

The Chinese Community in Markham

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The Canadian Image project provided a good opportunity for the Markham District Historical Museum to help foster understanding among Markham residents, build a documentary collection on the city's Chinese community; and also show the relevance of the museum to our society.

The project focused on the Chinese community in Markham for a good reason- in the past decade, it has grown dramatically. The 1991 Statistics Canada survey notes 21,910 Chinese residents, about 15 per cent of the city's population, and the most recent studies estimate the number will grow to 37,947 by the year 2000. This rapid growth has led to a visible transformation in the social and cultural life of the area. Considerable public interest has been expressed in both the Chinese community and in Markham's changing character. We launched this project because our museum's mandate is to document and preserve the patrimony of the city and district and because the Chinese community is a significant part of Markham. We also saw the opportunity to serve the public by fostering understanding both of Markham history and its changing social life.

Our project had two parts: 1) an extensive exploration of existing statistical information on the Chinese community and 2) a recording of oral history accounts of the memory, traditions and experiences of immigration and settlement in Markham.

Statistical information drawn from government and Chinese community resources provided a baseline picture of the Chinese community as well as key contacts to Chinese organizations and leaders. Our profile of the community included age, marital status, education, immigration statistics, employment and occupational distribution, participation in organizations, and a set of issues on the quality of life and integration as well as changes to mainstream society in Markham.

Our interviews focused on three groups: Chinese immigrants, Chinese organizations and businesses, and non-Chinese residents. We selected subjects from the full spectrum of the Chinese communities represented in Markham, including those from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and other Asian countries. Thirty interviews were conducted with an additional ten follow-up interviews of a more expansive nature.

Our partners for this project were the Markham District Historical Society, the Federation of Chinese Canadians in Markham and the History of Markham Publishing Fund Committee, which hopes to use this information for a future publication.