

A BIT OF SPACE BETWEEN
CHINATOWN AND THE FORMER
JAMES SHORT PARK AND JAMES SHORT PARKADE

Prepared by Harry Sanders for The City of Calgary

February 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, Councillor Druh Farrell's Notice of Motion launched a process to rename James Short Parkade and James Short Park, which serve the Chinatown and Downtown communities, and occupy part of the former schoolground of James Short School. James Short's active opposition in 1910 to Chinatown's establishment on its present site has long been known. James Short's name has been removed from the park and parkade, and a process to rename these facilities has begun.

This report examines the history of the site, the history of James Short, and the associations of both with the Chinatown community. The author conducted extensive research in published works and primary sources, but the historic power imbalance and cultural gap between Calgary's majority culture and its Chinese minority (as well as the author's non-Asian heritage) presented limitations. Interviews with James Short School alumni and written testimonies solicited from others have helped to overcome these limitations.

The underground parkade and the surface-level park that surmounts it were built partly on former private property but mostly on the former schoolyard of James Short School, which was demolished in 1969. The school itself stood west of the subject property on the present site of the TransCanada Tower (now the TC Energy Tower).

Ontario-born James Short moved to Calgary in 1889 to become principal of the original brick Central School, which stood on the park and parkade site. The local Chinese community began by 1886, but the head tax imposed the previous year, a circumstance unique to ethnic Chinese, impeded immigration and resulted in a population of adult men only. There were no Chinese students during Short's tenure. Short became a leader in the local Presbyterian church and befriended its minister, J.C. Herdman, whose mission to the Chinese community led to the establishment of Calgary's second Chinatown. Short

established the public school board's high school program and was its original teacher, but conflict with the board ended his educational career. He became a prominent lawyer and served many years as crown prosecutor for the Calgary judicial district. Short also served as the public school board's secretary-treasurer and then an elected trustee and board chair. The second Central School, which was later renamed James Short School, was built while he was a trustee. Short played a role in establishing Western Canada College, and he was a member of the Calgary College board of governors.

Short's house stood in the present Chinatown district before it became Chinatown. Calgary's first Chinatown was located in the Downtown Commercial Core. Establishment of the Chinese Mission at 10 Avenue and 1 Street W in 1901 led to the creation of the second Chinatown. When the Canadian Northern Railway received a right-of-way along 1 Street W in 1910, Chinatown's future was threatened. In an exercise of agency, Louie Kheong and a group of fellow businessmen then bought a property at Centre Street and 2 Avenue E and secured a building permit. Their project, the Canton Block, became the anchor for Calgary's third and present Chinatown. Opposition began as soon as the permit was issued. Short was both a member of, and a legal advocate for, an ad hoc group that unsuccessfully opposed the building and the concomitant establishment of a new Chinatown at this location. At a conference between the city commissioners and advocates for and against the project, Short invoked racist language. He did so again in comments that he made to the *Herald* in 1919 when noisy opposition to Chinatown's growth and its continued existence on Centre Street resumed.

In his legal career, Short prosecuted Chinese defendants and prosecuted defendants accused of offences against Chinese people. An unsubstantiated story asserts that Rev. Herdman changed Short's negative attitude toward Chinese. However, Herdman's death before Short opposed Chinatown's relocation to Cen-

tre Street makes this unlikely.

Besides the original Central School (which was built in 1887 and demolished in 1914), buildings on the future park and parkade site included the homes of businessman Hugh Neilson and future premier Arthur Sifton, the Knox Presbyterian Church manse, and, later, Central Bungalow School (which was later re-named James Short Bungalow School) and a number of commercial buildings. The manse later became the local RCMP barracks, and the Sifton home became the residence of the RCMP detachment's commander. West of the park and parkade site, the second Central School, a sandstone structure, was built in 1905 and demolished in 1969. The cupola was retained, and it was eventually placed in James Short Park.

Several educational institutions operated on this block. Central Public School moved to the original brick building on this block in 1887 and to the new sandstone building in 1905. From 1906 to 1908, the new building also housed the Normal School, the teacher-training college that eventually became the University of Calgary Faculty of Education (now the Werklund School of Education).

Proximity to Chinatown made Central the destination school for Chinese children who lived there, including members of the pioneer Kheong and Ho Lem families. However, the head tax, followed by the exclusion of Chinese immigration to Canada in 1923, diminished the growth of the Chinese student body. Chinese pupils excelled in scholarship and athletics at the school, and a Chinese student expertly designed the school's First World War roll of honour.

Central ceased to exist in 1933, and the sandstone building housed the Commercial High School from 1933 to 1938. The final institution in the building, James Short School, began in 1938 as a junior high school and finally closed its doors in 1967. It was the destination school for pupils from Chinatown, and their numbers increased after the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1947. English classes for Chinese immigrant children began in 1949. Chinese students consistently formed a substantial minority of the student body, and, by the time the school closed, the majority. The school's closure led many families with school-age children to leave Chinatown.

BACKGROUND

The underground parkade and surface-level park at 115–4 Avenue SW have served the adjacent Chinatown and wider Downtown communities since the two facilities opened in 1990 and 1991 respectively. Historically, the site comprised private properties (the eastern third of the site) and part of the schoolyard of James Short School (the western two-thirds of the site). The latter association informed the extant facil-

ities' original identification as James Short Parkade and James Short Park. The school's namesake, James Short, actively opposed the establishment of Chinatown in its present location in 1910. This has long been public knowledge, but it took until 2020 before The City of Calgary initiated a process to remove the name and choose a new one. This report was written as part of that process.

SCOPE, METHODOLOGY, AND LIMITATIONS

The author was tasked with examining the history of the site, the history of James Short, and the associations of both with the Chinatown community. The sources consulted included published articles, books, and reports on Chinatown and the Chinese community, Calgary's educational history, and James Short. The author conducted further research using school board minutes, Henderson's directories, tax rolls and assessment history cards, fire insurance maps, archival photographs, and newspapers on microfilm and online (where keyword searching is possible). As the project to date has taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic, some archival sources have been unavailable.

Given the historic power imbalance and cultural gap between Calgary's majority culture and the Chinese-Canadian minority, reliance on traditional records is incomplete. The project to date reflects non-Asian perceptions and biases. The author, while familiar with the city's history, does not share the lived experience of Chinese-Canadians. Testimony solicited from James Short School alumni—including David Poon, who attended in the 1940s, siblings Judy DoFoo and Joan McFetridge (née DoFoo), who were students in the 1950s, and Doug Wong and Carol Poon, who attended in the 1960s—has helped to address these biases and gaps and contribute to a more complete understanding of the subject matter.

FACILITY



Parkade superstructure, January 26, 2022. Harry Sanders, photographer

The former James Short Park and Parkade (115–4 Avenue SW) is a multipurpose facility in the Downtown Commercial Core adjacent to Chinatown. It comprises an underground parking garage, a surface-level park, and Plus-15 connections to Sun Life Plaza (112–4 Avenue SW), TransCanada Tower (450–1 Street SW), and the Suncor Energy Centre East Tower (111–5 Avenue SW).

Development history

Apart from the privately-owned strip at the eastern end of the block, this site was used for educational purposes until 1967. In the late-1950s, it was proposed as the location of a new City Hall and public school board office building, but the project was not realized. The first practical change occurred in 1962 when the school board gave permission to The City to use the school grounds as a parking lot during the summer.

In 1966, the block was scheduled for urban renewal. The school closed in 1967 and was demolished in 1969. A new Greyhound bus terminal (125–4 Avenue SW) opened on the northwest corner of the block in 1972. To address downtown parking needs, the terminal was designed to accommodate a five-storey parking structure above it, although this was never constructed.

City council initially approved park development for this block in 1973, but this plan competed with the federal government's aspiration to build a new federal complex on the site. (In the event, the project—the Harry Hays Building—was built in nearby Chinatown.) The land for the park was assembled in the 1980s, and the former Greyhound depot was demolished in 1987 or 1988. City Council approved James Short Park and James Short Parkade in 1988.

The James Short School cupola, which had been retained when the school was demolished, was moved onto the site and mounted on a pedestal. For all the time the cupola had been fixed atop the school, and in all the years it had been placed in storage or on display on Prince's Island, it had no clock mechanism. As part of the park's development, the mechanism retained from the clock tower of the Burns Block (101–8 Avenue SW), which had been demolished in 1965, was installed in the cupola.

The parkade was designed by Calgary architect Fred Valentine of the firm Culham Pedersen Valentine Architects and Engineers, and it was officially opened on December 3, 1990. The curved superstructure frames the park on three sides at its western edge, and it was designed with reference to adjacent Chinatown. With its red roofs and its window patterns broken into small divisions, the superstructure was conceived as a modern response to traditional architecture of Beijing, China. Garth Balls of the landscape consulting firm Landplan collaborated on the design of the park. The project won awards from the Alberta Landscape Association and the Institutional and Municipal Congress of North America.¹

The Calgary Parks Foundation was also involved in the park project, which was dedicated on June 20, 1991. At the time, Parks Foundation chair Norm Harburn explained his motivation in becoming involved with park development on the site, which he could see from his Dome Petroleum office window: "I'm not against buildings. I just like a bit of space between them."²

Naming

The following inscription on the dedication plaque, placed in 1991 and removed in 2021, explains the park's original name:

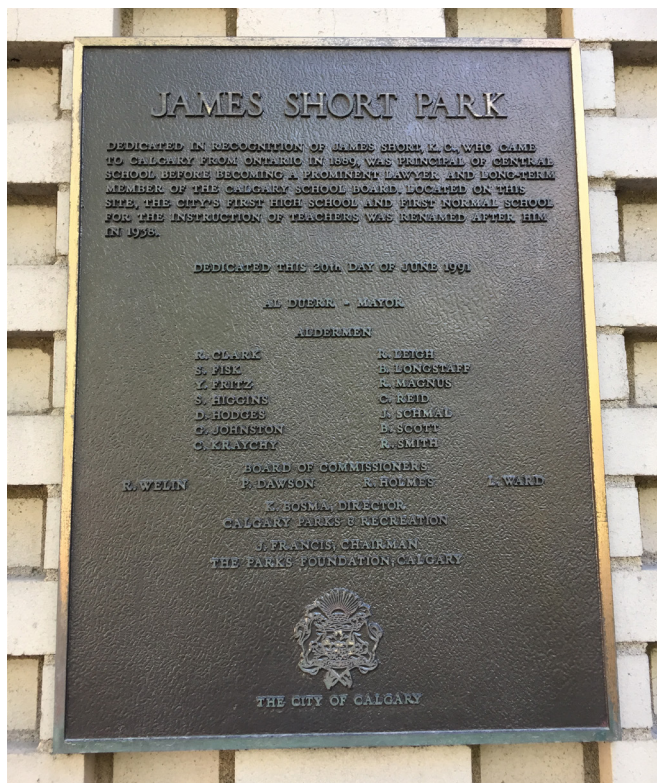
Dedicated in recognition of James Short, K. C., who came to Calgary from Ontario in 1889, was principal of Central School before becoming a prominent lawyer and long-term member of the Calgary School Board. Located on this site, the city's first high school and first normal school for the instruction of teachers was renamed after him in 1938.

At the time, Short's role in opposing the relocation of Chinatown to its present site was public knowledge. Elders in the Chinese community likely remembered his words and actions from 70 years earlier, or they remembered having been told about it by their own elders. For anyone who had forgotten, an unsigned article published in the *Calgary Herald* on May 2, 1981, told the story:

In 1910, prominent Calgary lawyer James Short represented a group of angry landholders protesting the fact that the Chinese were creating a new Chinatown on the present Centre Street site.

"The Chinese, when they come to reside in a place, ought to be treated the same as an infectious disease," said Short.

