

TORONTO'S CHINATOWNS, 1850 – 2022

A WALK THROUGH TIME



John Carlson



Mary Wong



Toronto Public Library
Newcomer Day
May 25, 2022

Harvey Low



Toronto Archives 257,A,229

PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

1. **Chinese populations (How many?)**
2. **A Short History of Chinese in Canada**
3. **Toronto's "Chinatowns"**
... and **THERE'S A QUIZ!**

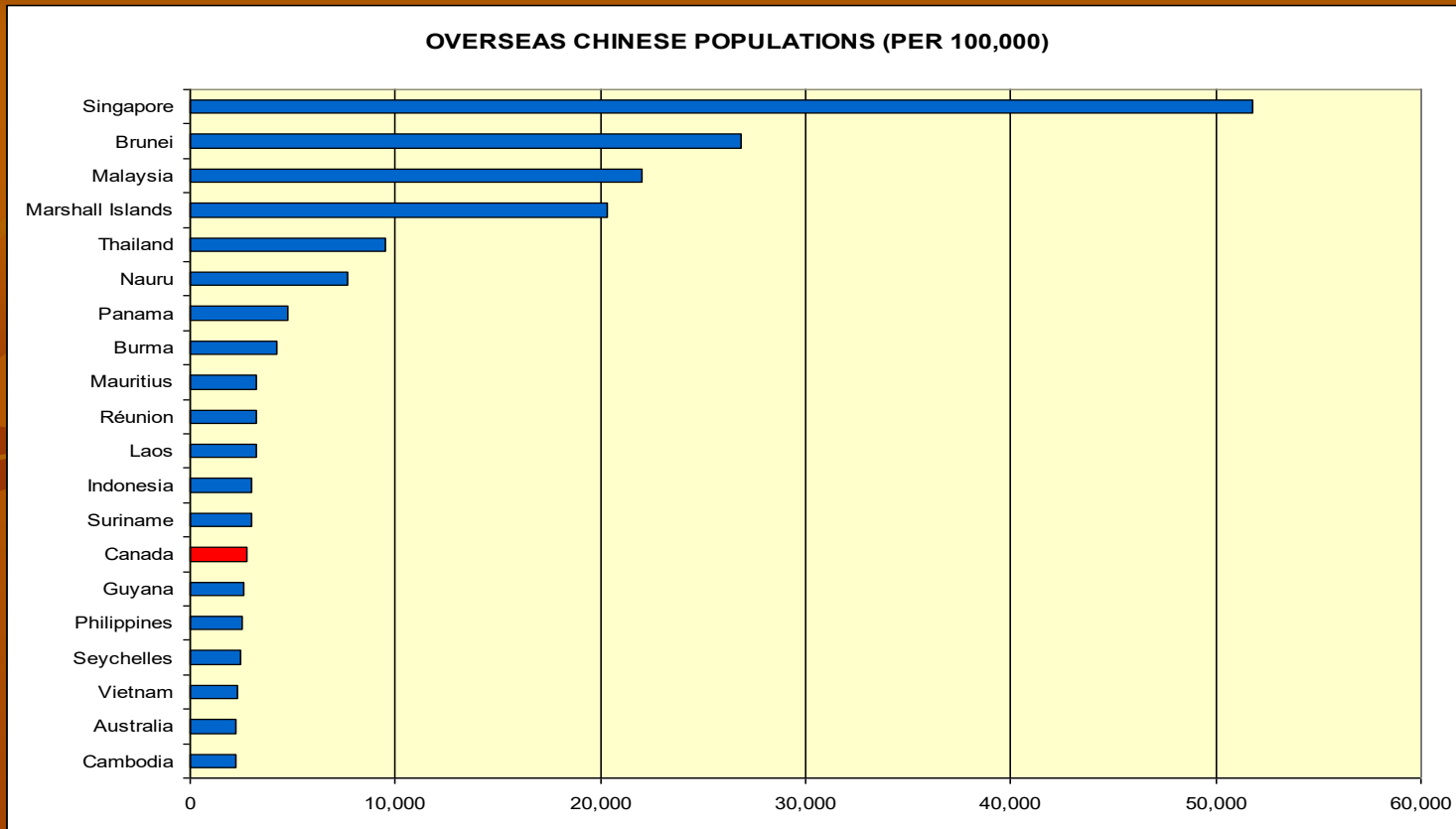
CHINESE POPULATION

HOW MANY...

