



# CHINATOWN AND EAST VILLAGE

## Walking Tour



HERITAGE  
CALGARY

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was able to convince the city to allow them to develop a lasting Chinatown, despite pushback from a group led by James Short and others.

Since its establishment in 1910, Calgary’s now permanent Chinatown has grown to support a diverse community in the face of adversity. In the 1960s, as the freeway and car culture became the preferred means of transportation, the City put forward a plan to build a freeway through downtown called the Downtown East-West Penetrator. The plan would have demolished much of Chinatown and Eau Claire, but thankfully failed thanks to an organized community organization named Sien Lok, the namesake for Sien Lok Park.

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Calgary’s Chinatown neighbourhood is situated in the northern section of downtown Calgary, along Centre Street. Originally, Chinatown was closer to today’s Stephen Avenue, where it was set up by 50 Chinese pioneers looking for work. When the Great Fire of 1886 occurred, the original Chinatown was lost. The current location of Calgary’s Chinatown was determined in 1910, but very nearly did not get built. A delegation of Chinese Calgarians led by Ho Lem, went to the city to discuss relocating as the new CPR station would need the second iteration of Chinatown demolished.

It took a long and hard fought battle, but the Chinese delegation

Downtown East Village is the site of some of the newest condominiums and apartments. The new Central Library and the National Music Centre call the East Village home. A lot of new is in the growing neighbourhood, but there is a good deal of important history to Calgary still standing.

The Simmons Warehouse and the King Edward Hotel have both been repurposed, with the King Edward having been deconstructed and incorporated into the NMC. Also standing is the St Louis Hotel, restored in 2016 and the Hillier Block, also having been restored.



# CHINATOWN AND EAST VILLAGE Walking Tour

While the sites are organized in a rough line, there is no starting point on this tour.

Pick a building to start on the map and explore!  
**Calgary’s Chinatown and East Village**

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Pick a building to start on the map and explore!



Cover image: Canton Block circa 1910



CHINATOWN

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**Centre Street Bridge**  
118 Riverfront AV SE - Beaux Arts - 1915

The Centre Street Bridge is historically significant as the second oldest bridge to span the Bow River in Calgary. Completed in 1916, it replaced the original Centre Street Bridge which dated from 1907. The Centre Street Bridge has long served as one of the main links between downtown Calgary and areas north of the Bow River. For much of its



early history the bridge also accommodated two street car lines in addition to automobile and pedestrian traffic. The Centre Street Bridge is also architecturally

significant as the most elaborate and ornamental bridge to span the Bow River in Calgary. Its graceful arched spans, classical balustrades, cantilevered balconies, and kiosks contribute to the beauty of the concrete bridge. The paired kiosks at each end of the bridge are surmounted with massive lion sculptures, which symbolize the British Empire, and are modeled upon those at Trafalgar Square.

**Chinese Cultural Centre**  
1971 ST SW - Postmodern - 1992

The 1992 Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre is a prominently located landmark building in Chinatown. The rectangular, four-storey building includes Classical Chinese architectural design principles. The scored concrete and stucco façade is highlighted with the central pagoda-style roof feature topped with a gold knob and covered in layered blue tiles with exposed multi-colour concrete supports. Modeled after the Hall of Prayers of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, the interior features a circular highly artistic Great Hall with three concentric floors, four ornamented columns and a detailed ceramic tile ceiling with several rows of circular transparent window blocks. Da qing Square provides a gathering place on the west side of the building.



**Sien Lok Park**  
100 Riverfront AV SW - Leisure - 1982

Sien Lok Park is symbolic of the survival and flourishing of both Calgary’s Chinatown and the downtown riverbank, which avoided destruction during the 1960s era of downtown urban renewal and ‘parkway’ projects that threatened the existence of Chinatowns across Canada. In Calgary this began with the 1963-64 Downtown Redevelopment Plan proposed by the CPR and City to move the railway to the south bank of the Bow River, and build a parallel 8-lane parkway.

The park possesses institution value for its association with Sien Lok, its namesake, and other Chinese societies for over five decades. During revitalization in the 1970s-80s, Sien Lok played a role in the riverbank areas’ transition from light industrial to recreational use.



**Chinese United Church**  
124 2 AV SW- Gothic Revival - 1953



The present Chinese United Church building, one of Chinatown’s first post-World War II buildings, was constructed in 1953-1954 on a site immediately west of the Mission building. The architect was Maxwell Bates, and the contractor was a man named Reed or Reid. Following the pattern set by the original Mission, the Chinese United Church accommodated both a sanctuary and a gymnasium.

The Chinese United Church has remained a notable institution in Calgary’s Chinatown. The Church board retained ownership of the Mission building and converted it into a rooming house for students and senior citizens. It was demolished in the 1970s and replaced by Oi Kwan Place, a senior citizens’ home.



Canton Block

1209 9 AV SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1911

Built in 1910-11, the Canton Block is the first building constructed and owned by members of Calgary’s Chinese community. Once the Canadian Northern Railway announced in June 1910 that it was planning a route and a hotel impacting the second Chinatown, property values in that area escalated. As a result, landlords sold their properties, displacing Chinese tenants.