Dedication plaque, June 2, 2017. Harry Sanders, photographer

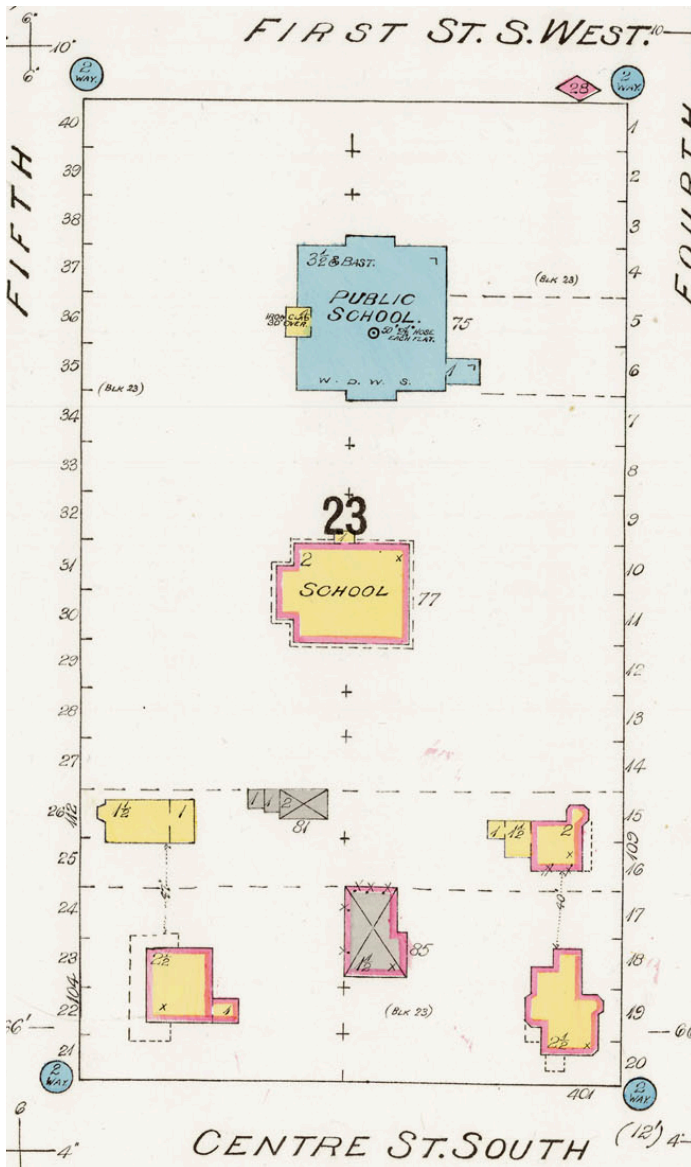


Decorated signal box at the southwest corner of Centre Street and 5 Avenue SW, January 26, 2022. Harry Sanders, photographer

"They live like rabbits in a warren and 90 of them crowd into where five white people would ordinarily reside. They have not the first idea of cleanliness or sanitation. Everywhere they go, they are undesirable citizens and furnish a problem to the municipality."³

Available research on the naming does not reflect discussion of Short's racist comments or his opposition to the Chinatown site. The decision to rename the facility occurred at a time of increased public awareness of racial injustice and discrimination. Recent contextual occurrences included the 2017 renaming of Calgary's Langevin Bridge (named for a 19th-century politician and advocate of the Residential School system) as Reconciliation Bridge and the 2020 murder of George Floyd in the United States, a tragedy that elevated the cause of Black Lives Matter. Short's name was removed from all signage on the facility in 2021; it remains only on a decorated signal box placed across 5 Avenue SW in 2018 that tells the story of the school, the cupola, and the park.

SITE



Detail of 1911 fire insurance map showing Block 23. Central Public School, the sandstone building later known as James Short School, is situated on the public school board property (lots 1–14 and 27–40). Old Central was located further east on this parcel. Lots 15–20 and 21–26 were privately-owned, and this map shows four dwellings and two outbuildings on those lots. The block is now evenly divided between the TransCanada Tower site (lots 1–10 and 21–40 on this map, approximately) and the James Short Park and Parkade site (lots 11–30 on this map, approximately).

Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.

The facility occupies the eastern half of Plan C, Block 23 in the Downtown Commercial Core. Along with the rest of Calgary and most of southern Alberta, the block ceased to be Indigenous land (at least from the Crown's perspective) in 1877 with the signing of Treaty No. 7.

This block was surveyed and subdivided as part of the Canadian Pacific Railway's Townsite of Calgary in 1884. It was bounded to the north by Reinach Avenue (now 4 Avenue SW), to the south by Northcote Avenue (now 5 Avenue SW), to the east by McTavish Street (now Centre Street SW), and to the west by Scarth Street (now 1 Street SW). Street and avenue names were changed to numbers in 1904.

James Short Park and Parkade Site

In 1887, the Calgary Protestant Public School District No. 19 acquired a portion of the block (lots 29–32, approximately) for educational purposes. (The board was later renamed the Calgary School Board and, eventually, the Calgary Board of Education.) In time, the board acquired the balance of the future James Short Park and Parkade site apart from lots 15–26, which comprise the eastern third of the block and remained under separate, fractured ownership until the site was assembled in the 1980s to develop James Short Park and Parkade. With the closure of James Short School in 1967, the board disposed of its property through a land exchange.

TransCanada Tower site

At an unknown date after 1887, the public school board acquired the future TransCanada Tower site. With that, the board owned the entire western two-thirds of the block. With the closure of James Short School in 1967, the board disposed of its property through a land exchange.

RELATIONSHIP TO CHINATOWN



The former James Short School site, shown here ca. 1968–72 and outlined in red, is kitty-corner to Chinatown, right. Matthews Studio & Photo Lab. City of Calgary Archives CalA 2011-013-12

Through geography and history, the park and parkade are strongly associated with Chinatown. The site lies directly southwest from Chinatown, which is kitty corner across Centre Street and 4 Avenue SW. The parkade and park have served Chinatown since 1990 and 1991 respectively. The park is used for recreation and programming.

The park is framed to the west by the superstructure of the subsurface parkade. It opens to the east, south-east, and northeast, where it faces Chinatown. Architect Fred Valentine's design for the superstructure embraces its relationship with Chinatown through its modern response to the historic architecture of Beijing and through its Plus-15 connections, which were intended to facilitate a link to Chinatown and the northeast portion of the city core.

Had it been installed as proposed in 1997, artist Cho Hosun's dragon's mouth fountain would have added a public art dimension to the park's Chinese associ-

ations.³ The sole example of public art in the park is Gernot Kiefer's 1991 sculpture "The Past, Present and Future," which can be perceived as a reference to the site's past and present Chinese cultural associations, among other such associations. Barbara Kwasny and Elaine Peake describe the sculpture's meaning in *A Second Look At Calgary's Public Art*:

Lines at the base depict past cultures; some of these have been lost, others were undeveloped or continue to evolve. The midsection represents the present in a dominant fashion, its high and low undulations typifying individual changes, choices and discoveries. The future, at the top of the sculpture, is smooth and shiny, with a significant opening for individual interpretation.⁴

The site's association with Chinatown predates the park and parkade. Historically, this was the location of James Short School and its forerunner, Central School, which were the designated schools for children in Chinatown. Up to its final years, the student body at James Short included a substantial Chinese



School patrol lines up Grade 1 students to cross Centre Street and 4 Avenue, 1960. Courtesy of Joan McFetridge

minority and, ultimately, a majority. And on July 7, 1962, the schoolyard was the venue of “Chinatown Night,” a spectacular event co-convened by James Short alumnus David Ho Lem and hosted by the city’s Chinese community to mark the golden jubilee of the Calgary Stampede. Approximately 2000–3000 spectators attended.

But the association began even earlier through the efforts of James Short, the school’s namesake and early principal, to block the establishment of today’s Chinatown in 1910.

The first Chinese settlers reached Calgary in 1885 or 1886, three or four years before Short moved to the community. Their arrival coincided with the passage of the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, which remained law until 1923. The Act, the first of its kind to be applied on the basis of ethnic origin, was intended to restrict immigration of people of Chinese background. It imposed a prohibitive \$50 head tax per immigrant (the price quickly increased to \$500), with the result that the local Chinese community originally comprised only adult men. These were single men or men whose families had to stay behind. Consequently, there were no Chinese students during Short’s tenure as principal.

In 1892, Calgary suffered a smallpox outbreak that was blamed on the town’s small Chinese community. Local police stood by while white Calgarians rioted against their Chinese neighbours; the NWMP intervened. Soon afterward, over 600 people attended a lecture by Locksley Lucas (ca. 1866–1895) of the newly-formed Anti-Chinese League at the Calgary

Opera House (on the present site of the Jack Singer Concert Hall lobby). Mayor Alexander Lucas (ca. 1852–1942) spoke at the same event. That night, prominent Calgarians decided to form a local branch of the league. They included Mayor Lucas and Councilor Wesley Fletcher Orr (1831–1898), a future mayor (and the originator of Calgary’s motto, “Onward”).

Calgary’s first Chinatown was located in what is now downtown. According to historian J. Brian Dawson, it originated at the intersection of Atlantic Avenue (now 9 Avenue) and McTavish Street (now Centre Street), where the Kwan Man Yuen restaurant established by businessman Louie Kheong (ca. 1868–1939) stood at 815 Centre Street.⁵ The *Chinatown Historical Context Paper* locates it where Chinese residents were concentrated between McIntyre Avenue (now 7 Avenue) and Atlantic Avenue (now 9 Avenue)—mostly along Stephen Avenue—from Drinkwater Street (now Macleod Trail S) east to Hardisty Street (now 4 Street SE).⁶

In 1900, the Methodist and Presbyterian churches began offering Sunday School classes for Chinese residents. The men who attended eventually learned English at these classes. The following year, Rev. James Chalmers Herdman (1855–1910)—the Presbyterian minister and a friend of Short’s—concluded that separate quarters were required for outreach to the Chinese community. Thomas Underwood (1863–1948), a building contractor and future mayor, provided quarters on Pacific Avenue (now 10 Avenue) at a property later addressed as 215–10 Avenue SW. A new Chinatown developed in that district.

In 1910, the Canadian Northern Railway (now part of Canadian National Railways) received a right-of-way along 1 Street SW that threatened the continued existence of Calgary’s second Chinatown. Louie Kheong and a group of Chinese businessmen, eight in total, bought property at the southeast corner of Centre Street and 2 Avenue SE and secured a building permit to construct their own mixed-use building. Faced with a threat to the second Chinatown, which comprised rented quarters, they took action to establish a property that they owned and controlled. The proposed building site was just blocks from Short’s home, and the project quickly met with interference. Short’s actions in 1910 associate him with the history of Chinatown.

JAMES SHORT AND CHINATOWN



James Short, n.d. Source: Ancestry.ca

James Short (1862–1942) was born in Elora, Ontario, where his parents farmed. He attended high school in Elora and was further educated at the University of Toronto and at a teacher training college in Hamilton.

After teaching briefly in Ontario, Short moved to Calgary in 1889 and remained for the rest of his life. In 1896, he married Janet Lafferty (1847–1934), a teacher at Central School who was 15 years his senior. They had no children. Janet's brother Dr. James Delamere Lafferty (1853–1920) served a term as mayor of Calgary in 1890–91. Her nephew Eric Lafferty Harvie (1892–1975) became a well-known lawyer and philanthropist in the city; he founded the Glenbow Museum, donated River Park to the city, and was involved in establishing Heritage Park and Devonian Gardens.

Two of Short's brothers moved to Alberta and became prominent citizens in their respective communities. William Short (1866–1926) served twice as

mayor of Edmonton, where William Short Road was named for him in 1974. Samuel Short (1882–1945) was appointed Medicine Hat's city solicitor in 1939.

Short quickly joined Knox Presbyterian Church, in which he eventually took a leadership position. It was there that he met Rev. James Chalmers Herdman (1855–1910), who established a Chinese mission in the city around 1900. In 1899, both Short and Herdman attended a Calgary conference of western Canadian Presbyterians. In a session titled "Christianity in Its Relation to Social Questions," Short spoke in agreement with Rev. E.D. Maclaren that Christians have an obligation to address broad social questions.⁷

Between 1889 and 1892, Short served as the second principal of Central School, the city's sole public school at the time. In 1891, he essentially created Calgary's public high school program, one of the first two in the North-West Territories (NWT), single-handedly. Short was the sole teacher for the high school program.⁸

In his capacity as principal and teacher, Short's relationship with the school board soured and ended in 1892. He informed the board that he could no longer teach all three high school grades without an assistant, adding that he was overworked daily and had given up three weeks of his allotted holiday. When asked, he declined to consider a reduction of his pay to hire an assistant, citing his low salary. To avoid an added tax burden, the board resolved to give Short and another teacher two months' notice of termination and replace them with new personnel at a lower salary, with the savings to be used to hire another teacher.

