

Chinatown Cultural Center- Final Report

HSPV Second-Year Studio



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Volume I- Group Work

Executive Summary

This report focuses on the former Chinatown Cultural Center, located at 125 North 10th Street in the heart of Philadelphia's Chinatown.

The work was carried out by a group of University of Pennsylvania graduate students in Historic Preservation as the course work for the Preservation Studio class in fall 2012. Between September and December 2012, the students conducted documentation and historical analysis of the structure, identified character defining elements and important historic building fabric. Building walkthroughs with architectural historians and a structural engineer informed the preservation plan and a list of immediate actions for the building.

Stakeholder interviews were conducted along with a community engagement project and an analysis of Chinatown building types. Other individual projects by group members investigated preservation options, design schemes and economic feasibility of reuse.

Results from the semester's project reveal a complex and layered history at the site, concerns with the physical stability of the structure and uncertainty about the site's future. The preservation plan dictates the most pressing needs of the building: a suitable advocate and structural stabilization.

Acknowledgements

We, the Chinatown Cultural Center Studio Team would like to begin this report by giving our thanks to all who made this project possible. It was through many conversations, meetings, and feedback sessions that we arrived at a product that we feel proud to submit. First and foremost, we extend our thanks to Fon Wang, our dedicated studio advisor for her guidance and patience with us this semester.

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Methodology

This project began with an exploration of the building and neighborhood in order to gain a sense of context. Historic maps, photographs, and records created a profile of the evolution of Chinatown from a small, one block bachelor's enclave to a bustling center city district. An exuberant Chinese-style building began to show the complexities of a structure which has been added on to and re-appropriated over time.

We conducted interviews with the building's owner as well as leaders within the Chinatown community. From that a sense of the use and scope of the site began to emerge, as well as many more unanswered questions. Understanding the former Chinatown Cultural Center proved to be a long and challenging one. Not many histories are written on Chinatown, and even fewer documents exist about the changes made within low-income and immigrant-owned buildings.

We tackled an understanding of the physical fabric by re-visiting floorplans, as well as making section drawings. After being given a key to the site, we were able to photograph extensively and discover many layers of historic building fabric which are hidden in plain view. A consultation with John Milner and Christina Carter from John Milner Architects, Inc. returned an even greater wealth of building history.

A building which served as a community and cultural center must also be understood for its use and impact. We interviewed and spoke with whomever we were able to. There was a good deal of controversy surrounding the Cultural Center's head, T.T. Chang. Discerning from rumor and truth helped us to better understand the underlying hopes, prejudices, failures, and successes of the former programming. This also began to inform our discussions of how the building should be used in the future.

In the second half of the semester we branched out into individual projects. These allowed each team member to explore an area of interest related to the building's future preservation and use. The combination of these products creates a profile for a building with many stories, and still some opportunities.

Historical Context

Historical Context of Philadelphia's Chinatown

Philadelphia's Chinatown had its beginning in 1784 when an American commercial commission from New York landed in Canton city in China to initiate trade between the two countries.¹ After that, Philadelphia became one of the earliest ports to engage trade with Canton. During the gold rush in the mid-1800s, thousands of Chinese came to United States for work opportunities. These first Chinese immigrants settled mostly in the west. At about 1869, a Mr. Thomas brought fifty Chinese from San Francisco to work in New Jersey, which gradually served as a relay station for Chinese coming east.² Philadelphia's Chinatown dates its founding to 1870, when the first Chinese-owned laundry shop opened at Ninth and Race Street. The surrounding neighborhood was largely typical Philadelphia row homes and warehouses.

Because of the immigration restrictions, especially the Oriental Exclusion Act (beginning in 1882), the first Chinese immigrants were predominately male. They were isolated from the rest of American society and families they left behind. Philadelphia's Chinatown, like others throughout the United States, was considered a "Bachelor's Enclave."

Chinatown became a cultural attraction to non-Chinese in the early 20th century. Restaurants such as the Far East, at 907–909 Race Street served non-Chinese diners, who came to the neighborhood in search of an exotic, Oriental experience.³ Mysterious associations and thrill-seeking patrons also made Chinatown a target for law enforcement officers, and Philadelphia police routinely raided the back rooms of Chinatown shops to arrest occupants on gambling and drug charges. Tales of violent "tong wars" circulated in the public press throughout the 1910s and 1920s, and even today the word "tong," which means "gathering place," has affiliations with Chinese crime gangs.

Economic hardships and new immigration restrictions led to a decline in Chinatown's population during the Great Depression, but world events brought Chinatown into greater public visibility by the end of the 1930s. China's contribution during World War II engendered a positive image of Chinese and by extension, Chinese-Americans.

The change of attitude towards Chinese after World War II was a turning point in the history of Philadelphia Chinatown. Immigration policies became more liberal. The Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943 allowed Chinese families to immigrate to the United States, and permitted some Chinese immigrants already residing in the country to become naturalized citizens. Philadelphia's Chinatown changed from a community of single men into a family centered community, as Chinese families reunited in America. The population of Chinatown increased and Sundays became important days for Chinatown as Chinese from around the area came to shop, worship, dine, and socialize.⁴

Churches and social organizations established during this period played an important role in opening this isolated neighborhood. The Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church, at 10th and Vine Street, had the only school and gymnasium in Chinatown. It hosted a youth group, the Yu Pin Club, and sponsored a variety of activities:

1 . Jean Barth Toll and Mildred S. Gillam, *Invisible Philadelphia: Community through Voluntary Organizations*. Atwater Kent Museum (Philadelphia 1995), 59.

2 Ibid, 60.

3 Kathryn Wilson, "From Bachelor Enclave to Urban Village: The Evolution of Early Chinatown," *Pennsylvania Legacies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (May 2012), 15.

4 "From Bachelor Enclave to Urban Village: The Evolution of Early Chinatown," 15.

historical context of philadelphia's chinatown

football, baseball, men's and women's basketball teams, bowling, skating, flute and singing lessons, and Sunday evening dances. Holy Redeemer influenced the lives of several generations of young Chinese who grew up in Chinatown from 1940s through the 1970s and continues to be an important place in the neighborhood. The Chinese Christian Church and Center at 1006 Race is another organization serving the community, under the directorship of Mitzie Mackenzie, who advocated for the neighborhood and Asian-American community for her entire life.⁵

The second floor of the building at 125 N 10th Street was opened as YMCA in 1955 by six young men including T.T. Chang, an important figure for the site. The Chinatown YMCA established a center for recreation and education in the Chinese community. It offered classes in English and Chinese for residents of all ages. It also did work to improve the physical appearance of Chinatown and helped design bilingual street signs and pagoda-style telephone booths.

City development projects in the 1960s, led to a series of save Chinatown movements, during which residents protested to preserve their neighborhood. Chinatown was first threatened in 1964, when the city government planned to clear the area east of Nine Street from Arch to Vine Street for Independence Mall. Two years later, the proposed Vine Street Expressway, which cut through the heart of Chinatown, galvanized the neighborhood to protest the demolition of neighborhood housing and the Holy Redeemer Church and School. A town meeting was held and the Committee for the Advancement and Preservation of the Chinese Community was formed and incorporated in 1969 as the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC).⁶ PCDC and other organizations that grew out of the 1960s Save Chinatown movement continue to combat the detrimental effects of projects like the Convention Center, and city proposals for a casino, a prison and ballpark that would adversely effect the neighborhood.

PCDC participated in 1982 in Philadelphia's Trade Mission to China, which laid the ground for the construction of an authentic Chinese gate at Tenth and Arch streets. The Friendship gate was erected in 1984 and become a major tourist attraction. Before the gate, the building at 125 N 10th Street was used to symbolize the neighborhood on tourist maps of Philadelphia.

