

CHINESE AMERICAN MUSEUM
HISTORIC TRAILS, MODERN TALES
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Historic Trails, Modern Tales is a walking tour that highlights 20 landmarks to rediscover and create a linkage between the history and development of two significant Chinese American communities in Los Angeles. The text in blue provides navigational directions and the text in black gives historical context to major points of interests in the walking trail.

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Major Points of Interest

To begin your tour of Historic Trails, Modern Tales, please start at the front of the Chinese American Museum.

Introduction

The 1850 U.S. Census revealed two Chinese residing in Los Angeles. In 1860, sixteen Chinese called Los Angeles home and by 1870, the population had increased to 170. A Chinatown district began to emerge on a small street south of the Old Plaza, all within the present day boundaries of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument.

Popularly known as the birthplace of Los Angeles, the El Pueblo area also became home to the first Chinatown in the region. Older adobe and wood frame buildings that had been built by the earliest residents, who were of Native American, Spanish, and African descent, came to be occupied by the newer Chinese immigrants.

Garnier Building

The economic boom of the 1880's continued to draw many Chinese to California and Los Angeles. The historic Garnier Building was built in 1890 by Phillippe Garnier, member of a prominent business family, to serve the growing Chinese American community in Los Angeles; it became the political center of Chinatown.

On the ground floor, facing both Los Angeles and Sanchez Streets, businesses such as Sun Wing Wo General Store served a bustling community. The upper floors contained offices to family, fraternal, and civil rights organizations, such as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, as well as many residential units.

The Garnier Building is now the last standing building of the Historic Chinatown and is now home to the Chinese American Museum. Opened in 2003, the museum stands as a symbol for the Chinese who started their legacy in Los Angeles. A timeline that details the journey of Chinese in America and a re-creation of the Sun Wing Wo general store is currently on exhibit inside the Chinese American Museum.

Walk to the east side of the Garnier Building by walking South down Sanchez Street and exit the park through the black gates. Make a left on Arcadia Street and another left on Los Angeles Street. Take a moment to study the plaques on the sidewalk. Locate the plaque regarding the Chinese Massacre of 1871.

PLAQUE OF 1871 CHINESE MASSACRE

Anti-Chinese sentiment had been rising in Los Angeles as a backlash to increased immigration and employment of Chinese. Prior to the construction of the Garnier Building, a shooting incident led a mob of 500 local men to publicly lynch and shoot to death 18 Chinese men and boys. The Chinese Massacre is considered to be one of the deadliest incidents of racial violence ever recorded in the American West. Although a handful of the perpetrators were tried and convicted, they were eventually all released on appeal due to prosecution errors. The massacre highlights the intense racist sentiments against the Chinese and their uncertain existence in an era devoid of reliable law enforcement.

Several years later, anti-Chinese sentiments, fueled by Denis Kearny and the Workingmen's Party in San Francisco, spread throughout the United States which led to the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. The law prevented Chinese laborers from entering the country. The Act was scheduled to terminate after ten years, but it was extended in 1892 and 1902 and expanded to include all classes of Chinese immigrants. One of the resultant impacts of the Act was a new economic focus for Chinese Americans. Instead of working primarily as laborers on large scale agricultural, mining, transportation, forestry, or manufacturing enterprises, many Chinese became independent produce farmers and distributors, shopkeepers, herbalists, and restaurateurs.

Continue North on Los Angeles Street, bearing right until you encounter the intersection of Alameda and Los Angeles. Look across Alameda Street to Union Station. This is the site of Old or Historic Chinatown. If you'd like, you may cross Alameda Street and walk into the building to explore the last major rail passenger terminal built in the West.

Union Station (19th century expansion)

Even after the Chinese Massacre, construction of new, substantial structures like the Garnier Building, Hellman-Quon store, and what later became a firehouse building, continued and, new entrepreneurs and residents continued to be drawn to Los Angeles for new opportunities. Chinatown quickly expanded to the east side of Alameda Street to accommodate growth. By 1900, the Chinese

population in the Los Angeles core had increased to approximately 3,000. Many more lived in the suburbs and outlying agricultural areas.

However, the Southern Pacific and other railroad companies were searching for a site for a new central rail passenger terminal. With support from the City of Los Angeles, all of the land east of Alameda was acquired. Chinatown residents and businesses were displaced, and almost all structures were torn down. The new Union Passenger Terminal, or Union Station, was opened in 1938. Except for scattered buildings west of Alameda and adjacent to the Plaza, Historic Chinatown was destroyed.

