



## SELF-GUIDED TOURS:

# Chinese History

# 历史

*Fort Edmonton Park is located in Treaty 6 territory, as well as the traditional lands of the Métis people.*

**How to use this guide:** This guide offers some tidbits of information about the history and experience of Edmonton's Chinese peoples, as a starting point for you to learn at your own pace. It also provides suggestions of buildings to visit and questions to ask costumed staff.

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## *The story's beginning:*

*Due to social unrest and overcrowding, many Chinese migrant workers left the southern province of Guangdong and set out for North America, which was referred to as "Gold Mountain" on account of the promise of financial opportunity.*

*Many of the first immigrants worked in gold mines throughout the Fraser Valley. Later, approximately 18,000 Chinese men were hired to cut down trees, remove rock, clear tunnels and level the grade during construction of the CPR railway.*

## *Meanwhile in Edmonton: 1846 Fort*

**Trade Goods from China:** Although it would still be quite some time before the Chinese people arrived in the Edmonton area, all of the tea that the HBC imported came from China. For example, in 1831, York Factory depot ordered 30 chests of Congou (general Chinese black tea), 20 chests of Hyson (a Chinese green tea), and 8 chests of Souchong (a black tea from South China). Tea was very much in demand during the Fur Trade. It was enjoyed not only by HBC staff, but also the local Cree, Métis and Blackfoot populations. Why do you think tea was such a popular drink?

**TRY TO FIND** the tea chests in the Trade Store (#3) and the lower floor of Rowand House (#5). Can you spot the mistake made during their reproduction?



**ASK AN INTERPRETER** how the Chinese silk industry changed the North American fur trade forever.

## *The story continues:*

*After the completion of the CPR, the Chinese men who had worked on the railway were left jobless. Those who had ample savings were able to return to China, while others began to migrate east in search of further job opportunities. They bravely withstood racism wherever they went.*

## *Meanwhile in Edmonton: 1885 Street*

*In 1885, Edmonton had become a settlement of approximately 400 people with the majority living as homesteaders outside of the community. Although anti-Chinese sentiment existed, it was considered "friendlier" than other Albertan cities.*

**Head Tax:** In 1885, the Canadian government imposed a head tax of \$50 on all new migrants from China in an effort to limit immigration to skilled laborers. This tax was raised to \$100 in 1901 and to \$500 in 1905. This made it very expensive for Chinese men to bring their families to Canada. Consequently, early Chinatowns were primarily bachelor societies. Why do you think the Chinese were the only group on which a head tax was levied?



**Chinese Edmontonians:** Fleeing the anti-Chinese riots in Calgary, Chung Gee was the first Chinese man to settle in Edmonton. He arrived in Edmonton in July of 1892 and opened a laundry. By 1899, the Chinese community consisted of a mere 13 men.

**ASK AN INTERPRETER** how the Chinese were portrayed by the editorials in *the Edmonton Bulletin* and how the rest of the community would have viewed the Chinese at this time.

## 1905 Street-Thrill Ride

By 1905, Edmonton was a booming city. There was great prosperity and many new immigrants came to the city to take advantage of the excellent job market, as well as enjoy the modern amenities such as electricity, running water, and central heating. The Chinese population grew from 154 people in 1911 to 329 people in 1916.

**Chinese Laundries** In addition to restaurants, many entrepreneurial Chinese opened laundries, a market which was wide open in part due to the difficult nature of this kind of work. Laundry staff worked long hours in steamy rooms cleaning, pressing and drying items, and their hands would become blistered from the boiling water and harsh soaps. These establishments were typically crowded, as they also served as living quarters for the workers and other members of the community. Would you be proud of forebears who toiled so hard?

**Morris Abraham “Two-Gun” Cohen (1887-1970)** was a Jewish real estate salesman and card shark who was nonetheless known for his loyalty (and for his two pistols). The Edmonton Chinese community established a good relationship with him, invited him to their lodge meetings, and introduced him to Dr. Sun Yat-sen. This famous revolutionary was touring Canada to raise funds for an uprising against the Qing Emperors. Cohen eventually became one of Yat-sen’s bodyguards, and would later travel to China and help train his soldiers – all arranged due to his relationship with Edmonton Chinese.

**BE SURE TO VISIT Reeds Bazaar (#60)**, and peruse the porcelain collection. Many of the designs seen here were inspired by Chinese and Japanese art.

**ASK AN INTERPRETER** at the Fire Hall (#63) about the strange and curious Fan Tan trial which ended in a lightning strike!



*Thank you for visiting  
Fort Edmonton Park!*

## 1920 Street- Tough Times, Modern Times

From 1919 to 1929, Canada experienced a time of rapid change and fully moved into the modern age. After the Great War, Edmonton experienced an economic depression and dealt with conflicts over labour issues and women’s and ethnic rights. The decade of the 1920s was one of advancement in technology, urban growth and the development of new forms of entertainment, sports and leisure.

**Continued Isolation:** The Chinese community at this time was still quite isolated from society at large. Immigration from China was banned in 1923, which only drove it ‘underground.’ Wishing to avoid detection from authorities, many new immigrants avoided all contact with non-Chinese people. Their lack of English language skills further limited their contact with other citizens of Edmonton. Consequently, the Chinese were restricted from joining existing cultural institutions, so the close knit community formed its own.

**Chinese Cultural Institutions:** The Edmonton branch of the Chinese Benevolent Association officially formed in 1929. It helped orient and acclimatize newcomers and provided support for community elders. Many Chinese kept close ties with their homeland, and contributed to the revolution via the Kuomintang, or Chinese Nationalist Party. Edmonton also had a local branch of the Chinese Freemasons. Do you see evidence of other groups forming their own cultural institutions and buildings on 1920 Street?



**BE SURE TO VISIT** the Silver Heights Peony Garden (#78). Although the peonies here were grown for ornamental purposes, the peony has long been used in traditional Chinese medicine.