Four months later, Short became the school board's appointed secretary-treasurer, a part-time paid position that he held until 1904. Early in his tenure as principal, Short had acted as secretary at school board meetings.

In 1903, Short played a role in establishing Western Canada College, the first private boys' school in

Calgary and the first independent boys' school in the NWT.⁹ He sat on the board of governors of Calgary College, which during its brief existence aspired to become the University of Calgary.¹⁰ When it closed in 1915, Short was part of a delegation to Edmonton that called for the establishment of the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art, which was established in 1916 and later evolved into the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) and the Alberta University of the Arts.

Short served as an elected public school board trustee between 1904 and 1914. He often acted as the board's chairman pro tem, and he served as board chair for two years in 1908–10 and again in 1914. In his decade on the board, it expanded staff and facilities to accommodate a tenfold growth in Calgary's population. One of the first new school buildings constructed during this period was the one eventually renamed James Short School.

After leaving the teaching profession, Short studied law, and at the time he retired in 1942 he had practiced longer than any other lawyer in Alberta. He served as president of the Calgary Bar Association and subsequently as its honorary president. Between 1908 and 1926, Short served as crown prosecutor for the judicial district of Calgary. He prosecuted some of Calgary's best-known legal cases.¹¹

Chinese associations

In 1891, Short built a new residence for himself at the northwest corner of Scarth Street (now 1 Street SW) and Abbott Avenue (now 2 Avenue SW). The house eventually acquired the address 202–2 Avenue SW, and the site now lies within Chinatown. It remained his home for the next half-century until his death in 1942. In 1910, the *Calgary Daily Herald* indicated that Short had once employed a Chinese man as a cook “and found him to be a good citizen, and he had always found them to be such”.¹² Neither Short nor the *Herald* provided any further detail, but it is reasonable to speculate that he employed the cook in a domestic capacity in this house. Short lived as a bachelor in this house for about five years before he was married.

There is no evidence that Short participated in the 1892 riot, attended the meeting to form the Anti-Chinese League, or joined the league at all. However, in



“Residence of James Short, Calgary, Alberta.”, [ca. 1900], (CU11055383) by Unknown. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary

two later episodes in 1910 and 1919, Short expressed racist sentiments directed at Chinese people in Calgary. One of those occasions, he took direct action to oppose the interests of the Chinese community.

On October 1, 1910, The City issued a building permit to Louie Kheong and his partners for the construction of the Canton Block at Centre Street and 2 Avenue SE. The project was evidently interpreted widely as a foothold for the relocation of Chinatown, which at that time was located in rental properties and was under threat by proposed railway development.

Soon after, Short and a group of citizens signed a letter to The City opposing the relocation of Chinatown to Centre Street and advocating instead for an alternative site near the Langevin Bridge (which was later renamed Reconciliation Bridge), which was a marginal and less desirable location. One of the other signatories was Rev. George W. Kerby (1860–1944), the minister of Central Methodist Church (which remains extant as Central United Church) and the founding principal of Mount Royal College (now Mount Royal University). The *Herald* summarized the letter as follows:

The letter said there was no reason why Chinamen should not make good citizens. They are wide-awake business men, and in many ways good citizens, and the market site could be leased to them. This appeared to the signers the most feasible and practical suggestion regarding the matter.¹³



Glenbow Archives NA-2798-6

Louis Kheong and Ho Lem, as well as James Short, almost certainly appear in this photograph of men who attended the conference of October 13, 1910 to discuss the matter of Chinatown's location. It appeared in the *Morning Albertan* the following day. "City commissioners and local Chinese delegation, Calgary, Alberta.", 1910-10-13, (CU1109412) by Unknown. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary

Short also put his name to the following petition, which was addressed to city council:

We understand ratepayers living nearest to lots 1, 2 and 3 in block 7, plan C, Calgary [the Canton Block site] hereby petition your honorable body to prevent Chinese from occupying said lots, on the ground that the residence of Chinese in the neighborhood deteriorates the value of the surrounding property, and makes it objectionable as a residential district, contrary to provisions of bylaw 1090.¹⁴

In the face of protest, The City issued a temporary order to withhold building permits for Chinese but not for any other applicants.

City council met on October 10 to consider the letter and other petitions it had received opposing the building permit. Short appeared as solicitor for a group of citizens who opposed the permit. Stanley L. Jones (1878–1916)—who, like Short, later became the namesake for a public school in the city—appeared as solicitor on behalf of the applicants.

Council accepted a suggestion put forward in a petition from Short, H.E. Lambert, and Rev. Richard H.

Standerwick (who later became superintendent of the Chinese Mission and Chinese YMCA). After consulting with members of the Chinese community and receiving their agreement, these men suggested the idea of a conference between the city commissioners and twelve representatives—six on each of the opposing sides—to resolve the matter. Short became one of the delegates who met with the city commissioners on October 13. The *Herald* characterized Short's comments at that conference:

James Shortt [sic], K.C., said he employed a Chinaman as cook once, and found him to be a good citizen, and he had always found them to be such. But there is not a man in the room, he said, who could get up and say there are not features in connection with Chinese homes that make them objectionable. They are a distinct race from whites, and nothing can eliminate the strong antagonistic feeling between the two races. When a Chinaman comes to reside in a neighborhood the whites will no longer live there. He suggested a partial measured bylaw limiting the number of Chinese to sleep in a room.¹⁵

Short's comments contrast sharply with Jones' as expressed at the October 10 council meeting: "The Chinese are citizens of Canada, and no bylaws can

be passed that will discriminate against them because they are of a different creed and race.”¹⁶

Kheong, Ho Lem, and their Chinese associates participated in the conference to assert their own interests. Besides his interest in the building project, Kheong was president of the Chinese Empire Reform Association of Calgary. Ho Lem represented the laundry business interest. Former mayor Thomas Underwood, a benefactor of the Chinese community whose income property was the basis of the existing second Chinatown, was also a delegate.

Kheong also wrote a letter to the *Herald*, which was published on October 7 and read in part:

I take your paper and see that some people in Calgary are saying some bad things about my countrymen here. This is not right. The Canadian government has given us the right to live here and pay our debts. We want to do honest business in Calgary same as all men, and Canada’s law will protect us. You send missionaries to our homes in China, and we use them good; also English business men. If my people are no good to live here, what good trying to make them go to Heaven? Perhaps there will be only my people there.¹⁷

In the event, Kheong and his associates prevailed, and The City did not rescind the building permit that it had already issued. Calgary’s third (and present) Chinatown was born.

Available sources indicate that Short acted as solicitor at the October 10 council meeting, but they make no such characterization of his role as a delegate to the October 13 conference. If Short made his hurtful comments in his role as solicitor, they could be ascribed to his clients’ views but not necessarily to his own. However, the circumstances suggest that Short was motivated by the proximity of his own home and property to the proposed Canton Block development and not in a capacity as a dispassionate intercessor. In its account of the conference, the *Herald* indicated that Sheriff I.S.G. Van Wart (1858–1919), one of Short’s fellow delegates, “said that he could sympathise with Mr. Shortt [sic] and his neighbors”.¹⁸ Short’s further comments in 1919, which he made in a personal capacity and not as a solicitor, express racist sentiments similar to those he made in 1910.

By 1919, Chinatown extended from 1 Street SW to 1 Street SE between the Bow River to the north and 4

Avenue to the south. Early in 1919, The City issued a building permit for new construction at the intersection of Centre St and 4 Avenue. Further research can determine which property this was. Opponents interpreted this development as an expansion of Chinatown. By the spring of 1919, opposition to Chinatown’s growth, and even to its location, resurfaced.

In April 1919, City Solicitor Clinton J. Ford (1882–1964) asserted that The City should not have issued the building permit—implying that Chinatown should not be allowed to grow—but that it was too late to act on the matter. That same month, a group of 150 North Hill citizens petitioned city council to prevent the growth of Chinatown, which lay opposite the Bow River across the recently-constructed Centre Street Bridge.

On April 30, the *Herald* published an editorial that expressed anti-Chinese stereotypes and called for a limit to Chinatown’s growth. The *Herald* also summarized remarks on the subject solicited from several prominent individuals, including Short:

James Short, who resides on the corner of Second avenue and First street west, in conversation this morning, said that Chinatown should be shifted, for as time goes on the gateway to Centre street bridge will grow in importance. He said that he had learned from the leading Chinamen in business here, that the Celestials would be willing to move, providing they would not be put to any great expense in making the change.

“It is too central for Chinatown, anyway,” went on Mr. Short. “Those people do not beautify any property and in fact they tend to make a district obnoxious. They have no idea of sanitation at all.”

Mr. Short said that he heard several complaints about people being frightened to pass through Chinatown at night, and did not consider that this was right, especially when the district is so thickly populated and a large number.¹⁹

Short’s remarks echoed those expressed by the North Hill petitioners and many others in the city.

Short continued to live at 202–2 Avenue SW while Chinatown grew around him. After his death, the house was broken up into apartments. Koy Hing Wong, Yut Kwan Yuen, and Hon Jear bought the property around 1957. The house was removed or demolished at an unknown date after June 1971, and, in 1991, the Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre opened

on its site.

In his legal career, Short prosecuted Chinese defendants and he prosecuted others who had been accused of offenses against Chinese people. In 1987, Calgary's Oi Kwan Foundation published a commemorative book that details a redemption story in Short's attitude toward Chinese-Canadians. In a section on Short's friend Rev. Herdman, the book states:

So profound had been his commitment to the Chinese that he'd won over one of their bitterest enemies in the city. James Short, K.C., a member of Herdman's [sic] session at Knox Presbyterian Church, the man who once tried to ban the Chinese to a ghetto outside the town at Mewata, memorialized Dr. Herdman after his death for changing his views on the Chinese.²⁰

This account, however, presents a chronological problem. Short's active opposition to Chinatown's

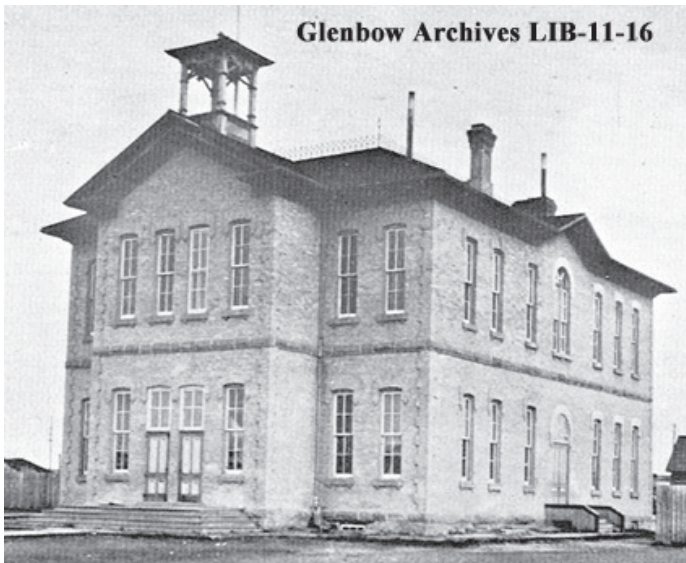
establishment in 1910, and the offensive comments that he made in 1910 and 1919, came after Rev. Herdman's death.

When the public school board first proposed naming renaming the sandstone Central Public School for its former principal in 1918, Short declined the offer. He accepted it in 1938 when the board renamed the new Central Junior High School in the same building after him. James Short School closed in 1967, and James Short Memorial School, which maintains its honours and traditions, opened in the Penbrooke Meadows neighbourhood in 1973. At the present school's opening ceremony, the Short family was represented by Short's niece by marriage, Marcella Love (née Laferty, 1894–1981) and her son Alan Tannahill Love (1922–1995). James Short Park and James Short Parkade were named for him in 1990–91.

