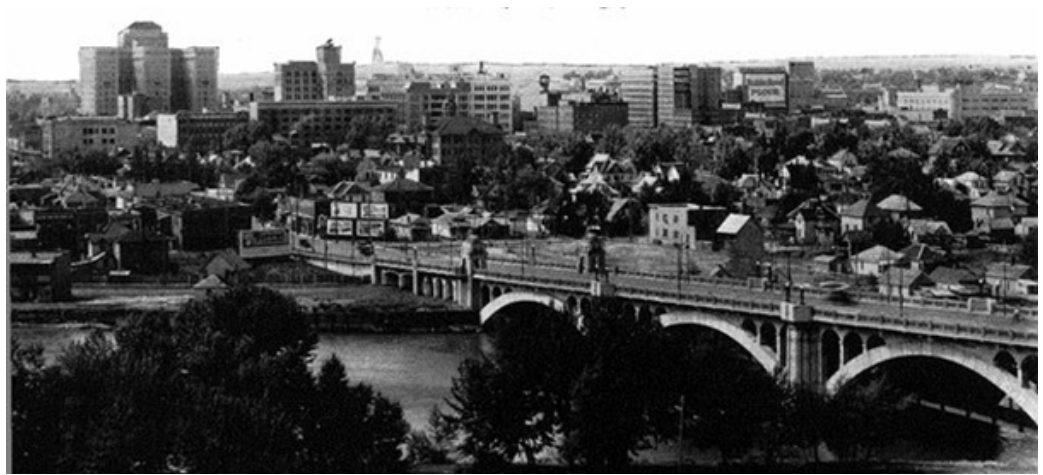


[Dora Quan fonds, Glenbow Archives]

There was a push during the war, by members of the Chinese community and others, to give voting rights to the Chinese, and the willingness of Chinese men to enter the military greatly advanced this cause. With growing public respect for the Chinese—and in reaction against the racism of the Hitler regime—there was also widespread support for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Johns, “Chinese Bachelors Seek Fairness 1936–37,” *Alberta History* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 14.





Chinatown in 1935. [Bayne, D.C. (1935) *Calgary School District No. 19, 1885–1935*, Calgary School Board]

## Heritage Value

- ◇ Surviving structures and sites built or used during the period have symbolic value for their associations with times of great challenge and hardship for the Chinese community.

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ Surviving structures or sites built during 1923–47 have not yet been identified; the key sites associated with this period, the 1911 Mission and the Chinese YMCA, are non-extant.

## Interpretation Opportunities

- ◇ Interpretation of the response to the Depression by the Mission at the site of the 1911 Mission, or at the current Chinese United Church that succeeded it.
- ◇ Interpretation at the historic or current sites of businesses, associations, and institutions that responded to the Depression and the Second World War.



## Post-war 1947-1966

### Chinatown's Decline in the Era of Selective Entry

Both during and after the Second World War, Chinese citizens—who had fought alongside their fellow Canadians in the war—advocated for equal immigration rights and were successful in having the Exclusion Act repealed in 1947. Although the repeal of the act was an important first step for Chinese Canadians, considerable obstacles remained. In theory those Chinese who were Canadian citizens could bring spouses and non-adult children to Calgary, but there were very few naturalized citizens at that time since citizenship status had required the renunciation of their allegiance with China. In addition, before the Canadian Citizenship Act of 1947, all residents of Canada were considered British subjects and eligible to vote, but after the Act it was necessary to have Canadian citizenship to vote. So initially the repeal had little impact on their population, not just in terms of growth but especially for gender balance since women remained under a quarter of the population. In sharp contrast were the preferential quotas and policies applied to European immigrants at that time. As a result there was little growth in Chinatown's population through the rest of the 1940s.

However, during the late 1950s and 1960s, there was a gradual relaxation of regulations controlling immigration from China. With the federal government now endeavouring to meet the critical demand for labour, emphasis on country of origin was removed, and in 1967 the quota system was replaced by a new points system.<sup>1</sup> By 1961, as with other major urban centres in Canada, Calgary's Chinese population had more than doubled from 1941 levels, and women had become 61 per cent of Canada's Chinese population. Two-thirds of immigrants during this period are still believed to be from the traditional source areas.<sup>3</sup>

The end of the era of selective entry did not mean all was well; members of the Chinese community recall facing challenges in many areas—from obtaining professional status, to being able to vote, to getting a driver's license—well into the later 20th century.

While growth in the overall Chinese population was taking place, these two decades were a period of decline or even extinction for Chinatowns across Canada. Influx from new immigrants had been slow due to selective government policies, but for current residents there was less need for sanctuary or for affordable housing than during earlier eras. By the late 1950s the demographics in Calgary's Chinatown had shifted toward elderly males with modest incomes.



Low-rise form of Chinatown in 1961 with houses and commercial-residential buildings, plus significant industrial and automotive development.<sup>2</sup> [University of Calgary Digital Library] Blue lines enclose the area levelled in 1974 to construct the Harry Hays federal government complex.

<sup>1</sup> In 1966 the Department of Citizenship and Immigration became the Department of Manpower and Immigration, reflecting the government's new focus on manpower.

<sup>2</sup> Insurance Plan of the City of Calgary, Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd. May 1961.

<sup>3</sup> The port of entry, however, was Hong Kong because Canada did not have a diplomatic relationship with the People's Republic of China. See David Chuenyan Lai, *Great Fortune Dream: The Struggles and Triumphs of Chinese Settlers in Canada, 1858-1966* (Halfmoon Bay, BC: Caitlin Press, 2016).

At the same time, Alberta was experiencing an economic boom triggered by a series of major oil discoveries, the first of which was the 1947 Leduc find. With car ownership within reach for many Calgarians, there was a movement to newly built, post-war suburbs from all the inner-city neighbourhoods, including Chinatown. Many businesses also moved or closed when their proprietors retired. Socially, Chinese were now being accepted at mainstream organizations like golf clubs and in politics. In 1958 Jennie Chow became the Stampede Queen. Normie Kwong—Norman L. Kwong (鄭) né Lim Kwong Yew (林佐民), 1929–2016—was the first Chinese Canadian to play professional football and would become the first person of Chinese heritage to serve as lieutenant-governor of Alberta (from 2005 to 2010) and was a strong advocate for multiculturalism.

With the majority of Chinese Calgarians living in other areas, the 1960s would mark the beginning of the changing role of Chinatown to meet new cultural needs, the social needs of its residents, and increased commercial demand from Caucasian customers. The roles of the traditional social organizations also began to shift, since the state was now often fulfilling their earlier welfare role. However, social activities remained as important as ever, and some groups still looked after funeral costs. There were fewer tongs, but new Chinatown-based organizations emerged. The Chung Shan Association, a hui kuan based in Heung-san (Zhongshan, in pinyin), formed in Calgary in 1954. The 1963 Gee How Oak Tin Benevolent Association, representing the Chan, Woo, and Yuen families, was established in 1962.<sup>1</sup> The Wong Wun Sun Society combined with the Wong Kong Har Tong in 1967 to become the Wong's Affinity Association. Despite the move of many residents and businesses to the suburbs, virtually all the kinship associations retained their Chinatown location. When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949 affiliations with the homeland became complex; some groups changed their focus to local activities instead of China, and some organizations withdrew. The Chinese National League, which was at its peak during the Second World War, constructed its new building in 1954.

While there had been a gradual improvement in the attitudes of Caucasians towards the Chinese in the first half of the 20th century, this improvement was greatly accelerated after the Second World War. A 25 September 1952 *Calgary Herald* editorial entitled “An Important Part of Our Society” referred to the relaxation of immigration laws as “belated.” It applauded the community for the way it had “been assimilated into the pattern of our society, accepting many of its forms while never losing touch with the greatness of their own culture,” as a model for successful immigration and as a “bright addition to the pattern of Calgary’s life.” At this time restaurants in Chinatown were becoming very popular with whites, especially as an opportunity to experience night life—an opportunity not available elsewhere in the city at the time.



Multiple exposure photo of Chinatown to illustrate the Western idea of “night life,” 1976. [Provincial Archives PA-1599-114-45]



Chinese National League Building, n.d. [City of Calgary]

<sup>1</sup> 1963 in some sources.