in the World

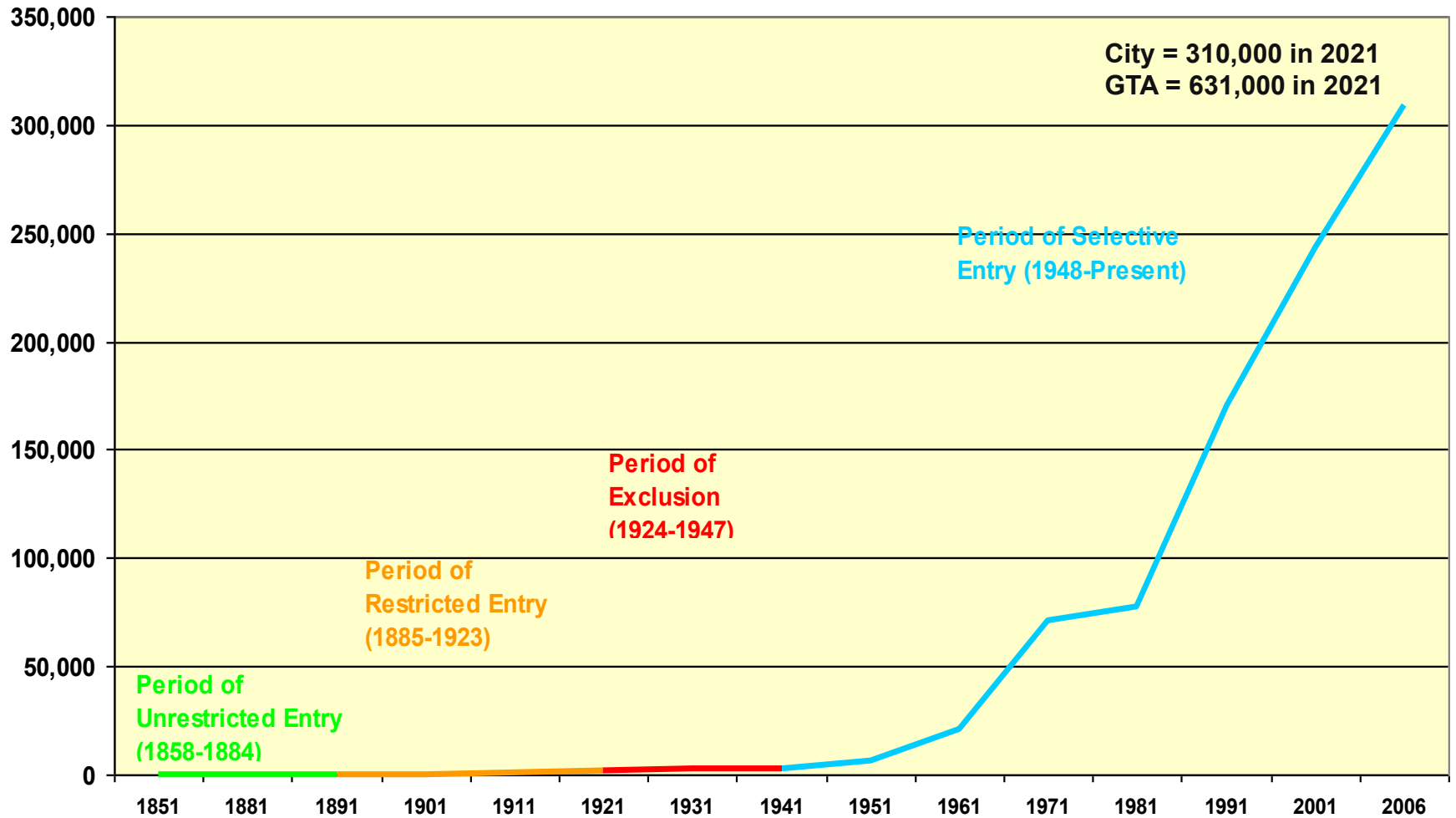
in Canada

in Toronto?

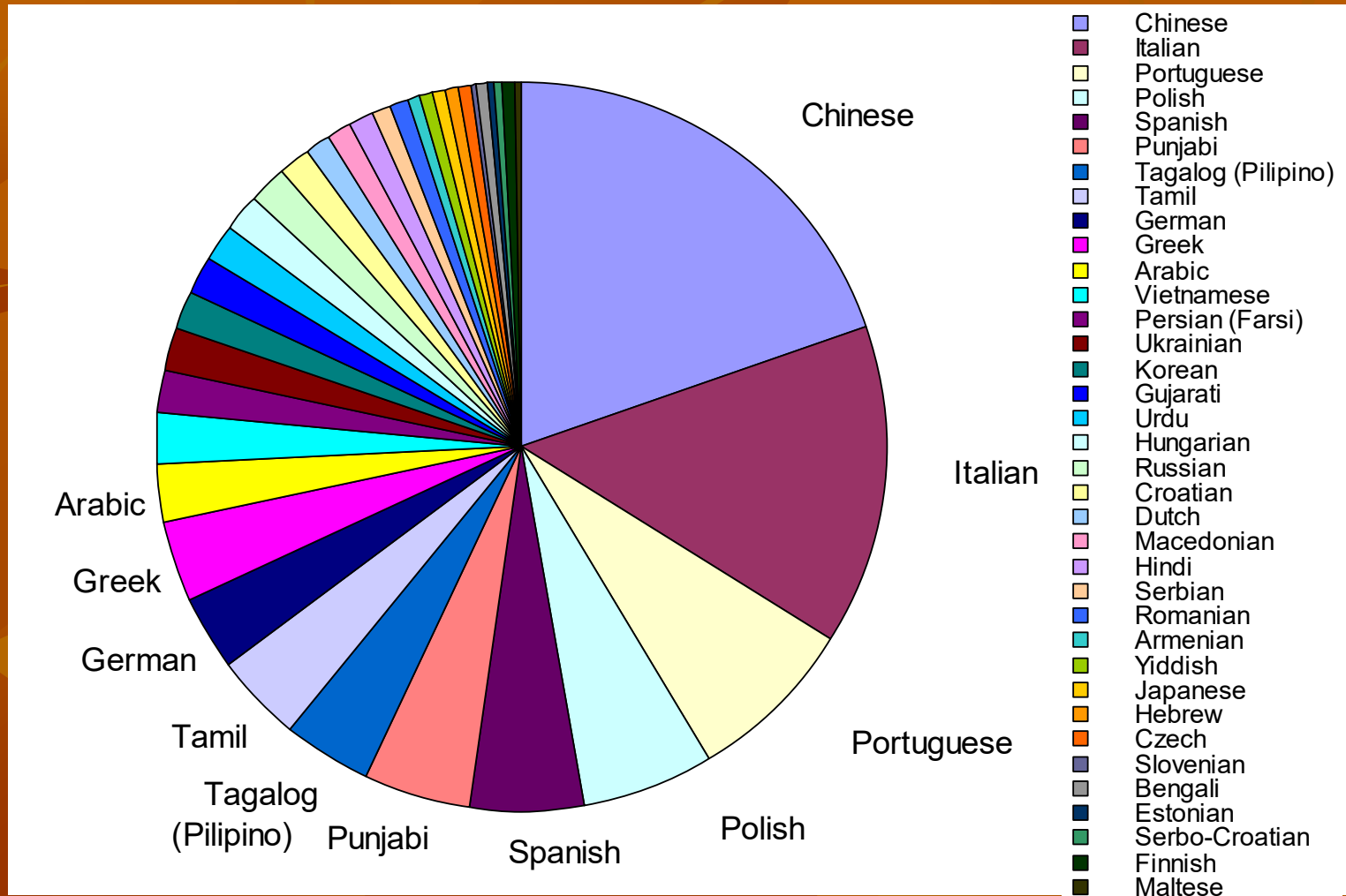


- **1 in 5** persons worldwide, live in China
- **34 million** Chinese (outside China) living around the **World**
- **1.4 million** Chinese live in Canada (largest Visible Minority Group in Country)
- **630,000** Chinese live in the **Greater Toronto Area**
- **310,000** Chinese live in Toronto
- **50,000** Chinese are new immigrants to Toronto (1 in 3 Chinese that came to Canada in the last 5 years live in Toronto)