Looking northeast across Chinatown toward the Centre Street Bridge, June 1971. This oblique aerial photograph illustrates the proximity of James Short's house at the northwest corner of 1 Street and 2 Avenue SW (lower left, white house with dark roof and trim) to Chinatown. Samuel A. Benny, photographer. City of Calgary Archives CalA 2013-032-089



BUILDINGS

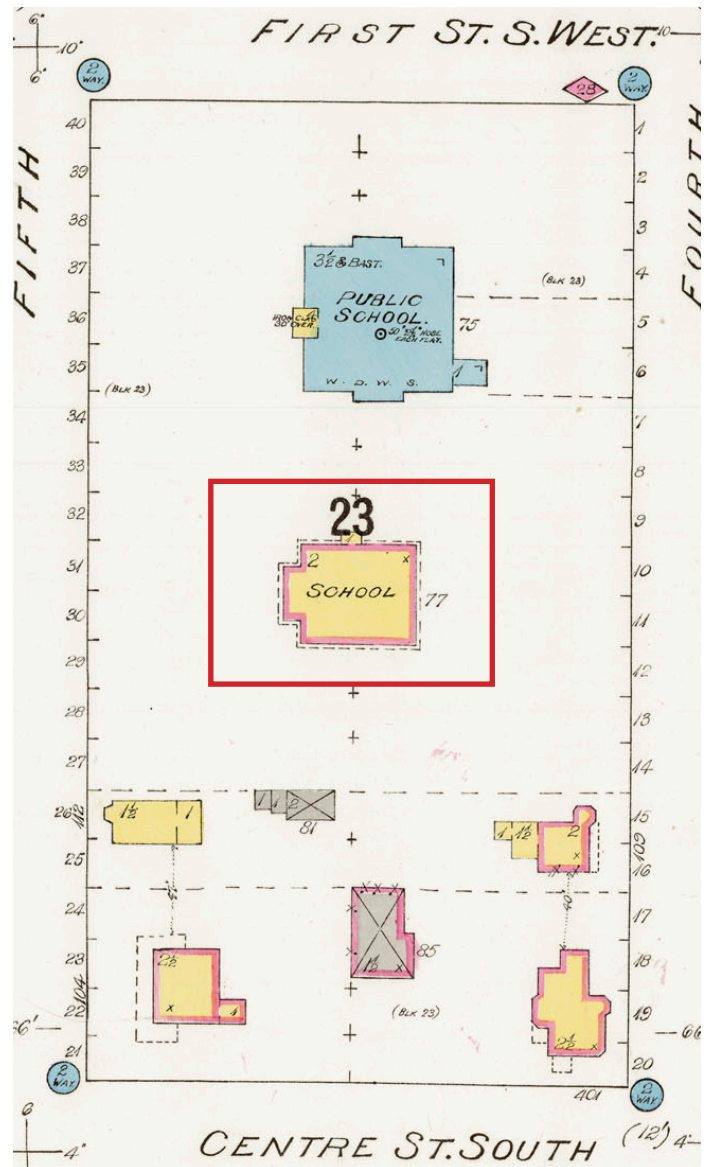


"Central School, Calgary, Alberta.", [ca. 1900], (CU11055405) by Unknown. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary

Buildings on the former James Short Park and Parkade site

Old Central School

In November 1887, the public school board opened its first purpose-built school along Northcote Avenue (now 5 Avenue SW, on what is now the southwestern portion of James Short Park). The Italianate-style two-storey brick school was evidently first known as the Calgary Public School; in time, it became Central Public School or simply Central School. The building was expanded to the north in 1891. A furnace failure in 1896 resulted in a catastrophic expense for the school board. After the adjacent sandstone building was completed in 1905, the original facility became known as Old Central. The schoolhouse was condemned in late 1913, and it was demolished in the summer of 1914.



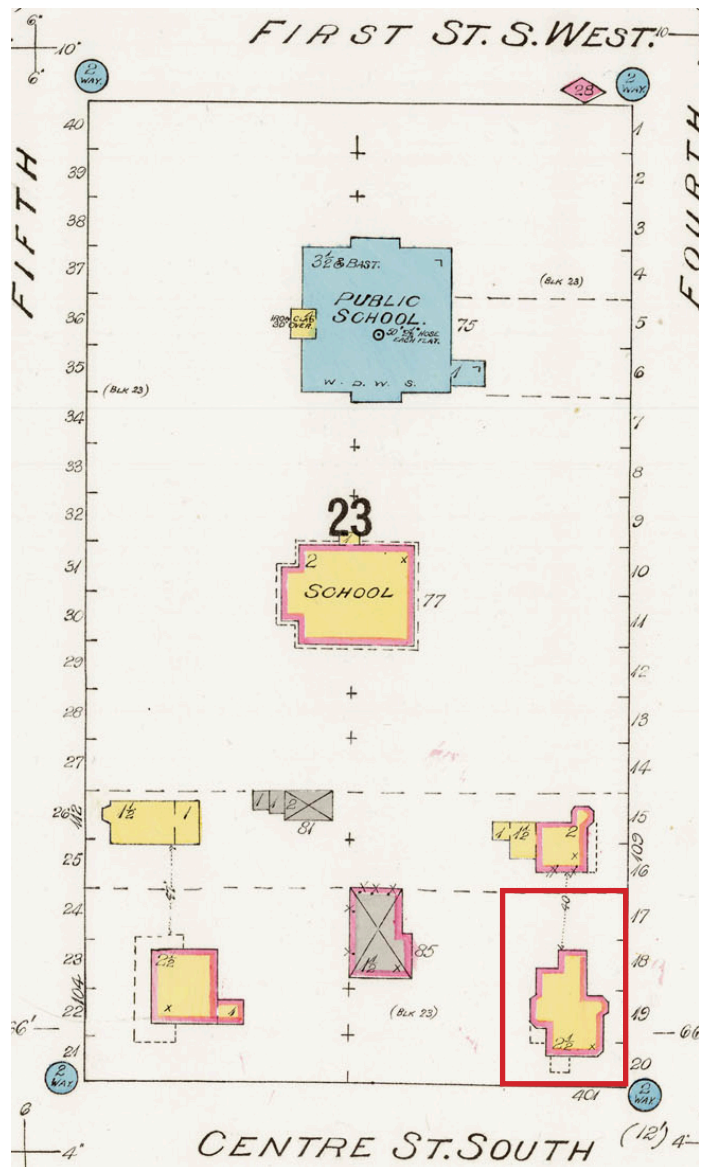
Detail of 1911 fire insurance map. Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.



Looking west to the Neilson residence; original Central School, background left. "Residence of alderman Hugh Neilson, Calgary, Alberta.", [ca. 1900], (CU11055101) by Unknown. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary

Hugh Neilson residence (401 Centre Street SW)

This Queen Anne Revival-style brick veneer residence stood at the southwest corner of Centre Street and 4 Avenue SW from about 1900 until it was demolished in 1952. It was evidently built for Hugh Neilson (1849–1918) and his wife, Lydia Catherine Neilson (née Dorland, 1847–1922), who came from Chatham, Ontario in 1894. It remained their home for the rest of their lives. Hugh Neilson established the Neilson Furniture Company and later built the extant sandstone Neilson Block (118–8 Avenue SE) as its shop and the extant Biscuit Block (438–11 Avenue SE) as its warehouse. Among other associations, Hugh Neilson served as an alderman in 1900–01 and as first vice-president of the YMCA. The house eventually became a rooming house.



Detail of 1911 fire insurance map. Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.



Looking south toward the north-facing elevation of 109-4 Avenue SW. Note the octagonal tower. The chimney and roofline of Central School are visible in the background to the right.

"Residence of Arthur Lewis Sifton, Calgary, Alberta.", [ca. 1900], (CU11055096) by Unknown. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary

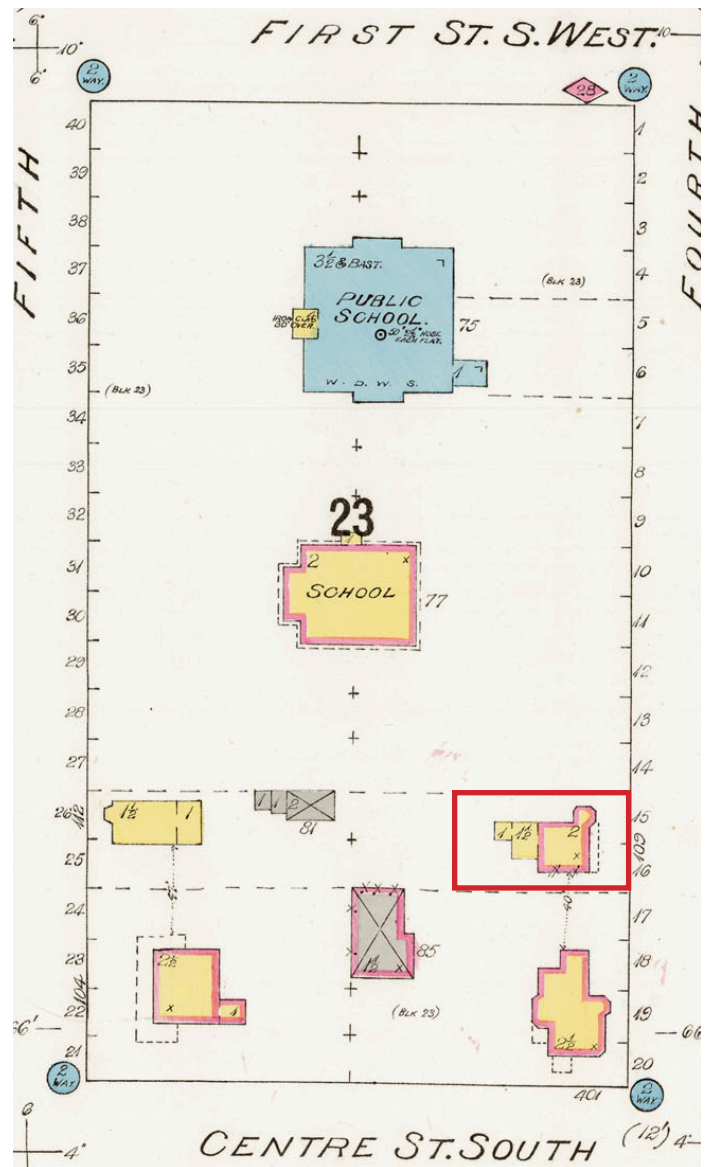
Arthur L. Sifton residence (109-4 Avenue SW)

This Queen Anne Revival-style brick veneer residence was built by 1900, when it was owned by Charlotte Boswell. It was demolished in 1952.

The most notable resident was Arthur Lewis Sifton (1858–1921), a lawyer who served as Calgary's town solicitor and later as premier of Alberta, a federal cabinet minister, and a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Sifton was a partner in the same law firm as James Short.

Dr. John Nisbet Gunn (1879–1937), an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, and his wife, Anna Elizabeth Gunn (1885–1966), lived here in 1911–14. In 1915–17, this was the home of William A. Montgomery, a music teacher and organist at the Anglican Pro-Cathedral (which remains extant as Cathedral Church of the Redeemer).

From about 1921 to 1931, this was the home of RCMP Inspector James Wilson Spalding (1878–1961) and Maude Marie Spalding (née Spurr, 1873–1961) and their son, Frank Spurr Spalding (1910–1993). Inspector Spalding commanded the RCMP detachment in the city, and he lived around the corner from the detachment's headquarters at 104-5 Avenue SW (which was also located on the future site of James Short Park and Parkade). Inspector Spalding later became deputy commissioner of the RCMP.



Detail of 1911 fire insurance map. Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.