C.H. Poon (潘仲謙) emigrated from China—the first of his extended family to do so—after a brief period in Hong Kong, first arriving at Vancouver and eventually in Calgary in 1930 where he discovered a tight-knit and very active Chinatown community. He first lived at the Shon Yee Benevolent Association house at 207 Centre Street South, and soon acquired the Nanking Restaurant in a small house (non-extant) at Centre Street South and 3rd Avenue. Bucking the 1960s trend of moving to the suburbs, and encouraging others to do the same, he and his wife and business partner Arline, along with their seven children, remained. The successful restaurateur also acquired an interest in the WK restaurant (209 Centre Street South, non-extant), which was extremely popular with white Calgarians, and in 1945 he bought the New China restaurant. In 1949 he acquired the property on the northwest corner of Centre Street South and 3rd Avenue and built the Linda Mae Building named for one of their daughters; there he opened the Linda Mae Lotus Garden while Arline ran Linda Mae's gift shop. He also acquired the Imperial Palace on 4th Avenue in 1962, which he ran until 1972.

He was another exemplary community leader, known as one of Chinatown's "Big Four" (along with Ho Lem, Harry Lee, and Charlie Mah Yet), serving many terms as president of the Shon Yee Association, holding executive and chairman positions on the National League, and playing a key role in the formation of Sien Lok. A skilled calligrapher himself, Poon was a passionate advocate for traditional Chinese culture and arts. Mrs. Poon was also active in Chinatown, assisting extended family members and others with the immigration and citizenship processes; she was active in the Mission and served many terms on the executive for the Mother's Club and the Ladies Aid.

## Arline and C.H. Poon [潘仲謙] (Poon Chong-Him, b. ca. 1890)



Left: Dr. Liu Chieh, Chinese Nationalist representative in Canada, greeted by Harry Lee, centre, and C.H. Poon, right.



Right: L-R: Mrs. C.H. Poon, Mrs. C.Y. Mah, and Mrs. L. Ying prepare food for a Chinese United Church event, 1958. [Glenbow Archives]

# The Lilydale Poultry Plant Near Chinatown

A poultry plant just outside of today's Chinatown was an important employer for the community and remembered by many old-timers. The Alberta Poultry Marketers Co-operative building (extant) opened in 1959 on the site of the Calgary Public Market at 316 3 Street SE. It may have been built by Sam Sheinin, who was one of the original vendors at the Calgary Public Market, running his poultry stall from 1914. His customers included the Linda Mae Restaurant. He came to own the public market, and occupied it at the time it was destroyed by fire in 1954. Today's building appears to incorporate some remnants of the market. Another nearby plant, the Community Kosher Poultry Plant, began operating at 317 3 Avenue SE around 1964.

The Chi Thanh Chinese School and Calgary Indo-China Ethnic Chinese Association have been located in the building since at least 1993 and likely since the school was established in 1985. So, although outside of Chinatown, this building has a strong connection to both Chinatown's post-war period when Lilydale was operating, and to the community's revitalization period when a new wave of ethnic Chinese immigrants from Indo-China arrived in Calgary.

**Announcing!**  
**...OPENING OF A NEW EGG AND POULTRY PLANT**  
operated by the **ALBERTA POULTRY MARKETERS CO-OP LTD.**

A modern, new plant at 3rd St. and 4th Ave. S.E., affiliated with Co-op Hatcheries throughout Alberta.

TO CO-OP MEMBERS this plant offers facilities to process 60,000 lbs. of poultry per day. The resulting fast service and efficient processing ensures maximum returns to members. Serving a total of 25,000 farmers in Alberta, Alberta Poultry Marketers operates Co-op. Hatcheries in Edmonton, Camrose, Calgary, Lethbridge, and maintains 44 country egg grading stations throughout Alberta.

TO THE CONSUMER this plant means better packaging techniques, while the new "liqui-flash" freezing process means fresher and more tasty products. The plant is completely sanitary and is under the Health of Animals Inspection Department of the Dominion Government.

**EXTERIOR OF PLANT**

**Lilydale** Brand in your retail store ... if you like Chicken, you'll love Lilydale!

FEATURING THE NEW "LIQUID-FLASH" FREEZING PROCESS

A revolutionary new process ensures every small portion of frozen poultry which "thaws" stays on the product to be frozen. The new Lilydale system freezes faster and more economically than any other known process with no loss of taste, texture or quality. The resulting eggs, meat and poultry are fresh, tender and healthy. In an excellent selection, and is approved for use in serving food products.

**LINE OF PRODUCTS**

TO PEOPLE, serving a nation, means that the packaging and distribution of these products is vital. Since Lilydale Hatchery, Inc. is a member of the National Poultry Marketing Board, it is able to guarantee the quality of its products. The products are packed in the following manner: under their own brand names and under: All Hatched Eggs - Lilydale Brand Eggs.

**ALBERTA POULTRY MARKETERS CO-OPERATIVE LIMITED**  
EDMONTON, CALGARY, CAMROSE, LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

Advertisement in the *Calgary Herald*, 24 October 1959.



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## Heritage Value

- ◇ Chinatown possess heritage value for the central role that the tongs and community leaders continued to play there in preserving Chinese culture in Calgary, even after many Chinese Calgarians had moved to the suburbs.
- ◇ Chinatown—with its distinctive architecture, signage, and interior and exterior decoration, along with its intangible heritage like cuisine, festivals, and art—also possesses value as a unique place for visitors to enjoy a cultural excursion.
- ◇ Chinatown possesses person value for community leaders Arline and C.H. Poon for their contribution in perpetuating traditional Chinese culture in Calgary.

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ The 1950 Linda Mae Building built by Arline and C.H. Poon and named for one of their daughters, and the former site of Poon's Linda Mae Lotus Garden restaurant and rooftop sign, the 1960 Jade Palace and rooftop sign.
- ◇ 1953 Chinese United Church and 1954 Chinese National League Building, both on the City of Calgary inventory.

## Interpretation Opportunities

- ◇ Signage at the former Lilydale poultry plant.
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## 1967–1974

### Preservation and Promotion of Chinatown

As with other Canadian Chinatowns in close proximity to downtown centres, land speculation increased and the types of owners changed; by 1962, 75 per cent of properties were owned by investors.<sup>1</sup> These owners were less interested in keeping up their buildings, many of which had sustained lengthy periods of deferred maintenance, in many cases leading to demolition and the creation of parking lots. This was an era when urban renewal and clearance projects were in vogue globally, and Chinatowns across the country were all potential targets. The Chinese communities were divided about the future of their Chinatowns: some considered them as a blot; some were fatalistic and could not envision a vibrant future for their community; others were simply disinterested but “there were also some community leaders who saw [Chinatown] as the root of Chinese culture and identity and wanted to protect it from redevelopment projects.”<sup>2</sup>

Calgary was fortunate to have such leaders, so our Chinatown—narrowly—escaped destruction. 1967 harkened a new period of immigration, with entry into Canada now on an equal playing field, and immigrants who came to Canada not because they were forced from their homelands, but because they were attracted to what the country had to offer. It is ironic that at the dawn of this new era Calgary’s Chinatown was facing its potential demise in the form of no fewer than four proposals from city administration.

The challenges to survival began in 1963–64 with Calgary’s “Robert Moses moment.” A joint CPR–City of Calgary Downtown Redevelopment Plan proposed the relocation of downtown CPR tracks to run along the south side of the Bow—paralleled by an eight-lane parkway! The proposal had the support of Calgary’s male-dominated business community and most of council, first led by Mayor Harry Hays.<sup>3</sup> But the Calgary Local Council of Women<sup>4</sup> envisioned parkland along the riverbanks and, led by city lawyer Ruth Gorman, spearheaded opposition to the plan. Also supporting river beautification was Alderman Jack Leslie who initiated a request for an independent impact study, after which council support began to erode. As widespread opposition grew, and anticipated project costs escalated, a motion to abandon the plan received council support of 10 to 3.

## George Ho Lem Jr. [何榮禧] (1922–2005)

George Ho Lem Jr. played an indispensable role in rescuing Calgary’s Chinatown, and in working with other major Canadian cities to save theirs. Although there were many strong contributors in Chinatown at this time, and the entire community came together, no one contributed more than Ho Lem. He was elected to council in 1959, the first Chinese-Canadian to do this in a major centre in the country. He was also a successful politician who served three terms on council and one term as member of the legislative assembly—the first Chinese-Canadian MLA in the province. Ho Lem led a strong opposition to the clearance of much of east Chinatown for a new federal building, in this case only achieving partial success: i.e., an improved redesign of the Harry Hays Building. A businessman, he began his career establishing and running the successful Rosedale Cleaners for three decades with his brother. He later became a key individual in Prime Minister Trudeau’s multicultural policy team.