5 Ibid, 17.

6 Invisible Philadelphia, 64.

Building Evolution

Building Evolution

1831-1848 SINGLE FAMILY DWELLING

The building at 125 North 10th Street was built between 1831 and 1832.¹ Evidence suggests that the building was built by Seedley and Baggs, who arrived in Philadelphia in the mid-1820s.² At the beginning of the 1830s, they bought three parcels of land near present day center city, including the lot at 125 N. 10th Street.³ They purchased the lot with an old frame house in 1831, and took out a mortgage of \$2,200 to build a new brick town house. The house was sold to Jacob C. Wikoff, from Blockley Township, in 1832. Wikoff purchased the house as a city home for his family and owned for 16 years.⁴

A map of 1858 suggests the same type of development characterized much of the Chinatown neighborhood. Three-story row houses surrounded the building at 125 N. 10th St (Figure 1).⁵ Slight differences in building size and proportion and deed research suggest that this was not a planned row of developments, though the buildings on the block all share common brick façades.⁶

The long and narrow building lot measures twenty-five feet across and ninety-five feet deep. The original building was approximately twenty feet by seventy feet with a five-foot-wide alley to its north leading to the rear yard (Figure 2).⁷ Although no exact plan of the house could be found, referring to the plan on 1858 Hexmer's survey and the typical rowhouse plans in Philadelphia in the early 19th century, the house was most likely based on a Town House plan (Figure 3).⁸ Much of the original three-story brick and timber structure still exists, including parts of the double pitched roof, basement arches and back dormers. The original façade included two dormer windows, replaced in the 1971 renovations. The original

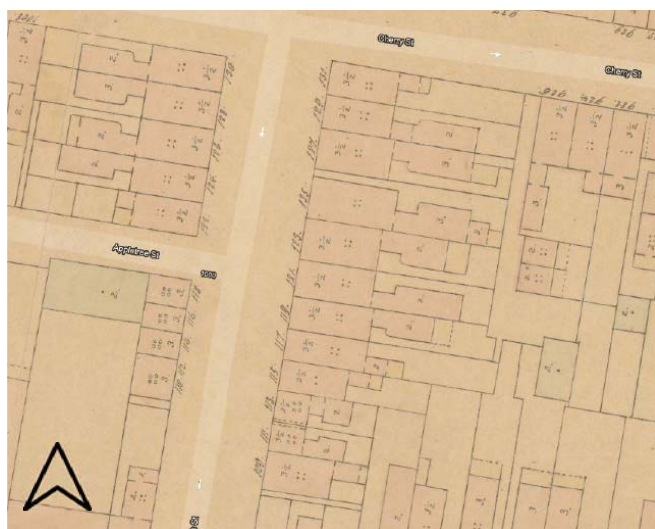


Figure 1. Map of 1858 showing the development in the block

1 HABS, PA, 51-PHILA, 315.
Deed Book A.M. No. 12, Page 239.

The HABS card from 1979 mentioned that the building was “built 1831-32”. The deed books from February 7th, 1809 and March 31st, 1831 described the property as a “lot or piece of ground with the frame messuage thereon erected”. From the next transaction in August 27th, 1832, the descriptions of the same property in the deed books were all the same as “a certain three story brick messuage or tenement, piazza, and kitchen, and lot or piece of ground.”

2 City Directory, 1820-1825.

3 Deed Book A. M., No. 12, Page 233-247.

4 Deed Book A. M., No. 28, Page 23 and following.

5 Hexamer & Locher, *Maps of the City of Philadelphia, 1858-1860*, Vol. 1 (1860)

6 Kenneth Ames, “Robert Mills and the Philadelphia Row House,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, XXVII (1968): 140-146

According to Ames, a planned row is defined as two or more contiguous dwellings created as an architectural whole. From the 1858 Heximer's map, it is obvious that each house in the row was individually built since the walls didn't line up with the adjacent buildings.

7 Deed Book A. M., No. 28, Page 23 and following.

8 Murtagh, 12

building evolution

layout of the front block was two rooms deep —possibly a parlor and a dining room—with the hall running along the south side and a fireplace in each room. A secondary stair area, commonly known as piazza



Figure 2. Map of 1858 showing the site plan of the lot

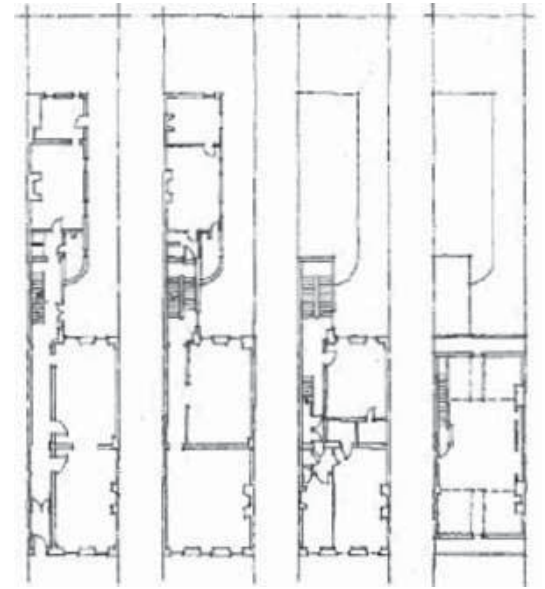


Figure 3. Typical Town House Plan

connects the front of the building to a narrow back section.¹ Remaining details from this period, include wood-grained door knobs, Greek Revival window frames and carved newel posts in the upper piazza stairwell.

1848-1955 FROM RESIDENTIAL TO COMMERCIAL

In 1848, the Wikoff family sold their house to Howard Williams, a lumber merchant.² Evidence suggests that Williams never lived in the house during his ownership between 1848 and 1876.³ It is likely the house was either rented as apartments or used as storage space for his business. Under the ownership of Williams few alterations were undertaken except for additions at the rear (Figure 4).⁴



Figure 4. Map of 1895 showing the back additions at rear

Commercializing the first two floors of single

1 According to Murtagh, the stairs were not necessarily located in the piazza, as shown in the Powel House (Figure 6). The main stair could be either placed in the hall which was almost always a straight open run returning upon itself or a double run in the piazza. But we found the remains of a newel post in the 1830s style which indicated the ever existence of staircases there. Also the building permit from 1967 mentioned the relocation of the staircase on the first floor, so an educated guess suggests the original staircase was in the piazza.

2 Deed Book A. W. M., No. 85, Page 133 and following

3 City Directory, 1848-1876

4 Hexamer & Locher, *Maps of the City of Philadelphia, 1858-1860*, Vol. 1 (1860)

building evolution

family units and row houses became popular in the early 20th century. It was fostered by the development of the district within the city and the improvement of the iron/steel framing technologies. The building at 125 N. 10th Street followed this trend. When the title was transferred to James Mifflin in 1906 a series of alterations were undertaken to convert the first floor of 125 N. 10th to a commercial space. Additional renovations



Figure 5. Map of 1908 showing the one-story side addition and three-story rear addition

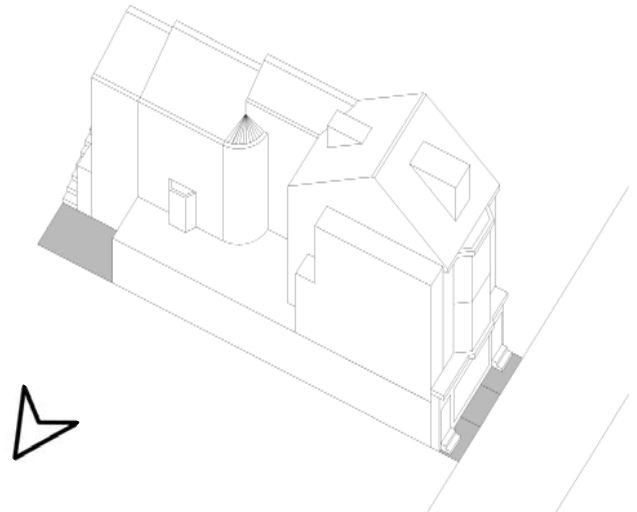


Figure 6. Sketchup model showing the possible appearance of the building in 1910

included a one-story side addition that filled in the five foot alley and a three-story rear addition, which extended the building to the alley (Figure 5). The first floor brick façade was replaced with cast iron and I-beams in order to enlarge the interior space. A second entrance at the addition allowed private access to the upper floors.¹

Further renovations to the buildings upper floors were completed in 1910. A second story was added to the side addition and bay windows with decorated frames and colored glass panels were added to the 2nd and 3rd stories of the façade and on the 2nd story along the north side (Figure 6).² The types of businesses run in the building after these extensive renovations remain unclear. In 1936, the building was bought by Victor I. Zelov, a wire-recorder manufacturer. He shared the building with other small electric manufacturers and suppliers.³

1955-2007 CHINATOWN COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL CENTER

In 1955, Tien-teh Chang (T. T. Chang) leased the second floor of 125 N. 10th St. in order to open a YMCA. In 1957, T. T. Chang removed the partition walls in the front rooms of the 2nd floor to create a larger recreation space.⁴ An electronic shop operated on the first floor until 1966, when T. T. Chang bought the building and

1 Building Permit No. 2006, 1906.
2 Building Permit No. 842, 1910.
3 Philadelphia Telephone Directory, 1937-1966
4 Building Permit No. 3894, 1957.

building evolution

renamed the YMCA as the Chinatown Cultural Center (CCC) the following year.¹ At this time, T.T. Chang undertook extensive renovations to the building, including the addition of the current façade, which is attributed to Cho-cheng Yang, a Taiwanese architect responsible for the Chinese Pavilion at the International and Universal Exposition in Quebec, Canada, 1967.² Materials used for constructions and decorations were largely reused from the Pavilion and construction was overseen by three volunteer architects, eleven Philadelphia building trades and Chinese crewmen from seven ships visiting the Philadelphia port.³

The current façade was completed in 1971 and features richly colored wood panels decorated based on Chinese prototypes and symbolism, and glazed clay roof tiles known in China as liuli. The animals, figures, foliage, and patterns were chosen based on Chinese traditions to represent Confucian virtues as well as best wishes for the future.