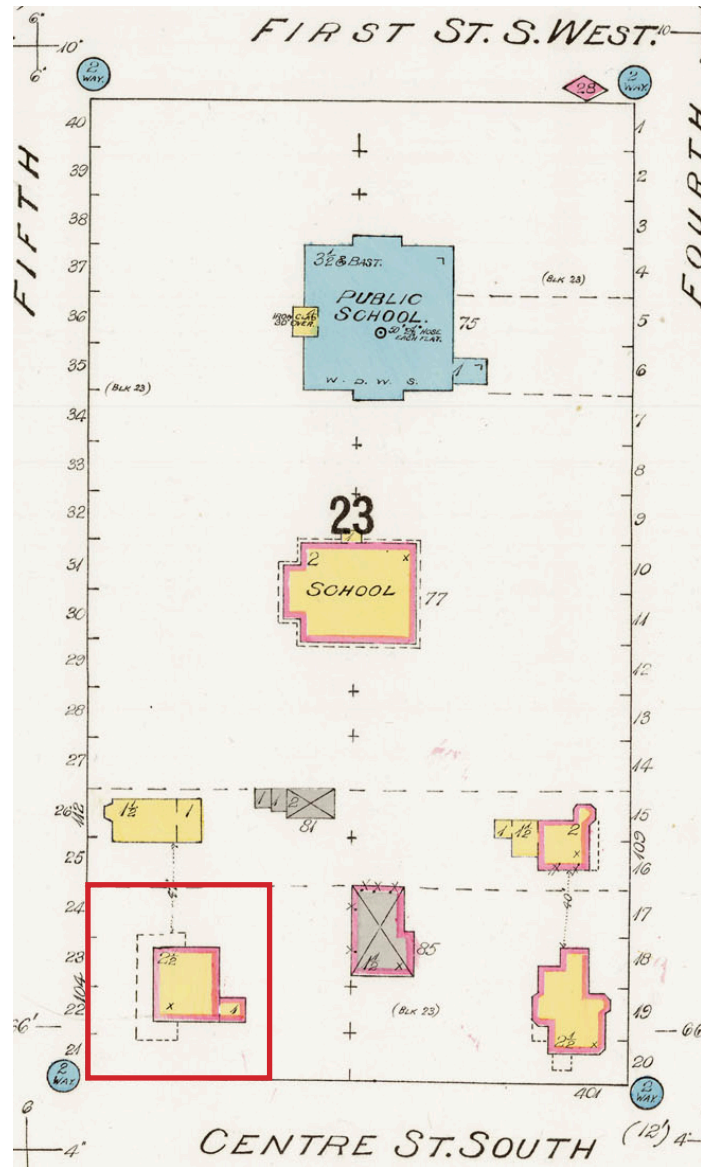


"Royal Canadian Mounted Police headquarters, Calgary, Alberta", ca. 1922. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, NA-2796-23, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary

Knox Presbyterian Church manse (104–5 Avenue SW, 419 Centre Street SW)

This large Foursquare-style house was constructed in 1903 as the Knox Presbyterian Church manse. It was the home of the congregation's minister, Rev. John A. Clarke (ca. 1866–1938), and his family. The manse was also a venue for congregants' weddings. Clarke resigned and moved to Halifax in 1915, and the church sold the manse. In 1919 it was converted into the headquarters for the local Royal Northwest Mounted Police detachment. It remained headquarters of the renamed RCMP detachment until 1932.

The building later housed the Calgary Faith Mission church around 1933, and that year the Standard Church of America, a Black congregation, held meetings and services in the building. By 1935, the building housed the Alberta Conservatoire, a cultural facility. It was the home of a Danish immigrant family in the 1940s. In 1947, the building was moved to 1331 (or 1351)–12 Avenue SW.



Detail of 1911 fire insurance map. Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.

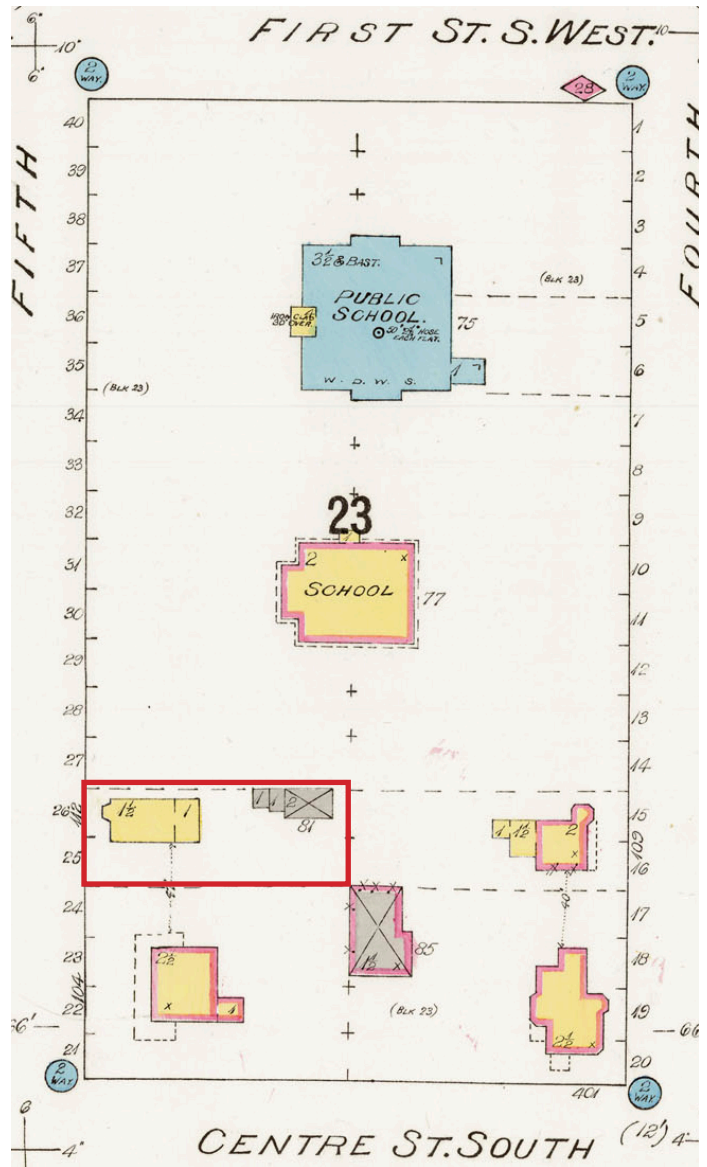


Dwelling at 112-5 Avenue SW, left. "Inspector J.W. Spalding in carriage outside Royal Canadian Mounted Police headquarters, Calgary, Alberta", 1922. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, NA-2796-21, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary

Clennan residence (112-5 Avenue SW)

This vernacular frame house was built by 1910 when it was the home of William J. Clennan, a teamster and building caretaker. Between 1914 and 1928, this was the home of Thomas W. Haddow as well as the address of his business, the Denver Transfer Co. As part of their respective businesses, Clennan and Haddow likely kept horses in the outbuilding that appears on this property in the 1911 fire insurance map.

John Elphick (ca. 1895–1973), a sleeping car porter for nearly 40 years, lived here between 1929 and 1933. Elphic was a First World War veteran. Joe Clitheroe (ca. 1901–1984), a co-founder of the Canadian Youth Hostels Association, lived in the house with his wife, Mary, circa 1934–49.¹⁴ The building became a rooming house before it was eventually moved or demolished.



Detail of 1911 fire insurance map. Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.

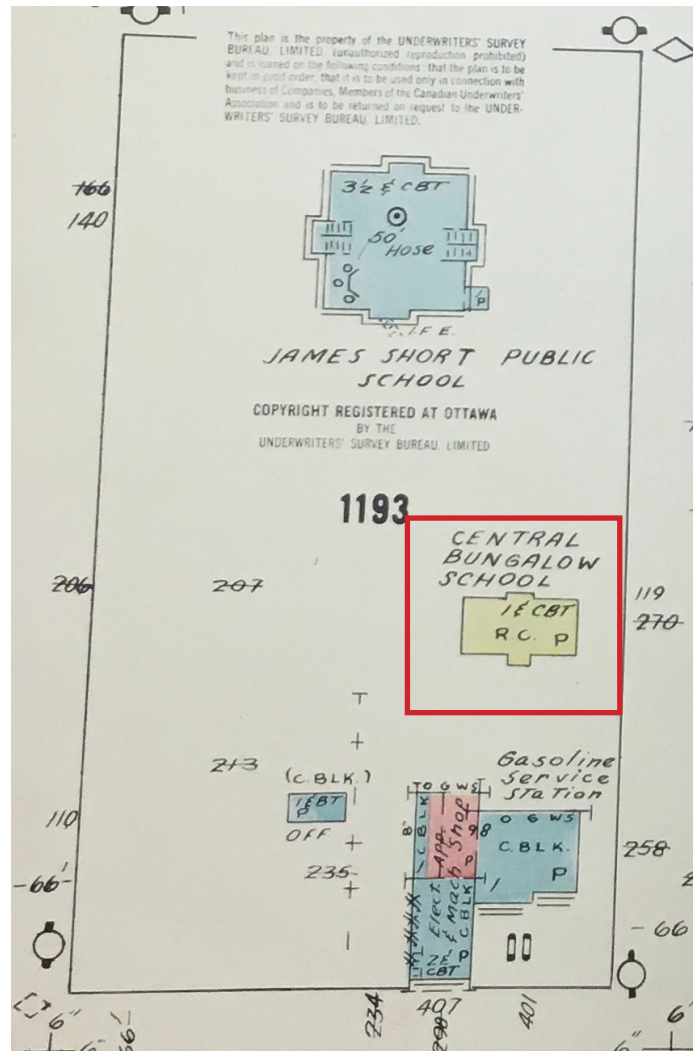


Central Bungalow School is visible to the left of James Short School in this south-facing oblique aerial photograph. "Aerial view of Downtown, Calgary, Alberta", 1964, by Andrew Etey. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, NA-2864-466h-1, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary

Central Bungalow School (119-4 Avenue SW)

Built in 1919, this two-storey facility was one of several four-classroom bungalow schools built for the public school board in the dozen or so years following the First World War. They were intended for temporary use and ultimate conversion to residential purposes. All were used considerably longer than first intended.

The building was renamed James Short Bungalow School, presumably in 1938 when the main building was renamed James Short Junior High School. The bungalow school was demolished at an unknown date between 1964 and 1969.



Detail of fire insurance map, 1961. Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.

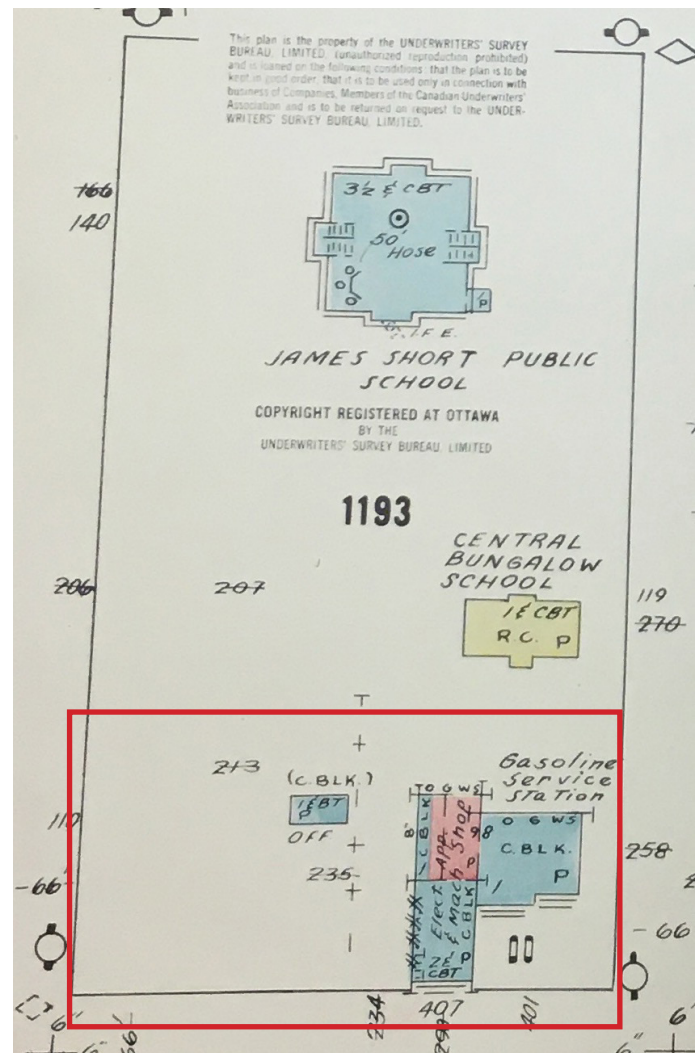


"Smith Batteries, Calgary, Alberta", [ca. 1929], (CU166921) by R.A. Bird. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary.