[Courtesy of Legislative Assembly of Alberta]

<sup>1</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 23 October and 22 November 1962, cited in David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns*, 278.

<sup>3</sup> Until he became the new federal Minister of Agriculture, replaced by Grant MacEwan.

<sup>4</sup> Organized in 1894 by Lady Lougheed; the same organization was also responsible for seeing the James Short School cupola returned to its original site.

Following on that episode, there was a new proposal by the city in 1965 to extend Bow Trail through Chinatown, another to construct a 12-lane “parkway” along the river—including a major interchange at Centre Street South—and in 1967 yet another to rebuild the Centre Street Bridge. Businessman Ray Lee rose to the occasion, and in 1968 was instrumental in establishing Sien Lok, a group with many young businessmen and professionals, the name coming from the expression “Wai sien gee lok” (“charity gives the greatest happiness”). They were motivated not only by the loss of other Canadian Chinatowns to urban renewal but also by the recent loss of much of the Victoria Park neighbourhood. In 1969 Sien Lok organized the National Conference on Urban Renewal as It Affects Chinatowns, attended by politicians and Chinatown representatives across Canada as well as US observers. In addition to renewing the commitment and spirit of many Chinatown supporters in the wider Chinese community, the conference gained positive and sustained attention from the media.

Moreover, to meet the need for the wider Chinese community to be consulted and to present a united front, 20 traditional associations responded by forming the United Calgary Chinese Association (UCCA). The result was that the city and province announced that they would not do major roads projects through Chinatown; in 1970 the Bow Trail extension was put on hold, and in 1971 council decided to rehabilitate the bridge.

The community was yet again required to respond when in 1973 the Bow Trail extension was resurrected as the “Downtown Penetrator.” This time community leaders formed the Chinatown Development Task Force, with George Ho Lem Jr. at the helm. And again they were successful. The group also triumphed in having council delineate about 20 hectares of the community as a Neighbourhood Improvement Program area. By 1971 about 1,000 of the approximately 12,000 to 15,000 Chinese Calgarians were living in Chinatown; overall, Chinatown residents were 60 per cent Chinese ethnicity, and 30 per cent were over 65 years old. Although most Chinese who lived in Chinatown resided in various tong houses, the funds were not used to improve existing houses (as they were in Ramsay and Inglewood, for example). By contrast, in 1974 two city blocks were levelled for the construction of a federal government complex—resulting in the loss of 30 houses and the displacement of 200 residents!

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## Heritage Value

- ◇ The neighbourhood possesses person value for George Ho Lem Jr. and Ray Lee, and their critical leadership to ensure Chinatown’s survival in the 1960s and 1970s.
- ◇ Chinatown possesses event value for the 1969 Sien Lok National Conference on Urban Renewal as It Affects Chinatowns, attended by politicians and Chinatown representatives across Canada.

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ Green spaces and walking paths along the banks of the Bow River; natural area on Prince’s Island.

## Sites of Interest

- ◇ Sien Lok Parks Phases I & II.

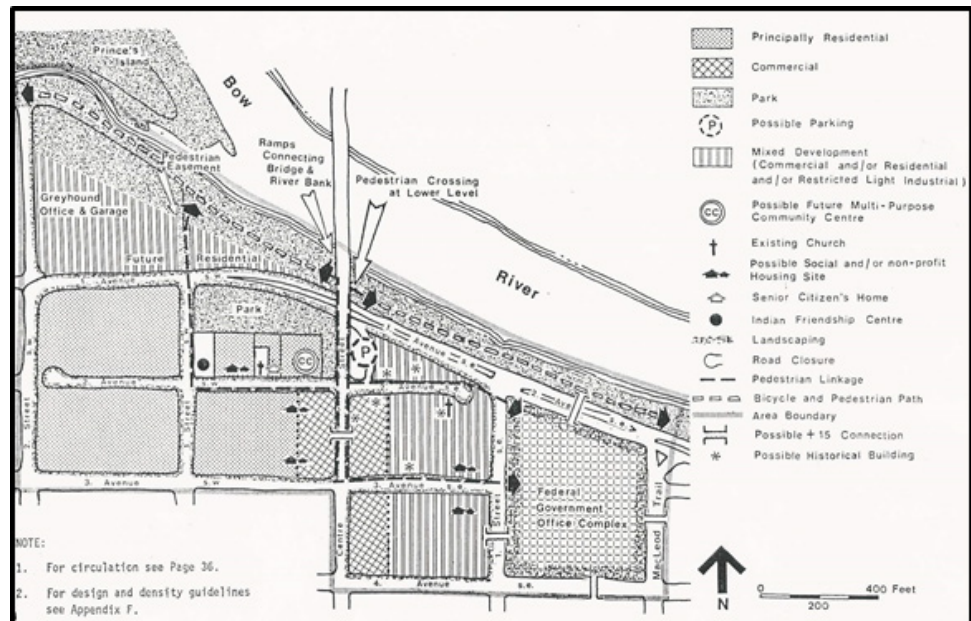
## Interpretation Opportunities

- ◇ Interpretation on the site of the Harry Hays Building about the demolition of the houses.
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## 1975–Early 1990s Chinatown's Revitalization

Responding to both the 1966 Downtown Master Plan and 1970 Bow Trail Extension (known as the Downtown Penetrator), the formation of the Calgary Chinatown Development Task Force (CCDTF) in 1973 began a significant preservation and revitalization period for Chinatown. Both of these plans, threatening to impact Chinatown as a community, rallied businessmen, merchants, and residents under the leadership of the then-member of the legislature for Calgary McCall, George Ho Lem. It took the 170 CCDTF professional and non-professional members three years to prepare the *Calgary Chinatown Design Brief* which resulted in a comprehensive plan that excluded the previously planned east–west Downtown Penetrator and instead provided a vision to retain and redevelop a 20-hectare area as a residential community for both Chinese and non-Chinese. Approved by City Council in 1976, the *Chinatown Design Brief* provided a later, well-recognized foundation for Chinatown's revitalization and ultimately its continued existence.

The *Chinatown Design Brief* preserved, revitalized, and envisioned some major cultural shifts that may be seen as both contributing and impacting. It did expand a business-focused Chinatown vision into a liveable community that continued to meet the needs of the Chinese community and at the same time grow it as a cultural centre for the wider Chinese community and later occidental cultural tourists.



*Chinatown Design Brief Improvement Plan, 9 November 1976, City of Calgary.*

Similar to many communities in Calgary, blocks of single-family houses and some of the tongs buildings were lost to major developments such as the Harry Hays Building and larger residential buildings. The CCDTF played the role of mediator in the federal government's expropriation of the Chinatown lands for the Harry Hays Building by helping relocate low-income residents to newer housing opportunities. It was a transitioning time for Chinatown, with CCDTF's goal being to ensure that Chinatown continued to constructively grow while reinforcing Chinatown's value both as a place of residence and also as a place of cultural celebration for the many Chinese who had moved to the suburbs.

Changes in built form were evident in the new residential high-rise buildings being constructed. With the help of funding from Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation, the CCDTF played a role in building several seniors' housing projects, including Oi Kwan Place in 1976 and the 10-storey public housing Bowside Manor apartment building for low-income and elderly Chinese Calgarians. Bowside Manor was approved under the National Housing Act in 1980 and remains home to the Calgary Chinese School and the Lee Family Association.



In the early 1980s the height and density of redevelopment projects in Chinatown became controversial. The United Calgary Chinese Association (formulated in 1969 in response to the 1966 Downtown Master Plan) wanted to maintain the small building and medium-sized character envisioned in the *Chinatown Design Brief* while the Calgary Chinatown Development Foundation (CDF) wanted to see high-density commercial and residential projects. City Council's decision to have a consultant host a Chinatown design workshop with the community resulted in the *Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan* in 1984, which had a vision for medium- to high-density projects in the centre of Chinatown and high-density commercial projects along the perimeter of the community. It was this plan that recommended the construction of the Chinese Cultural Centre and other senior citizen apartments such as Wai Kwan Manor and Wah Ying Mansion. At this time Sien Lok Park was built, the streets beautified, and the Chinese lampposts and streetscape enhancements implemented. The Chinese Cultural Centre (1992) and the Calgary Chinatown Seniors' Centre (Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association, 1995) were both built from the *Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan* vision.



