



Historical Context

Edmonton's original Chinatown settlement emerged in the area around Jasper Avenue and 97 Street, in the years following the arrival of Chinese immigrants to the Edmonton area in the late 1800s. Many immigrants from mainly from southern China chose to move to escape the poverty caused by floods and wars.

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The slow recovery of Chinatown gained momentum in the 1960s when families were permitted to immigrate, bringing more diverse Chinese people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia.

The Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese population grew rapidly after 1979 when Canada agreed to accept refugees from Indochina. The new wave of immigrants began establishing a few blocks further north of the Canadian National rail bridge. This led the expansion of a commercial district and resulted in the infusion of many new Chinese businesses (now commonly known as "Chinatown North") to the area what would traditionally have been businesses owned and operated to serve the Ukrainian, Italian, and Eastern European communities.

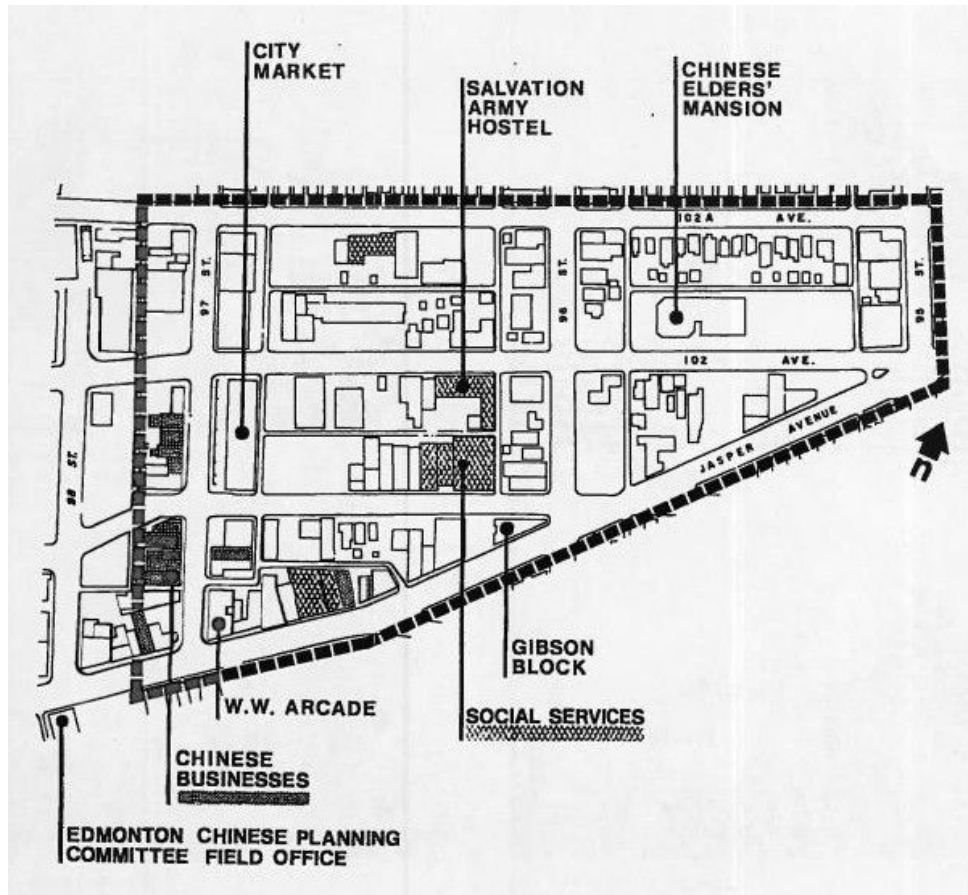
By the early 1900s the population of Chinatown grew to support a small, supportive community, providing services such as housing, employment, social and cultural activities. This was suddenly halted in 1923, when new federal legislation prevented immigration from China.

This resulted in a period of stagnated growth for the Chinese community and the loss of business and societies. By the time the immigration law was repealed in 1947, the remaining population consisted of largely of elderly and single men.

The confirmation that Canada Place would be constructed at the northwest intersection of Jasper Avenue and 97 Street triggered the need to work towards a new Chinatown in the late 1970s. The Chinese community and the City of Edmonton worked to create a new Chinatown that would see Chinatown develop east of 97 Street along 102 Avenue.

A Chinatown Plan was contemplated in 1977 which culminated in the 1979 Chinatown Plan that focused on the area around 102 Avenue, between 95 and 97 Streets (See Figure 1). Since 1979, further study and development of the area (currently referred to as “Chinatown South”) continued and significant investments to realize the Plan were carried out. These include the Chinese Elders Mansion in 1977, a second tower completed in 1991, the Chinese Multicultural Centre in 1985, several family associations, and the arrival of the Harbin Gate in 1987, constructed to symbolize friendship with Edmonton’s sister city, Harbin, China.

Figure 1: *The Future of Chinatown (1978) Study Area.*



Over time, the development in the planned Chinatown did not fully materialize and the businesses that established in the north created a concentration of ethnic commercial entities. This gave way to the emergence of two separate and distinct areas identifying as Chinatown Edmonton today.

Additionally, over time, daily goods and services that had traditionally only been available in Chinatown, such as grocery, herbal medicines and services such as acupuncture, began to suburbanize, serving the Chinese community in various sectors of Edmonton.

With the introduction of major supermarkets such as T&T Market (Northgate Center, West Edmonton Mall, 34 Ave NW), Korean Central Market and other large Asian supermarkets locating on the fringe of Edmonton, demand for Chinatown services decreased.

The cumulative effect of the development of two distinct and separate areas of Chinatown, one cultural (south) and the other commercial (north), declining consumer base and demand for Chinatown services, and the perpetuating perception of Chinatown as an unsafe place to visit has resulted in the need for a long term Chinatown economic strategy. Its changing character and evolving identity with increasing immigration from African, Korean, and Vietnamese populations also presents a challenge to what has traditionally been a district distinctly focused on providing goods, services, and community support to Chinese immigrants.