Most of the remaining buildings were demolished in the 1950's to make room for parking lots and for onramps for the 101 freeway.

Continue North on the west side of Alameda Street to Regent China Inn and turn left on Ord Street. Behind Regent is a parking lot for Phillippe's The Original. Walk towards the neon signs that states "Shanghai Street"

China City – relocation and remarketing of Chinatown

The "Shanghai Street" sign is one of the last remnants of China City. Efforts were made to reestablish the Chinese community following the demolition of Old Chinatown. Christine Sterling, the founder of Olvera Street, envisioned China City as a location to promote tourism and for displaced merchants from Old Chinatown. Located in a block surrounded by Spring, Ord, Alameda and Macy now Cesar Chavez, China City was constructed using donated stage sets of a Chinese village from the 1937 MGM film, "The Good Earth." But its life would be brief. After thriving with the return of World War II soldiers disembarking at Union Station, it was destroyed by a series of fires one decade later.

Head West towards Broadway Street. Cross Broadway and Head North towards Alpine Street. Stop at 727 N. Broadway Street in front of Far East Plaza.



Far East Plaza

Chinese Exclusion greatly curtailed Chinese migration to the United States and slowed the growth of the Chinese American communities throughout the nation. Although there are presently over 52 different ethnic groups in China, the majority of the residents of Historic and New Chinatown came from the province of Guangdong, historically known as Canton, and spoke Cantonese, with a few

others from Fujian, Shanghai, Zhejiang, and other coastal areas. Even with repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, a race-based quota was implemented, allowing only 105 new Chinese immigrants to enter the United States per year. The passing by Congress of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 restructured immigration policies and provided new opportunities for Chinese to migrate to the United States. The new quotas, coupled with outmigration from civil conflict in Southeast Asia in the 1960's and 1970's resulted in many new residents of Chinese descent in Chinatown.

Far East Plaza represents some of that new migration. It is now considered the first modern ethnic shopping center in the United States and is an example of the change in demographics of Chinatown. It is presently home to Wing Hop Fung Ginseng and China Products Center, one of the largest stores of its kind in Los Angeles, selling herbs and teas, and overflowing with chinaware, garments, and arts and crafts. A pharmacy and acupuncturist are located within the store.

The pho restaurant, takeout deli, and music store serve the Vietnamese community, while the tea shop, upstairs café, and other restaurants provide Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Mainland style offerings.

Continue North on Broadway and make a left on Alpine Street. Continue on Alpine past Hill Street, make a left on Yale and stop at 750 N. Yale Street

Thien Hau Temple

Many Italian immigrants lived in this historic neighborhood. The Thien Hau Temple property was previously the site of an Italian Baptist church; when the Italian membership moved outside of downtown, the building was reoccupied by a Chinese Baptist church. When that church moved to the San Gabriel Valley, the Chinese-Vietnamese Camau Association purchased and converted the original structure in 1990 into the Thien Hau Temple.

After raising funds to build a larger complex, the new temple opened its doors in 2005. The temple honors Tin Hou, worshipped as the “Empress of Heaven” in China and as the “Goddess of the Sea” in Taiwan. She is the highest ranking female object of devotion in China and her deified spirit was believed to save fishermen, imperial envoys, and maritime merchants at sea. As fishing and maritime trade were major occupations in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, the temple holds special meaning for the new immigrants from that region. Historically, Tien Hou shrines were placed on junks or boats carrying immigrants on their harsh trans-Pacific journey, seeking gold or a new life.

Many people throughout Los Angeles attend evening worship at Thien Hau and other temples on the eve of the Lunar New Year to receive blessings for the rest of the new year. Celebration begins with lion dancers and firecrackers can be heard throughout the evening until midnight.

Turn around and head North on Yale Street towards Alpine Street. Cross the street until you stand in front of Alpine Recreation Center.

Alpine Recreation Center

The Alpine Recreation Center, a part of the Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department, provides athletic and arts programs to local residents of all ages, including basketball, volleyball, ping pong, ballet, and photography.

Home to the only open space in Chinatown's residential area, Alpine is the site of tai chi and other open-air exercises. A large gymnasium is the home court of the Alpine Striders, the Los Angeles Chinatown youth basketball team that, over the decades, has competed against teams from other Chinatown communities, sometimes as far away as Boston.

Continue north on Yale Street to College Street, and then turn right.