Residential high-rise buildings, 2018. [City of Calgary]

Between 1975 and the early 1990s the CCDTF played a significant role in envisioning and working with the community and city to evolve a vision and respond to challenges such that Chinatown truly revitalized to what it is today. During these years, residential and cultural uses were expanded, in the process building a comprehensive Chinatown community. Despite differing goals at various times and between different groups, this time period seemed to solidify the value of meeting needs for the Chinese community culturally and for its seniors as a means of reinforcing Chinatown's value.

Redevelopment was significant for Chinatown during this time, resulting in many of the pre-war buildings and streetscapes being replaced, by the 1990s, with new high-rise residential and commercial buildings and community facilities. As the revitalization unfolded, many parts of Chinatown transformed to what might be expected of an urban Chinese community in the 1970s and 1980s. The remaining pre-war buildings are mainly focused on Centre Street and 2 Avenue SW and SE.

During this time period, revitalization successes spurred a significant number of "newly established organizations" within Chinatown—a combination of associations and non-profit volunteer groups that supported families, culture, and sports. In 1984 the Alberta Gee Tuck ("supreme virtue") Family Association was established for Ji Zhou descendants of the Wu, Zhou, Cai, Weng, Cao, Fang, Gong, Ke, Xin, Hong, Wang, and Jiang family units (in pinyin). Based in the Chinese Cultural Centre, the Calgary Chinese Community Services Association was founded in 1979 to facilitate community involvement and integration. In 1975, the Chinese Cultural Society was formed to play a significant role in the development of the Chinese Cultural Centre, work with the city on the development of *Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan*, and promote continued cultural interaction, exchange, and services to the Chinatown community.

The Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association was formed in 1985 to provide a meeting place for seniors. Starting with 50 members, it now boasts over 2,000. The Tsung Tsin Association, representing the Hakka (guests) from central China, was established in 1986 in Calgary. Formed in 1992, Vietnamese Chinese Association initially shared space with the Tsung Tsin Association and later moved to Happiness Plaza. The Chao Chow Community Benevolent Society, representing the people from Chao Chow (Chaozhou) City, was established in 1985. In 1982, the Hoy Sun Association of Calgary was formed with initial meetings at Peter Eng's Garden Exchange Café, later moving to its current location at 328 Centre Street. Established in 1991 in the Good Fortune Plaza, the Wu Yi Association of Calgary is a group of Chinese-Canadian volunteers that come from five districts of China to provide assistance to its members. The Calgary Chinese Basketball Association was formed in 1986 to coordinate tournaments for the Alberta Chinese Basketball invitational.



Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association, 2018.  
[City of Calgary]

Although not located in Chinatown, it should be noted that during this time period many other associations were formed within Calgary to support the Chinese community.

## Heritage Value

- ◇ Chinatown possesses activity value for the period of 1975 through the early 1990s in regard to the activities, responses, and ultimately significant shift in the development of Chinatown for the Chinese community as its members worked through the planning and higher density issues of their location within Calgary's downtown core.
- ◇ Chinatown possesses cultural practice value as community members worked to establish Chinatown as a cultural centre and a community that supported its seniors after having had many Chinese families move to the suburbs.

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ New characteristics introduced into the streetscape and architecture from the period of revitalization and later to create a new sense of place, such as Chinese street names and signage, murals, symbolic designs and decoration, and the use of gold and red colour (including red brick).

## Sites of Interest

- ◇ 1976 Oi Kwan Place, 1980 Bowside Manor, 1992 Chinese Cultural Centre, and 1995 Chinatown Seniors Centre— see Architecture section for character-defining elements of these buildings.

# Merchants and Businesses of Chinatown

One of Calgary Chinatown's foundations is the merchants and businesses that worked hard to establish a vital and sustainable community. Chinatown was built with a focus on business that further offered mixed-use opportunities for residential, meeting, and boarding areas. Although the first building, the Canton Block, was built by a group of relatively wealthy businessmen, there was a gradation of merchants and working-class immigrants who were a part of building Chinatown. Many Chinese came for short periods of time to earn money to return home for visits, or they established themselves as merchants with the intent to build a long-term business and be exempt from the Head Tax.<sup>1</sup> "This tax was to be paid by the Chinese immigrants as a condition of entry with the exception of consular officers, merchants and clergymen and their families, tourists, men of science, students and teachers."<sup>2</sup> Many who established themselves as merchants built businesses that have sustained for decades. The merchant and working-class immigrant often had very different experiences yet both significantly contributed to building Chinatown for their community and the city.



Chinatown's Flatiron Building, ca. 1911. [Glenbow Archives NC-24-52]

The merchant buildings provided a variety of uses to meet the needs of the Chinese community, such as shops, restaurants, laundries, boarding houses, meeting places for political or clan associations, and domestic space for families. This mix of uses provided diversity in Chinatown and a vitality reflective of the Chinese culture, particularly the initial typical building design of running a commercial business and then living above or adjacent to that business.

Some of the emerging specialized businesses in the early years included laundries, Western restaurants, and entertainment. That grew to include traditional medicine, specialized grocers, post office, import trade, barbers, tailors, and shoemakers. Later businesses catered to non-Chinese cultural tourists, Cantonese restaurants that adapted cuisine for Western tastes, and professional services. As Jacques Hamilton wrote in the *Calgary Herald* on 11 January 1969:

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*"Chinatown businessmen provided Calgary's Chinese, regardless of where they lived in the city, with familiar goods and services and tallied the cost on an abacus. Grocers stocked familiar foods, and while Chinese restaurants in the white community struggled to imitate Western cuisine, those in Chinatown served traditional Cantonese fare. In the herb shops, doctors prescribed the ancient cures of Kwangtung [Guangdong]. Chinese barbers, tailors, and shoemakers catered exclusively to a Chinese clientele. Shopkeepers imported tea, porcelain, clothing, and knickknacks directly from Canton or through Vancouver's huge Chinatown. Some even prospered."*

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<sup>1</sup> Some sources indicate merchants were required to pay the Head Tax.

<sup>2</sup> The Canada Yearbook, 1927–28, p. 200, cited in Gunter Baureiss, "The Chinese Community in Calgary," *Alberta Historical Review* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1974).

Paul DoFoo was a highly respected resident of Chinatown—and his life spans its history.

DoFoo was born in Calgary, the eldest of five. His father, Luey DoFoo (originally named Luey Choau [雷], Luey being the family name), came to Canada from China in 1899 and ran a restaurant in downtown Calgary; his mother arrived in 1912. As a child, Paul was active in Chinatown's YMCA (part of the Chinese Mission, forerunner of the Chinese United Church), including playing on its hockey team. He and his wife continued to be engaged members of the Chinese United Church throughout their lives.

DoFoo attended The Institute of Technology and Art (now Southern Alberta Institute of Technology), earning a diploma as a radio technician. Knowing that discrimination would prevent him from getting a job in this field in Canada, in 1941 he took the opportunity to work in China as a radio technician and English-language news broadcaster. There he met his wife, Lilian, a journalist and broadcaster. Because of the Communist Revolution, in 1949 the DoFoods decided to leave China and resettled in Calgary's Chinatown. There they opened Home Confectionery (at 312 Centre Street South) with his father, which they ran for 34 years, raising four children in a house behind the business. In addition, Lilian trained and worked as a nursing aide.

The store became a community gathering place, where they provided translation services and other support to new immigrants as well as to many others. Both Chinese and Canadian traditions were honoured at home and at the store, which was fully decorated for holidays.

DoFoo was well-known in Chinatown—and he knew Chinatown well. For six decades, he worked daily on his “Chinese in the News” project, filling dozens of binders with articles that made reference to Chinese people, taken from both Calgary newspapers. He carefully indexed and cross-referenced the hundreds of articles by hand. He also greatly supported the work of the Sien Lok Society to document Chinatown's history, providing photographs and insights to help it mount two photo exhibitions. The society honoured and thanked him with a celebration of his 100th birthday.

Paul DoFoo's “Chinese in the News” collection, as well as videotaped interviews with him conducted as part of the 2005–2007 Chinese Canadian Oral History Project, are held at the University of Calgary.