Toronto's Chinese Population (1881 - 2006)

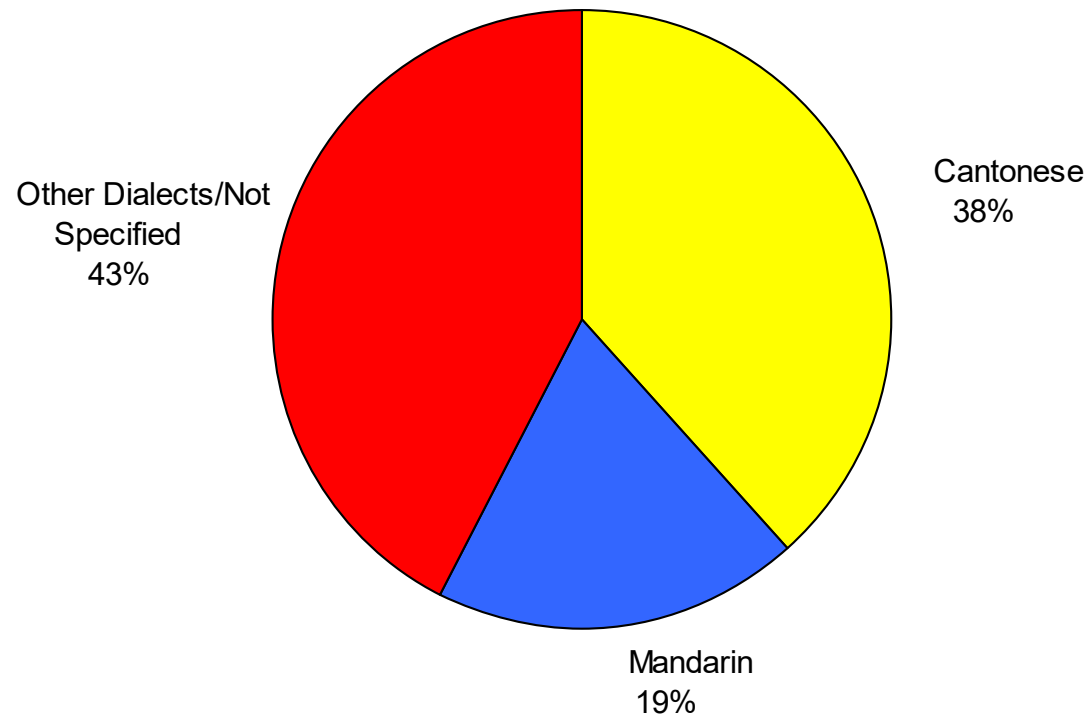


Languages (other than English/French) Spoken In Toronto



Chinese Dialects In Toronto

**Chinese Dialects Spoken in the Home
City of Toronto, 2006**



Since 2006, the numbers of both Cantonese and Mandarin speaking Chinese have increased.

Mandarin-speakers have, for the first-time in the census, outnumbered Cantonese-speakers!

Toishan-Speakers (original settlers), are making a comeback!

The background of the slide is a solid orange color with a pattern of stylized, overlapping leaf shapes in a slightly darker shade of orange. The leaves are arranged in a way that they appear to be floating or falling, creating a sense of movement and texture.

A SHORT HISTORY OF CHINESE IN CANADA

Key Dates in Chinese-Canadian History

- **1788**
British explorer John Meare arrives on Canada's Pacific coast with two ships and 50 Chinese carpenters and craftsmen. They build a fort and a schooner. No record of fate of Chinese labourers.
- **1858**
The first Chinese gold-miners arrive in British Columbia from San Francisco.
- **1861**
Won Alexander Cumyow is born in Victoria. He is the first Chinese baby to be born in Canada.
- **1880-85**
The construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway employs thousands of Chinese workers.
- **1885**
The Federal government introduces the **Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese Immigration into Canada**, which requires that Chinese people entering Canada to pay a head tax of \$50 per person.

Key Dates in Chinese-Canadian History

- **1886**
Following the completion of the railway, some Chinese people start small businesses. Many move east to centres such as Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal in search of job opportunities and less discrimination.
- **1902**
The federal government raises the head tax to \$100.
- **1903**
The federal government raises the head tax to \$500.
- **1917**
Toronto's YMCI (Young Men's Christian Institute) holds the first conference of Chinese students in Canada.
- **1920**
A dozen Chinese veterans who served in the Canadian Army during WWI are given the right to vote.

Key Dates in Chinese-Canadian History

- **1923**
The Chinese Immigration Act (the Exclusion Act) prohibits Chinese immigrants from entering Canada. Many wives and children in China are unable to join their husbands and fathers in Canada.
- **1945**
British Columbia passes a law giving the vote to Asians who are Canadian citizens and fought in WWII.
- **1947**
The Exclusion Act is repealed. Chinese Canadians are given the right to vote.
- **1960**
Bill of Rights: bars discrimination by Govt agencies on the grounds of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex.
- **1962**
I was born 😊
- **2006**
Canadian Government apologizes to the Chinese Community and offers compensation to families affected by the head tax.

Other Examples of Early Policies Targeting Chinese



- **1902 - Toronto By-law #41:** to “license and regulate laundrymen and laundry companies and for inspecting and regulating laundries.”
- **1902 - Toronto Police Board of Commissioners:** delegation of licensing of laundries to Police for “improved sanitary conditions, less danger from infection, prevention of gambling, opium smoking, etc,”
- **1914 - Provincial Factory, Shop and Office Building Act:** amended stipulating that “no Chinese person shall employ in any capacity or have under his direction or control any female white person in factory, restaurant or laundry.”

