

1 CHINATOWN MILLENNIUM GATE

Pender Street @ Taylor Street



Situated at the historical origin of Chinatown, the Millennium Gate opened in 2002, funded by three levels of government and private donations. On its eastern face, the gate says "remember the past and look forward to the future"; while on the western face it says "Chinatown Millennium Gate."

2 CHINESE FREEMASONS BUILDING

3-9 West Pender Street

The Chi Kung Tong, a traditional Chinese fraternal organization, first appeared in Canada in 1863 to provide welfare assistance to miners in the Cariboo gold rush. Built in 1901, the Chi Kung Tong purchased this building in 1907. The Chi Kung Tong changed its name to Chinese Freemasons in 1920, in order to forge links with European Freemasonry. This building is the perfect headquarters for an organization that sought to form bonds with Europeans because of the way the structure blends the Chinese and Western traditions of architecture. The Pender St. façade, facing Chinatown, has traditional Chinese recessed balconies and ironwork. The Carrall St. side of the building faces the entrance to predominantly Caucasian Gastown and presents a Victorian Italianate façade. The Freemasons supported Dr. Sun-Yat Sen's attempts to bring democracy to China. During visits to Vancouver to increase support and raise money for his cause (in 1910 and 1911) Dr. Sun-Yat Sen was hosted by this society. The building was even mortgaged to fund Sun-Yat Sen's 1911 rebellion.



3 CHINESE TIMES BUILDING

1 East Pender Street

The Chinese Times Building was constructed early in 1901 by Wing Sang, a local businessman. From 1939 until the early 2000s, the largest of Vancouver's several Chinese newspapers was published in this unassuming building. It used to be that one could watch the printing presses through the ground floor windows with their 5,000 different Chinese characters at work.



4 SAM KEE BUILDING

8 West Pender Street



An act of defiance in 1913 resulted in the construction of this 6'2" (1.8m) wide building. To widen the road, the city expropriated land on Pender St., demolishing Chang Toy's grocery warehouse and leaving him with a narrow strip of land. No compensation was offered and the furious Toy, rather than sell his prime location cheaply to his neighbour, hired architects

Brown and Hillam to design a building for the site. They designed for him a building of steel-frame construction with a series of bay windows which increase parts of the usable width of the upper floor. The basement, running the length of the building and extending under the sidewalk to double the square footage, housed public baths. The section under the sidewalk was lit with prisms which have been replaced by glass blocks set in the pavement. This was a common way to augment lighting in basements prior to the improvement in electric lighting. The building was restored in 1986 by the current owner, Jack Chow and architect Soren Rasmussen.

SHANGHAI ALLEY

Lane on south side of East Pender, just east of Carrall Street

After 1904, the area south of Pender St. at Carrall St. became the hub of Chinatown. Many of the new buildings had double fronts, one side opening onto Carrall St. and the other onto Shanghai Alley. Life in Chinatown became centered in this location. Restaurants, stores, a 500 seat theatre and several tenements crowded the narrow alley. A similar alley called Canton Alley, ran parallel one block west. There were 2 opium factories here, which were legal until 1908. By the 1920s, Chinatown's commercial area shifted eastward toward Main St. and by the '40s Canton Alley and much of Shanghai Alley were demolished when non-Chinese industries moved in. CBA Manor, an assisted housing project sponsored by the Chinese Benevolent Assoc. whose design references details of the Sam Kee Building, successfully redefines the eastern edge of Shanghai Alley.

10 LUNG KONG KUNG SHAW LTD.

102 East Pender Street

Built in 1911 for Loo Gee Wing, a leading Chinatown merchant who made his fortune in the Gold Rush, the building has been owned by a clan society since 1926. First called, the Lung Kong Kung Shaw Association this society was later known as Lung Kong Tien Yee. The building now houses the Sun Ah Hotel, whose top three stories were lodgings for Chinese labourers early in the 20th century. On ground level was the famous Ho Ho restaurant. For many years the Ho Ho Restaurant's 4 story high neon sign served as a landmark, but 8 years after the restaurant closed, the sign was removed. The building was designed by R.T. Perry and White and Cockrill with no apparent Chinese architectural influence.