## Paul DoFoo [雷] (1913–2018)



Lilian and Paul DoFoo as newlyweds. [Courtesy of their daughter]



The number of Chinese grocery stores, restaurants, and laundries in Calgary reached a peak in 1915. This was due to the growth of people in Calgary in these pre-war years. In 1915 there were 100 businesses; that dropped to 63 in 1920 then rose again in 1925 to 72 businesses. By 1947 there no longer were laundry businesses; however, merchants, restaurants, and other services such as barbers and tailors remained strong given post-war prosperity, which resulted in more investment in the restaurant business. In 1985 there were 93 businesses in Chinatown.

The city's first streetcar ran on 5 July 1909 at the entrance of the Exhibition Grounds on 2 Street SE; however, it wasn't until early 1917 that the streetcar route was opened and extended up Centre Street from 4 Avenue South through Chinatown. Initial planning of the streetcar back in 1909 determined that Centre Street would provide the best grade to continue north across the river, creating a loop back through Sunnyside into the western side of downtown. At the time that the Canton Block was built it was known that the streetcar would eventually run northward through Chinatown contributing to the commercial vitality as the third and current Chinatown was developed between 1910 and 1922. The streetcar system in Calgary was dismantled between 1946 and 1950, therefore removing this mode of transportation through Chinatown.

Over the years, the businesses in Chinatown have evolved and continued to sustain the cultural needs of the Chinese community despite most Chinese Calgarians now living in other communities. As Calgary's downtown grew professionally and Chinatown was revitalized in the 1980s, Chinese restaurants became a popular destination for non-Chinese for Sunday dim sum and lunch-hour meals.



Canton Block commercial with mixed-use above, 2018.  
[City of Calgary]

## Heritage Value

- ◇ Chinatown possesses activity value for specialized businesses in the early years, which included laundries, Western restaurants, and entertainment. That grew to include traditional medicine, specialized grocers, post office, import trade, barbers, tailors and shoemakers. In addition Chinatown later became a nodal commercial point for the Chinese population of the city; as well, businesses (such as Cantonese restaurants that adapted cuisine for Western tastes) catered to non-Chinese cultural tourists.
- ◇ Chinatown possesses cultural practices value for its Chinese cuisine and traditional Chinese medicine.
- ◇ Chinatown possesses activity value for the role that Centre Street provided as a streetcar commercial street that ran through the community and supported commercial businesses.

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ The character-defining elements were that of traditional storefronts that began as Edwardian, and evolved as interwar and mid-century storefronts that mostly remained as lower one- and two-storey commercial buildings with living above yet expanded to include small commercial mall type of buildings such as the Dragon City Mall and Hong Kong Plaza (see the Architecture section on commercial buildings).
- ◇ Centre Street as an historic streetcar commercial street is characteristic of buildings that were built close to the lot lines (again, see the Architecture section).

## Community Life: Chinatown as a Social, Recreational, Cultural, and Spiritual Home Village

*"A Chinatown ... is a unique component of the urban fabric of Canadian cities and part of Canada's multicultural mosaic."*

David Chuenyan Lai  
1988<sup>1</sup>

*"(Calgary's Chinatown) was the social, recreational, cultural and spiritual 'home village' for the rapidly assimilating Chinese"*

Oi Kwan Endowment Trust  
Fund Commemorative Book



Chinatown streetscape in 1973. [John Colville, *Calgary Herald*. Provincial Archives PA-1599-114-41]

### Women and Families at the Heart

One of the most profound changes was the shift from a bachelor society with overseas families to one centred on the local family unit. In 1911 only 3 of the 485 Chinese Calgarians were women. So through the 1910s women found themselves with the challenge of raising a family in a foreign place where they did not know the language, supported only by a handful of other women. Some hoped to return to their homeland. But within a few generations things began to change. In 1932 the Mother's Club, headed by Mrs. Lem Kwong, was formed, later joined by the Women's Mission Circle in 1934. Indicative of the economic times the women's initial activities were focused on feeding the jobless housed at the Mission, and teaching English to the unemployed. In 1936 they began fundraising with their popular annual "Chow Mein Teas" and from 1937 with Chinese fashion parades by the girls of the Young People's Society.



One of the Young People's Society "Oriental Fashion Parades" to raise funds for Chinese refugees during the Second World War. [Chinese United Church 75th Anniversary pamphlet, Glenbow Archives]

<sup>1</sup> David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), p. 285.

## Spiritual

In addition to the turn of the century Chinese Mission, by 1908 there was a Chinese Cemetery on the west side of Cemetery Hill, separated from the rest of Union Cemetery to allow for special Chinese burial practices. The graves are placed on an east-facing slope so that the departed can face the rising sun. C.H. Poon was involved in a mid-century cemetery improvement project that included its remediation as well as the construction of a pavilion for incense and food-burning ceremonies (replaced with a more permanent pagoda during another improvement project in 1990). He believed such spiritual rituals were important for the new generations, so they could learn respect for the ancestors and continue the bond with the family graves.

As well as being the centre of many community activities, the Mission continued to play a strong spiritual role in Chinatown. At the outset the Mission was multid denominational, but in the late 1940s George Ho Lem Sr., who was spearheading the fundraising for a new building, influenced the decision to join the Chinese United Church in 1949. But even after this time, because it was the only Chinese church, people came to meet there regardless of their religious background. At that time many of the congregation were first-generation Canadians and Chinese speakers. By 1953 a new Chinese United Church had been constructed (facade, bell tower, and layout of sanctuary interior extant, 124 2 Avenue SW), complete with a new gymnasium to accommodate recreational activities. The 1911 Chinese Mission (non-extant, 120 2 Avenue SW) was then used for affordable housing, and in 1970 was demolished to use the land for Oi Kwan Place seniors housing. By 1990 the congregation comprised about 120 families; the composition had shifted to the second and third generations and three-quarters were English-speaking. The remainder who spoke Chinese were generally not bilingual so special Chinese services were still offered.

In 1954 the Chinese Pentecostal Church was founded by Reverend Clarence Stahl, first located in a house and later moving to two other Chinatown locations before the purpose-built church was erected at 129 2 Avenue SE in 1963 (extant). Like the United Church it also offered services in Chinese. By 1990 it had a 200-member congregation; it has undergone alterations and also been expanded with a major west addition.



Explorers girls' group made toy animals for 1959 Chow Mein Tea at the Chinese Mission (now the Chinese United Church). L-R: Linda Poon, Joan DoFoo. [Provincial Archives PA-1599-114-23]



Chinese Pentecostal Church, ca. 1960–70s (left) and 2018 (right). [City of Calgary]



## Education

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As Chinatown's demographic evolved to include children, education became an important societal function. The first public school Chinatown children attended would have been the James Short sandstone school (non-extant, school cupola remains on site in a small park). A Calgary Chinese public school was founded in the 1910s to teach the new generation their traditional language and culture although its formal registration was not until 1939. C.H. Poon again showed his passion for preserving traditional Chinese culture in Canada by being a major supporter of the Chinese Public School, which his own children and grandchildren attended.

The Chinese Public School operated on and off during the Depression and other difficult economic times. Significant community effort and donations were required to acquire the schoolhouse and keep it running, and volunteers served on the school board. There were funding challenges, and by necessity teachers were responsible for classrooms of multiple grade levels. By 1950, 40 students were enrolled, growing to 100 by 1980 when the schoolhouse was replaced by the school component of Bowside Manor, a joint project of the school, the Lee family association, and the Chinatown Development Foundation.<sup>1</sup> Enrolment grew to 400 a few years later. For a while classes were held after regular school, but as more families moved away to the suburbs, the school moved to weekend classes of a few hours. By the early 1990s, with increased immigration as well as a desire for second and third generation children to learn their ancestral culture, enrolment soared to 1,800 children (60 per cent born in Canada).