“Gold Mountain” and the Railway



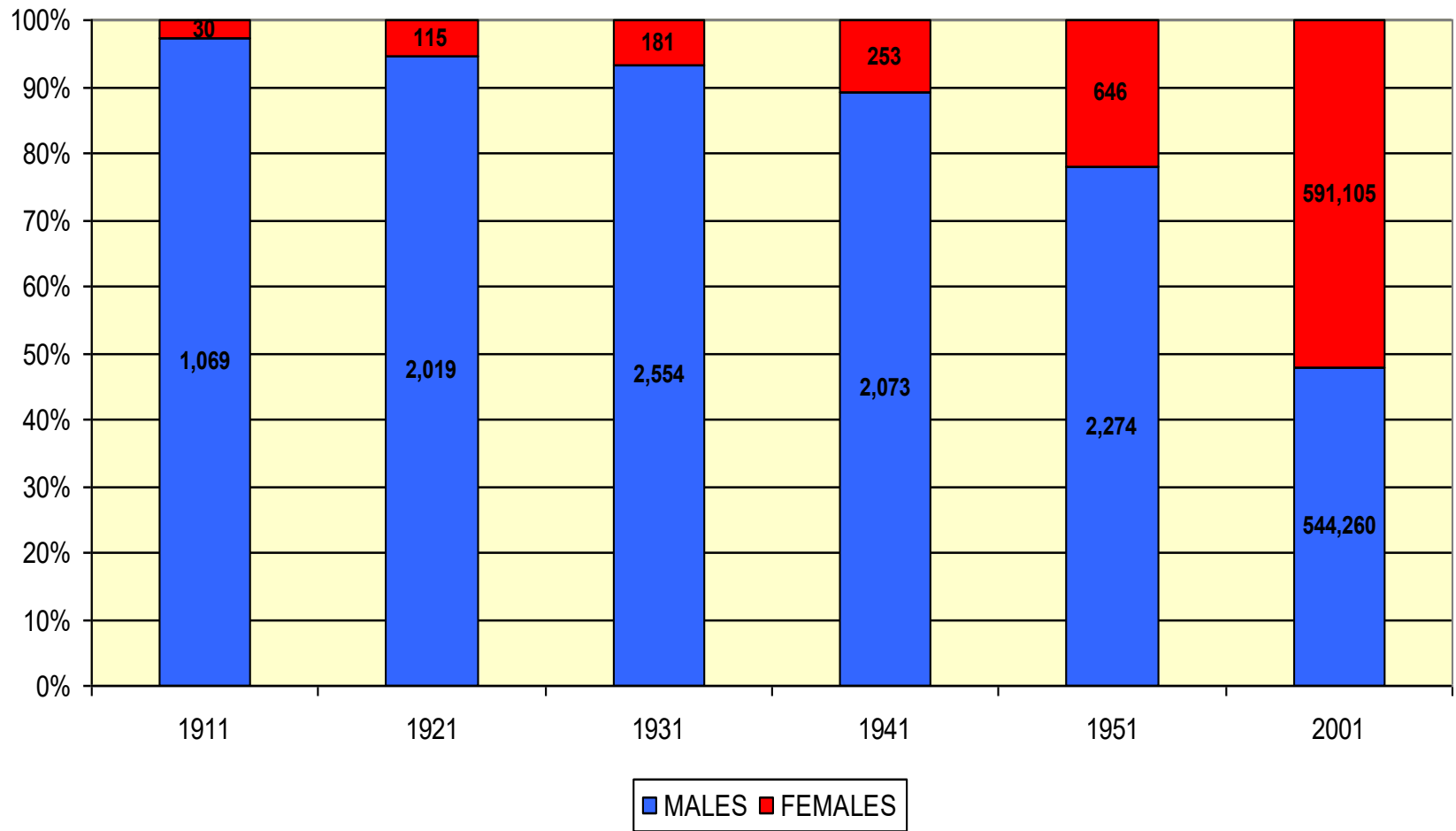
“Chinese Railway Worker’s Memorial”



