

A MUSEUM TO HONOUR THE PIONEER
CHINESE RAILWAY WORKERS &
HEAD TAX PAYERS

纪念铁路华工及
付人头税者

Building upon the Chinese heritage in Kamloops, the Kamloops Chinese Cultural Association has undertaken a museum project called the **Heroes of Confederation**. This major heritage project to honour the pioneer Chinese railway workers and the Head Tax payers will have national and international significance. It will illustrate why the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway line, the first great engineering feat in Canada was the cause of the Chinese Head Tax legislation and the misunderstanding of the Chinese culture. This project will educate the public about the past and to ensure future generations that nothing like this will ever happen again towards other ethnic groups. Our project will heal the hurt feeling of the Chinese people. It will draw tourists and history buffs to British Columbia and Kamloops from all over North America and especially the Chinese from China who would like to pay respect to the Chinese pioneers.

This project, is being developed to raise the awareness of all Canadians to the sacrifices and contributions that these workers made during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway line in 1880s and the duress of the Chinese Head Tax on the immigrants. The goal is to build the Heroes of Confederation Museum at Pioneer Park in Kamloops in conjunction with the Kamloops Heritage Railway Museum and Roundhouse.



Kamloops has a very long Chinese history dating back to the Gold Rush Era in 1858 and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s. A Kamloops Sentinel newspaper reporter in 1887 stumbled onto a Chinese grave site, which later became the Kamloops Chinese Heritage Cemetery dating back to 1860, the oldest cemetery in Kamloops. Many Chinese railway workers that died during the construction of the railway line were buried here. The cemetery was a temporary burial site for Chinese railway workers. Later, some of the bones were dug up and shipped back to China. This practice was stopped in 1920.

A report in 1890 estimated that just three years prior to the incorporation of Kamloops, over one-third of the population was Chinese. Many of the railway workers remained in Kamloops, some sent for their relations and friends in China to live here, hence the new comers had to pay the Head Tax.

On October 19, 2004, Kamloops City Council supported in principle the “**Heroes of Confederation Project**.” Many towns and cities across British Columbia believe that as well, and have stated their written support for the project.

Kamloops has continued to have strong ties with the Chinese community. In 1958, Peter Wing was elected to Kamloops City Council, and in 1965 became the first Chinese mayor in North America. Today, our Thompson Rivers University has a large Chinese international students population. The City of Kamloops also signed a Friendly Exchange Cooperation Agreement with Changping, Beijing, in China in August 2005.

We need your support to raise awareness of this project and also your generosity to help achieve our goal through your charitable donations. Any amount over \$20 will be issued a tax deductible receipt. Please make cheques payable to: **Heroes of Confederation**. We would also be most appreciative if you have any pertinent information, articles, pictures, or stories of Chinese history from Kamloops and the surrounding areas that you could either make us aware of, or donate to the museum.

We need your help to build the Pioneer Chinese Railway Workers Museum to properly honour them as the true unsung **Heroes of Confederation**.

HEROES OF
CONFEDERATION
CANADA'S PIONEER CHINESE
RAILWAY WORKERS
MUSEUM

甘露市
铁路华工纪念馆



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Kamloops Chinese Cultural Association: www.ccak.ca

A BRIEF HISTORY

Between 1881 and 1885 about 17,007 Chinese Railway Workers flocked to British Columbia to help build the most difficult section of the Canadian Pacific Railway line. The railway construction reached Kamloops in 1884. An estimated 10,000 Chinese labourers worked on the stretch between Port Moody, Kamloops, and Craigellachie.

Despite all the hard work of the Chinese railway workers during the railway construction, there was no formal recognition of the Chinese workers. Even at the railway completion ceremony at Craigellachie, British Columbia on November 7, 1885, there were no workers of Chinese descent present, instead the Chinese Head Tax was enacted for future immigrants such as families, relatives, and friends.

BELATED RECOGNITION

Ninety-five years later, the first official recognition of the Chinese Railway Workers was on June 16, 1980. In 1982, a bronze plaque was installed at the Yale museum. In Vancouver, a Chinese Railway Workers bronze plaque was installed in 1988. A 12-metre high memorial was built in Toronto and unveiled in 1989. In Winnipeg, a bronze sculpture was erected in 1998. The latest tribute to the Chinese Railway Workers was the documentary “Canadian Steel, Chinese Grit” produced in 1998.