## Eldercare and Social Housing

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At the beginning of the 1970s, with demographics again changing—this time to reflect an aging population—30 per cent of Chinese Chinatown residents were over 65 years and there was a need for affordable care and housing of elders. The United Church launched an initiative led by David Ho Lem, another son of George Sr., to form the non-profit Oi Kwan (“Love of Humanity”) Foundation. \$1.6 million dollars was raised to construct the eleven-storey Oi Kwan Manor in 1976. The Chinatown Development Foundation played a role here as well. In 1978 the Mah Society built a five-storey building for their society with retail below and apartments above on Centre Street at 110 2 Avenue SE.<sup>2</sup> The second component of the 1979 Bowside Manor<sup>3</sup> project (128 2 Avenue SW) was an 88-unit housing complex. The Oi Kwan Foundation initiated another senior housing project in 1985, the Wai Kwan Manor (200 1 Street SW), and the following year the Wah Ying Manor seniors’ home (122 3 Avenue SE) was erected at a cost of \$1.6 million.<sup>4</sup>

The Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association was formed in 1985 as a meeting place to protect elderly residents from isolation, and to offer English and citizenship services and classes for new immigrants. They soon expanded to include outreach and recreational activities. With over 2,000 members by the early 1990s, a foundation was established for a purpose-built complex which was constructed in 1995 (111 Riverfront Avenue SW), set on the riverbank at the east end of Sien Lok Park.



Top: Wai Kwan Manor, 200 1 ST SW, 2017, with symbol for “longevity” on north facade.

Bottom: 1995 Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association at east end of Sien Lok Park, 2018. [City of Calgary]

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<sup>1</sup> The successor to the Chinatown Development Task Force, formed to qualify for CMHC housing projects.

<sup>2</sup> Currently the Broadview Centre and no longer owned by the Mah Society who have moved to 207 1 Street SE.

<sup>3</sup> Also located in the complex at some point were the Sien Lok Society, the Tsung Tsin Association, and *Oriental News*.

<sup>4</sup> Over time many of these buildings began offering market (versus affordable) housing.



## Changing Social Organizations: Cultural and Intellectual Life

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The traditional benevolent associations, as we have seen, were at the centre of community life in Chinatown, especially in the early years. In fact, in addition to a strong commercial sector, and the presence of effective voices for redevelopment, the kinship and benevolent associations were critical to the survival of Canadian Chinatowns and also played a key role in their revitalization. As they evolved, the number of tongs as well as aspects of their role was reduced, but they continued a strong involvement in cultural activities and festivals, and some continued to offer funerals. In this way, over a century, they fostered integration of immigrants into mainstream culture without losing the strong ties to Chinese culture. New umbrella organizations emerged. While other Canadian Chinatowns had a Chinese Benevolent Association to act as a single official voice externally and resolve issues between internal organizations like tongs and other kinship organizations, Calgary had the United Calgary Chinese Association (UCCA) as the main unifying organization. Sadly, not a single tong house remains to represent the pivotal role of the tongs, but commercial buildings like the Canton Block played a very strong institutional role in housing many traditional organizations.

The Wah Kiu Musical Society, established in 1961 and based in the Canton Block, use traditional Chinese instruments as well as Western instruments in their orchestra. They offer Cantonese music concerts and play for Chinese operas.

### Chinatown Communications

Chinatown has had a post office since 1962, first franchised by Leonard Wong. A variety of Chinese-language newspapers have operated in the community, including the Calgary Chinese News based at 233 Centre Street South and the Oriental News situated at Bowside Manor. The Sing Tao newspaper was first published locally in 1988, from the newly opened Good Fortune Plaza at 111/115/119 3 Avenue SE, although they are no longer based in Chinatown. The Sue Yuen organization (at 206C Centre Street South) also publishes a monthly journal in addition to providing financial support for students, the elderly and family members in need. Chinese broadcasting organizations in Chinatown began in 1981 at 197 1 Street SW with the Calgary Chinese Broadcasting Society, which operated for at least a decade.<sup>1</sup>



1992 Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre, in 2018. [City of Calgary]

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<sup>1</sup> There have been a number of commercial and non-commercial Chinese media organizations in Calgary that did not operate from Chinatown, including Fairchild Radio currently broadcasting from the northeast.



1978 Mah Society building, in 2018. [City of Calgary]

## Heritage Value

- ◇ Chinatown possesses institutional value for its historic institutional buildings, for historic associations with Calgary's Chinese immigrants, and for its role as the gateway for new Chinese and ethnic Chinese immigrants.
- ◇ Chinatown also possesses spiritual value for the Chinese Mission, which has played a continuous role in Calgary's Chinatowns since 1901, and which carried on its central role after joining the United Church in 1949.
- ◇ In addition, Chinatown possesses social value for its intangible heritage of traditional Chinese culture as a place for Chinese festivals, language schools, music and dance performance, and art for over a century.

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ Chinatown's institutional buildings listed below.

## Interpretation Opportunities

- ◇ The 1953 Chinese United Church built by the Chinese Mission congregation and the 1963 Chinese Pentecostal Church.
- ◇ The 1992 Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre, a four-storey building modelled after the Temple of Heaven in Beijing.
- ◇ The 1978 Mah Society building, which references Chinatown's Edwardian commercial buildings.
- ◇ The 1976 Oi Kwan Manor.
- ◇ The 1995 Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association.

# Chinatown Architecture and Streetscapes

*“Calgary’s Chinatown...has been transformed from a small cluster [of] largely Chinese businesses that occupied anonymous, two storey undistinguished buildings, into a vibrant and intensified commercial zone... [and] the centre of the preservation of Chinese culture, not just for the people of the area, but for the population as a whole.”*

Wayne K.D. Davies  
2006

## Into the 1940s

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During Chinatown’s first four decades the population was small, with few women or families; residents had low earnings so not much discretionary income to spend on new building; and many did not intend to stay in Calgary. During these first decades, Chinese residents, businesses, and organizations mainly utilized pre-existing buildings. Business, institutional, social, and residential uses were often combined within the same structures.

There was a short building stage during 1910s and ‘20s. After that, there was little construction until after World War II, and existing buildings deteriorated.

The few new buildings constructed by and for the Chinese were intentionally inconspicuous—indistinguishable in style and form from buildings of the same era found throughout Calgary. However, there were surely important differences inside: in their usage, layout, arrangement of furniture and possessions, and culturally specific signage, objects, and decor. For example, though not indicated from the outside, several commercial buildings followed the Chinese tradition of inserting a mezzanine level between floors to provide extra sleeping space. Interiors of Chinatown buildings would be a rich area for further research.

### Commercial / Mixed-Use Buildings

#### Character-defining elements:

Commercial buildings were mainly along Centre Street. These one-, two-, and two-and-one-half storey structures were in an Edwardian commercial style typical of the modest commercial buildings constructed throughout Calgary. They were usually faced in red brick with sandstone lintels and details, and had flat roofs and pressed metal cornices. Ground floors, with display windows, held businesses; upper floors had institutional and residential users.

#### Examples/additional character-defining elements:

##### Canton Block

200–218 Centre Street South

Constructed 1910, expanded twice 1911; by J.B. Henderson

Notable as the first building constructed by members of the Chinese-Canadian community in present-day Chinatown. Housed businesses (grocery store, restaurants, and cafes), and also tong associations (Lim Shai Hor Association, Sue Yuen Tong Society, Yee Fong Toy Tong) that provided housing and recreational areas for members. A portion built in 1911 includes a mezzanine level.



Flatiron Building, ca. 1911. [Published in *Calgary, Alberta Merchants and Manufacturers Record*, 1911, p. 125. Glenbow Archives NC-24-52]

### Flatiron Building [not extant]

112–134 2 Avenue SE

Constructed 1910–13; by Duncan Beverage

Included stores, restaurants, residences.

### Ho Lem Block

109 2 Avenue SE

Constructed 1911

Built for prominent Chinatown leader Ho Lem, who used half for his business (Calgary Knitting Mills) until World War II, and gave half to the Chinese National League. It served as the organization's headquarters between 1920 and 1950, with a reading library and living quarters for members. Includes a mezzanine level.

## Residential and Institutional Houses

### Character-defining elements:

Almost all of Chinatown's single-family structures were built before 1920. These were modest one- and two-storey buildings in the Queen Anne Revival and Edwardian Cottage styles typical of working-class housing found throughout Calgary. They were usually of wood-frame construction; with hip, gable, or cross-gable roofs; and with front porches, some with turned wood posts and spindlework. Many were probably used for businesses, tong houses, and other community needs in addition to or instead of as residences.

### Examples:

There are no extant examples. A 1961 map shows more than 100 single-family houses in Chinatown.<sup>1</sup> In 1974, 30 were razed at one time to make room for the Harry Hays Building, a massive federal office complex.