Early Life



Chinese Population in Canada, by Gender, 1911 - 2001

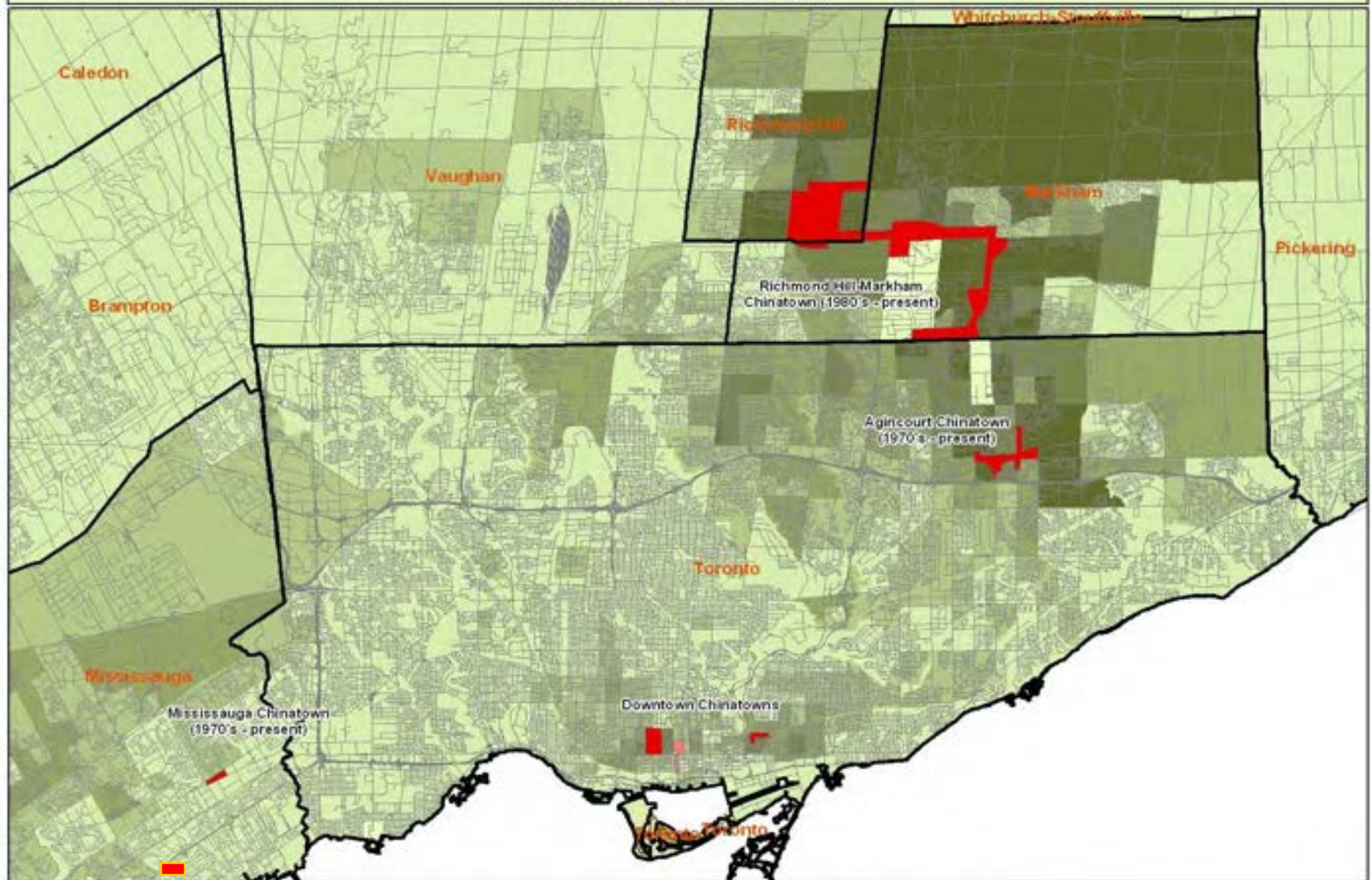


Prepared by Harvey Low from 2001 Census (single response Chinese Ethnic Origin). Other years: Richard Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown – the Changing Social Organization of an Ethnic Community*, AMS Press, NY, 1989.

The background of the slide is a solid orange color with a pattern of stylized, overlapping leaf shapes in a slightly darker shade of orange. The leaves are arranged in a way that they appear to be floating or falling, creating a sense of movement and texture.

THE CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN TORONTO

Toronto CMA Chinatowns 2001



Legend

Chinese Ethnic Origin

0 - 345	346 - 880
	881 - 1,765
	1,766 - 2,945
	2,946 - 6,045

Minor Streets

Former Chinatown
Existing Chinatown



Source: Census 2001, Toronto Assessment, Social Policy Analysis & Research, Survey & Mapping
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 Publication Date: October 2005
 Contact: spar@toronto.ca

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CHINATOWN PHOTO QUIZ #1



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1498, f1498 it0016

1857



**York Street looking north to Osgoode Hall
2022**

YORK STREET
(b/ King and Queen Streets)
“Toronto’s 1st Chinese Settlement”
(1858 - late 1800’s)

- **First area of Chinese settlement.**
- **Factors for creation:**
 - close to railway for Chinese railway workers
 - tight-knit community for “protection”, “support”, and “friendship”
- **Factors for demise:**
 - restrictive City ordinances limited location & operation of Chinese businesses
 - ethnic tensions towards Chinese & Chinese labour
 - replaced by development of the downtown business district
 - restrictive Federal immigration policies

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CHINATOWN PHOTO QUIZ #2



City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Sub Series 33, 176

1937

City of Toronto Archives Fonds, Series 372, Sub Series 33, 176



2009

Harvey Low



2022

Harvey Low

SW corner of Elizabeth Street & Edward Street



City of Toronto Archives, Series 71, #0071_88072

1930

City of Toronto Archives/TTC Fonds, Series 71, Item 8072



2022

Harvey Low

Elizabeth Street looking south from Dundas Street West



1970's

York University Library #002-102-403-003



2022

Harvey Low

Elizabeth Street looking north from City Hall



1937

City of Toronto Archives Series 372, Sub Series 33, Item 161



2022

Harvey Low

Condo, east-side of Elizabeth Street just south of Dundas



City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Sub Series 33, Item 178

1937

City of Toronto Archives Series 372, Sub Series 33, Item 178



2022

Harvey Low

west-side of Elizabeth Street just south of Dundas



1970's
mapleleaffan



2022
Harvey Low

west-side of Elizabeth Street just north of City Hall



1913

City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 341



1937

City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Sub Series 33, Item 160



**SE corner of Elizabeth Street
& Foster Place**

2022

Harvey Low



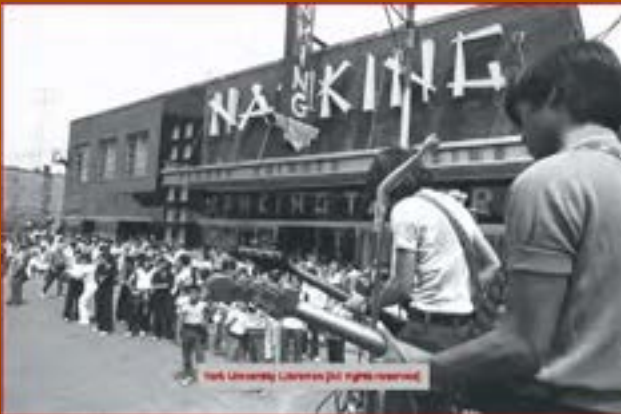
1930's

City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Sub Series 33, Item 159



1940's

City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Sub Series 33, Item 257



1970's

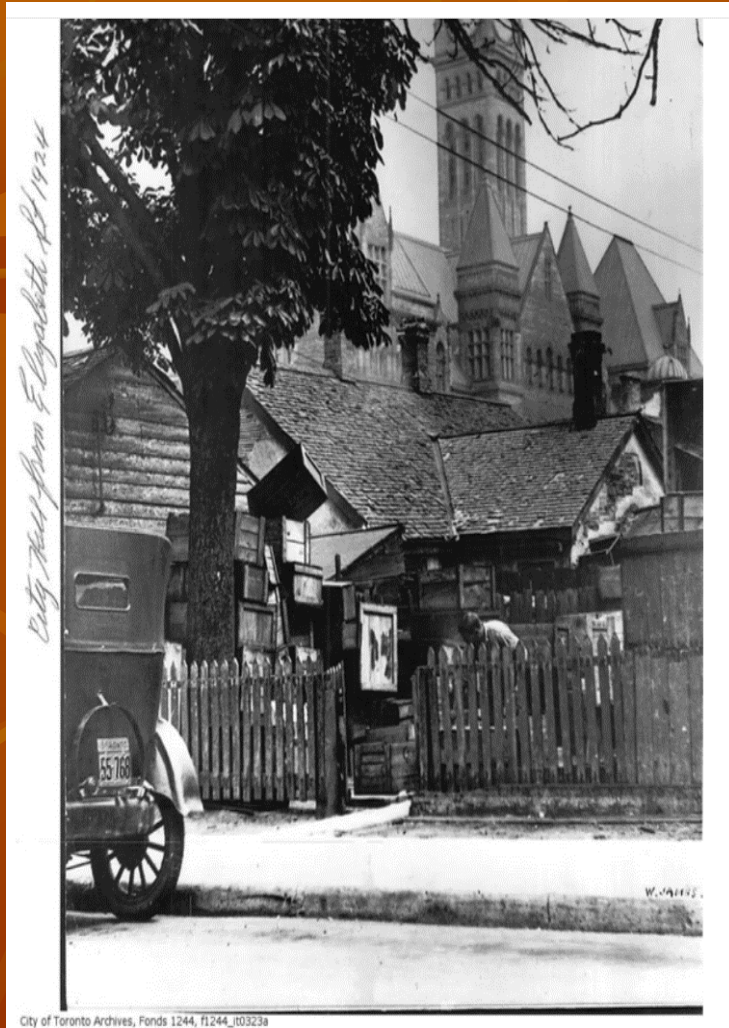
York University Library, #1974-002-102-403-013