Interior spaces on the first and second floor were renovated to incorporate Chinese-style decorations into the special spatial sequences and accommodate larger group meetings and special cultural programs, such as Chinese New Year Banquets, films and lectures, as well as festival performances.⁴ Kitchen facilities were installed and structural problems were fixed.

After a period of decline and disuse in the 1990s, the building was closed permanently in 2007 and several deterioration issues are threatening its integrity. The wood structure suffers from serious termite damage in the basement and water damage on the roof and the facade. A section of the first floor has collapsed and the façade material is rapidly deteriorating. Pieces of stucco have spalled and its condition and extended closure have made it an eyesore on an otherwise robust Chinatown street. Vicki Chang, the widow of T.T. is the current owner of the building. She would ideally like to reopen it as a traditional Chinese restaurant.

1 Deed Book CAD 869, Page 338 and following.

2 Andy Wallace, "T.T. Chang, 74," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 26, 1996, SFCITY edition, sec. City & Region. Edgar Williams, "As You Were Saying in Peking," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 31, 1979, sec. Metropolitan.

3 "The Chinese Cultural & Community Center," Carnegie Mellon University Library, Senator H. John Heinz II Papers, <http://ptfs.library.cmu.edu/awweb/main.jsp?flag=browse&smd=1&awdid=1>

4 Building Permit No. 31746, 1967.

Documentation

Entering the building and descending the front stairs into the basement, you immediately come upon obvious renovations, but also signs of the building's original construction. There are two discontinuous arches which span along one wall. These were likely built as the building was being erected. There is exposed field stone and foundation walls in some places. Also visible is concrete block infill showing where the street access directly into the basement would have been in the structure's earlier commercial days. Holes and nooks throughout the series of basement rooms highlight the campaigns of additions and alterations. New floor joists indicate where there would once have been a multi-story masonry chimney.

Returning to the ground floor, the entrance has been totally recreated by the 1970s renovations. A coffered ceiling terminates in a moon arch. This leads into a wide open space where the popular holiday banquet series was held. To the rear are kitchen and food preparation spaces. Returning to the front of the building, the primary stairs were added in the 1970s renovation and incorporate decorative Chinese-style elements. These stairs lead past the Confucius statue from the Montreal Expo of 1967 and to the second floor. Here is a continuation of the Chinese-style decorative elements into an open space which has a pair of inset display boxes to the rear. In these are other artifacts brought down from the Montreal Expo. There is a balcony which opens out onto 10th Street. It is decorative in nature, as the scale of the opening and raised floor level is not meant for occupant access. To the north there are two small rooms, not much wider than a closet. These appear to be the width of the addition which filled in the alleyway on the north side of the building.

Moving back towards the interior of the building, it becomes more apparent that these Chinese-style ornaments were imposed onto a 19th century rowhome. There are details which were dated to the 1830s and turn of the 20th century with the assistance of renowned Philadelphia Architects, John Milner, FAIA and Christina Carter, AIA. The decorative "targets" in the corners of the display box facing onto the stairwell hint at a historic window frame which has been re-appropriated. Other windows show the pocket shutters and molding patterns of a 1830s Greek Revival style. The second stairwell has what appear to be the original handrail, posts, and newel post. The acorn style newel drop is visible within a storage closet under the stairs. In the back room is a bay window hidden behind folding doors. The exterior of the window is covered in vinyl siding. The leaded glass windows are framed by a thin decorative panel of textured mum-patterned glass, known as Florex. This type of glass became available around 1897. There is a building permit which dates the addition of this bay window to 1910. The rear staircase is quite narrow and is also part of the 1910 addition.

The third floor is now in a semi-unfinished state. It appears that finishes have been removed for structural repairs. There is a Chinese style decorative screen sliding door leading out onto another balcony space. Proceeding further back into the house, there are several windows with 1830s Greek Revival molding and folding pocket shutters. One of these has been converted into a display case for more Montreal artifacts. The original two parlor layout is most intact here. The exposed floor joists show traces of plaster residue from the original plaster and lath finishing layers. In the connecting hallway is a 1830s interior door with inset panels and a faux-grained handle. The rear room also demonstrates evidence of the former masonry fireplace in both new expansions on the floor joists and a slope in the floor where the support is uneven.

More fireplace evidence is found in the attic, where the building's two chimneys would have sprouted. This former point of exit is also visible. Facing towards 10th street is the Chinese style roof addition. There is a great

documentation

difference in quality of the two constructions, with the 1830s shingle roof still greatly intact and the 1971 roof with leaks and visible light pouring through. The varying direction and appearance of the wood members in the framing systems also explain how the roof line changed as the building evolved over time.

There are decorative ceramic elements on the roof. The fire escapes hanging over the back alley space also hold several milk crates of surplus green Chinese roof tiles. Leaning out the third story window overlooking the fire escape and alley, one can see on the western side of the curved back portion of the building a small oval window which is has been covered by vinyl siding in the current interior. Small discoveries like this are representative of the multiple secrets and layers of meaning this building contains.

building walkthrough- basement



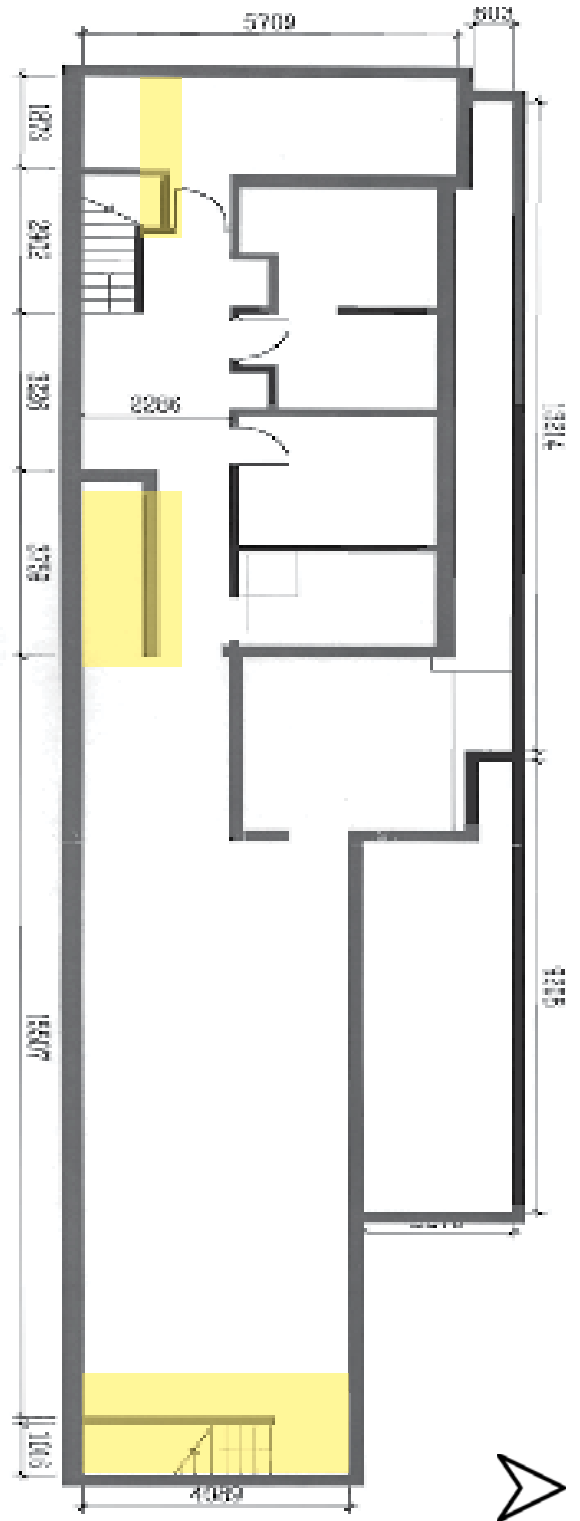
Remaining brick arch at front portion of basement