The red brick façade, storefront doorways with large display windows, upper floor symmetrical bays of rectangular windows, and a raised parapet with a pressed metal cornice along the width of the building are representative of a chosen western architectural style for the first building in Chinatown.



Linda Mae Block

233 Centre ST SW - Commercial - 1950

The 1950 Linda Mae Block is a two-storey, flat-roofed, concrete-block Post-war Commercial-style building. The upper façade has streamlined Moderne architectural detailing like the curved corner, smooth stucco wall, and coping along the roofline. The lower storefront level has a prominent corner entry and large storefront windows with kneewall below; non-original red brick veneer covers the original corrugated brick on the piers and kneewall.

The Sibley Block is an attractive and relatively intact Edwardian Commercial commercial-residential building, with a lower façade design



which is distinctive for the 9th Avenue commercial street. The symmetrical red-brick façade features brick voussoirs over the large central display window and entrance, and distinctive corbelled brick cornices.

Chinese Masonic Hall

107 2 AV SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1912

The Chinese Masonic Hall (1912) is significant as one of the early buildings constructed by Chinese immigrant owners to establish Calgary’s current Chinatown. After the Chinese were pushed from two other locations by economic and social pressures, several Chinese businessmen built the Canton Block (1910), where they could be owners not tenants. Other Chinese-owned buildings went up nearby, enabling Chinatown to take root.

This building was the first headquarters of the Chinese Freemasons’ Calgary branch, founded in 1911. The Chinese Freemasons started as a secret fraternal society promoting the overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty in China. Later less involved in Chinese affairs, the organization provided aid, social space, and activities for members as well as support for local arts groups and community projects.



Canton Block Extension

218 Centre ST SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1911

Canton Block Extension is a brick-clad, two-and one-half storey, commercial and residential building located on the east side of Centre Street in Calgary’s Chinatown. The Edwardian Commercial-style building features pressed-metal cornices and a single storefront with access to the upper storeys through a narrow door at the south end of the building.

The Canton Block is an important landmark for the community as it is Chinatown’s first building owned and built in the community by Chinese



residents. The Chinese community was established in the 1880s with settlement that occurred after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. A small Chinese community was first established on the corner of Centre Street and 9th Avenue East, but moved to 10th Avenue and 1st Street SW circa 1901. They were forced to relocate again after 1910 when the Canadian Pacific Railway proposed construction of a hotel in the area.

**Chinese National League Building**  
110 3 AV SE - Modern Classical - 1954

The 1953-54 Chinese National League Hall is a two-storey, concrete-block institutional building faced in ornamental Tyndall stone. This symmetrical, flat-roofed, Modern Classical-style building displays a centred front entryway with tall transom flanked by large, vertical 3-light windows and shallow, classical pilasters.

As one of Chinatown’s notable mid-century buildings, the hall is also symbolic of the community’s Post-War development following the repeal of the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act in 1946.

The Calgary Chapter dates to 1911 when Chinese revolutionary leader Dr Sun Yat-sen was hosted in Calgary during a North American fundraising tour for his Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT), which aimed to depose the Manchu dynasty.



**Jade Palace Restaurant Sign**  
103 3 AV SE - Modern - 1902

The Jade Palace Restaurant business sign exemplifies the surge in popularity of Chinatown restaurants after WWII, reflecting more favourable attitudes by non-Chinese towards Chinatown and people of Chinese descent.

The sign is a fine and rare example of a Google sign tower in inner-city Calgary, notable for combining Googie with Chinese-influenced elements: lanterns, a profile of a Chinese roofline, and a finial that evokes (but is not) a Chinese symbol. Chinatown’s post-WWII restaurants were decked out to be attractive, “exotic” destinations for Westerners, with “oriental” features.



**Chinese National League (Ho Lem Block)**  
109 2 AV SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1911

The 1911 Chinese National League (Ho Lem Block) is a two-storey brick building situated between two similar sized buildings along 2 AV SE in Calgary’s Chinatown community. The building is a rectangular design in the Edwardian Commercial style and features a smooth red brick façade with symmetrically placed upper windows, a central curved entranceway, pressed metal cornices.

The Ho Lem Block is associated with the beginning of the Chinese National League movement in Alberta. The Chinese Nationalist League is one of the oldest

and most important Chinese institutions, which dates back to 1911 when Chinese revolutionary leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen visited Calgary as a part of his North American fundraising tour. Dr. Sun Yat-sen became the first provisional president of the Chinese republic in 1912.



**Reconciliation Bridge**  
4 Ave SE - Camelback Through-Truss - 1910

Reconciliation Bridge, built in 1910 is a 116.58-meter-long and 14.02-meter-wide, two-span, Parker Camelback, riveted-steel through-truss bridge on a concrete substructure made up of one pier and two abutments. The bridge permits 4th Street North East to cross the Bow River and connects the communities of Bridgeland - Riverside to the downtowns area. The bridge holds symbolic value as the location of an ancient crossing of the Bow River on the Old North Trail, an ancient aboriginal transportation corridor; it perpetuates this historic transportation route.