Pacific Alliance Medical Center – former French Hospital

The Pacific Alliance Medical Center, formerly known as the French Hospital, is the oldest hospital currently standing in Los Angeles. Built in 1869 by the French Benevolent Association, the hospital initially supported the French population, but expanded its services to serve all, including the newer Italian and Chinese communities. Demand for healthcare services grew exponentially and the hospital expanded its operations in 1901, 1926, 1962 and 1972.

In 1989, the founding board members of the Pacific Alliance Medical Center purchased the hospital and restructured the operation to better serve the community. In 2007, the hospital opened a new 10,000 sq.ft. maternity center. A statue of Joan of Arc can be seen by walking East on College Ave and is a reminder of the hospital's legacy as the French Hospital.

Continue East on College, and turn North on Hill Street, but remain on the west side of the street and turn into Chungking Court, at the Kwan Yin fountain.

Chung King Road/West Plaza – an alternative image

The growing population in Chinatown created a demand for more residential and commercial spaces. Delayed due to World War II, the West Plaza and Chung King Road were completed in 1948. All the buildings have living quarters on the second floor and commercial store fronts in the first floor. In its heyday, the location had grocery stores, bookstores, a newspaper office, and sewing shops to serve the community residents.

Over time, families moved outside of Chinatown and business owners began to retire. Many of the shops and apartment spaces were transformed to fit a new economy.

Continue West and head to Chung King Road.

Artists, architects, and downtown professionals, mostly non-Chinese, have purchased or leased some of the spaces for studios, galleries, and living space, creating a new character for the neighborhood.

The galleries regularly coordinate openings of new contemporary art shows, which has given a festive new look and an international reputation for Chungking Road and Chinatown as an art destination.

From the West Plaza, cross Hill Street at the pedestrian crosswalk.

New Chinatown - Central Plaza

The construction of Union Station called for a new location for the Chinese community. New Chinatown opened in 1938 and was considered to be the first planned urban Chinatown in the United States. Originally geared toward the tourist trade with a variety of gift and antique stores, New Chinatown was also a major restaurant and nightclub destination throughout the 1960's. As the Chinese American population has expanded and migrated out toward the suburbs, most of the restaurant spaces have been re-occupied by contemporary design shops, design offices, and even a residential unit. For a touch of nostalgia and romance, Hop Louie, housed in the distinctive five story pagoda tower, is the only restaurant and bar remaining from the early years of New Chinatown.

From the West Plaza, cross Hill Street at the pedestrian crosswalk

West Gate

The oldest of the four gates in the New Chinatown plaza, the West Gate, is made partially of 150 year old camphor wood. The gateway consists of three flat arched openings, the central one being taller than the sides, with columns and carved brackets supporting a five-part tile roof. The ceremonial stage and parade for the 1938 opening of New Chinatown were held in front of this gate. On top of the West Gate is a plaque with a four character motto inscribed "Cooperate to Achieve," composed by the Honorable T.K. Chang, the Chinese Consul at the time of the grand opening. At that time, Governor Frank Merriam also placed on the gateway column a bronze tablet commemorating the part played by Chinese laborers in the "constructive progress" of California.

Continue through the West Gate until you reach the "Wishing Well" on the right.

Wishing Well

Conceived and designed by Professor Liu Hong Kay from Los Angeles the Wishing Well is modeled after the Sacred Seven Star Caverns, a famous scenic site in Guangdong . At its public dedication, Los Angeles-born international film star Anna May Wong planted a willow tree (her Chinese name translated to

“Frosted Yellow Willow”); the event was captured on postcards which were sold at nearby gift shops.

Today, wishers can try their luck at such fortuitous forces as “love,” “money,” and “health.”

As you walk through the New Chinatown complex, note that street name signs mark the various pedestrian walkways.

Street Names

Inside the plaza, the streets are named after the three People's Principles of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, and the maiden name of the wife of Chiang Kai-shek and Sun's sister in law, Soong Mei Ling.

Madame Chiang Kai-Shek made a famous trip to the United States and Los Angeles in 1943 to raise funds for China relief during World War II. Shortly afterward, the U.S. Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which had been in place since 1882.

Continue straight east on Gin Ling Way. On the left, note the two story Y.C Hong Building (more on this later), with the large arched doorway. Continue to the open Central Plaza. Continue to the corner building and look up. Note the upper balcony railing on the left, the mural on the right...