The area left by the other arch being used for storage



LEFT: Rear stairwell



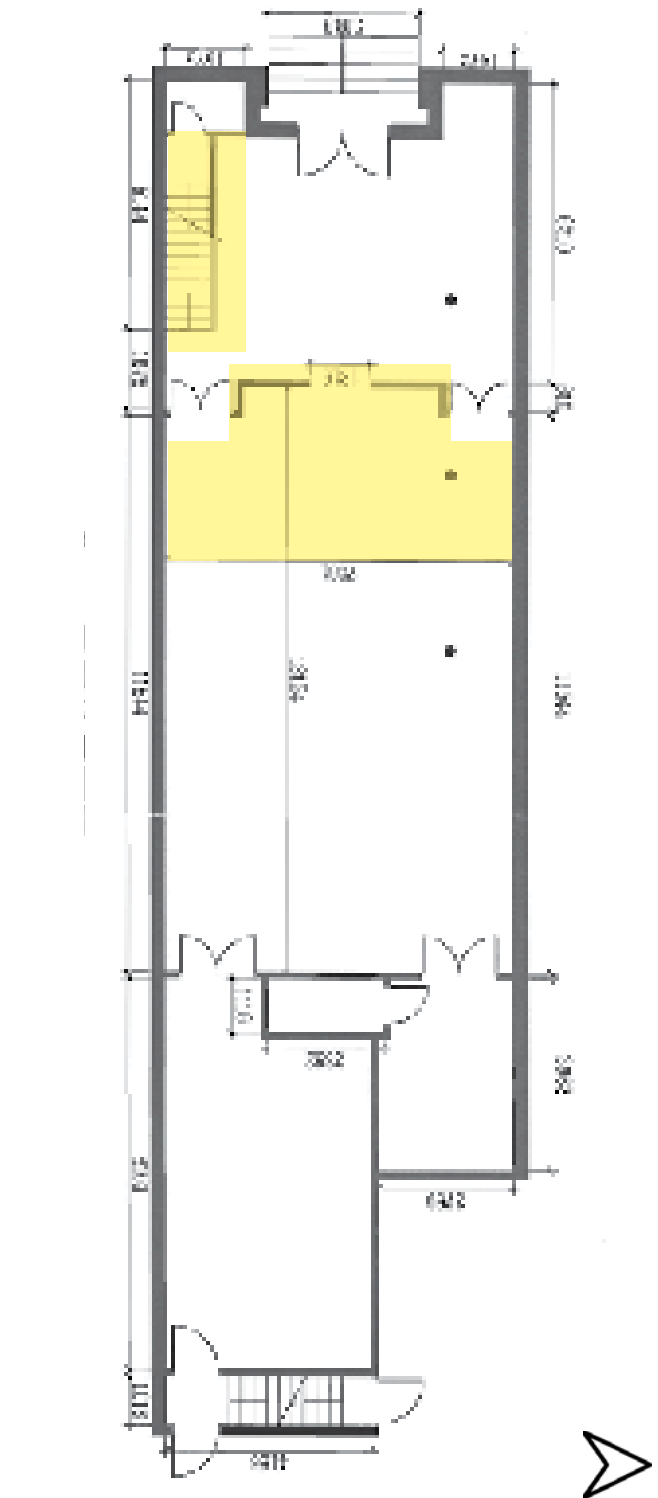
building walkthrough- first floor



The Moon Gate greets visitors



An open banquet hall



LEFT: The decorative stairs leading past a large Confucius statue to the second floor

building walkthrough- second floor



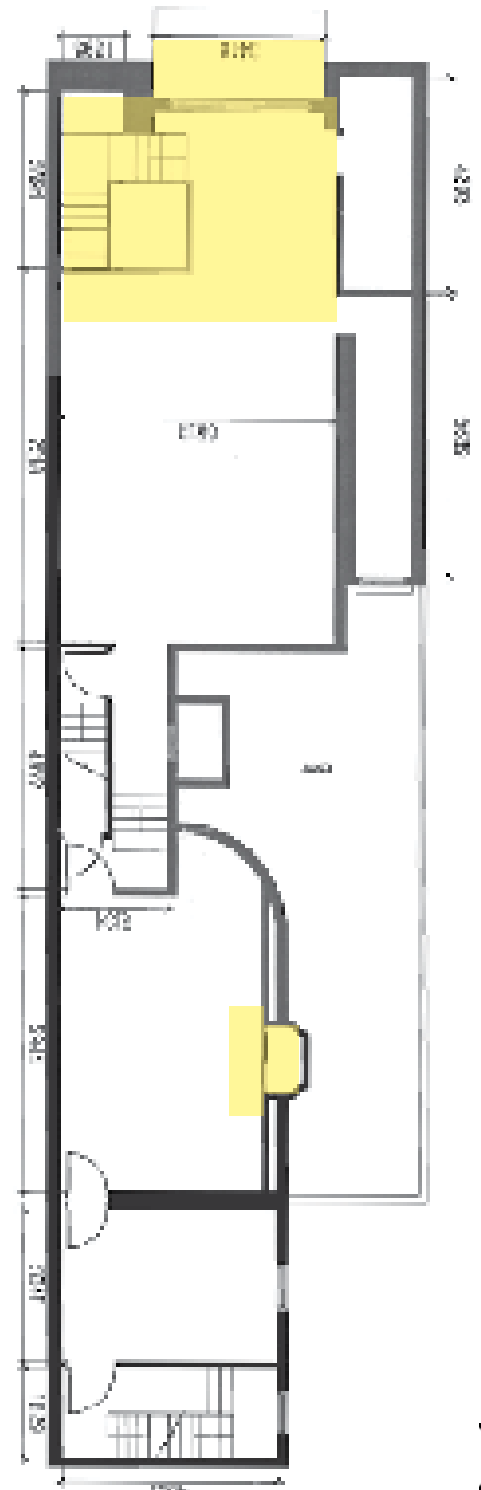
The second floor landing, the Confucius statue, and balcony



What appears to be a balcony from the street is a window on the interior



LEFT: Some historic fabric, like this bay window, have been covered by later Chinese-style decorations



building walkthrough- third floor



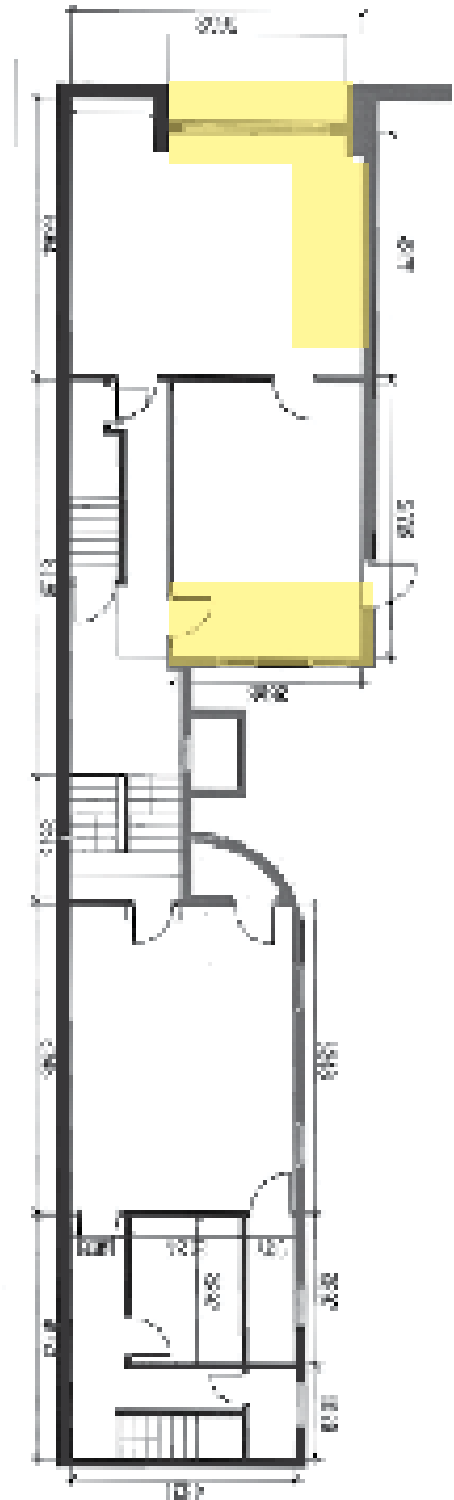
The third floor balcony, with a sliding screen door