Commercial buildings

Several commercial buildings stood on the eastern portion of the block, primarily along Centre Street. These included:

- An auto body shop built ca. 1907
- Smith Batteries, built 1929 (405–407 Centre Street SW)
- A gasoline service station (401 Centre Street SW)
- A temporary taxi stand built in 1946 and removed in 1950 (409 Centre Street SW)
- Freeman Wilson used car office, built in 1953 at the northwest corner of Centre St and 5 Avenue SW



Detail of fire insurance map, 1961. Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.



"Central School, Calgary, Alberta", [ca. 1912], (CU1234223) by Unknown. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary.

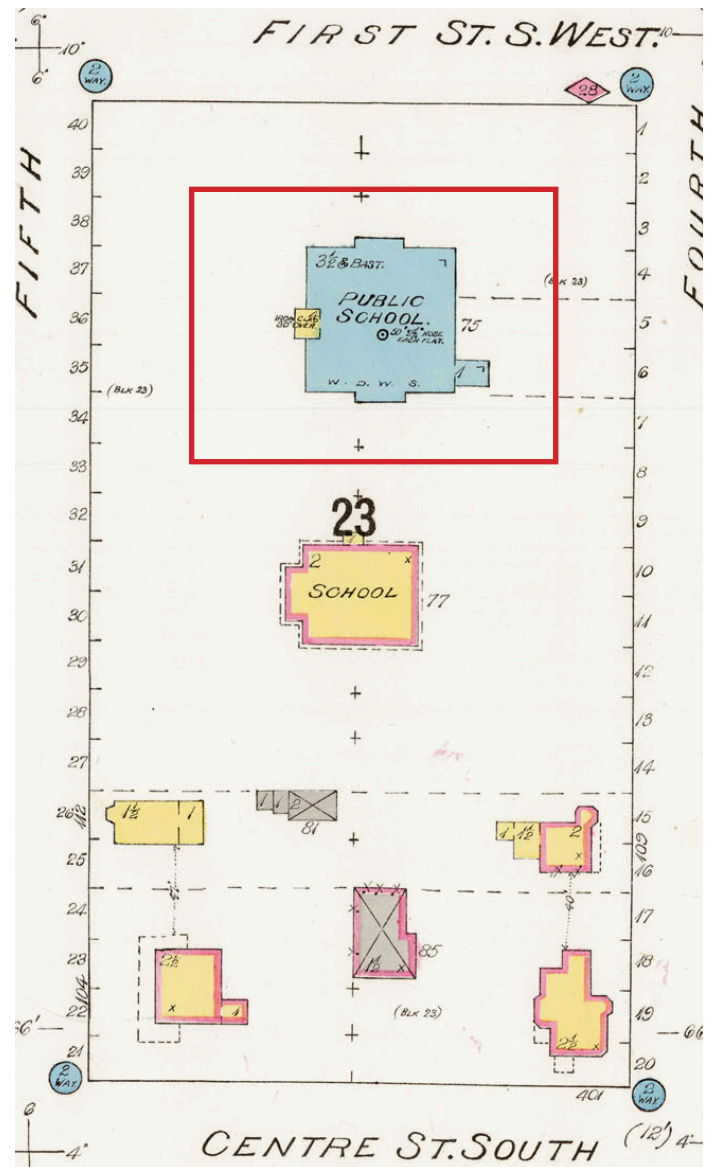
Buildings on the TransCanada Tower site

Central Public School / James Short School

The second Central Public School, a three-storey Edwardian Classical sandstone building, was designed by architect William Marshall Dodd (1872–1949) and built by contractors Addison and Davey. Dodd's most notable commission in Calgary, City Hall, remains extant.

Central was one of nearly 20 sandstone public schools constructed in the city between 1884 and 1914. The school was built in 1904–05 and was officially opened on May 24, 1905. It housed Central Public School from 1905 until 1933, Commercial High School from 1933 until 1938, and James Short School from 1938 until 1967. It then remained vacant until its demolition in 1969.

The Local Council of Women facilitated the retention of the cupola, and it was placed in storage. An anonymous donor (later identified as geologist J. Richard Harris) donated \$10,000 to restore the cupo-



Detail of 1911 fire insurance map. Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.

la and have it placed in Prince's Island Park in 1974. The cupola was again moved in 1990 or 1991 and placed in James Short Park.



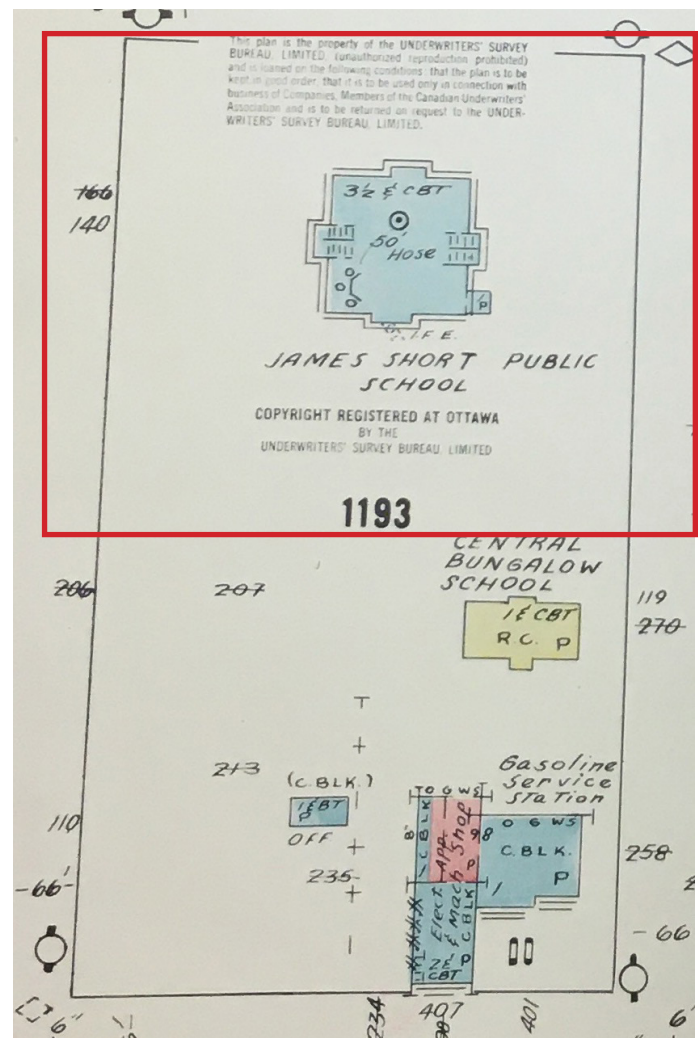
Looking southeast toward the northwest corner of 5 Avenue and 1 Street SW. "New bus depot sign, Calgary, Alberta", 1972 (CU1111994) by Calgary Herald. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary.

Greyhound Bus Station (125–4 Avenue SW)

Greyhound Lines of Canada built its new terminal in 1971, and it was officially opened in January 1972. It evidently straddled the James Short Park site and the TransCanada Tower site along 4 Avenue and 1 Street SW on the former public school board property. The building included a restaurant, and it was designed to accommodate construction of a never-built five-storey parking structure above it. The terminal remained at this location until it moved to a newly-built facility in Sunalta in 1986. It was demolished at an unknown date in the late 1980s.

TransCanada Tower (450–1 Street SW)

TransCanada Pipelines Ltd. acquired the site in 1997 and announced the construction of the first office tower project in Calgary since 1991. The 38-storey TransCanada Tower, also known as the TC Energy Tower, was completed in 2001.



Detail of fire insurance map, 1961. Copyright registered at Ottawa by the Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited. Contact SCM Risk Management Services Inc. for further information.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

James Short School is commonly assumed to have been a singular institution that operated from before James Short's tenure as Central School principal until James Short School closed in 1967. However, the complex of buildings on this site housed at least four distinct educational institutions over an 80-year period.



"Students and teachers in front of Central School, Calgary, Alberta", 1904, (CU1123301) by Unknown. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary.

Central Public School

Central Public School was a public educational institution that operated from 1885 until 1933. The public school board's first purpose-built schoolhouse was constructed on this block in 1887 to house this institution. The school provided education for grades 1–8, and it was the only public school in Calgary until 1894. Under Principal James Short's administration, Central began offering high school placement examinations in 1889, but the nearest high school was in Winnipeg. In 1891, Short added a complete high school program and personally taught all high school courses. The high school program was relocated to a new stand-alone institution in 1903. While new schools (known as "ward schools") were built throughout the city in the 1890s and after the turn of the century, Central remained the only public institution that included Grade 8 in its curriculum.

Central classes were relocated to the new sandstone building immediately to the west in 1905. Further research can determine whether the classes that remained in what became Old Central were part of a separate institution or if they were simply an adjunct to Central School. Similarly, further research can

determine whether Central Bungalow School, which opened in 1919, was a separate institution or simply an adjunct to Central School.

Central School closed in June 1933, and its remaining students were redistributed to other public schools, including McDougall and Riverside (later renamed Langevin). The sandstone building was then renovated and repurposed as the new home of Commercial High School.

Chinese associations

In the 1901 census year, Calgary's population was well over 80 per cent Anglo-Saxon, and the student body's ethnic composition reflected this demographic. The city experienced rapid population growth in the years leading up to the First World War, and in 1911 the Anglo-Saxon population dipped to 71.3 per cent. That year, free evening English-language lessons for immigrants began at Central. This was a prelude to the school's future polyglot character.

Central was the nearest school to Calgary's present Chinatown, which was established in 1910 when The City issued a building permit for the Canton Block (202–212 Centre Street SE) a short distance from the school. The city's Chinese community dated back to 1885 or 1886, but it initially comprised adult men only. These were single men or men who had left



"Central School, Calgary, Alberta", ca. 1913. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, PA-816-2, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary

their wives or families in China to earn money in North America. These men had come from China or the United States to work on Canadian Pacific Railway construction in British Columbia in the early 1880s.

The same year the sandstone Central Public School was built, Louie Kheong brought his wife, Tuey Tai, from China. Kheong had arrived in Calgary in 1899, and he became one of the businessmen who built the Canton Block. Ho Lem (1870–1960), another businessman from China who moved to Calgary in 1901, brought his wife, Hong Quo (Mary Ho Lem, 1874–1948), and their son, Frank Ho Lem (1900–1947), in 1907. The Kheong and Ho Lem children were among the first Chinese pupils at Central. However, the head tax imposed by the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 severely limited immigration and diminished what might otherwise have been a larger Chinese student body at the school. The Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 effectively prohibited immigration of ethnic Chinese until it was repealed in 1947.

Owing to a gap in surviving attendance records for the school, the identity of Central's earliest Chinese student, or students, is unknown. The missing records, spanning 1909 to 1920, contained that name or names. Chinese students certainly attended by 1916, when one of them created the school's First World War Roll of Honour. James Short attended the unveiling ceremony, which took place in the school. In its account of the ceremony, the *Calgary Daily Herald* described the roll:

A hundred and forty-three names stand out in prominence on one of the most elaborate and artistically designed honor rolls ever unveiled in this city. The work, which would do justice to a professional hand, was done by one of the Chinese students.²¹

Attendance records from 1921 list three of Ho Lem's children (Charles, Jack, and Jessie), a presumed daughter of Louie Kheong (identified as Mary), as well as Hong Chow, Peter Chow, Paul DoFoo (1913–2018), Annie Kee, Mary Luey, Luey Ock, Charlie Ong, Luey Sun, Helen Wong, Margaret Wong, Nellie Wong, and Guy Woo.

By 1922, 44 of the city's roughly 50–60 Chinese students in public schools attended Central. To relieve congestion, that year Superintendent Dr. A. Melville

Scott (1869–1941) suggested fitting up classrooms at the school board's stores facility in the former Woodcrafts Ltd. building (312–4 Avenue SE) and transferring the Chinese students there. The move would have segregated the Chinese students in a warehouse but would not have affected non-Chinese students. Fortunately, the idea was not realized.

That same year, the Chinese Public School opened (or re-opened) in a repurposed dwelling at 126–2 Avenue SW. This institution provided additional after-school classes for Chinese students, and it remained at that address for decades.