### Chinese Public School [not extant]

126 2 Avenue SW

Construction Date Unknown

Adaptive reuse of an existing house, starting in the early 1920s.



1962 photograph of Chinese Public School (replaced by current school in Bowside Manor complex in 1980). [Glenbow archives NA-2645-48]



Office of the Mah Society. [Terry Cioni, *Calgary Herald*, 11 July 1978. Glenbow Archives PA-1599-114-48]



Buildings on Centre ST S in Chinatown. [Rosettis Studio, Calgary, 1955. Glenbow Archives NA-5093-51]



Ho Lem Block (1911) on the right of photo, with 1980s commercial buildings on left, 2018. [City of Calgary]



Houses in Chinatown slated for demolition. [Roger Pierce, *Calgary Herald*, 1976. Glenbow Archives PA-1599-114-44]

<sup>1</sup> Insurance Plan of the City of Calgary, Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd., May 1961, sheets 118, 119, 120, 126, 127.



## Post-World War II

With improved immigration policies, the numbers of Chinese Calgarians, especially families, grew, and they had a greater commitment to settle in Canada. Although many families moved to the suburbs, they still looked to Chinatown to meet business, cultural, and social needs, and new buildings were constructed to serve them. With more favourable attitudes toward the Chinese by other Calgarians, Chinatown buildings now more freely showed Chinese-language signage and culturally influenced design elements.

At the same time, Chinatown's restaurants and nightclubs became popular with non-Chinese. These places were decked out to be attractive, "exotic" destinations for them, with prominent, Chinese-influenced signage, architectural and design features, and interior decor.

### Commercial / Mixed-Use Buildings

#### Character-defining elements:

The most notable commercial buildings specific to this period are restaurants. New one- and two-storey structures were built, and existing buildings probably also adapted, to create attractive dining and entertainment destinations. They drew attention with exuberant, projecting rooftop or wall signs (sometimes in Chinese-influenced shapes such as pagodas) with Chinese characters and typefaces resembling calligraphy, and perhaps also images such as dragons. The new structures had flat roofs, like other buildings of the same Mid-Century Modern era, but these were sometimes augmented with features meant to evoke traditional Chinese roofs, such as the appearance of roof ridges or seams with hooked ends. Inside and out, traditionally favoured colours—red, gold, jade green—and ornamentation such as fretwork were used. Interiors were enlivened with Chinese paintings and calligraphy, curtains and screens, and artifacts.

Other buildings used in part as tong houses or associations displayed prominent signage outside, and typically had culturally specific features inside, such as shrines to a deity holding food offerings and incense.

#### Examples:

##### Silver Dragon Restaurant

106 3 Avenue SE

Constructed 1966

##### Jade Palace Restaurant (now Soluxe Restaurant)

312 Centre Street South

Constructed 1960

##### Linda Mae's Coffee Shop (now Visions Eyecare Centre)

233 Centre Street South

Constructed 1950



Linda Mae's Coffee Shop. [Alison Jackson, 1967. Glenbow Archives NA-2645-54]



Jade Palace Restaurant exterior and interior [Alison Jackson, 1967, and John D. Colville, *Calgary Herald*, 1977. Glenbow Archives NA-2645-53, NA-2864-17752.]



Former Jade Palace Restaurant, now Soluxe Restaurant, 2018. [City of Calgary]

### Character-defining elements:

These buildings were similar in style and form to non-Chinatown buildings serving the same purposes, but differentiated by Chinese-language exterior signage as well as culturally influenced interior elements.

### Examples/additional character-defining elements:

#### Chinese National League Building

110 3 Avenue SE

Constructed 1954

Includes an auditorium and living quarters.

#### Chinese United Church

124 2 Avenue SW

Constructed 1954 (Architect Maxwell Bates) [facade, bell tower, and layout of sanctuary interior extant]

In a Gothic Revival style typical of much church architecture of this period. Included a gymnasium.

#### Chinese Pentecostal Church

129 2 Avenue SE

Constructed 1963; expanded 1979–80

Originally a three-bay symmetrical building in a modest Romanesque Revival style. Later became the western half of an enlarged structure with a horizontal emphasis, showing an influence of the Prairie style.



Chinese National League Building. [Calgary Herald, 1954. Glenbow Archives, PA-1599-114-12, PA-1599-114-12]

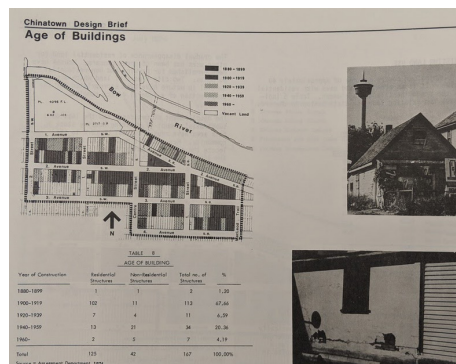


Chinese United Church. [Calgary Herald, 1954. Glenbow Archives, PA-1599-114-15] Remaining church facade and bell tower, 2018; buildings behind from left to right: 205 Rivefront AV SW, Bow Side Manor, Oi Kwan Place addition and original building. [City of Calgary]

## 1970s Revitalization to Current Day

As has been discussed earlier, in the 1960s and '70s Chinatown's buildings and places were threatened from the outside by proposals for new development. And they were also threatened from within by unchecked deterioration, often due to neglect by absentee landlords. Chinatown took a direct blow in 1974 when two city blocks—including about 30 housing structures—were levelled to make room for a federal office complex.

The *Calgary Chinatown Design Brief*, a City of Calgary report approved in 1976, was a key document used to direct the revitalization of Chinatown. The document described the neighbourhood boundaries, and recommended that family residential development and community facilities be encouraged to the west of Centre Street, and non-family residential and mixed-use development to the east. It recognized the need for new housing options, especially to serve the low-income seniors who make up the bulk of Chinatown residents. It also called for more parkland and open space, including better use of the riverbank.



Excerpt from the *Chinatown Design Brief* [City of Calgary Corporate Records, Archives]

The housing solution came from community and church-affiliated groups who obtained government and other funding to construct residential high-rises. By 2014, according to a census report, virtually all of Chinatown's 1,836 residents lived in apartments. No single-family houses or duplexes remain.<sup>1</sup>

The *Chinatown Design Brief* recommendations also led to the creation of Sien Lok Park on land acquired by the city, taking over land then occupied by low-end users such as parking lots and repair shops.

The brief urged that “the use of Chinese character, symbols, designs and colour in structures and identification signs be encouraged,” as well as bilingual signage. Such elements are now seen on buildings and outdoor features throughout the neighbourhood, as noted in examples below. It doesn't matter whether or not these elements are used in a historically or culturally appropriate way. The goal is not to re-create anything like a “real” Chinese place but rather to mark out Calgary's Chinatown as a distinctive cultural area within the context of the larger city.

A rift developed between property owners and developers seeking to build higher-density structures than proposed by the design brief and residents who wanted to maintain Chinatown's lower-density character. The Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan, adopted in 1984, struck a compromise. It allowed medium- to high-density construction in Chinatown's core and high-density construction on the perimeter. In exchange for allowing this higher density, the city provided land and funding for the construction of a cultural centre.

In 1988 the city began a beautification project in Chinatown that introduced unifying street furniture and streetscape enhancements. Much public art has also been added, including the sculptures in Sien Lok Park (1999, 2000), the Double Fish Ornament Gate, (ca. 2005), and 16 murals created by the non-profit Calgary Chinese Community Service Association between 2009 and 2017 to enhance public spaces and discourage graffiti.

All these initiatives have resulted in a flurry of new construction and other changes that have enlivened and transformed Chinatown.

It should be noted that red brick, used on the original Chinatown buildings, has continued to be a predominant building material in newer construction.



Corner of Centre Street South and 3 Av SW in 2018, showing Five Harvest Manor (left), former Linda Mae's Coffee Shop (centre), Ng Tower Centre (right). [City of Calgary]

### Residential and Mixed-Use High-rises

#### Character-defining elements:

These residential high-rises of 10 or more stories would be indistinguishable from others in Calgary of the same era were it not for their culturally influenced details. These include vertical Chinese characters prominently attached to an outer wall (Five Harvest Manor, Wai Kwan Manor); roof portions or secondary roofs in green tile or a material that resembles it, some with upturned red hooks at roof seams (Sunrise Building, Wai Kwan Manor, Wah Ying Mansion, Ng Tower Centre); red metal posts and/or decorative fences (Wai Kwan Manor, Wah Ying Mansion); decorative brackets (Wah Ying Mansion, Ng Tower Centre); posts with distinctive tops including ball finials (Oi Kwan Place, Ng Tower Centre). All have bilingual signage. Most have lower-level commercial and/or institutional users.