Most rooms have been stripped, with the floor joists now left exposed



LEFT: Historic window frames, possibly from the 1830s seen here in their original use, and also adapted as a display box for Expo artifacts



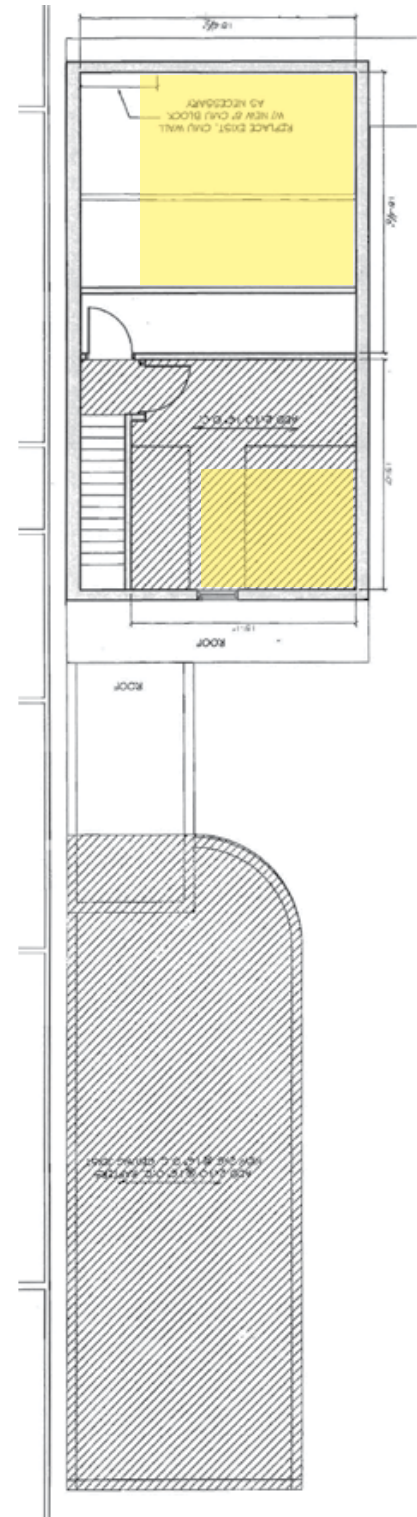
building walkthrough- attic



The building's original pitched roof framing is still intact



The campaigns of addition are visible throughout the attic space



LEFT: The new roof "penthouse" added with the Chinese facade

Stakeholders

Building Owner

Victoria Chang – Vicki is the owner of the building and widow of T.T. Chang. Her dedication to her husband and his memory is an integral part of her life; she lives in their family home in Drexel Hill and occasionally goes to Chinatown to shop. She got involved with T.T. while she was a student at Penn, after he convinced her to teach English at the Center. From then on her life was entwined with T.T., while he ran the Center she was a school teacher. They have one son.

Vicki holds on to the memories of her husband and would like to see the building function as it did in its heyday, as a cultural center with high style Chinese cuisine. She would like the first floor to be a restaurant with cultural components upstairs. Vicki is open to other uses but most importantly wants the building to survive as a symbol of her husband's legacy.

Former Center Board Members, Employees or Volunteers

Gersil Kay – a dedicated volunteer, Gersil got involved with the CCC in the 1960s to offer her services as Treasurer. She is also a lighting engineer and contractor. She was on the CCC Board for more than 30 years, and was instrumental in getting the Building & Construction Trades Council to donate labor and materials to renovate and add the Chinese façade in 1971. After the death of T.T. Chang, Ms. Kay mentioned how Vicki was overwhelmed by grief and many groups in Chinatown were trying to get control of the building. The Board of Trustees at the CCC reorganized in the early 2000s to figure out what to do with the building. Ms. Kay wants to see the building operate as a museum interpreting the history of Chinese in Philadelphia. In 2007, she was part of a group that got the Community Design Collaborative, a volunteer design group to assess the structural needs of the building. The findings indicated structural issues but Vicki was reluctant to do anything and evidently had new advisors. According to Ms. Kay, the new caretaker is unfamiliar with conservation architecture and more interested in promoting grandiose schemes beyond the capacity of funding and board expertise. She stepped down in 2008 following the structural analysis session, but looks forward to seeing this structure rejuvenated.

Barbara Doose – With an avid interest and degree in Asian Studies, Mrs. Doose found the CCC after a trip to Japan and was looking for a job teaching English. In 1973 T.T. Chang hired her to set up tours at the CCC to highlight Chinese artifacts. She ran one-hour tours to visitors, school children and community groups. Mrs. Doose believed that the most important contribution the CCC made to the community was the site itself, which demonstrates authentic Chinese architectural items. She saw the CCC as a unique and comfortable place for non-Chinese to be introduced to Chinese culture and Philadelphia's Chinatown. She believes the CCC served as a catalyst for the later Arch at 10th and Race Streets.

John Kromer – Mr. Kromer moved to Philadelphia in the early 1970s and his first job was with T.T. Chang, serving as T.T.'s assistant at the CCC. Kromer believes that T.T. was an important figure in Chinatown at the time for T.T.'s ability to present himself as a different type of immigrant. Kromer recalls T.T. as a good communicator, a salesman and brought attention to Chinatown through newspaper connections and events. Many thought that T.T. was exploiting Chinatown by inviting so many outsiders to visit, but Kromer specifically said T.T. was not a crook, but an individual with ambitions. John Kromer went on to serve in many community organizations in

stakeholders

Philadelphia including Director of Housing for Mayor Street and now teaches in the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania.

Community Groups

While we conducted interviews with many community groups in the neighborhood, due to time constraints and scheduling conflicts, we were unable to conduct interviews with all the groups that serve the neighborhood. Below is a list of some of the groups that we spoke with.

Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation – the PCDC was founded around the same time at T.T. Chang established the CCC. The two groups clashed frequently in the political arena of Chinatown, which at the time was shifting from a Chinese Benevolent Association run bureaucracy to a more activist community. The founder of PCDC Cecilia Moy Yep and T.T. Chang did not get along. However, PCDC recognizes some value in the building. In 2007, PCDC representative Andrew Toy was involved with the structural analysis of the building and looking to purchase the site from Vicki Chang. However, the size and decayed state of the building deterred PCDC along with the fact that Vicki refused to sell to PCDC. Mr. Tony Wong, a PCDC Board Member and friend of T.T. wants to see the CCC turned into something for Chinatown, but stated that the organization tried to work with Vicki Chang, but she was not receptive to their ideas.

Preservation Alliance of Philadelphia - the Preservation Alliance of Philadelphia in 2011 cited the CCC on their 11 Most Endangered List and brought attention to the building through the media. In 2012, the Preservation Alliance nominated the building for the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places; the application has been submitted and is awaiting the city's approval.

Chinese Benevolent Associations – These associations represent private business interests in Chinatown, as well as recent immigrants. They've discussed possible options for the CCC Building with PCDC in the past and are interested in it as a possible Chinatown museum.

Asian Americans United – a neighborhood group in Chinatown, this organization provides many cultural services to the community and is the founder of FACTS Charter school in Chinatown North

Asian Arts Initiative – on the cultural front, AAI is the new organization responsible for culture and arts in Chinatown, featuring contemporary Asian artists They are in the process of conducting an oral history project and sponsor many art installations in Chinatown.