11 CHINESE BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION (OF VANCOUVER)

104-108 East Pender Street

Although Vancouver's branch of the CBA was formed in 1895, it found a home when this building was completed in 1910. An organization was needed to support destitute railway workers and teach them English. It evolved into a vocal representative of the Chinese community, organizing protests against repressive legislation as well as advocating for community social and physical well-being by sponsoring Chinese language schools and a medical clinic. The CBA building is one of the most impressive and oldest examples of the architectural style imported from southern China, with recessed balconies, ornate ironwork, and decorative tile. The stone fire walls and imposing four floors topped with a pediment wall add to the prominence of the structure. The CBA continues to be active in Chinatown through sponsorship and support of CBA Seniors residence as well as acting as an umbrella organization, uniting the community.



12 WONG BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION (MON KEANG SCHOOL)

121 East Pender Street



A mutual assistance program based on the most common Chinese surname, the Wong Benevolent Association built this structure in 1921 as their clan headquarters. The original building was built in 1904 with a first, mezzanine and upper floor. When it was purchased by the Wongs, they knocked off the top floor and added 2 new floors. Since 1925, Chinese children have attended after-school Chinese language classes on the first floor. In 1947, after the repeal of the Exclusion Act and the reunification of many families, the school began offering the first high school-level Chinese classes in Canada. The building is notable for its typical recessed balconies coupled with its projecting finials atop the structural piers and decorative glass above the entrance.

14 MAH SOCIETY OF CANADA

137-139 East Pender Street

The Mah society was informally established in Vancouver in 1919 and purchased its building two years after. Constructed in 1913, it has retail space at grade, and 3 floors for 39 rental rooms above. Like other successful clan associations, the Mahs used rental income to finance most of their operations. Unlike others however, it rented out to non-members as well as members. Because it housed both North American headquarters as well as a local branch, an additional floor to accommodate a meeting hall was added in 1921. Its recessed balcony is the only reminder of an elaborate traditional Chinese design. The additional story, which bears the Society's name at the top, also increased the status of the building by making it the tallest on the block. In recent years the Mah Society has undertaken new activities, the most notable of these being the sports club.



15 CHIN WING CHUN TONG SOCIETY OF CANADA

158-160 East Pender Street

Smaller Clans sometimes joined forces to build a headquarters for their society. This enabled them to build a substantial structure that would show their importance in the community. This building, erected in 1925, is a perfect example of this type of co-operation. It is also a demonstration of the blending of influences in Chinatown's architecture. The architect, R. A. McKenzie, who worked for more than 5 years in China, incorporated the recessed balconies common to tropical southern China in the building design. However, the crowning pediment supported by columns is a neo-classical Western idea. The interior of the assembly room is pure Arts and Crafts. The imposing awning was added in the 1970s.



18 SHON YEE BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION

254-262 East Pender Street



Shon Yee was established in Vancouver in 1914 to provide support and aid for immigrants from the town of Shek Kei in Zhongshan county. An unusually active society, Shon Yee began in 1922, through the sale of shares, to purchase Chinatown properties including this late Edwardian building in 1946. The association, which moved its headquarters to 408 Jackson Ave in 1977, is engaged in a wide variety of activities and initiatives. These include seniors housing finished in 1988, as well as various social activities, educational endeavours and the establishment of an athletic club in 1975. This building is home to the May Wah Hotel, a three storey building with 40 rooms which has had various names over the years. In the past it has served mostly single men, but has also housed single women and families.

19 CHINESE NATIONALIST LEAGUE OF CANADA (KUOMINTANG BLDG)

529 Gore Avenue



The architecture of this building, designed by Scottish architect W.E. Sproat for the Kuomintang (KMT) in 1919, is similar to many structures in Hong Kong and Macau. Observe the enclosed recessed balconies on the top floor. However, its significance lies in the political life and aspirations of the Chinese community. For years before the building's construction, the KMT worked to raise money for the overthrow the Qing Dynasty and bring democracy to China. Chinese in BC, who had few rights in Canada whether they were new immigrants, naturalized or born here, hoped that a democratic China would help their situation here. Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, the international leader of the KMT became the provisional leader of China in 1911 when a revolution was finally successful. His time as president lasted only until 1913 when infighting in the leadership led to Sun's exile.

OTHER SOCIETY BUILDINGS



WONG BEN. ASSOCIATION (1910)
(HAN SHEN BUILDING)
27 East Pender St.



CHENG WING YEONG TONG BEN. ASSOCIATION (1926)
79-83 East Pender St.



LUNG KONG KUNG SHAW (1923)
135 East Pender St.



SOO YUEN SOCIETY (1880S)
152 East Pender St.



HOY PING BEN. ASSOCIATION (1939)
434 Main St.



LUNG JEN BEN. ASSOCIATION BLDG. (1933 & 1987)
240 Keefer St.



