

A PEOPLE'S MAP OF BOSTON CHINATOWN

Chinatown is the cultural, economic, political, and social hub of Greater Boston's Chinese population and one of Boston's smallest neighborhoods by area and residents. Much of the densely populated neighborhood is built on filled-in land for railroads, industrial activity, and housing. In the mid-1800s, ethnic enclaves arose in the area, the population largely of Irish, Italian, German Jewish, and "Syrian" (Lebanese and Syrian) descent.

Chinese residents, mostly male workers fleeing racist violence in the U.S. West, began arriving in Boston's South Cove in the 1870s. An area called Chinatown gradually emerged; its population numbered several hundred by 1900. Subsequent decades saw a much greater population increase—growth tied to the clothing and hospitality industries and the unraveling of discriminatory immigration laws—and Chinatown spread beyond its core.

Chinatown has long been an embattled neighborhood and has struggled to maintain affordable housing. Urban renewal, highway construction and the New England Medical Center and Tufts University's expansion led to displacement in the 1950s-1980s.

More recently, gentrification and real estate speculation have exacerbated the housing situation and intensified inequality. Key to Chinatown's endurance as a historically working-class and immigrant neighborhood are vibrant activist organizations, benevolent associations, and community-owned housing.



Parcel C Protest, 1990s

People's Power

Over the decades, Chinatown's people have exercised power in various ways as they have fought to establish themselves and remain in place.

Traditional family, clan, or village associations were the first groups to provide protection and social services, mediate disputes, and advocate with outside authorities during the early decades when anti-Chinese hostility prevailed. They gradually united under the **Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) (1)**, originally established in Boston near the end of the 1800s and incorporated in 1923, its first office at **14 Oxford Street**.

In the context of the Civil Rights Movement and the Great Society, social service agencies such as the **Asian American Civic Association (2)**, **87 Tyler St.**, and advocacy-oriented groups, like the **Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (3)**, **38 Ash Street**, emerged.

Beginning in the 1970s, community members influenced by movements associated with the Vietnam War, Black Power, and college campuses brought new grassroots organizing techniques to Chinatown. They formed groups like the **Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) (4)** and the **Asian American Resource Workshop (5)**, both of which operated out of a reclaimed garment factory at **27 Beach Street**.

Key struggles revolved around the Boston Public Schools' desegregation in the mid-1970s, and a police brutality incident a decade later. Organizing to support workers was constant. Also frequent were housing and tenants' rights campaigns, and fights against Tufts-NEMC's expansion and high-end development.

To address housing and business stabilization, community development organizations emerged. They include the **Chinese Economic Development Council (6)**, **65 Harrison Avenue**, **Asian Community Development Corporation (7)**, **38 Oak Street**, and, most recently, the **Chinatown Community Land Trust (8)**, **28 Ash Street**.

9. 1903 Immigration Raid Site

On October 11, 1903, Boston police and U.S. immigration agents raided Chinatown locations in search of "illegal" immigrants, commandeering the Harrison Avenue building for their headquarters and arresting hundreds.

10. Boston Chinese Parents Association meeting site

The Boston Chinese Parents Association arose due to concerns for the safety of Chinese children who would be bused amidst school desegregation. The immigrant-mother-led BCPA first met at the (nonexistant) Chinese Christian Church in June 1975. With hundreds of members, the BCPA organized a 3-day boycott at the school year's beginning, forcing officials to agree to almost all its demands.

11. The Boston Dispensary

One of the first hospitals in the United States, it opened in 1796, to provide medical care to the poor. Today it is part of Tufts Medical Center.

The Combat Zone

With origins in World War II's aftermath, the Combat Zone, squeezed between Downtown and Chinatown, was officially designated as Boston's "adult entertainment district" in 1974. In the early 1980s, Chinatown activists began organizing to eliminate the now greatly reduced red-light area as many of its ugly features spilled into the neighborhood.

12. Boston Public Library, Tyler Street Branch Library

Demolished in 1956 for the Central Artery highway project, it was the Boston Public Library's last "permanent" branch in Chinatown.

13. Chinese Historical Society of New England

Founded in 1992, CHSNE documents and promotes the regional history and legacy of Chinese immigration.

14. The Common Cupboard

It was a restaurant/café and meeting place for political radicals that opened circa January 1918. Leaders of the all-women telephone operators' union frequented the establishment.

15. Denison House

A women-run settlement house, Denison House (1892-1942) provided social and educational services to area residents, with the goal of aiding the poor. Many residents were sympathetic to socialism and pacifism and involved with the labor movement.

