

Montreal's Chinatown Family and Benevolent Associations

Foreword

Family and benevolent associations are clan-based institutions that were originally founded for mutual aid, in a context where immigrants of Chinese origin living in Montreal were suffering acute discrimination.

Their functions were varied: translation, sending funds overseas, financial support for holding funerals or legal problems, a mutual credit system, games, cultural rites, rooming houses, employment assistance, material support for unemployed members, a dispute resolution body.

Today, the role of family associations has changed in tandem with the transformation of the community and its needs. They are seen primarily as a vehicle for cultural transmission and organize important annual events such as: Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, Chinese New Year, Commemoration for Ancestors, the National Days of China and Taiwan.

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Chinese Association of Montreal

by Bryant Chang

The Benevolent Chinese Association of Montreal was founded in 1889, and is one of the oldest Chinese family associations in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. It was formed with the original 3 largest family clans - The Wong's, the Lee's and the Hum's, joined by the Chan's a few years later, and has been serving the Chinese community of Montreal ever since. It has been a significant contributor to the development of Montreal's Chinatown, which began to emerge in the early 1890's.

During the 1890's to early 1920's, many Chinese laundries were established in mostly working-class districts, such as Saint Marie and Saint Louis in Montreal. In 1920, the Benevolent Chinese Association of Montreal began planning and organizing their own health services by opening a permanent Chinese Hospital in more spacious premises. The Association bought an old synagogue at 112 De La Gauchetière Street West, in the heart of Chinatown. To this day, the building is still owned by the Association, its stewardship having been passed down from generation to generation.

In recent years, CAM has been actively involved in preserving and promoting the Chinese culture and traditions for younger generations. In 2021, part of Montreal's Chinatown was classified as a Quebec heritage site, and CAM offered "warmest congratulations, and most sincere gratitude to the Quebec Government and the City of Montreal for having granted national heritage status to the core of Montreal Chinatown."

Hum Families Association

by Victor Hum

The Hum Quong Yea Tong Association was founded in 1887 and is the oldest family association in Montreal. According to the City of Montreal, Hum Quong Yea Tong was registered in 1892.

The Hum Quong Yea Tong Association is mainly composed of Toisan and Kaiping county of Guangdong province in China. With the same surname Hum, it started out with a few members and as of today we are thousands.

The intention was to bring together all the Hum family members from Montreal, Quebec and Halifax where there was a local place where the Hums would meet, which made Montreal the Canadian headquarters.

Over the years, we are grateful towards are former members who gave so much and did a great amount of work for the association.

Today we appreciate what has been built over the years. The objective was to pursue and save our culture and traditions as well as help new members in Montreal. To work with Montreal's Chinese community for peace and prosperity.

We carry our home culture and traditions from one generation to the next. To keep our association going, we need the younger generation to take on our mission and realize our dreams.

Lee's Family Association

by Jason Lee

The Lee's Family Association in Montreal is a remarkable institution that stands as a testament to the enduring importance of family associations within the Chinese diaspora. The association holds great historical and cultural significance, serving as a hub for preserving traditions, providing support networks, and fostering a sense of community among Chinese immigrants and their descendants. The Montreal Lee's Association was established at the turn of the century prior to 1900 - official records were not documented.

The Lee's Family Association in Montreal is one largest family associations - or "tongs" in Chinese - in the city and has emerged as one of the vital institutions for early Chinese immigrants. The association continues to play several key roles after 123 years.

The Lee's Family Association of Montreal has played a crucial role in the history and development of the Chinese-Canadian community. They have not only preserved Chinese culture but have also served as pillars of support and solidarity for generations of immigrants. Through recognition by the Federal, Provincial and municipal branches of government as well as international levels of government, The Lee's Family Association of Montreal remains relevant today, continuing to foster a sense of belonging and ensuring that the rich tapestry of Chinese culture thrives within the Canadian mosaic.

Wong Families Association

by Wilson Wong

The Wong Wun Sun Association was founded in 1917. We are located at 76 De La Gauchetière Street West, Montreal. This building is our own property, it belongs to all the family members of the Wongs in Montreal. We are the founding member of the Chinese Association of Montreal.

In the early stage of last century, many newly arrived immigrants were having language barrier and hardship to adjust to the new environment. Our mission is to assist them to adapt to the new living standard. For the past hundred years, we have proudly accomplished this purpose.

We are not only serving our Wongs in Montreal, we are also connected with all the Wongs associations in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary and Toronto. Every three years, each association will take turn to host the national convention for enhancing friendship. In 2011, when national convention was held in Toronto, the Canadian government handed out the coat of arms shield to the Wong Wun Sun Association in recognition of our indelible contribution to the development of the nation. This is a huge honour for us.

In the near future, we will continue to work hard for our Wongs. As our association is ageing, we strongly urge the young generation to come out and help us to carry on.

Chan Families and Gee How Oak Tin Association

by Jimmy Chan

Associations such as the Chan Families, otherwise known as the Chin Wing Chun Tong Families Association of Montreal, as well as of the Gee How Oak Tin Association, are among the oldest Chinese family associations in Que-bec founded in 1910 by a group of Chinese under the family names of Chan, Woo and Yuen.

Aside from Chan, Woo and Yuen, the following surnames also belong to our clan Yao, Yu, Tien, Sun, Loke, Wang and Che.

In North America, Gee How Oak Tin Association is organized by the Chan, Woo and Yuen families. The Chin, Wing Cheun Benevolent association is organized by the Chan families.

We are a non-profit and non-political organization and we are one of many branches throughout the United States and North America.

Our mission is to provide benevolent activities, social welfare, and to preserve and promote the Chinese culture and traditions for the younger generations.

We provide educational scholarships to qualified students, we raise and provide funds for local and global emergencies as well as provide social support to the non-English/French-speaking Chinese in our community.