YEE FUNG TOY SOCIETY (1910)
222-226 East Georgia St.

8 YUE SHAN SOCIETY

33-39 East Pender Street



The Yue Shan Society is an organization for people from Poon Yue county near Guangzhou. Originally formed in 1894 under the name Chong Hoo, the society underwent a number of name changes. By 1943, it took its present name and raised money by share sales to buy this building. Influenced by the South China shop house style, this building was designed and constructed in 1920 by Chinatown architect W.H. Chow. Although not recognized legally as an architect because of his Chinese origin, Chow worked on many Chinatown buildings. The Yue Shan Society also owns the 2 story building next door which is one of the oldest existing in Chinatown (from 1898) and the building on the back of the headquarters building facing, Market Alley. These three buildings simulate a central courtyard structure common in China at the turn of the 20th century. The Market Alley building was used as a dormitory for members visiting Vancouver, especially in the post-war period and continues as a rooming house today. Yue Shan is now more focused on recreational and social affairs.

5 LIM SAI HOR (KOW MOK) BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION

525-531 Carrall Street

This building was originally constructed in 1903 for the Chinese Empire Reform Assoc., whose focus was to bring about political reform in China. It was the most influential association in Chinatown at the time. Their influence faded when China fell into revolution in 1911 instead of reform within the Imperial framework. They owned the building until 1945 but rented it to the newly formed Lim Sai Hor Assoc. in 1926. The Lim Sai Hor Assoc. finally bought and extensively renovated the building in 1945. Its recessed balconies identify it with South Chinese architecture, but much of the original detail disappeared in the 1945 renovation. It is one of the only original structures remaining in Shanghai Alley. It's frontage on both Carrall St. and Shanghai Alley provides a glimpse of how the neighborhood looked in the earliest days of Chinatown. The building is home to an ancestral altar, built in 1993 which is used for commemorative ceremonies by society members.



VANCOUVER'S

CHINATOWN



The Chinese in British Columbia played an integral part in shaping the province. Years before Vancouver's incorporation in 1886, Chinese labourers worked in the industries that built the province – in gold fields, coalmines, sawmills and canneries. Many emigrated from southern China, to work under contract in Canada. Between 1881 and 1885, for example, 10,000 Chinese were contracted to build the Canadian Pacific Railway.

In those early years Chinatown was predominantly male. It was difficult for labourers, who had come to Canada hoping to make their fortunes to bring their families, when in 1885, the Canadian government placed a head tax on incoming Chinese immigrants. Using Chinatown as a base, many Chinese labourers lived out of Vancouver for months at a time working at seasonal jobs, like lumbering or canning fish. In Chinatown, they usually lived in rooming houses in the Pender St. area.

The government of BC was not particularly interested in the social or physical welfare of the Chinese community so the community created its own aid associations and societies based on common surnames, place of birth in China or organizations for the general community good. Designed for mutual help; co-operation and general welfare, these associations flourished in Chinatown.

By 1937, there were over 60 such organizations. Many of the imposing headquarters on Pender Street dating from the early part of the 20th century are still owned by the societies that continue to serve their membership.

The larger societies successfully sold shares or bonds to their members in order to pay for the construction of their headquarters, often canvassing members across the country for help.

Many of the associations tried to help the poorest people in the community, but not all Chinese were suffering. There were a handful of wealthy firms run by individuals who controlled much of the business life of Chinatown. The firms grew well-off by contracting workers, importing and exporting, investing in real estate, selling steamship tickets and manufacturing opium (legal to manufacture for export until 1908). Partners in the wealthiest firms lived in Chinatown in great luxury surrounded by their family members.

More numerous were the middle-class merchants, who owned and operated green-groceries, laundries, tailor shops and other small businesses. These occupations were in many cases the only options, because discriminatory policies prevented Chinese from working in areas such as city works and other professions. The limit on acceptable vocations resulted in a concentration in certain areas of business. By 1933, there were 155 licensed Chinese vegetable peddlers in Vancouver, and the corner stores on the city's West side were almost exclusively Asian owned.

Discrimination did not end with vocational limits. It took many forms, from disparaging cartoons in local newspapers to systematic harassment by city inspectors. Chinatown itself was a response to the climate of racial hostility. Not legally required to live apart, the Chinese felt that the anti-Asian sentiment in the general public made it wise.

The laws until 1947 categorized Chinese as aliens, even if they were born in Canada. They could apply for naturalization, but that process was dependent on the largess of a judge, and was often unsuccessful. Individuals nevertheless actively resisted discriminatory measures in ways such as taking the city to court to redress their grievances.