Carl Safran (1917–2005), who later served as the public school board's Chief Superintendent, was one of many Jewish children who attended Central in the 1920s. He later recalled:

We had a real conglomeration of ethnic groups—Chinese, Jewish, German, Russian. There was very little prejudice because most of us came from minority groups. The Chinese and Jewish youngsters always did very well and usually headed the class....²²

School attendance records and newspaper accounts of school sporting events confirm Safran's recollection of the student body's ethnic composition. In 1930, David Ho Lem (1916–2000), team captain of Central's cadet shooting team, accepted a national award on the team's behalf. Brigadier-General Daniel Mowat Ormond (1885–1974) presented Ho Lem with the Duke of Devonshire's challenge cup, which was awarded "to the team or school making the best all-round showing from Canadian units."²³

When Central closed as a public school in 1933, the *Herald* characterized the change that had taken place in the student body's ethnic composition over time:

During the growth of the city the character of the pupils attending here has gradually changed. Originally composed of the best residential section of the city, it has now changed so that a large part is included in the business district. Many of the pupils now live in blocks and apartments. The Chinese section is included within its boundaries. A few years ago a census was taken of all nationalities in the school and it was found that twenty-seven different countries were represented. It has been of recent years the most cosmopolitan school in Calgary. Here, Negro and Caucasian, Chinese and Japanese, Greek and Arabian are on an equal footing—they are all Canadians.²⁴

The *Herald* indicated the emphasis on “Empire Day” celebrations at Central:

Stress has been laid during the last few years on Empire Day ceremony. This is one occasion when all the pupils may take part and the advantages of being a Canadian and an integral part of the British Empire are emphasized.²⁵

When the public school board announced its intention to close Central School in 1933 and convert the main building into the Commercial High School, 283 area residents petitioned the board to reverse its decision. Louie Kheong and his wife were among several Chinese signatories.²⁶ When the school closed in 1933, the final staff meeting took the form of a dinner at the Mandarin Gardens, a newly-opened restaurant at 811 Centre St SW owned by Ming Yee (or Kee).

Other associations

Like all schools in the city, Central School was closed at least once during the 1918–19 influenza pandemic.

Central’s student body had a considerable Ashkenazi Jewish minority. For a few months in 1919, the public school board allowed the Jewish community to use the building for Jewish classes on weekday evenings. The Jewish school acquired its own building in 1920.

Alberta Normal School / Calgary Normal School

Between 1906 and 1908, the top floor of the new sandstone Central Public School housed the Alberta Normal School (which was quickly renamed the Calgary Normal School). This institution was the province’s first teacher training college. The institution moved to its purpose-built facility (which remains extant as the McDougall Centre) in 1908 and to the present SAIT campus, another purpose-built facility, in 1923. The Normal School operated until 1945 when it became the Calgary branch of the University of Alberta Faculty of Education. This institution eventually developed into the University of Calgary.

Central Bungalow School

Central Bungalow School was established in 1919 to relieve congestion at Central Public School. It evidently operated as a separate institution from Central Public School, at least initially, and it remained in

operation after Central School closed in 1933. Wilhelmina Henderson (1867–1951) was its first principal. She retired in 1937 after teaching school in Calgary for 26 years.

Chinese associations

Attendance records show Chinese students to have been a small but notable minority in integrated classes.

Other associations

In 1929, the bungalow school became the venue of a “sight-saving” class for visually impaired students taught by a specially-trained teacher. After the creation of James Short School in 1933, Central Bungalow became James Short Bungalow, and it housed James Short’s pre-school and Grade 1 classes. It also accommodated an early nursery program in the early 1940s as well as classes for students with hearing impairments.

Commercial High School

From 1933 to 1938, the sandstone Central Public School building housed Commercial High School, a now-defunct public school board institution. The board had initiated commercial classes at Central High School in 1908 to teach office skills such as accounting, bookkeeping, shorthand, and typing. The classes moved to the new Commercial High School in 1919, and by 1932 one or more of its classes were held at Central Bungalow.

After Central Public School closed in 1933, it was renovated and repurposed as the new home of Commercial High School. In 1934, more than half of the school’s approximately 700 students were more than 18 years old. Besides its daytime curriculum, the school offered night classes in commercial subjects. By the time the school closed in 1938, it had the largest student body of any public high school in the city. Commercial classes were transferred to Western Canada High School as part of a move toward developing composite high schools. The sandstone building was then repurposed as a new junior high school.

Chinese associations

During the five years that the Commercial High School was located in this building, the student body was overwhelmingly non-Asian. Attendance records

list at least one Chinese student, Silas DoFoo (1914–2003), in 1933–34. A list of students in the school’s final graduating class, published in the *Calgary Daily Herald*, contains no Chinese names.²⁷

James Short Junior High School / James Short School

The final educational institution on this block was James Short School, which operated from 1938 until 1967. It was created as Central Junior High School in 1938, four years after the public school board had adopted the junior high school model and established Calgary’s first two junior high schools in 1934. One month after the school opened in September 1938, with Short’s permission, the board changed the school’s name to James Short Junior High School. “In naming the junior high school after Mr. Short,” the *Calgary Daily Herald* reported, “the School Board has continued to follow the long-established practice of honoring eminent citizens, for in the names of other older schools one sees recognition of the worth of men who have gone before.”²⁸ In time, it was changed to an elementary school (plus Grade 7), and the school’s name changed to reflect this.

In 1966, urban renewal plans called for the school to be demolished for redevelopment. James Short School closed in December 1967, midway through the school year, and its students were transferred to the vacant former Central High School (which remains extant at 930–13 Avenue SW) as an inter-

im measure. James Short Memorial School, which opened in the Penbrooke Meadows neighbourhood in 1973, continues the honours and traditions of James Short School.

Chinese associations

As the elementary and junior high school closest to Chinatown, James Short was the designated school for families who lived in that area. Extant attendance records demonstrate that the student body consistently had a substantial Chinese minority. At least one Chinese parent, Rose Ho Lem (née Lung), who was married to David Ho Lem (1916–2000), was active in the James Short Home and School Association in the early 1950s. In the school’s truncated final school year, September to December 1967, the majority of students were Chinese.²⁹

In 1947, following the Second World War, the Chinese Immigration Act, 1923 (commonly known now as the Chinese Exclusion Act) was repealed. Immigration from China (and of ethnic Chinese from elsewhere) slowly resumed for the first time in decades. (That same year, Chinese people in Canada were no longer denied the right to vote at the federal and provincial levels.) Consequently, Chinese-Canadian pupils grew in number at James Short. The school initiated a special English class for Chinese-Canadian students in 1949, and it added a second class in 1951 and a third in 1952. Victor Mah, a future chairman of the Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre, was in the first class. His classmates held a reunion at the Chinese Cultural Centre in 2002.

Five alumni of James Short School were interviewed for this report or supplied written testimonies: David Poon, Joan McFetridge, Judy DoFoo, Doug Wong, and Carol Poon.

David Poon was born in Calgary in 1936, and he grew up in a fourplex at 211 Centre Street S. David’s father, Chong Him (C.H.) Poon (ca. 1889–1971), was born in China, immigrated to Canada in 1913, and moved from Vancouver to Calgary in 1929. He was a restaurateur whose businesses included the W.K. Restaurant, the New China Restaurant, Linda Mae’s Coffee Shop & Lotus Garden, and, later, Imperial Palace Restaurant, introducing Dim Sum to Calgarians. David’s mother, Arline (née Koo, 1913–1976),

“James Short School, Calgary, Alberta”, 1956 (CU1141351) by Jack De Lorme. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary



had previously lived on the Walker Estate (the future site of the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary) where her parents operated a market garden. David grew up with his five siblings directly across Centre Street from his parents' New China Restaurant (213 Centre Street S).

David lived a five-minute walk from James Short School, which he attended from about 1941 to 1948. His sisters also went to the school. David had the sense that he was leaving Chinatown when he walked to James Short; "You were leaving your territory," he recalls.³⁰ He spent kindergarten and Grade 1 in the bungalow school and grades 1–6 in the sandstone school. In his experience, in a class of 25–30 pupils, approximately four or five students were ethnic Chinese. David had a small group of about five contemporaries who were his friends at school and outside of school, who came from families that knew each other well, and who formed his cohort all through his years at James Short and then at Langevin School, where children from Chinatown went for Junior High. This group included Frank Ho Lem, George Louis, Ken Jung, Harry Chow-Kam, and Betty Chow-Kam (who later became Betty Nakamura, and was a year younger). In kindergarten, he recalls, he and his friends played with white children, but off the schoolground, the Chinese kids kept to themselves. David remembers that his life pretty much revolved around James Short School and the Chinese United Church.

David also attended the Chinese Public School for two hours each weeknight from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. This was very important to his father. David and his friends played, on or off the James Short school-ground, in the hour between dismissal at "English school" (as he called it) and Chinese school. David and his contemporaries did not appreciate having to go to Chinese school after regular classes. They felt that they were Canadians and that their public school studies were more important than Chinese school. He also recalls that Chinese school, which taught students to read and write, was largely ineffective. Progress was interrupted as teachers came and went. David feels that the children who learned their Chinese language were those whose parents spoke it in the home.

David went to the United States to study architecture and then changed his discipline to business admin-

istration. He returned to Chinatown with his wife, Jan, and lived with his parents until they could afford their own home in the Fairview neighbourhood. David recalls that, in his youth, Chinese people were expected to live, work, and do business in Chinatown unless they had a compelling reason (such as market gardening) to live elsewhere. He views this as a limitation imposed on Chinese people, and he characterizes the authority/enforcement as "knowing one's place" in society. He feels that living in Fairview would have been unrealistic for someone like him at an earlier time.

Joan McFetridge (née DoFoo) attended James Short School from 1952 to 1959, as her sister Judy DoFoo did from 1956 to 1962. They grew up at 312 Centre Street S behind their family's convenience store, Home Confectionery. Chinatown kids used to buy candy there on their way home from James Short School.³¹

Joan and Judy's father, Paul DoFoo (1913–2018), was born in Calgary and attended the school when it was Central School. Paul's brother Silas was one of the few Chinese students, if not the only one, who attended the Commercial High School when it was housed in the James Short School building in the early 1930s. Paul and his wife, Lilian (died 2000), who immigrated from China in 1949, acted as translators for the school and as unofficial social workers. In 1967, when the school's closure was imminent and the school announced a parent meeting to discuss arrangements to bus the children elsewhere, Lilian translated the announcement and offered to provide on-the-spot translation at the meeting.

Judy recalls the experience of walking to and from the school:

The school was a quick three-minute walk from our front door. If anyone of us was late for whatever reason, we could hear the warning bell from our house, run like the dickens, and if the traffic lights were with us, make it into the girls' or boys' line-ups by the entrance doors before the second bell rang.