Philadelphia Suns – Started in the 1940s, the basketball league is a well-established organization in Chinatown.

stakeholder map

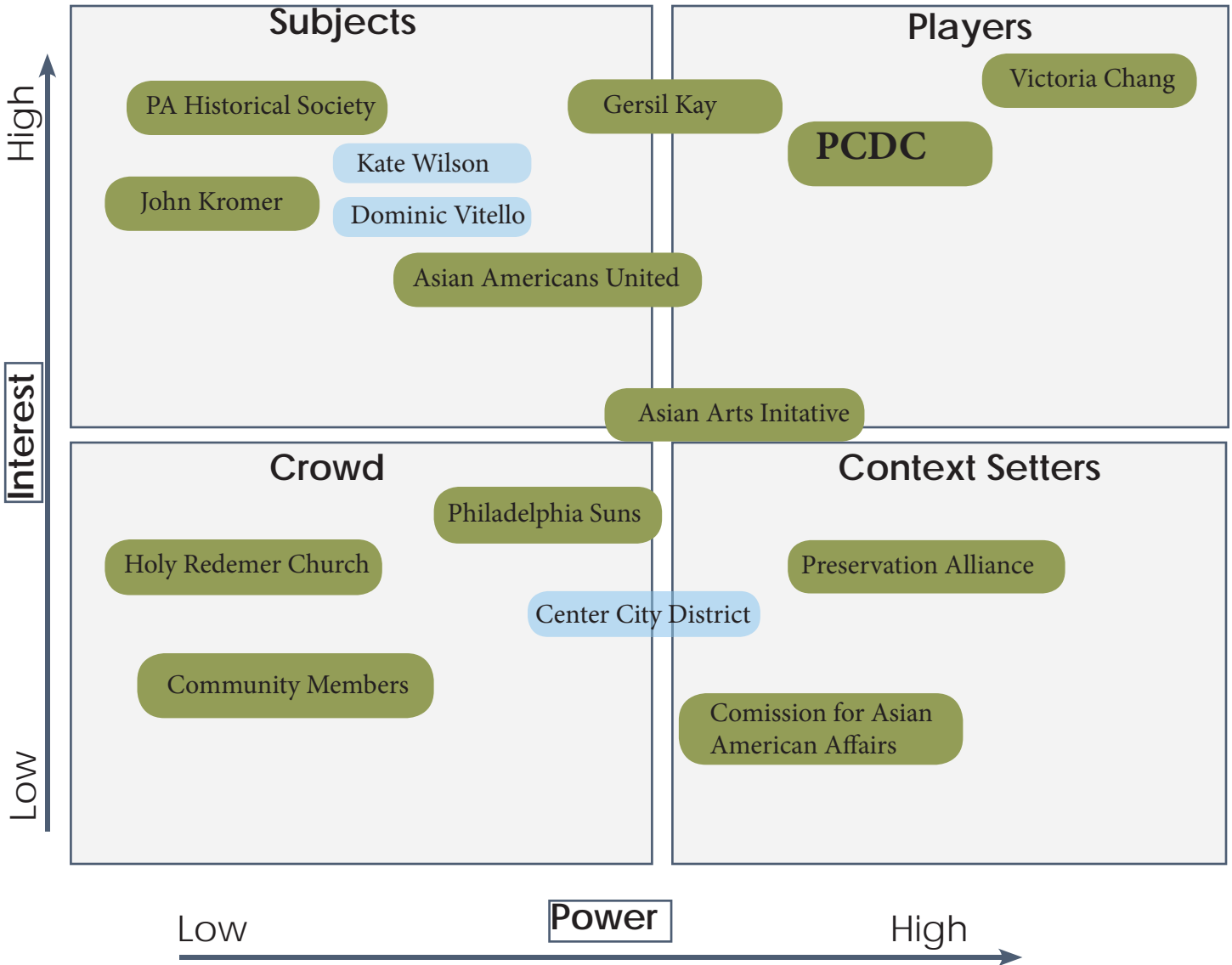


Figure 7. Graphic following Eden and Ackernlann (1998) review of the interaction between stakeholder power and interest. Green denotes primary stakeholders who have or may have a direct impact on the building, blue denotes secondary stakeholders who may influence the future of the building but do not have a direct impact on it.

Statement of Significance

Primary Significance

The Chinatown Cultural Center (125 N. 10th Street) located north of Philadelphia's Chinatown gate is an iconic building in the neighborhood. In 1955 T.T. Chang, a tireless promoter of Chinese culture, founded the Chinese Cultural Center, originally as a YMCA. The cultural center provided Chinese-Americans a place to gather together to celebrate holidays and banquets, to share traditional Chinese meals, attend concerts and exhibits and teach their children about the country they left behind. In 1971 architectural elements from the Chinese Pavilion at the 1967 Montreal Expo were added to a brick rowhouse, dating from the 1830s, resulting in an exuberant 'Traditional Chinese-style' façade. Chang's devotion to the community and enthusiasm for Chinese culture are reflected in the buildings exterior. It was designed with the intention to arouse curiosity—to attract people in off the street—and not just people from Chinatown, but tourists, from other neighborhoods in Philadelphia as well as outside the city.

Opening Chinatown up to the outside community was a particular concern of T.T. Chang's and the Chinatown Cultural Center became an important meeting point for Philadelphia's Chinese and non-Chinese communities. In addition to hosting visiting politicians, the center offered programming like Chinese cooking classes aimed at introducing Main Line housewives to Chinese culture. This significance is reflected in the building's physical fabric. The Chinese-style façade and entryway lead to a familiar 19th century row house layout and traditional details on the upper floors. Just as the CCC was a place where Philadelphians from various backgrounds met with their Chinatown neighbors, the building itself is a meeting point of diverse architectural elements.

The Chinese-style architecture of the Chinese Cultural Center holds significance beyond simply a celebration of Chinese culture. This style has long been used in Chinese-American communities throughout the United States as a way to establish themselves and lay claim to their own neighborhoods by making them attractive to outsiders, particularly tourists. As urban development threatened Philadelphia's Chinatown in the 1960s and 1970's Chinatown residents were looking to protect their neighborhood more and firmly establish themselves as an important part of the city's diverse fabric. The CCC, like many other "Chinese-style" buildings in US, was an act of self-preservation. The addition of the façade resulted in a building that was unique enough to attract outsiders to the neighborhood but Chinese enough to prevent them from taking it over.

Additionally, a survey of Chinatown reveals that there are very few buildings that incorporate Chinese-style architectural elements into their façades. Only three buildings in the neighborhood have full "Chinese" façades. The rarity of this building type in Philadelphia is alone an important argument for its preservation.

Secondary Significance

The building is also significant for its association with C.C. Yang, an important Taiwanese architect known for his traditional style. Yang is credited with the design of the CCC's façade and portions of the interior. The Philadelphia Chinatown Gate and the Cultural Center are his only building projects within the United States. Much of the architecture associated with American Chinatowns was actually built by white American architects working from books—making the involvement of a Taiwanese architect particularly notable. Much of the decorative material used on the façade and interior space, including exhibits and statues was also constructed in Taiwan for use at the 1967 Montreal Expo before they were incorporated into the Cultural Center.

Character-Defining Elements

Context

“Traditional Chinese” Façades are rare in Chinatown – this building is one of the few buildings in Chinatown with Chinese architectural elements. It is the only building with the decorative tile roof, wood panels, carved stone, and decorated brackets.

Façade

Gable and hip roof with multiple eaves represents one of the traditional Chinese roof styles of high-hierarchy architecture. It is characterized by glazed roof tiles, curving roofline and fired ceramic decorations at the ends of ridges. Two dragons are facing each other biting the main ridge and three horsemen are riding along each curving ridge. The roof, which is supported by wood rafters and brackets painted with Chinese red, gives a sense of flying bird. Balconies are depicted by the wood panels, sparrow braces and railings. These components are non-structural, but are representative of the classical Chinese architecture elements. The wood panels show detailed traditional Chinese patterns, for example the fortune clouds, dancing dragon and etc. The fortune clouds have also shaped the sparrow braces and newel posts of the railing. The windows to the balconies are decorated in Bogu pattern, which is consisted of randomly connected wooden brackets. Decorative molded cement blocks – are reflections of stone drums, lions which are typically built at both sides of entrances as water-barrier to protect timber structure in classical Chinese architecture. Although the cement blocks were not meant to prevent moisture penetration, the pattern of scroll.

Building Composition

Typical of many Philadelphia-area rowhomes, this building is composed of a front building, a piazza, and a rear building. The combination of this typology along with the Façade creates a unique building whose physical manifestation reflects the same inter-cultural connections that its previous use.

Piazza

Typical of a 1830s rowhome, the piazza is located at the junction of the front building and the back building in the layout and would have contained the main stairwell. Between the second and third floors, the original newel posts from the 1830s still exist incorporated into the new pattern of circulation. Visible in a closet under the stairs is an original acorn detail from the bottom of the newel post.

Curved Wall with Windows

A Victorian feature was to include a curved wall as the building narrowed, with windows looking onto the interior of the lot.

character-defining elements

Tolerance for Change Matrix

Building Element	Location	Period of Significance	General Condition	Tolerance for Change
Masonry Arches	Basement	Orig Construction (1830s)	Fair	Low
Moon Gate	First Floor	TT Chang (1960s)	Good	Low
Front Stairs	First Floor	TT Chang (1960s)	Good	Low
Piazza Stairwell Materials (newel, newel drop, handrails)	Second & Third Floor	Orig Construction (1830s)	Fair	Low
Coffered Ceiling	First Floor	TT Chang (1960s)	Good	Medium
Historic Window Frames	Second & Third Floor	Orig Construction (1830s)	Fair	Medium
Bay Window	Second Floor	Addition (1890s-1910s)	Poor	Medium
Florex Glass	Second Floor	Addition (1890s-1910s)	Fair	Medium
Balcony Sliding Doors (interior)	Third Floor	TT Chang (1960s)	Poor	High
Oval Window	Third Floor	Addition (1890s-1910s)	Poor	High

Preservation Plan

Preservation Plan

Preservation Philosophy

The Chinese Community Center's traditional Chinese façade and interior elements from the original 19th century rowhouse should be preserved because they are material expressions of the building's significance as a meeting point for the Chinese-American community and the population of greater Philadelphia.

