

THE

BEECHWOOD WAY

SECTIONALS

The Ottawa Chinese Cemetery at Beechwood Cemetery



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One of the first things

visitors will see when entering the southeast corner of Beechwood Cemetery is a pagoda honouring the ancestors of Ottawa's Chinese community.

Built in 1995, the red, green and gold structure, standing on four pillars surrounded by flowers and trees, is one of the distinctive landmarks of Canada's national cemetery, an island of tranquility in a city of one million people.

It is designed according to Chinese religious principles, and surrounding the circle in which it lies are the graves of over 4,000 Chinese-Canadians, with room to grow for generations.

They date from the first influx of former railway workers to third- and fourth-generation members of Ottawa's now-thriving Chinese-Canadian community.

Many of the cemetery's early occupants were male and buried alone. They had been recruited by agents in China to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway, and when the epic job was done they'd come to the capital, where federal politicians had passed immigration legislation preventing them from bringing their families to Canada.

Some Chinese had their bodies shipped back to their homeland after they died. Many died alone without money to make the trip, or even to finance a funeral, spurring members of the local Chinese community to come together and help. In 1925, funds were raised to designate an area at Beechwood a Chinese section. However, the first burial did not take place in 1903.

Twelve years later, civilian transportation across the Pacific Ocean was cut off with the outbreak of war between China and Japan, and another 50 lots were set aside.

Headstones in Beechwood's Chinese section, now officially known as the Chinese Cemetery of Ottawa, bear names like Wong, Hum and Chow. They were largely business people, restaurateurs, laundry workers.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in May 1947, and with the subsequent reunification of families, the country's Chinese population grew and thrived.

ORIGINAL SECTION AND COMMUNITY MONUMENT

BEECHWOOD CEMETERY started serving the Chinese community in the 1910's when the Chinese community consisted of less than 100 settlers from British Columbia who were railroad workers there.

The relationship between Beechwood Cemetery and the Chinese community was formally established in 1937 when the Chinese Benevolence Society, now known as the Chinese Community Association of Ottawa, erected a monument in the older Chinese section.



PAGODA OF REMEMBRANCE

THIS RELATIONSHIP was strengthened in 1996 with the completion of the Pagoda of Remembrance and the Gateway of Blessings in the Chinese section. Crafted from authentic Chinese building materials donated by Jiangmen City of Guangdong Province, it is fashioned in red columns and green tiles. A fragrant and colourful grove of crab-apple trees surround the Pagoda.

Beside the stairways to the Pagoda pavilion is a circular walking path paved with interlocking stones. All the circles are arranged to form concentric circles with the Pagoda at their centre. This geometric layout, with its diversities and rhythms, coincides with the Chinese Law of Unity of the opposing Yin and Yang in Chinese architecture.



TRADITIONS

WITH THE SECTION being prominently Buddhist, there are sacred traditions that have been around since its appearance 2,563 years ago. Burning incense is very common at graveside service to help loved ones along on their journey to the afterlife. Families will also burn money, or paper money so they have money to spend in the next life. A more recent practice is burning images of houses, tv's, and cars to represent objects people can bring into the afterlife.

Another tradition is placing a coin or pearl in the mouth of the deceased so they say good things in the afterlife.



Did you know?

The number of clothes on the deceased is very important. Men need to be dressed in an even number of clothes, and women need to have an uneven number.

Did you know?

Green lettering on monument's inscriptions means the person has died; red lettering means they are still alive.



FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS

QINGMING (CHING MING) FESTIVAL

Also known as Tomb-sweeping day is when Chinese people clean the graves of their ancestors. It falls between April 4 and April 6 each year or is the first day of the fifth solar terms on the Chinese solar calendar. The festival remembers loved ones and honour ancestors who passed away. Families come to the cemetery to sweep the grave area, weed the gardens, clean moss off of the gravestones, and make offerings of food. Often, people will burn paper offerings or incense.

CHUNG YEUNG FESTIVAL

The Chung Yeung Festival always falls on the ninth day of the ninth month on the lunar calendar. Often families will have picnics at the cemetery and perform traditional practices at the graveside.



The People of Beechwood

QUEN CHOW LEE

BORN IN CHINA on 18 October, 1911, Quen Chow Lee was nicknamed “Noeey Quen” — meaning women’s rights in English. She married Guang Foo Lee in 1930, who had returned to China from Canada to find a wife. He paid a \$500 head tax in 1913 to enter Canada and would have had to pay another \$500 had he stayed in China longer than two years. Guang had to leave his pregnant wife and two children behind.

Due to the Second World War and the civil war in China, Lee was unable to reach her husband for almost 14 years. Lee raised the children on her own until the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act in 1947, which for more than two decades had effectively banned Chinese immigration to Canada. After saving up to afford the journey to Canada, the Lee family arrived after Christmas in 1950 and settled in Sudbury, Ont. There, they opened a number of restaurants: the Capitol Café, the Star Restaurant, the China House Restaurant, the Empress Tavern and Lee’s Palace.

While in her 80’s, Lee volunteered to be one of the lead claimants of the class-action lawsuit representing the head-tax-payers’ widows with the Chinese-Canadian National Council. Between 1885 and 1923, the Canadian government collected a total of \$23 million from some 81,000 people under the various forms of the Chinese Immigration Act. Lee travelled between Ottawa and Toronto to attend fundraising and public awareness events, all in a wheelchair. Despite the lawsuit being dismissed, it eventually led to the Canadian government giving an official apology at the House of Commons on 22 June, 2006.