All of my friends lived within a few blocks' radius of the school. Back then, rather than the office towers, apartment blocks and commercial buildings, houses lined the streets and avenues near the school. We all walked. Maybe some of the older boys biked to school.... These sidewalks and the schoolyard were our playground where we played hop-



Lilian DoFoo shows Principal May Willie her translation of the message to parents concerning pending arrangements to bus children to the former Central High School after James Short School closes. *Calgary Herald*, 4 December 1967

scotch, marbles and jacks, skipped, bounced balls, rode our tricycles and learned to ride our bikes.³²

Unlike David Poon, Joan and Judy had close friends who were white. “The population of the school was extremely diverse and none of us seemed to be concerned about this,” Joan recalls. “We played and worked with whoever had the same interests at the moment.”³³ Judy elaborates:

I suppose my classmates came from many different ethnic backgrounds although it was not something that seemed to occur to any one of the kids that made up my group of friends. We all played at each other’s houses after school, went to one another’s birthday parties, went trick or treating together at Halloween.³⁴

Judy remembers the social division between Canadian-born Chinese children and immigrant children from China:

In my recollection, if there was any kind of a divide at all,

it would have been within the Chinese student body itself—between those of us who were Canadian born and/or raised and those who were more recent immigrants. It must have been humiliating for boys (because it seemed they were always boys) in their early teenage years to be placed in an elementary school classroom because they hadn’t yet acquired the English skills to cope with a junior high school curriculum. They would band together and become the “bad boys” of the school, constantly misbehaving, constantly in trouble. I don’t recall ever being teased, hurt, humiliated or belittled by any other student or adult at the school...but the Chinese bad boys? They became my nemesis....I could never understand what I had done to deserve their meanness but oh my, as an adult I so much see how I represented everything they did not have.³⁵

Joan recalled a notable detail about the schoolyard. “There was a diagonal path worn across the school grounds from 4 Avenue close to Centre Street all the way to 5 Avenue and 1 Street West,” she remembers. “This was how people walked to ‘downtown’. You always cut the corner.”³⁶

Joan also remembers when one of the teachers, Mrs. Bagby, offered to take any students who were interested up to see the cupola after school. “Of course I was there,” she recalls:

The ladder and everything else was completely covered with decades worth of dried pigeon droppings. As I went up the ladder my dress skimmed along the rungs and I could hear the bits crunching and falling. We had to hold the rungs which were totally covered. I am a very squeamish person, but this was definitely a most memorable, amazing experience.³⁷

Neither Joan nor Judy went to Chinese school, although Judy recalled that many of her classmates did on Saturdays. When Judy asked why, her father explained that “we were much too busy going to piano lessons, music theory, violin and cello and flute lessons!”³⁸

Doug Wong was born in Calgary in 1952, and he grew up at 215–217 Centre Street S in the same four-plex where David Poon’s family lived. Doug’s father, Woon Ming Wong, and his mother, Shu King (née Yee), were both born in China. Woon Ming followed his own father from China to Calgary, and they established the W.K. Restaurant, which the family operated in the years that Doug attended James Short from about 1958 to 1964. Doug’s brother and five sisters

also attended the school. They walked to school and back, and Doug remembers walking to his family's restaurant for lunch, which he ate at a round table in the back that had Chinese newspapers and was used by staff members.

Doug's friends in the schoolyard were all Chinese. "I don't remember if it was for protection or just because we understood each other," he recalls.³⁹ Outside of school, he had a neighbourhood friend who was white, and their mothers were best friends. Doug remembers playing with his friends at the James Short schoolyard outside of school hours, but they preferred to go to "the playground," which was later developed as Sien Lok Park. The playground had improvements like swings, a teeter-totter, and a seasonal skating rink, while the schoolyard was just a field for playing sports.

Carol Poon was born in Calgary in 1960, and she went to James Short for Grade 1 in 1966–67. She and her family lived in the same Centre Street fourplex where David Poon and Doug Wong grew up. C.H. Poon brought his nephew Allen, Carol's father, to Calgary from China around 1952–53 when Allen was about 17 years old. Carol's mother, Shirley Poon (née Leung) came from China in 1959 to marry Allan. Allen worked for C.H. Poon in the New China Restaurant and later at Linda Mae's.

Carol grew up in a Cantonese-speaking home, and Cantonese was her first language. Before she went to James Short, her parents enrolled her at Peter Pan Nursery so she could learn English. Once at James Short, she walked on her own to and from school each day. She remembers that between one-third and one-half of her classmates were Chinese.

Carol's family was one of many that moved away from Chinatown because of the closure of James Short School. Most of the families that moved relocated to Thorncliffe, which was easily accessible to the families' Chinatown businesses via the No. 3 bus on Centre Street N. In August 1967, Carol's family moved to North Haven, where she entered North Haven Elementary for Grade 2.⁴⁰

None of the alumni consulted for this paper had been aware as children of James Short's reputation with respect to Chinatown or Chinese people—or even

who he was. To them, James Short was just the name of their school. Joan McFetridge remembers that the name was pronounced as though it was one word ("Jamesshort").⁴¹

Neither did any of the alumni remember any acknowledgement of their Chinese heritage at the school. Chinese students participated in cultural pageants in 1949 (the Calgary Council of Home and School Associations' "A Night With the Nation") and 1951 (the annual Junior Red Cross Rally), but neither event was produced by James Short School or took place there.⁴² Judy DoFoo recalls:

There was no inclusion of Chinese language and culture despite so many of us being Chinese. That surely was not a part of the formal curriculum at the time. The immigrant experience was simply not there in the program of studies. We were just a bunch of kids growing up in the fifties whose parents came from all over the place and here we all were now. And that was okay. We were good with that.⁴³

The major exception was the absorption of immigrant children from China beginning in 1949 and the establishment of special classes for them. Unfortunately, none were interviewed for this project. Future interviews with such alumni, and with additional Canadian-born or -raised alumni, can add to the understanding of Chinese students' experience at James Short School.

The five alumni consulted for this report remember that Chinese students formed a minority or up to half of their classmates. The three alumni whom Fung Ling Feimo interviewed for her 2021 essay *Reflections on Exclusion and Other Things in the Dark* remembered that their classes had a majority of Chinese students.⁴⁴ In an article published December 4, 1967, the *Calgary Herald* described the school as "predominately-Chinese" and indicated that 70 per cent of the students' parents understood little English.⁴⁵

Other associations

King George VI and Queen Elizabeth's motorcade passed James Short Junior High School as students watched during the Royal Visit of May 26, 1939.

In 1942, during the Second World War, James Short was one of 24 schools designated as potential emergency quarters for displaced citizens in the event of

an enemy air attack that destroyed homes in Calgary. It was also one of four designated dressing stations/casualty clearing stations in the city. These arrangements were made by The City's Air Raid Precautions Committee.

Notes

- 1 Fred Valentine, telephone interview, 9 February 2022.
- 2 Phillip Jang, "Persistence nurtured park," *Calgary Herald*, 21 June 1991, B2.
- 3 "Humiliation and bitterness hatred's legacy," *Calgary Herald*, 2 May 1981, H3. This article quotes Short from "Withdraw Chinese Permit," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 4 October 1910, 1, 3.
- 4 Barbara Kwasny and Elaine Peake, *A Second Look At Calgary's Public Art* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1992), 42.
- 5 J. Brian Dawson, "The Chinese Experience in Frontier Calgary: 1885–1910," in *Frontier Calgary: Town, City, and Region 1875–1914* (Calgary: University of Calgary/McClelland and Stewart West, 1975), 134.
- 6 Marilyn Williams, Jeanie Gartly, and Kerri Rubman, *Chinatown Historical Context Paper* (Calgary: The City of Calgary, 2019), 11.
- 7 In another session, Rev. A.B. Winchester of Victoria, missionary to Chinese-Canadians on the west coast, "made a magnificent appeal for the rights" of Chinese-Canadians. The Herald summarized his remarks: "Let any man, he said, come amongst us that is a man. Let qualifications and character [stand] as our test and not the mere accident of birth. Neighborliness means not love to a certain section or race or color, but must be determined according to the needs of the man next to you, for G-d hath made of one blood all the nations of the world." It is unknown whether Short attended the session.
- 8 In 1903, more than a decade after Short's departure as principal, the high school program that he founded was separated from Central School and established as a stand-alone institution housed in its own building behind City Hall. It was known officially as City Hall School and colloquially as "Sleepy Hollow" School. In 1908, the institution moved into a purpose-built sandstone school that remains extant at 930–13 Avenue SW where it was renamed Central High School or Central Collegiate Institute. The school finally closed in 1965; Central Memorial High School, which opened in Calgary's Lakeview neighbourhood in 1968, perpetuates its honours and traditions.
- 9 As an elder of the Calgary Presbytery (a governing body in the Presbyterian church), Short was a member of a sub-committee that recommended the establishment of the college. The school operated as a non-denominational institution. When the Western Canada College Old Boys' Association was reorganized in 1919 after a period of inactivity during the First World War, Short was elected to its board. The college finally closed in 1926, and its campus became home to the Calgary School Board's new Western Canada High School in 1928.
- 10 When Edmonton was selected as the provincial capital in 1905, Calgarians expected that the provincial university would be established in their city. Instead, when the University of Alberta was created in 1908, it was located in Strathcona, a city that amalgamated with Edmonton soon afterward. A group of Calgarians then pushed for the creation of a private University of Calgary. The institution was chartered in 1910 as Calgary College. While it held classes (at what is now the Memorial Park Library) for three years, the institution lacked degree-conferring powers, and it folded in 1915. Short was a member of the college's board of governors; his nephew by marriage, Eric Harvie, was a student in its Faculty of Law. In 1915,
- 11 These included: John Cashel, who was charged with assisting his brother, convicted murderer Ernest Cashel (ca. 1882–1904), to escape from NWMP custody in 1904; Arthur Pelkey (1884–1921), who was charged with manslaughter after fellow boxer Luther McCarty died in the ring during a prize fight between the two men in 1913; and Charle Harry Minchin (ca. 1886–1952), a former alderman accused of stealing \$5000 from the city treasurer's office in 1914; Cashel and Minchin were convicted; Pelkey was acquitted.
- 12 "Told the Chinamen How They Must Sleep," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 14 October 1910, 11.
- 13 "Council Trying to Straddle the Fence," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 11 October 1910, 1.
- 14 "Withdraw Chinese Permit," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 4 October 1910, 3. By-law 1090 was the Building Ordinances By-law. Other signatories included W.R. Hull, F.H. Brown, S.H. Might, Thos. Pain, G.B. Cook, Nat. Lynn, and other unnamed parties.
- 15 "Told the Chinamen How They Must Sleep," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 14 October 1910, 11.
- 16 "Council Trying to Straddle the Fence," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 11 October 1910, 1.
- 17 Luey Kheang [sic], "Why Are They Suitable for Heaven?" *Calgary Daily Herald*, 7 October 1910, 6.
- 18 "Told the Chinamen How They Must Sleep," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 14 October 1910, 11.
- 19 "Protests, re Chinatown Being Located in Heart of Calgary, are Vigorous," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 30 April 1919, 11.
- 20 Glenbow Archives. Oi Kwan Foundation Fonds (M 77011). Commemorative Book, 1987, 22.
- 21 "Central School Pupils are Hosts at an At-Home," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 16 December 1916, 29.
- 22 Robert M. Stamp, *School Days: A Century of Memories* (Calgary: Calgary Board of Education/McClelland and Stewart West, 1975), 30.
- 23 "City Cadets Win Dominion Trophy," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 7 February 1930, 13.
- 24 "Calgarians' Old School Home Closes," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 11 July 1933, 9.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Others included: Chong Lee (210A Centre Street S); Goon Nam and Goon Key (228–2 Avenue W); Luey Chow and his wife (107–2 Avenue W); and Chow Kam and his wife (218 Centre Street S).
- 27 "Trustee Expresses Hope Girls to Take More Part In Country's Government," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 9 June 1938, 3.
- 28 "City Honors James Short By Naming New High School After Prominent Barrister," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 29 October 1938, 2.
- 29 "Board Hurdles Language Barrier," *Calgary Herald*, 4 December 1967, 27.
- 30 David Poon, personal interview by author, 11 November 2021.
- 31 Doug Wong, personal interview by author, 7 February 2022; Fung Ling Feimo, *Reflections on Exclusion and Other Things in the Dark*, 2021.
- 32 Judy DoFoo, "Childhood Memories: James Short School 1956–1962," unpublished memoir appended to personal communication with author, 17 October 2021.
- 33 Joan McFetridge, personal communication with author, 14 October 2021.
- 34 Judy DoFoo, "Childhood Memories: James Short School 1956–1962."
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Joan McFetridge, personal communication with author, 14 October 2021.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Judy DoFoo, "Childhood Memories: James Short School 1956–1962."
- 39 Doug Wong, telephone interview by author, 7 February 2022.
- 40 Carol Poon, telephone interview by author, 9 February 2022.
- 41 Joan McFetridge, personal communication with author, 14 October 2021.
- 42 "Color and Action in Pageant," *Albertan*, 4 April 1949, 9; "Many

Countries Represented,” *Calgary Herald*, 8 May 1951, 12.

43 Judy DoFoo, “Childhood Memories: James Short School 1956–1962.”

44 Fung Ling Feimo, personal communication, February 10, 2022.

She had interviewed Ellen Wong (née Mah), who attended between 1959 and 1966, Jeannie Tse (née Mah), who attended circa 1962–67), and Jim Mah, who attended for Grade 1 around the time the school closed.

45 “Board Hurdles Language Barrier,” *Calgary Herald*, 4 December 1967, 27.