

The “Pioneer Organizations” in Calgary Chinatown

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By Paul K.P. Wong

The Calgary Chinatown Centennial

The present Chinese settlement –Chinatown-- will be a century old next year, the community is planning to have lots of celebration for this extraordinary event in 2010.

Don't forget our predecessors

As one of the most famous Chinese poets in Southern and Northern Dynasties (A.D. 317-581) Yu Xin said, “Don't forget the origin while you drink the water”. Today, when we are ready to celebrate this remarkable occasion, we shouldn't forget our predecessors for who contributed their enthusiasm to the community. “Tong”, it means in English is organization or association, is a part of our pioneers great contributions. I would like take this opportunity to look back the old days at once.

First Group of Chinese people in Town

According to the local historical records shown, the first group of Chinese pioneers arrived Calgary at least as early as 1883, after the CP railway was completed; they were the CP railway workers from B.C., and some of them came across the Rocky Mountains looking for jobs.

Early Chinese Population

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

The Birth of Present Chinatown

Based on the local historical records, the Chinese pioneers had gone through three times of settlements in Calgary. The first location was not far, in the east side of Stephen Avenue (today's 8th Avenue and Centre Street S.E.). After the “Great Fire” burned down the area in 1896, the Chinese re-located their spot along 10th Avenue and 1st Street S.W. In 1910, CP Railway wanted the area to build a station, and then forced the Chinese to move out of that location. They set-up a delegation to discuss the re-location of Chinatown with the City's commissioner. After a period of legal procedures with those landowners in that surrounding area – the present Chinatown location -- was settled. The Chinese get a permanent area for residence and business. Finally they were starting to build the two-storey premises along the 2nd Avenue and Centre Street S.E. for business and residence, the third Chinatown (the present one) was declared its birth in 1910.

15 "Pioneer Organizations"

According to the information in hand, starting from 1900 and until World War 2 (WWII) was started on September 1, 1939, there were 15 social and kin organizations or associations established in Calgary Chinatown. A few of them are not active or don't exist any more today; I named them as the "Pioneer Organizations", as they were a part of the early developments in the history of Chinese community.

"Traditional Organizations"

All those associations organized after the WWII and up to the end of 70s, there was even a few of them that were not active or don't exist any more; I classified them as the "Traditional Organizations".

"Newly Established Organizations"

In the 80s, it was the turning point of Calgary Chinatown. Starting from 1980, the area was facing huge changes, such as the population keep growing, the new business and building developments increasing, the beatifications of Chinatown, more associations and organizations are established, and the contributions from the City of Calgary, the Calgary Police Service (CPS), and other developments in the Chinese community; especially, after the "Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan" (Bylaw 3P86) was approved by the City Council on January 29, 1986, the environment surrounding the area was changed significantly. Therefore, for those organizations found from 1980 and afterward, I described them as the "Newly Established Organizations".

List of "Pioneer Organizations"

The 15 "Pioneer Organizations" as follow:

| <u>Established Date</u> | <u>Organization</u> |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1900 | The Chinese Mission (The originator of present Calgary Chinese United Church) |
| 1910 | Tung Shing Fon (The originator of present Lee Association of Calgary) |
| 1910 | Wong Kong Har Tong (The originator of present Wong's Affinity Association. The Tong was combined with Wong Wun-Sun Society, and became the Wong's Affinity Association in 1967.) |
| 1911 | The Chinese Freemasons |
| 1913 | The Chinese National League of Canada, Calgary Branch |
| 1914 | The Calgary Chinese Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) |

- 1917 The Calgary Chinese Y.M.C.A Hockey Team
- 1919 January 7th Mah Kam Gee Tong (The originator of present the Calgary Mah Society, which was re-named in 1979.)
- 1919 Dart Coon Club (A subsidiary of the Chinese Freemasons)
- 1920 The Yee Fung Toy Society
- 1923 Shon Yee Benevolent Association
- 1926 The Sue Yuen Association
- 1927, December Wong Wun Sun Society (The originator of present Wong's Affinity Association. The Society was combined with Wong Kong Har Tong, and became the Wong's Affinity Association in 1967.)
- 1937 The Lung Kong Association
- 1939 March The Calgary Chinese Public School

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