Oxford Street Bulletin Board

From the early 1900s to the early 1970s, the bulletin board at Oxford and Beach Streets was a key means to communicate Chinese-language information about employment, legal assistance, local and international news, and political matters.



18. International Bookshop

The store, likely affiliated with the U.S. Communist Party, existed during the 1930s.

19. International Ladies Garment Workers Union/UNITE-HERE Building

Today the UNITE-HERE labor union's home, it housed the ILGWU's New England offices beginning in 1938. Post-mid-1960s, Chinese women constituted the majority of local garment industry workers and the union's membership.

20. John Jewett Home

Jewett, the publisher of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, resided at the site in the mid-1800s.

21. Kahlil Gibran Residence

The famed Lebanese American poet, writer, and philosopher often stayed at this address, his sister's home. Among his previous residences was one on Oliver Place (now Ping On Alley), part of a thriving "Little Syria" in the late 1880s/early 1900s, with Hudson Street its center.

22. Kwong Kow Chinese School

Founded in 1916 by the Chinese Merchants Association, the school promotes Chinese language and culture, while helping immigrant and first-generation children to adapt to U.S. society.

Environmental Injustice

Chinatown has air pollution concentrations, especially ultrafine particles, associated with I-93, the Mass Pike, and South Station, that are among the highest in Massachusetts. It also has a high child asthma rate, which is associated with air pollution.

23. Long Guang Huang police brutality site

Washington and Kneeland Streets

On May 1, 1985, a Boston police detective brutally attacked Mr. Huang, a 56-year-old restaurant worker and recent immigrant, leading to a year-long community mobilization for justice and accountability.

24. Maryknoll Sisters

From 1946 to 1992, the Maryknoll Sisters ran a community center at the site. It provided courses in English, sewing, and typing, sports programs, and interpretation for hospital and immigration appointments, among other services.

25. The Metropolitan / Parcel C

A mixed-income and mixed-use development that opened in 2004, the Metropolitan grew out of a long fight against New England Medical Center's effort to build a parking garage on the site (Parcel C).

26. Merchants Building

Opened in 1951, it is Chinatown's first building built with community funding. In 1954, it was the site of the first protest against the Central Artery highway project, which led to much of the building's destruction.

27. New England Telephone Company Exchange/Verizon Building

In 1919, it was the site of a major strike, one supported by Chinatown residents and merchants, by hundreds of mostly Irish American, female telephone operators.

28. Parcel 24

Kneeland Street and Albany Street

The area was torn down to make way for a highway on-ramp, displacing hundreds of residents, in the early 1960s. Redeveloped in the 2010s, the parcel is now home to the **Pao Arts Center**, Chinatown's first art center; a small public park; and mixed-income housing.

29. Peter Trott House (1807) and James Spear House (1822-1823)

They are the oldest surviving buildings in Chinatown.

30. Pine Street Inn Rescue Mission

Established on the site in 1969, the "mission" grew to become the Pine Street Inn, today New England's largest homeless services provider.

31. Progressive Bookshop

The Leftist bookstore opened in the 1940s and closed in 1951. It came under FBI surveillance.

32. Quincy Grammar School / Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of New England

Opened in 1848, it was the country's first grammar school organized by grades, each with its own teacher. It played a large role in Chinatown children's education. With the opening of a new elementary school in 1976, the Quincy closed and later became the CCBA's home.

33. Sampan

Founded by the Asian American Civic Association in 1972, *Sampan* is New England's only bilingual English-Chinese newspaper.

34. Tufts-New England Medical Center protest site

The first mass protest against Tufts-NEMC's expansion, organized by the Free Chinatown Committee, took place here in 1971.

35. Walker's Auto Park

As a teenager in the 1940s, Malcolm X worked at the "auto park" (a parking lot), which was owned by a relative.

36. Young Women's Christian Association

The first YWCA in the United States, it comprised two boarding houses here from 1868 to 1874, after relocating from Chauncy Street.

KEY

- Streets
- Former streets
- Parks and green space
- Highways
- Tufts Health Sciences Campus and Tufts Medical Center

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Berkeley Community Garden

East Berkeley Street, between Shawmut and Tremont Avenues

Chinese residents who engaged in guerilla gardening on an empty, half-block lot in the South End first established the garden in the mid-1970s. Today, it is comprised of 140 gardeners, many of them Chinese. The Trustees of Reservations holds the BCG in perpetual trust.

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