

Summary of timeline of significant events in early Chinese settlement in Calgary/Alberta

- Chinese settlement in Calgary began in the early years of the Canadian Pacific Railway construction from 1871 to 1885.
- Over 17,000 Chinese workers were recruited from Guangdong Province in China, Taiwan, and from Chinese communities in California and Victoria B.C. to work on the railway.
- Chinese workers were paid less, given dangerous tasks, and faced high levels of volatility, death, illness, and malnutrition while working on the railway.
- The Anti-Chinese Movement emerged during this time, led by organized groups such as the Working Men's Protective Association, to disenfranchise Chinese workers of their labour rights and prevent their immigration.
- Anti-Asian propaganda circulated widely and in 1885, the federal government enacted a \$50 Head Tax on Chinese immigration, increasing significantly in 1902 and to \$500 by 1903, that was eventually followed by even more restrictions.
- The *Chinese Immigration Act of 1923* was passed, which restricted all Chinese immigration to Canada and had a significant impact on the Chinese population and community in the country.
- Families were separated and the lack of Chinese women limited the community's natural growth, leading to the formation of "bachelor societies" dominated by men.
- Calgary's Chinese population declined from 1,054 in 1931 to approximately 800 in 1941, with few new buildings constructed in Chinatown.
- The *Chinese Exclusion Act* was repealed in 1947 after Chinese citizens who fought alongside white Canadians in the Second World War pushed for equal immigration rights.
- The repeal had little impact on the community at first as preferential quotas and policies applied to European immigrants at that time. Only Chinese Canadian citizens could bring spouses and non-adult children to Calgary, which still was limiting as many Chinese Canadians were not granted citizenship.
- In the late 1950s and 1960s, there was a gradual relaxation of regulations controlling immigration from China. In 1967 the quota system was replaced by a new points system.
- Prior to this policy reform, immigrants from majority-white countries such as the United Kingdom, western Europe, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand were favoured and experienced no such barriers the way the Chinese did. The *Chinese Exclusion Act* was the first of its kind that legally discriminated based on race.
- By 1961, Calgary's Chinese population had more than doubled since 1941, and women became 61% of Canada's Chinese population. However, members of the Chinese community still faced challenges in obtaining professional status, voting rights, driver's licences, and other barriers that continue to exist even for the contemporary racialized newcomers.
- During the Great Depression, the Chinese community in Canada experienced additional hardship due to systemic racism. Unemployed Chinese men received less government relief money than white men.

- In 1936, a group of Chinese men were denied relief money for refusing to work in federal relief camps. The following year, protests were held by the Communist Party of Canada and unemployed Chinese men.
- The protests highlighted a divide between working-class bachelors willing to form an alliance with the Communist Party and the merchant class who preferred existing Chinatown organizations and the church.
- The relief payment was eventually raised to \$2.12 per week, but several buildings that housed unemployed Chinese men were shut down, including the Chinese Mission.

Community organizations and their role within Chinese communities

- In 1884, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) was formed to serve as an "internal administrative institution" for the Chinese Canadian community, offering various social services and assistance.
- Four types of social organizations were established in Chinatown: 房 fong/堂 tong, clan associations, 會館 hui kuan, and secret societies.
- These organizations provided support and services to Chinese settlers, including finding affordable accommodation and other necessities of everyday life.
- The organizations reflected the importance of kinship systems in Chinese culture and provided broader support for members, including legal, recreational, and social responsibilities.
- Other organizations would form in future phases of Chinatown to maintain Chinese traditions and cultural heritage while supporting settlement efforts for extended family members.
- Mutual aid societies and institutions formed or expanded branches in Calgary, including the Chinese Public School, the YMCA, and the Chinese Mission.
- Several family associations, such as the Mah Kam Gee Tong, the Sue Yuen Benevolent Association, and the Wong Wun Sun Society, were formed in these decades.
- The Dart Coon Club was established at the inner lodge of Chinese Freemasonry.
- During the Depression Era, Chinatown associations also played a critical role in providing diverse and crucial aid.
- The Chinese Mission also provided refuge to the community by housing 50 jobless men, initiating the Mothers' Club, leading English classes, and running the popular "Unemployed Men's Choir."
- Chinese business leaders also provided charity, by offering cheap or free meals at restaurants in exchange for dishwashing, and warm places to sleep beside the dryers in laundries.
- When China unified in 1949, some traditional social organizations shifted their focus to local activities instead of affiliating with China, while new Chinatown-based organizations emerged.
- Government-sponsored social services also began reaching the Chinese community.

Community spaces and businesses (e.g. cafés, grocery stores) and how they shaped Alberta towns

- Calgary's first Chinatown was built in the 1880s and served the community for Chinese settlers but was destroyed by fire in 1886.
- In 1892, a smallpox outbreak occurred and white Calgarians attacked the Chinese laundries and stores in Chinatown, causing damage and injuries. This was the first documented event of hate-motivated violence against the Chinese community in Calgary among many undocumented accounts.
- The second Chinatown in Calgary was at risk of displacement due to the construction of the Canadian Northern Railway and escalating property values.
- Successful Chinese businessmen purchased a piece of land for \$18,000 at the corner of Centre Street South and 2 Avenue, which became known as the Canton Block and the genesis of Calgary's current Chinatown.
- White citizens opposed the location of Chinatown and demanded segregation from whites, known as the Chinatown Relocation Issue of 1910.
- City Council set up a committee to assess if the Chinese should be segregated or permitted the same property rights as whites, with Louie Kheong, Ho Lem, and Thomas Underwood as members.
- Other areas in the city were proposed as an alternative site for the new Chinatown but were rejected by the committee.
- Despite opposition, the purchase of the Canton Block proceeded as originally planned.
- Calgary experienced an economic boom in the 1960s due to major oil discoveries and many people moved away from Chinatown to newly built suburbs.
- Multiculturalism was becoming mainstream in Canada and Chinatown had to adapt to new cultural needs and increased commercial demand from white customers.
- Chinatown faced challenges from transportation and urban renewal programs in the 1960s, but the Sien Lok Society successfully lobbied for business and residential redevelopment to reflect the area's heritage.
- The city's Design Brief in 1976 formalized these ideas, giving the streets Chinese names and adopting Chinese motifs on buildings.
- The Chinese Calgary Cultural Centre, designed after the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, was opened in 1992 and continues to be used by the city's Chinese community.

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April 2023