Dragon Mural

The mural of a fiery dragon was created by noted watercolor artist Tyrus Wong in 1941 and restored in 1984 by Fu Deng Cheng. The dragon represents strength and goodness, the spirit of change, and life itself.

Kwan Yin Reflecting Pool

Below the dragon mural is a recently restored pool with a sculpture of Kwan Yin, commonly known as the Goddess of Mercy, as well as the Buddhist Bodhisattva of Compassion. Kwan Yin delayed her entrance to nirvana, or “enlightenment,” until all suffering in the world ceased and is one of the most revered figures in Asian communities worldwide.

Walk out to the center of the open plaza. Look down and try to find the handprints of action film star Chow Yun Fat. In front of the K.G. Louie store is a monument recognizing the founders of New Chinatown. Gaze at the ornamentation on the buildings.

Festivities & the Underground Music Scene

During Chinese New Year, Moon Festival, and other festive occasions, entertainment stages and booths are set up in the New Chinatown plazas and

walkways; lion dancers snake through the streets and crowds of visitors to the sound of drums, cymbals, and firecrackers.

From 1978-1980, the Central Plaza was host to a popular club scene in Los Angeles. New wave bands played at Madame Wong's while punk groups performed at the Hong Kong cafe. The shows were featured in publications such as *Slash* and *Flipside*. For a brief period in 1992, the punk scene resurfaced at the Hong Kong cafe. Today, Grand Star provides a classic and underground hip hop dance venue, while the Mountain Bar occupies the former General Lee's restaurant space and provides edgy, contemporary music.

Art and Architecture

Note the rooflines of many of the buildings in New Chinatown, and elsewhere in the Chinatown district. Animals and fishes on the roofs, as on the Realm store and Hop Sing Tong Association buildings, are traditional talismans for the protection of buildings. Also, the word for "fish" is a homonym for the word "wealth" in Chinese, a good omen for a business! Doorways and windows reflect classical Chinese design elements.

Walk around to the front of the seated figure, which faces the East.

Dr. Sun Yat Sen

The statue of Dr. Sun Yat Sen was erected in 1964. Sun Yat Sen led the overthrow of the Manchu or Ching Dynasty Emperors in 1911 and is regarded as the founding father of the Republic of China. Sun was educated in Chinese and Western schools. His political ideals are summarized in a set of doctrines called "The Three Principles of the People--Nationalism, Democracy, and the People's Well-Being." Major ceremonies are conducted in front of the statue every year on the anniversaries of the founding of the Republic of China on October 10th, 1911 and of Dr. Sun's birth and death.

East Gate

Facing the statue is the East Gate, one of the most popular landmarks of Los Angeles' Chinatown. The gate was sponsored by Y.C. Hong, the first Chinese American in Los Angeles to pass the bar, who moved his law office to the Central Plaza. Mr. Hong was a community leader who spoke for the rights of immigrants before the state legislature and the U.S. Congress. The four large characters on the gate poetically state, "The spirit of (Mother) Meng and (Mother) Ow" in tribute to Y.C. Hong's mother and to all mothers.

Exit through the East Gate and turn left on Broadway.

Association Row

Early Chinese immigrants in America often found themselves in a strange and hostile environment and consequently created family, fraternal, and district associations in many Chinatowns to provide financial and legal assistance, as

well as shelter and fellowship. On North Broadway, Bamboo Lane, Bernard, and Cottage Home Streets, also known as Association Row, is a concentration of some of these associations, some of which have been in existence for more than a century; the Los Angeles Lodge of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, a civil rights organization, was established in 1912.

Phoenix Bakery

At the corner of Bamboo Lane and Broadway is Pheonix Bakery. The family-owned bakery, established in 1938, originated the famous strawberry whipped cream cake.

Continue north on Broadway, turn left on Bernard Street.

Chinese Historical Society of Southern California (CHSSC)

On the site of a 19th century brickyard are two Victorian-era cottages built by Philip Fritz, an immigrant from Alsace, France who settled among the large French population in this neighborhood. Here the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California maintains its offices and the Chinatown Heritage Center, containing exhibits, a library-reading room, and bookshop. It is open every Sunday afternoon from 1:00 to 5:00 PM, and at other times by appointment. For more information, please go to chssc.org, call 323-222-0856 or email chssc@hotmail.com.

Thank you for joining us on this tour. Visitors are invited to continue their explorations of this historic neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Oral Histories can be heard on the full version of the podcast or at our website at trails.camla.org

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