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The Calgary Chinatown

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The First Chinese Pioneers in Calgary

The first group of Chinese pioneers arrived in Calgary at least as early as 1883, after the CP railway was completed; they were the CPR railway workers came from B.C., and some of them came across the Rockies to here looking for works.

In 1900, there were less than 100 Chinese lived in the city. In 1910, there was over 400 Chinese resided in locations spread throughout the city. According to the source from the Census of Canada in 1911, the total population in Calgary was 43,704, and Chinese were 485 (included 3 women and 482 men).

The First Location

Chinatown began not far to the east of Stephen Avenue (today's 8th Avenue), around 50 of Chinese were migrated from the east, west or south of Canada, when the cross-country railways were completed in August, 1883. During that time, most of the Chinese worked in laundries, restaurants, grocery stores, or housekeepers, cooks, ranch and gardens, or coal miners and lumber camps. When the "Great Fire" occurred on the opposite side on Atlantic (now the 9th) Avenue S.E. and between MaTavish (now Centre) Street and 1st Street S.W.— the site was closed of today's Glenbow Museum – in November 1886, a strong wind spread the blaze to the Stephen Avenue; and included the Chinatown was caught fire.

The Second Location

After the "Great Fire" occurred, a part of the Chinatown was destroyed, and Chinese moved their businesses to other location. Then, the Chinese businesses were moved to along 10th Avenue and 1st Street S.W. After 1894, the Chinese population kept increasing in Calgary, and the need to expand but the area was restricted, because there were no more unused land. Until June 1910, the CPR announced its proposed route station into the downtown of the city and planned to build a hotel and depot in the corner of 10th Avenue and 1st Street S.W.

The Present Location

The present Calgary Chinatown is one of the most vibrant and interesting areas to visit in the Downtown. The community is located at the south of the Bow River and north of 4th Avenue from 2nd Street on the west to Macleod Trail on the East.

When the second Chinatown was forced to relocate in June 1910, there was a Chinese delegation – Louie Kwong, Chong Kee, Charlie Yee, Yuen Sun, Kwong Wing Kee, Wong Yuen Jan, Joe Giough and Wong Chui - led by Ho Lem, Thomas Underwood, Rev. R.H. Standerwick, W. Porterfield and T. Humphries went to the city's commissioners to

discussing the relocation. After a period of discussion, and the supports from a group of white people such as the acting Mayor Brocklebank, parks superintendent J. Buchanan, commissioner A.G. Graves, medical health officer Dr. Thomas Dawson, police chief Mr. Mackie, and one of the ratepayers Henry Haskins also changed his mind to support the Chinese. After another petition wasn't met the requirement – 418 property owners and only 32 had signed -- then, the city council refused to act on the petition, instead the council finally approval to let Chinese relocated their community to the present location.

When the 3rd Chinatown – the exist one – was established in 1910. At that time, some wealthy Chinese purchased a site at the corner of Centre Street and 2nd Avenue South to built up houses, and various of businesses opened to serve the local Chinese. Later on, groups of Chinese associations were formed for social and benevolent – hometown people and kin –gathering purposes.

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