2009

Harvey Low

SW corner of Elizabeth Street & Louisa Street (no longer there)



1924 City of Toronto Archives. Series 1244, F1244



2022 Harvey Low

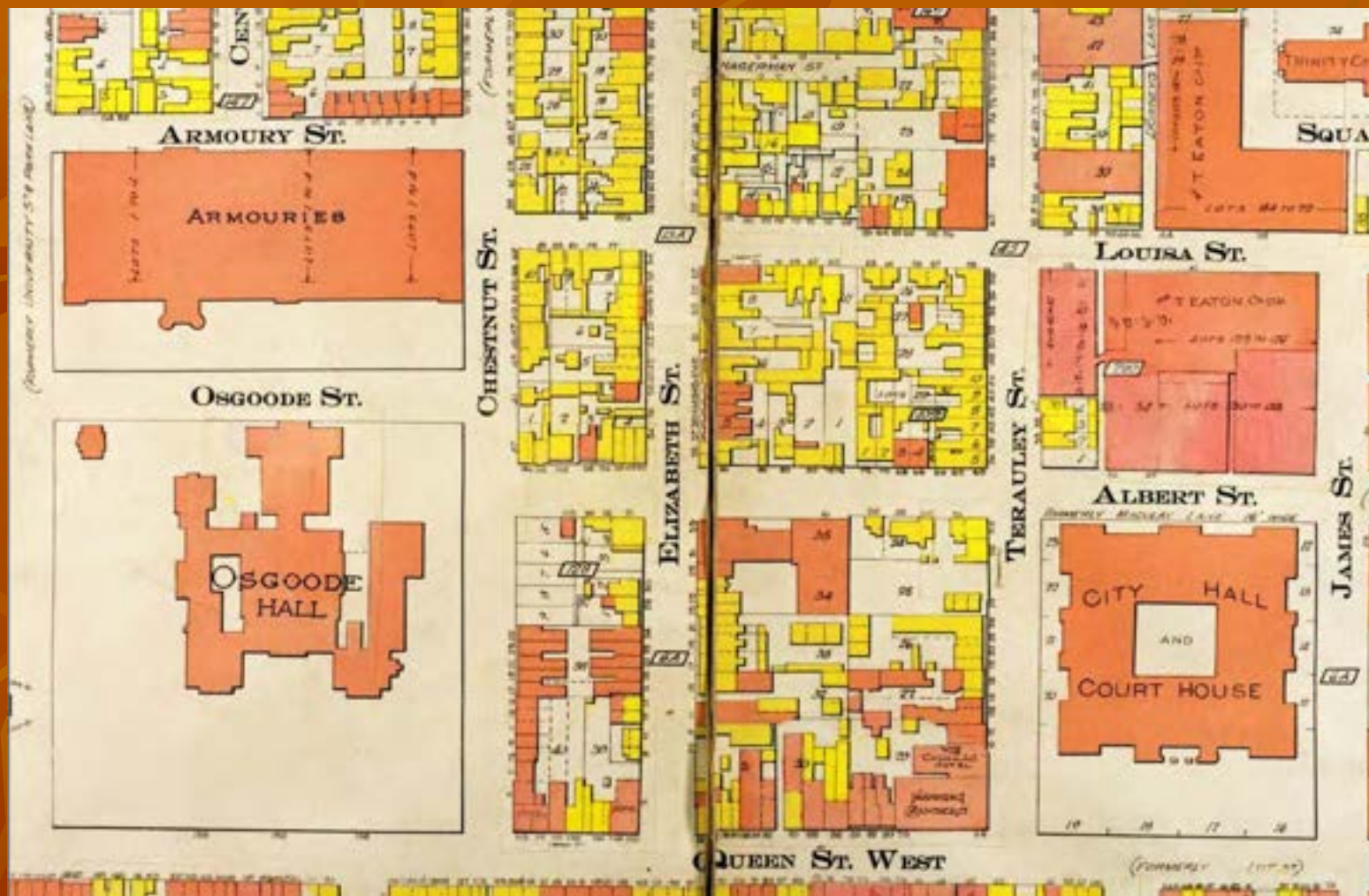
ELIZABETH STREET

“Original Chinatown”

(late 1800’s – 1950’s)

- **Located primarily on Elizabeth, Chesnut, Louisa, and Albert Streets, and on present-day site of New City Hall**
- **Factors for creation:**
 - natural migration northwards as a result of displacement from original York Street location.
- **Factors for demise:**
 - 1960’s development of New City hall over heart (Elizabeth Street) of Chinatown

ELIZABETH STREET



ELIZABETH STREET



1923 Goad's Fire Insurance Map with New City Hall Superimposed

ELIZABETH STREET



1937

City of Toronto Archives. Series 372, Sub Series 33, Item 172

west-side of Elizabeth Street (on site of New City Hall)

ELIZABETH STREET



1937

City of Toronto Archives/TTC Fonds, Series 71, Item 10092

west-side of Elizabeth Street (on site of New City Hall)

ELIZABETH STREET



1937

City of Toronto Archives. Series 372, Sub Series 33, Item 251

west-side of Elizabeth Street (on site of New City Hall)

ELIZABETH STREET



1937

City of Toronto Archives. Series 372, Sub Series 33, Item 171

west-side of Elizabeth Street (on site of New City Hall)

In and about town

Some Historic Chinese Businesses

1878

First Chinese-owned business in Toronto (Sam Ching Laundry at 9 Adelaide At East) .