Certain character defining elements have been identified for the façade and interior spaces. Any renovations for the building should incorporate and highlight these elements. The entire façade has been identified as important as celebration of traditional Chinese culture and Chinese-American self representation, as well as one of the rare examples of sinophilic architecture in Chinatown.

Our recommendation is that this building be re-opened as a space where the story of Chinese immigration in Philadelphia that is reflected in the building's materials can be more widely interpreted for the public.

Immediate Needs

Building in desperate need for an advocate within Chinatown

Building in desperate need of stabilization

Adapted from the Chinese pavilion at the 1967 Montreal World's Fair, the façade of this building was constructed of temporary materials which have deteriorated over time. It is necessary to assess the areas in which these temporary materials should be replaced with more permanent alternatives. Any replacements or changes will be informed by the Secretary of Interior Standard for Rehabilitation 6 and 9¹.

Stages of Recommendations:

Immediate

Structural analysis and repair both interior and exterior

Secure the property

Identify advocate within Chinatown

Open up lines of communication with building owner

Assessment of mechanical systems

1 6: Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

preservation plan

Primary

Restoration of the façade, consideration of façade easement

Rehabilitation of the interior

Continued advocacy to increase stakeholder base

Secondary

Redesign/renovate for more functional use

Long-term Goals

Ensure continued public access

Regular building maintenance

Ideas for Use

Chinatown History Museum

Traditional Asian Art Center

Mixed-use occupancy, ie non-profit office space, restaurant, tea room, gallery space, chess club, English/Chinese classes, library, theater space

Comparisons

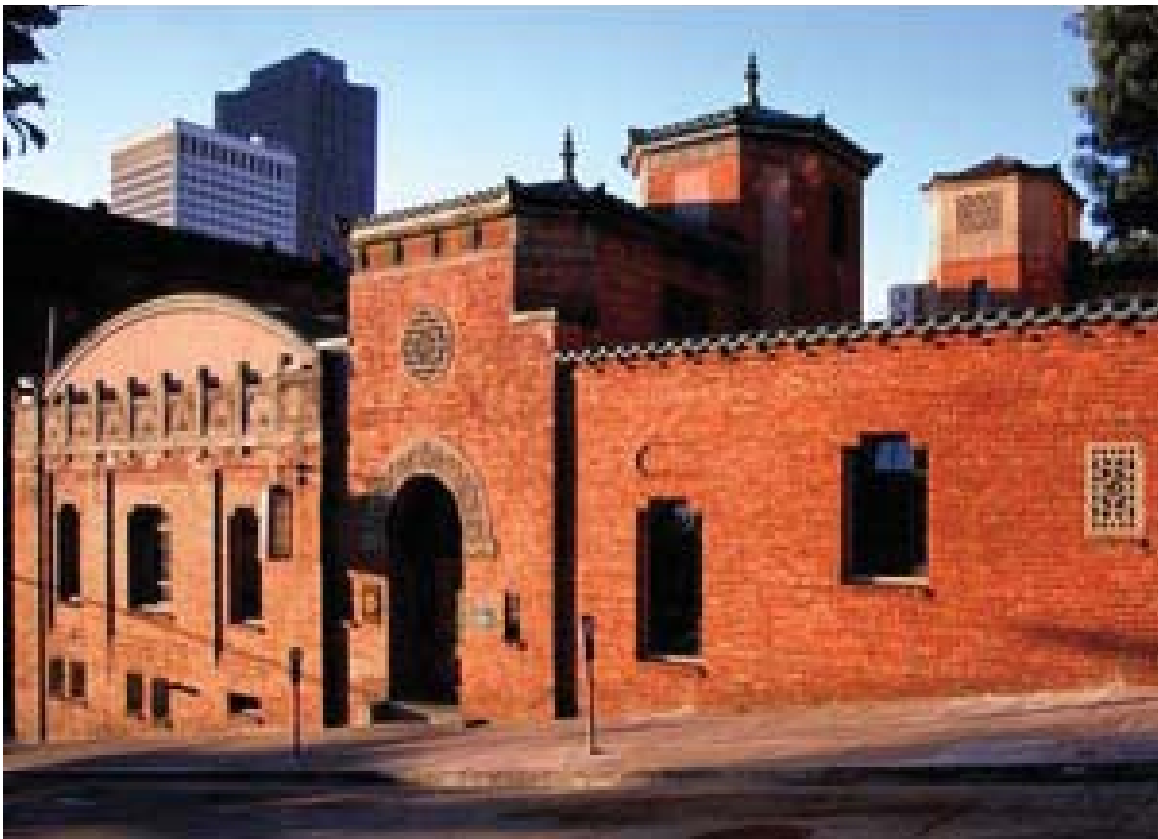
Research into comparable buildings was an important part of developing our preservation plan. In conducting this research we were interested in traditional preservation projects, completely new construction and partial design interventions.

Traditional Preservation approaches

In these examples no major alterations were made to the buildings façade and restorations were faithful to the original design. We were interested in why these buildings were considered significant enough to reinvest in and restore, how they were adapted for reuse and the design approach to modernizing interior spaces.

Example

Julia Morgan’s YWCA, located in San Francisco’s Chinatown, was vacant for 14 years after damage sustained from the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. The building is associated with a significant architect and the design is considered to be “a tribute to the people of Chinatown, symbolizing the aspirations of the wider Chinese community.” The building reopened in 2001 as the home of Chinese American Historic Society. Gymnasium space was renovated for museum galleries and a learning center. The restoration was recognized by National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2004.



comparisons

New Construction

In looking at new construction we wanted to examine the ways architects engaged with more traditional Chinatown architecture when designing new projects. Did they think buildings like the CCC were important to reference in their designs? Or was inspiration drawn more directly from contemporary Chinese architecture?

Examples

In these two examples decorative sunscreens were used to contextualize the new buildings with their surroundings. Color is an important element in the Vancouver example. In the Chicago building, titanium cladding is meant to evoke dragon scales. Projects like these attempt to mediate contemporary aesthetic with traditional pagoda-style structures that surround them.



Interventions

For these comparables we looked at the ways “Chinese-style” buildings were treated when more radical interventions were required. What aspects of the original building were preserved? What was changed?

In the San Francisco example Chinese-style elements had been added to an existing building. Both were considered significant enough to retain elements of each during the planning process. The Chinese style side gate became the main entrance. The building’s historic beams were retained and repainted, “as were parts of the hand-painted wooden and plaster ceiling, still peeking out from under the new tile.

Essentially, the architecture is “maintaining the historical integrity of what [Chinatown] stood for in [the past], and the new building appeals to the new generation.”

acknowledgements



Conclusions

After a semester long study of the material condition of the Chinatown Cultural Center, extensive stakeholder interviews, building and neighborhood specific research and thorough investigation into potential for future reuse, it is clear that while this building is valued within Chinatown for its rarity and reflection of traditional Chinese culture, the window for action to preserve its most significant features is narrowing. The primary façade, mostly comprised of temporary materials, is rapidly deteriorating. Deferred maintenance, termite damage and decades-old structural issues threaten the character defining features that make the building an important presence in the neighborhood and a symbol traditional uses of “Chinese-style’ architecture as self-representation and preservation.

Stakeholder interviews reveal a strong interest in the CCC’s preservation, but long-standing neighborhood feuds have prevented investment in the building. It is time that personal politics be shelved for the sake of the building itself. The cost of rehabilitation is rising and another decade of vacancy would result in material loss to the most important building fabric and complacency with regards to the buildings future. As one interview subject stated “if you don’t take care of it pretty soon you have no choice but to tear it down.” We hope that this studio project has clarified the significance of the Chinese Cultural Center as a neighborhood landmark and a rare example of ‘traditional Chinese-style’ architecture in Philadelphia.

Regardless of the future actions taken by the building’s owner, we hope our discussion of this site; its defining and historical features as well as its significance can serve to further inform the understanding of this building’s layered history. The outlined proposal for rehabilitation can serve as a tool to expand upon for any new users or owners of the building. We hope to soon see the red doors of 125 N 10th Street opened to the public so that all may be educated, enriched and inspired by the story of Chinatown history that the building tells.