<sup>1</sup> City of Calgary Community Profiles, Part A — Demographics, Chinatown, p. 3.

### Examples/additional character-defining elements:

#### Oi Kwan Place

120 2 Avenue SW

Constructed 1976, addition 2012

Notable as the first seniors' residence building in Chinatown. Built by Oi Kwan Foundation, affiliated with the Calgary Chinese United Church. The addition was built behind, connected to, and included alterations to the Calgary Chinese United Church. Currently called Clover Living.

#### Five Harvest Manor

108 3 Avenue SW

Constructed 1976

#### Ng Tower Centre

115 2 Avenue SW

Constructed ca. 1978

#### 205 Riverfront Avenue SW

Constructed 2001

Red-brick facade with blue metal details (posts, balconies, fretwork screen) that reference the colours of the next-door Chinese Cultural Centre; oval-shaped penthouse that references the Cultural Centre's dome.

#### Wah Ying Mansion

122 3 Avenue SE

Constructed 1986

#### Bowside Manor

128 2 Avenue SW

Constructed 1980

Built jointly by the Chinese Public School, which occupies the first storey, and the Lee Association, which has its office there along with commercial tenants. Mural within a ground-level window.

#### Sunrise Building

116 3 Avenue SE

Constructed 1982

Lower levels hold the current headquarters of the Chinese Freemasons and Dart Coon Club, Jin Wah Sing Musical Society, and also commercial tenants.

#### Wai Kwan Manor

200 1 Street SW

Constructed 1985

Built by Oi Kwan Foundation, affiliated with the Calgary Chinese United Church. Red metal posts supporting a covered walkway and entrance porch, both with gable roofs with extended, upturned rafter ends and upright posts along roof ridge. Exterior has attached vertical Chinese characters for the word "Longevity." Street-level murals.



Left to right: Sunrise Building, Wah Ying Mansion, 2018. [City of Calgary]



Roof and ground-level features of the Ng Tower Centre, 2018. [City of Calgary]



### Character-defining elements:

These one-, two-, and three-story commercial buildings often also house associations and institutions. Many have recessed upper-storey balconies (open or enclosed) and multi-level street access: that is, stairways down to a raised basement and up to the storey above, providing patrons and suppliers with easy access from the street to both stories. The flat roofs may be augmented by tiled visor roofs or roof portions, sometimes with flared eaves, extended rafters, and/or “flying” corners. Some buildings have rooftop additions with gable, round, or hexagonal roofs with these features. There is much prominent bilingual signage. Other culturally influenced exterior details include round-arch doorways, round or hexagonal windows, decorative brackets and fretwork, and red metal front fences with decorative patterns or insets. Interior features may include tiled floors in decorative patterns.

### Examples/additional character-defining elements:

#### Dragon City Mall

328 Centre Street South

Constructed 1994

A unique and prominent building that makes exuberant use of most all the Chinese-influenced exterior and interior elements listed above.



Dragon City Mall, 2018. [City of Calgary]

#### Golden Happiness Plaza

112 2 Avenue SE

Constructed ca. 1989

#### Good Fortune Plaza

111/115/119 3 Avenue SE

Constructed 1987

#### Far East Shopping Centre

138 3 Avenue SE

Constructed 1980s

Features red-tile visor roof with flared eaves and “flying” corners, decorative fretwork and round plaques on window frames, pair of very large bas relief plaques of dragons, interior floor tiles in decorative pattern.



Far East Shopping Centre, 2018. [City of Calgary]

#### Hong Kong Plaza

128 2 Avenue SE

Constructed early 1990s

Low-rise portion with individual street-front retail spaces, high-rise portion behind. References Chinatown's street furniture with its red-metal posts and railings, but otherwise in a style typical of other large-scale commercial buildings of its era.

#### Tans Plaza

114 3 Avenue SW

Constructed 1991

#### Diverse other commercial/association structures and streetscapes

Centre Street South, 1 Street SE, 2 Avenue SW and SE, 3 Avenue SW and SE

## Institutional Buildings

This period of community revival is marked by unique, expressive structures that are local landmarks and social hubs.

### Examples/character-defining elements:

#### Chinese Cultural Centre

197 1 Street SW

Constructed 1992

Modelled after the Hall of Prayers of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, this is Chinatown's most recognized building. Its key exterior feature is its round-roof dome topped with a large finial and covered in layered blue tiles, with exposed, complex, multi-coloured supports. Inside is a round multi-storey atrium, highly decorated with four gold-and-red painted columns, and the upper portion and ceiling extensively painted with culturally significant colours, patterns, and figures. Used for diverse classes, meetings, and special events.

#### Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association Building

111 Riverfront Avenue SW

Constructed 1995

Prominently situated at the base of the Centre Street Bridge, and notable for its stepped-back stories suggesting a pagoda shape. Other culturally influenced features, all in red metal, are its multi-pane windows, round doorway surround, and fencing. Used for diverse classes, meetings, special events, and the provision of health and wellness services.

## Public Places

Unifying street furniture and a variety of murals and other outdoor features—all with Chinese-influenced forms, elements, or themes—work together throughout the Chinatown district to reinforce its identity as a distinctive cultural area.

### Examples/character-defining elements:

#### Street furniture and other outdoor features

Constructed 1988+

Bus shelter with green-tile hip roof with decorative brackets and red-metal posts; lantern-shape lampposts; red metal benches; round, ceramic plant pots; trash cans with round-roof tops; red metal fences with decorative inserts.

#### Daqing Plaza

2 Avenue SW between 1 and 2 Streets SW, at the west entrance to the Chinese Cultural Centre

Constructed ca. 1994

Concrete plaza with metal benches and red lantern-shape lampposts, featuring the inset character for Daqing Plaza. Named for Daqing Street (2 Avenue) which in turned was named in 1985 for Calgary's twin city in the People's Republic of China.



Daqing Plaza in 2018, showing the inset character for "Daqing Plaza." [City of Calgary]

## Sien Lok Park

### Riverfront

Constructed 1982 (Phase I) and 2002 (Phase II)

Includes a shelter with green-tile hip roof with decorative brackets, red-metal posts, metal fretwork sides; red-brick round-arch entranceway; paved paths; red metal benches; lantern-shape lampposts; sculptures “In Search of Golden Mountain,” 1999, and “Wall of Names,” 2000.

**Murals**, including: *Chinese Blossoms*, 2010, and *The Lion Dance*, 2011 (north and south elevations of Wai Kwan Manor, 120 2 Avenue SW); *Changing Times*, 2010 (wall east of Wai Kwan Manor); *Chinatown and the Chinese Zodiac*, 2010 (north elevation, top storey, 100 3 Street SE); *Establishment*, 2010 and 2011, and several other works, 2010–2018 (back parking area of 100 block between 2 and 3 Avenues SE); *Peace Bridge*, 2013, and *Noodle Dome*, 2014 (rear elevation of Dragon City Mall, 328 Centre Street SE).<sup>1</sup>

## Double Fish Ornament Gate

Riverfront Avenue at north end of Centre Street South

Constructed ca. 2005



Double Fish Ornament Gate, 2018 [City of Calgary]

## Heritage Value

- ◇ Many of the sites listed above have landmark value as prominent and much-used community places, and symbolic value for their role in Chinatown history. Individual buildings also have activity, event, institution, person, and style value.

## Character-Defining Elements

- ◇ As noted throughout this discussion.

## Interpretation Opportunities

- ◇ Cell-phone, online, print, and/or in-person walking tours. The Sien Lok Society has already produced mobile apps for tours of Sien Lok Park and the murals of Chinatown.<sup>2</sup>
- ◇ On-site programs for school children, such as scavenger hunts to locate building features and public art.

<sup>1</sup> Information on Chinatown murals provided by Robson Yuen, Community Resource Coordinator, Calgary Chinese Community Services Association, August 2018.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sienlok.org/sien-lok-walking-tour/>

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