1905

Chinese Freemasons - 92 York Street

1905

Chinese Christian Association – 134 Church

1910

Chinese Presbyterian Church – 188 Church

1935

Shing Wah Dailey News – 12 Hagerman



TORONTO'S FIRST CHINATOWN

多倫多的首個唐人街

The first Chinese resident recorded in Toronto was Sam Ching, the owner of a hand laundry business on Adelaide Street in 1878. Though immigration to Canada directly from China was restricted after 1885, Ching was eventually joined by Chinese men who migrated from western Canada after helping to build the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway.

Between 1900 and 1925, Toronto's first Chinese community took shape here, around Elizabeth Street which once ran all the way south to Queen Street. 'Chinatown' was a bustling commercial and residential area that included restaurants, grocery stores, and traditional clan associations.



Detail of 1923 Gold's Fire Insurance Plan showing the streets of Toronto's first Chinatown. Chinatown's main street, Elizabeth Street, is coloured red. The area shaded in grey was demolished in the 1950s for Nathan Phillips Square and City Hall. City of Toronto Archives, © CCL.

文籍在一九二三年製作的大火保險圖顯示多倫多第一個唐人街的街道。紅色的是唐人街的主要街道伊麗莎白街。灰色的部分在五十年代被拆毀，以興建彌敦道廣場和多倫多市政大樓。
多倫多市政府檔案室 | © CCL

根據記載，多倫多的第一個華裔居民是“Sam Ching”。一八七八年，他在 Adelaide 街經營洗衣店。一八八五年後，雖然加拿大政府限制華人從中國直接移居加國，但參與興建橫跨加拿大太平洋鐵路的華人在鐵路完成後，從加拿大西部移居多倫多，最終與“Sam Ching”一同居於此地。

在一九零零年至一九二五年之間，多倫多的第一個華人社區在伊麗莎白街一帶建立起來。伊麗莎白街一度向南伸延至皇后街。當時的“唐人街”是一個熙來攘往的商業和住宅區，餐館、雜貨店和宗親會比比皆是。



This first Chinatown thrived until the late 1940s, when the City of Toronto began its controversial expropriation of much of the neighbourhood to make room for a new city hall and the future Nathan Phillips Square. Demolition finally took place in 1955. Some Chinese businesses could not afford to re-locate, and closed. Others packed up and moved west along Dundas Street to Spadina Avenue where they became the heart of today's 'Old Chinatown'.



The window of this early shop reads "Railroad Workers Management Office", and advertises discounts on international money transfers. Multicultural History Society of Ontario, E.C. Mack Family Collection, File 1-10.

這所早期的商店在櫥窗上寫上「詩曼亞鐵路華人經理處」，並推銷各國匯款的扣優惠。
安省多元文化歷史協會，麥爾斯家族收藏品，影片 1-10。



60-70 Elizabeth Street, 1935
City of Toronto Archives, Series 311, subseries 11, box 31.

一九三五年伊麗莎白街 60-70 號的景況。
多倫多市档案馆，112 號，31 分卷，影片 1172。



第一個唐人街持續繁榮興旺，直到一九四零年代末期。為了興建新市政大樓和未來的彌敦菲臘廣場，多倫多市政府展開了具爭議性的行動，大幅度徵用該區的土地。拆卸工程最終在一九五五年進行。部分華人商戶因無法遷往其他地方經營而結業，其他商戶則收拾一切，沿登打士街及士巴丹拿大道向西遷移，該處成為今天「舊唐人街」的中心地帶。

On August 15, 1945, many Torontonians flocked to Chinatown to celebrate the final victory over Japan—the end of WWII for Allied forces, and the end of 14 years of war between China and Japan. PHOTO LEFT: The British Union Jack, and a flag of Canada, is paraded down Elizabeth Street by Chinese-Canadian women. Multicultural History Society of Ontario, E.C. Mack Family Collection, File 1-1.

一九四五年八月十五日，成羣結隊的多倫多市民湧入唐人街慶祝抗日戰爭勝利——對盟軍來說，這是第二次世界大戰的結局，對中國和日本來說，這是十四年戰爭的結束。

左圖，加拿大皇家騎警手持英國國旗，亦是加拿大國旗，在伊麗莎白街巡遊。

安省多元文化歷史協會，麥爾斯家族收藏品，影片 1-1。

HERITAGE TORONTO 2007

The “WARD”



Archives (modern photo by Jeffery Low)




Zi-Sen Lee Collection

New City Hall Site - 1958

ELIZABETH STREET



The background of the slide is a solid orange color with a pattern of stylized, darker orange leaves. The leaves are arranged in a way that they appear to be floating or falling, with some overlapping. The overall effect is a warm, autumnal theme.

CHIANTOWN PHOTO QUIZ #3



1960's

Kenneth Chan



2022

Harvey Low



1960's

York University Archives



2022

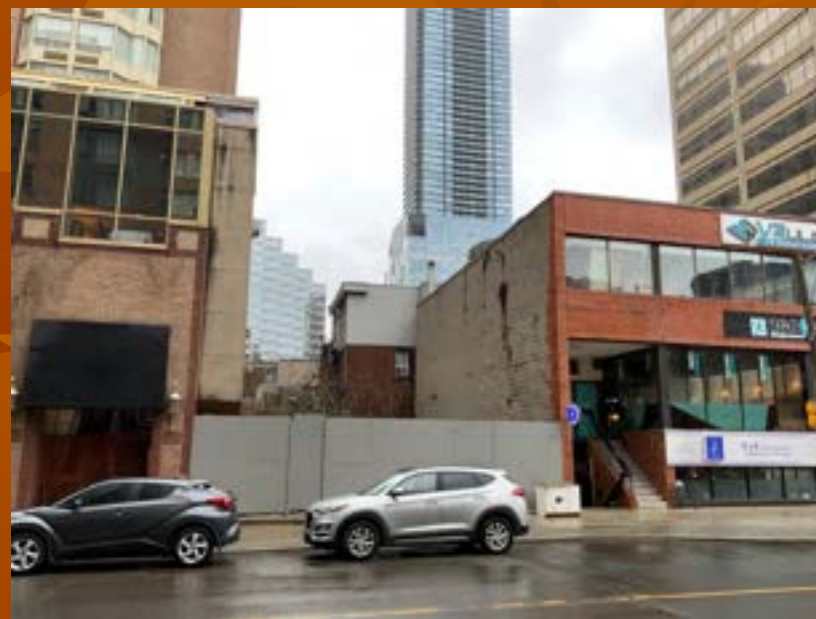
Harvey Low

looking north on Chesnut Street towards Dundas



1957

Mary Esther-Lee



2022

Harvey Low

West-side of Chesnut Street (just south of Dundas)

