

# Museum Corner: A Page From History

## August 2018: Ashcroft's Chinatown

There were two major influxes of the Chinese into Canada. The first being to work the gold fields, and the second to work on the CP Railway. With many Chinese stopping over to buy supplies and food, some stayed to open stores and businesses in Ashcroft.



Left: Post 1916 fire of Ashcroft's Chinatown

A Chinese merchant by the name of Lin Kee set up the first Chinese business in Ashcroft in the early 1890s, which was a general store. This store became the catalyst for the Chinese business community of Ashcroft, which would be called "Chinatown". The Wing Chong Tai Store, was one of the principle stores in Chinatown and remained a fixture on Railway Street until it was torn down in the early 1980s.

Wing Chong Tai (Forever Great Prosperity) Store opened in 1892 by Chow Sing, who was one of the Chow clan whose members had been operating stores and working as cooks in the Cariboo mining camps since the beginning of the Gold Rush. Then in 1893, Chow Sing's brother Chow Lung came from China and went to work as a hired hand on the Evan's Family Butte Ranch, by 1905, Chow Lung became a full partner in the Wing Chong Tai store. Chow Sing returned to China and his son Chow Ping Kew took over his shares of the store.

Wing Chong Tai was more than just a general store. It had a great medical department stocked with every possible herb available. Large wall cabinets about six feet high by ten feet wide, which was divided into rows of dozens of little drawers, each divided into four parts, each holding a different herb with a Chinese label. Here you could fill your prescriptions that were prescribed by the Chinese herb doctor. Not only was there a doctor but also a Chinese Community Hospital that cared for the sick and dying which was located at the furthest north end of Chinatown (located where the River Inn is today).



1920s



1930s

Photo of Chinatown's Chinese Hospital (white building in the middle of the photo)



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1920s

In 1902, the Loy brothers opened Wing Wo Lung Store. Also in the early 1900s, J.J. Ting bought the old Foster store and remodelled and renamed it J.J. Ting & Co.

As the years went by, Chinatown prospered and welcomed more and more shops and stores to their growing street. However, the evening of July 6<sup>th</sup> 1916 greatly impacted a large portion of Ashcroft's business strip and destroyed all of Chinatown. But in no time, the stores in Chinatown were built back up on both sides of the streets in the block, and Wing Chong Tai and Wing Wo Lung were two of the first general stores that were rebuilt (Left: Newspaper clipping about Wing Wo Lung Store after the fire). Then a man by the name of Foo Leong established the Kwong Yeun Sing Co. and erected a Chinese hotel and teahouse at the North end of Chinatown (where Safety Mart Foods is located today). Shortly after this, Kwong Yee Chong and two other corner stores were constructed to add to the growing Chinatown.

Wing Wo Lung has purchased the sites formerly occupied by the Inland Express office and garage, and will begin building at once. Two cars of lumber are already on the way. Wing Wo Lung will open up a general store. July 15, 1916

Over the years, Chinatown continued to grow and welcome two Chinese Chop Sueys and tea houses; one being Nabob, a Chinese Bakery which made Chinese cakes and candies, a Chinese butcher shop, a laundry, a shoe repair, a barbershop, a tailor shop with a "made to measure" men and ladies' suits, a drycleaner who also did mending, a pawn shop and watch repairs, and two rooming places.

Agent for Lake of the Woods Famous "Five Roses" Products  
Vegetables and Fruit in Season, Imported and Local  
Carlot shipping of famous Ashcroft Potatoes, Beans, Onions, etc., a specialty.  
1915 WING WO LUNG

J. J. TING & CO.  
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL IMPORTERS AND DEALERS IN  
Merchandise of all Kinds  
Groceries, Dry Goods, Boots and Shoes, Hardware. We make a Specialty of JAPANESE AND CHINESE SILKS AND FANCY GOODS  
ASHCROFT, - 1915 - B. C.

Btm left: Three photos from 1970s. Btm right: Kwong Yeun Sing Co.



From 1916 until the early 1940s, Chinatown was really humming. The Chinese community were supplying the tomatoes for the cannery and during harvest time the Chinese population outnumbered the whites by a ratio of 2 to 1. The majority of the Chinese lived in Chinatown, either in the rooming houses or upstairs in the stores.



By the latter half of 1981, most of the Chinese business were vacant and deteriorating, and with the exception of the Wing Wo Lung building, all of Chinatown was torn down, making way for new developments.

The Ashcroft Museum is open from Monday to Sunday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Come on down and learn some fascinating history about the area.

Located at 151 and 4th Street.

250-453-9232

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Check out the Chinese Cemetery located just off of Barnes Road/ Hwy 97C. Here you can see 60 Chinese gravesites, get information at the kiosk, and look at the beautiful glass mosaic mural and bench.