In bad times, when jobs were scarce, anti-Chinese sentiment peaked. Union workers resented Chinese labourers because they were often used by employers to break strikes. Chinese labour bosses prevented contact between Chinese workers and the organized union movement, hoping to maintain their supply of cheap labour. In 1907 a mild recession focused attention on Chinese workers.

That year, Vancouver's Asiatic Exclusion League held a huge rally. Afterwards, a mob marched on Chinatown (and Japantown), smashing property and looting stores. Another job shortage after WWI led the passing of the Exclusion Act in 1923, which effectively barred Chinese immigration until it was repealed in 1947 (in part due to lobbying by Chinese societies, including the Chinese Benevolent Association).

Under the Exclusion Act, Chinatown stagnated. The community of predominantly aging men was unable to grow without new immigration. During the 1930s the Vancouver Chinese community lost 6,000 people, half of its members, to death or emigration. The Depression hurt Chinatown too. The City provided lower levels of relief for Chinese than for white residents.

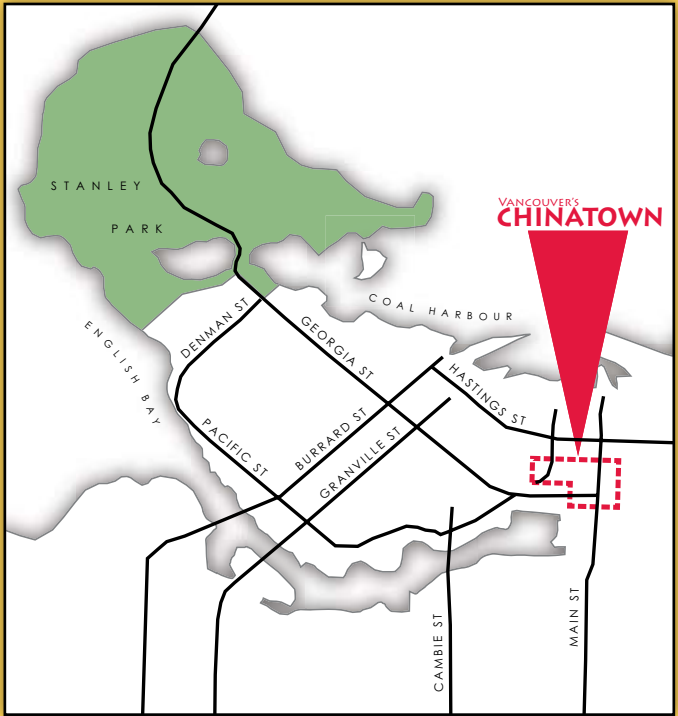
In 1936, Chinatown erected a gate on Pender St. near Carrall St. for the City of Vancouver's Golden Jubilee. This was an important event in changing the city's attitudes toward Chinatown.

During the war and afterwards, Vancouver began to look at Chinese-Canadians and Chinatown in a new way. Suddenly the Chinatown that had seemed foreign and dangerous began to seem exotic and appealing. From all over the city, residents traveled there with the enthusiasm of tourists—sampling foods, buying curios and savoring the district's distinctiveness. Merchants and restaurateurs added glamour to Chinatown's new image with glittering new neon signs.

In the 1960s, Vancouver planned its first major freeway to cut right through Chinatown. A citizens' action group lobbied successfully to stop the plan. The province recognized Chinatown's special history and architecture by designating it a historic district in 1971.

In 1979, the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee sponsored a streetscape improvement program. Chinese-style elements, such as tile red street lamps and specially paved sidewalk crosswalks, were added, reflecting Vancouver's new appreciation of Chinatown.

While Chinatown is no longer the only Chinese area in the region, it is home to important cultural and historic resources and many community organizations. As a result, the Chinatown of today maintains a strong cultural identity and community vision for the future.





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The Vancouver Heritage Foundation is a registered charity committed to the conservation of Vancouver's heritage buildings in recognition of their importance to the culture, economy and the sustainability of our city. The VHF supports the conservation of homes, commercial and public buildings, and sacred sites by:

- Giving the public practical tools, information and incentives to be successful in conserving heritage buildings.
- Creating opportunities for the public to access and learn about Vancouver's historic buildings.
- Attracting public and private sector support for an endowment to protect buildings into the future.
- Developing strategic relationships that nurture a civic culture supportive of heritage conservation.

VANCOUVER'S CHINATOWN

HISTORIC SOCIETY BUILDINGS