DUNDAS - ELIZABETH

“Second Chinatown” (1950’s – Late 1970’s)

- **Centered at Dundas & Elizabeth, and spread along Dundas b/ University and Bay**
- **Factors for creation:**
 - New City Hall forces businesses to spread northward along Dundas
 - more open immigration policies
- **Factors threatening sustainability:**
 - traffic and congestion
 - movement westward (e.g., institutions, residents) to Dundas & Spadina

The background of the slide is a solid orange color with a pattern of stylized, darker orange leaves. The leaves are scattered across the frame, with some showing prominent veins. The overall aesthetic is autumnal and textured.

CHINATOWN PHOTO QUIZ #4



1960's

City of Toronto Archives. Series 648, File 246, ID0005



2022

Harvey Low

NE corner of Dundas & Spadina



1930

Tayloronhistory.com



2022

Rexall

NE corner of Dundas & Spadina



1890's



2022

Rexall

Spadina looking north to College



1970's

Kenneth Chan



2022

Harvey Low

south side Dundas – east of Huron Street



1960's

City of Toronto Archives. Series 648, File 246, ID0001



2022

Harvey Low

NW corner of Dundas & Spadina



1960's

City of Toronto Archives. Series 648, File 246, ID0003



2022

Harvey Low

SE corner of Dundas & Spadina

DUNDAS - SPADINA

“the Downtown West Chinatown”

(1970's - present)

- **Centered around the intersection of Dundas Street West and Spadina Ave**
- **Factors for creation:**
 - former Jewish community moves north
 - natural migration of population to areas of more housing
 - more open immigration policies
 - Other ethnic business join the community (e.g., Vietnamese)
 - international/political circumstances (Hong Kong riots of the late 1960's)
- **Factors threatening sustainability:**
 - traffic and congestion
 - competition with suburban Chinatowns (business and resident exodus)
 - demographic transformation (age, family and ethnic composition is changing)

SUPERSTITIONS AND STORIES



The old Pearl Restaurant ghost and the “lucky cat”.



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CHINATOWN PHOTO QUIZ #5



1904

City of Toronto Archives, Series 376, File 4, Item 37



2022

Harvey Low

Gerrard looking east from Broadview



1904

City of Toronto Archives. Series 372, File 58, Item 1008



2022

Harvey Low

Broadview looking south to Dundas



1983

Posted by GBC on Lost Toronto website



744 Gerrard Street East - 2022

Google Maps

Gerrard north side east of Broadview

Site filming of "A Christmas Story"

BROADVIEW-GERRARD

“the Downtown East Chinatown”

(1970's - present)

- **Centered around the intersection of Broadview and Gerrard Street**
- **Factors for creation:**
 - natural migration of population to areas of more housing
 - more open immigration policies
 - international/political circumstances (Hong Kong riots of the late 1960's)
- **Factors threatening sustainability:**
 - traffic and congestion
 - competition with suburban Chinatowns (business and resident exodus)
 - demographic transformation (age, family and ethnic composition is changing)

THE OUTER “CHINATOWNS”

**“Agincourt, Markham, Richmond Hill, Mississauga
(1980’s - present)”**

- **Located along the major roads of “suburbia” in the former municipality of Scarborough, and to the west in the City of Mississauga**
- **Factors for creation:**
 - believed to be partly influenced by superstition in the name “Richmond” (alluding towards “wealth”)
 - available land for development of strip retail and other commercial malls
 - more open Immigration Policies
 - international/political circumstances (Hong Kong riots of the late 1960’s and 2019) spur increased immigration
 - demand for both affordable and large high-end houses
- **Factors threatening sustainability:**
 - sprawl and not pedestrian oriented

MISSISSAUGA



RICHMOND HILL-MARKHAM



**Combo Indoor and Strip
Malls, with emerging Asian
chains like Japanese “100-
yen” Oomomo, + large
condo developments!**



RICHMOND HILL-MARKHAM



**Mixed-use Asian Retail-
Residential and Office-
Retail**



AGINCOURT



Evolution of Toronto's many "Chinatowns"

1. **York Street**
Toronto's first Chinese settlement (1858 - late 1800's?)
2. **Elizabeth Street**
Original Chinatown (late 1800's? - 1950's)
3. **Dundas-Elizabeth Street**
Second Chinatown (1950's – late 1970's)
4. **Dundas-Spadina**
"Downtown Chinatown" (1970's - present)
5. **Broadview-Gerrard**
"Chinatown East" (1970's - present)
6. **Agincourt**
"Scarborough Chinatown" (1970's - present)
7. **Mississauga**
"Chinatown West" (1980's - present)
8. **Richmond Hill-Markham**
"Chinatown North" (1980's - present)

CONCLUSION

The Future of “Chinatowns”

population decline + development pressures

Washington, Philadelphia, San Diego

gentrification

Negative effects are rising cost of housing

shift from *Urban* to *Suburban* Chinatowns

Toronto, Vancouver, New York

more car-oriented

Impact on seniors etc.

cultural richness: ethnic lines are increasingly blurred

(influx of new groups such as Filipinos, Vietnamese etc.)

Chow Keong Chinese Hand Laundry

The only one left (in Canada?)





Acknowledgements

In addition to the notations cited in this presentation, the author would like to specifically thank

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(<http://www.toronto.ca/archives/>)

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Chapter (<http://www.ccnctoronto.ca/>)

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