Recommendations of the Calgary Aboriginal Urban Advisory Committee in White Goose Flying, A Report to Calgary City Council on the Indian Residential School Truth and Reconciliation (White Goose Flying Report) which included a recommendation to address the name of the Langevin Bridge.





**Simmons Factory Warehouse**

618 Confluence WY SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1912

The Simmons Factory Warehouse, built in 1912, is a two-storey, brick structure adorned with historic painted signage. The property is situated on the eastern edge of downtown Calgary in the East Village neighbourhood, on the bank of the Bow River. The Simmons Factory Warehouse is an excellent and rare representative example of the pre-World War I manufacturing and industrial buildings which were once situated east of downtown. Its standard post and beam construction with brick exterior walls exemplifies industrial and warehouse construction in Calgary. The twelve-inch fir square posts, short-span beams, and mill floors provided maximum floor loading capability to support the heavy machinery and the stacks of mattresses and other bedding materials produced by the Simmons Company.



**St. Louis Hotel**

430 8 AV SE - Commercial - 1913

Built in 1914, the St. Louis Hotel is a three-storey, brick structure. Distinctive Chicago windows and Neoclassical-style influences, such as an elaborate metal cornice and brick pilasters distinguish the façade.

The St. Louis Hotel was developed by one of Calgary’s most prominent citizens, Col. James Walker. Prior to becoming a leading real estate businessman, Walker was one of Calgary’s first residents, serving as an original officer with the North West Mounted Police at Fort Calgary.



The exterior character-defining elements of the St. Louis Hotel include such features as its: three-storey, rectangular plan with short façade and flat roof; brick and tile construction; a façade brickwork laid in stretcher bond with raked joints, and articulated to create pilasters and panels, and forming a straight parapet, and illuminated 1950s signage suspended from the facade.

**Hillier Block**

429 8 AV SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1910

The Hillier Block is a three-storey, red-brick structure. The building is distinguished by its first-storey storefront and decorative metal cornices. The Hillier Block recalls the apex of an economic boom which occurred in Calgary between 1910 and 1913 due to the mass immigration to Western Canada and the city’s emergence as an important regional wholesale and distribution centre. The exterior character elements of the Hillier Block include such features as its: symmetrical facade and flat roof; brick construction with a red-brick façade laid in common bond comprising quoins (at corners) and a straight parapet, and ornamental, galvanized-metal, roofline cornice and storefront cornice.



**Alberta Hide & Fur Co. Building**

431 8 AV SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1907

The Alberta Hide & Fur Co. Building is symbolic of the historic mixed use community of East Village, as an early commercial-residential building and an important part of the neighbourhood’s last remaining grouping of early 20th Century buildings.

The commercial block is a rare remaining example of the Edwardian Commercial Style in East Village, with many of the elements which typify that style. The lower storefront displays a moulded pressed-tin cornice with signband and decorative end brackets. The upper façade displays a brick parapet with corbeled, dog-toothed brick cornice as well as large, segmental-arched windows.



King Edward Hotel

438 9 AV SE - Edwardian Commercial - 1905

The King Edward Hotel, built in phases between 1905 and 1910, is a modestly finished pioneer-era structure consisting of two distinct sections which are three and five stories in height. It is significant as the second oldest extant hotel building in Calgary and was the oldest continually operating hotel in the city until its closure in 2004.



In the early 1980s the King Edward Hotel became one of Canada’s first blues bars, proclaiming itself ‘Home of the Blues’. It gained a national and international reputation attracting ‘A’ circuit bands and performers from the USA and Canada. Legendary blues musicians such as B.B. King, John Hammond, Pinetop Perkins, and Otis Rush performed at the King Edward during this time, as well as rock star Brian Adams. When the King Edward closed its doors, the hotel was considered to be Canada’s oldest blues bar. The hotel is now a part of the National Music Centre, which reflects the building’s history in the Calgary blues scene.

Fort Calgary Archaeological Site

750 9 Ave SE - Archaeological Site - 1875

The Fort Calgary site, through its associations with the North West Mounted Police and as the birthplace of the present day city, is of major provincial and historical importance. It was one of the first NWMP outposts in western Canada and, in 1882, achieved further prominence as a divisional headquarters. Around it developed on of the first permanent settlements in Southern Alberta and, until the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Calgary in 1883, the Fort was the focus of development for the small community. The detachment played a major role in facilitating construction of the CPR and the Calgary and Edmonton train lines, enforced Department of the Interior control over three major Blackfoot reserves, and assisted the cause of western settlement.

None of the surface elements remain. Nevertheless the 1875 buildings from Fort Calgary were architecturally significant because they were of vertical rather than horizontal log construction as were most early NWMP buildings in Alberta.





## About us:

Heritage Calgary is a charitable Civic Partner of the City of Calgary that identifies, preserves, and promotes Calgary's diverse heritage for future generations. We believe heritage is a dynamic process by which identity is experienced, interpreted, and represented and we take pride in working with Calgarians to honour the fabric that we are all a part of.

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