In May 2005, the Canadian Pacific Railway named the Cheng Interchange in Kamloops in honour of Chinese railway workers, in November 2005, the Province of B.C. issued a proclamation declaring November 1-7 as “Pioneer Chinese Railway Workers’ Week”, and on the 29th of November, the Heroes of Confederation project was adopted into the City Centre Plan/Kamloops Official Community Plan.

RECOGNITION NEEDED

The members of the Kamloops Chinese Cultural Association feel that further recognition is needed to remember the pioneer Chinese railway workers and the Head Tax payers. The plaque, sculpture, documentary memorials, and other dedications are a start for the pioneer railway workers, however, in our opinion, the best way of acknowledging the Chinese railway workers and Head Tax payers is to build a museum dedicated to their sacrifices and contribution to the Confederation of Canada. A proper facility would serve as a reference for future family members who want to trace their family roots and a research centre for educational and archives. The museum can function as the central recording office

for all Asians. The possibility is endless. For example, the museum could house an Asian library and be part of the Canadian Asian education for Asian Studies at Thompson Rivers University. The museum can also house the railway history of British Columbia, or Canada in its entirety or be a satellite of the B.C. Royal Museum in the interior of British Columbia. The museum would also contain tributes to those non-Chinese railway workers.

WHY KAMLOOPS AND REGIONS

We feel Kamloops would be an ideal location for this museum because of its central location in the area of railway construction. Many of the Chinese railway workers that came to British Columbia never had a place to call home. They were always on the move, working to build the railway. Many of them were never able to return home to China. Deceased Chinese railway workers were buried in graves scattered along the Fraser Canyon and in cemeteries in Kamloops, Ashcroft, Lytton, Boston Bar, and Yale. Of all the Chinese cemeteries, Kamloops has the largest Chinese heritage cemetery. It is fitting to build a Chinese museum in Kamloops, where so many Chinese railway workers and Head Tax payers made Kamloops and region their final resting place. We must not forget them!

RAILWAY WORKERS/HEAD TAX PAYERS

The Heroes of Confederation Museum would store all the records of the Chinese railway workers and the names of the Chinese Head Tax payers because they are synonymous – since it was the Chinese railway workers who initiated the head tax unintentionally and unknowingly because they competed too willingly, worked too consciously, and were satisfied to work for low wages. As a result, the non-Chinese workers were forced to pressure the British Columbia government to act, who in turn pressured the

federal government to pass the Head Tax legislation on future Chinese immigrants in 1886 January 1. In total, over \$24million was collected from 81,000 Head Tax payers which is equivalent to over \$1.5billion in 2006.

TOURISM AND CIRCLE TOUR ECONOMICS

The Kamloops Chinese community believes that the Chinese Railway Workers’ museum must be visible, sustainable, and educational. The only way to make this a reality is to include all the Regions (TNRD, CRD, CSRD, and FVRD)* along with the city of Kamloops as partners. A cluster of museums and various historic cultural circle tours would lay out the entire history of the pioneer Chinese railway workers and the Canadian Pacific Railway line from start to finish. This will also serve to remind people of the hardship that the Chinese Head Tax payers had to endure as new immigrant and living in a harsh environment of racism that later blossom to diversity.

They will learn about the Gold Rush Era of 1850, building of the CPR line in the 1880s, the early history of the city of Kamloops up to present day, and the achievements of the pioneer Chinese railway workers and Head Tax payers to-date.

For added attractions and economic sustainability, the Challenger map would outline the whole B.C. province that would draw much interest into the city of Kamloops and region. Imagine, a comprehensive, fascinating, artistic, educational experience in one location! This whole project would have national and international attention because the building of the railway across Canada included many nationalities: Chinese, British, Aboriginals, Italians, and so on.

* TNRD (Thompson-Nicola Regional District), CRD (Cariboo Regional District), CSRD (Columbia Shuswap Regional District), FVRD (Fraser Valley Regional District)