Appendix A- Photo Index

Research and documentation of the site resulted in the compilation of a photographic record of the CCC Building's history and current conditions. The following appendix of images includes many wonderful pictures related to the site which were not included in our final report narrative. We hope that the reader might enjoy a deeper look into the building.

photo index



T.T. Chang and founding members of the Chinatown YMCA in 1955



T.T. Chang and Vicky Chang's marriage in 1959



Dinner at the second-floor YMCA.

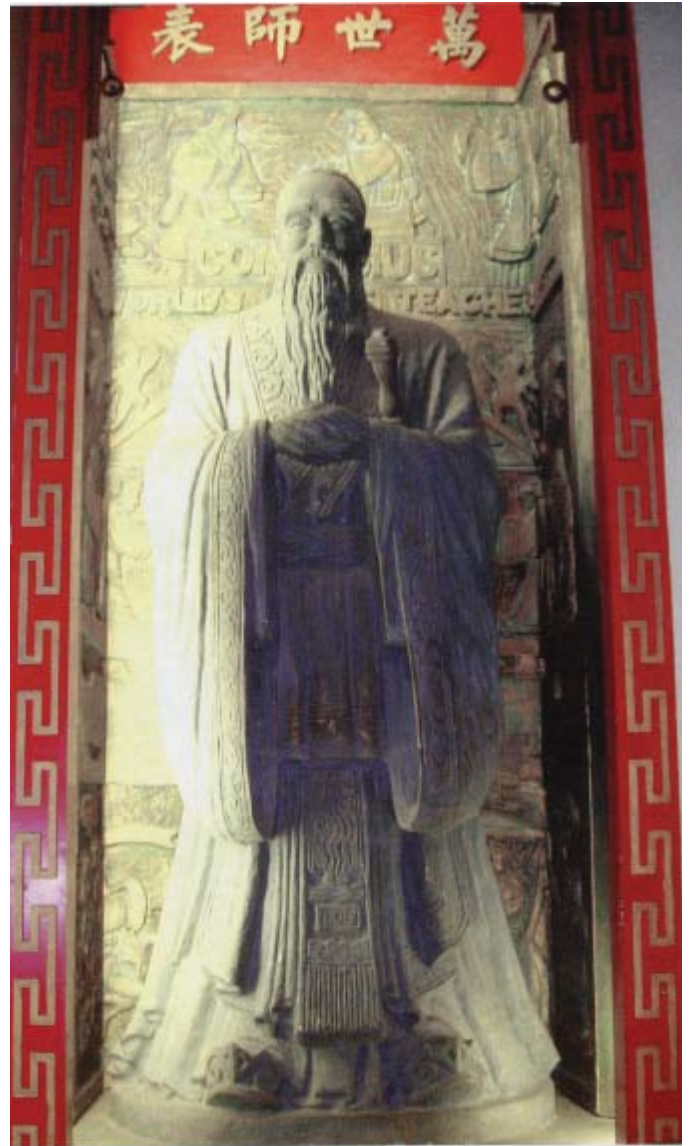


RIGHT: The Proposal for the YMCA Building in 1963

photo index



The Chinese Pavilion in 1967 Montreal Expo designed by C. C. Yang



The replicated nine-foot high statue of Confucius from Montreal Expo in the building



The YMCA incorporated to the Chinese Cultural and Community Center (CCCC) and underwent major renovation in 1971.

RIGHT: Celebrating the Center's grand opening



photo index



Cooking classes for housewives



The Center's Chinese language classes



Exhibition of rooster paintings at the Center



Governor Milton Sharp's visit to the CCCC



Senior citizens enjoying reading at Center's library



The Golden Dragon Club organized by CCCC joining Philadelphia's Mummers Parade in 1977

photo index



T.T. and a friend show off the Center's instrument collection, the dragon is visible in the background



Banquet held before the normalization of Chinese-American relationships with chefs from New York



After 1981, "Cuisine Teams" came from all over China for the annual banquets

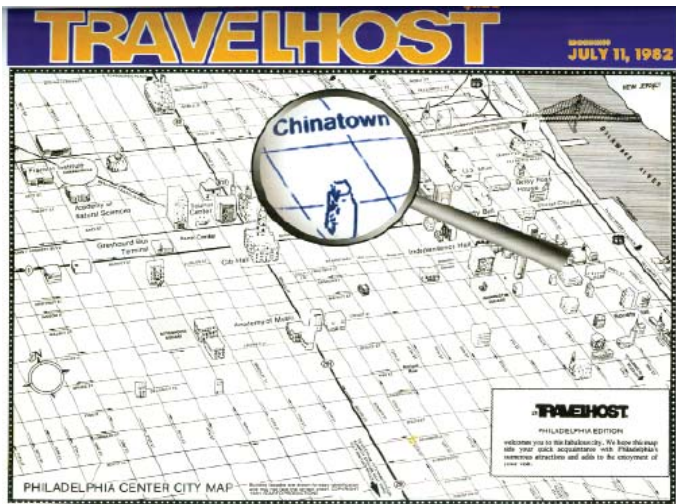


Student groups touring the CCCC



T.T. Chang's greeting to the patrons at the Chinese New Year's Banquet

photo index



The CCC listed as one of the attractions in Philadelphia in the American's #1 Travel Magazine (1982)



Floor joists above ceilings in the basement



Remains of electricity facilities, 1900s-1960s



Collapsed floor boards in northwest corner on the first floor



Basement addition under former alley



Exposed brick and concrete under floor boards on the first floor

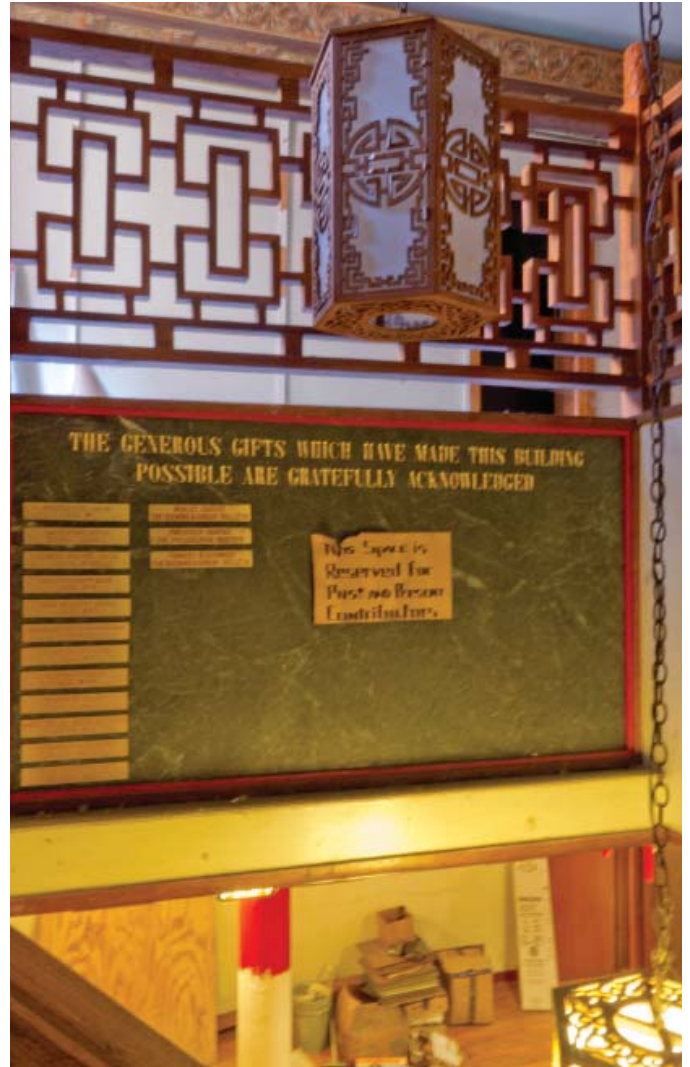
photo index



Timber frame supporting bay window on the second floor



Coffered ceiling on the first floor



The entry staircase with lanterns and donor sign above



Dragon boat shadow box in piazza on the third floor



Sign of former library on the third floor

photo index



Vestiges of a chimney in the rear of the building



Roof profile of piazza and back portion



Roof framing over the curved wall



Glazed roof tiles stored on the fire escape deck



Dragon decorations on the ridge of penthouse roof



Fire escape and HVAC duct work outside the back portion

photo index



Blockage of an opening at the back of side addition



Exit to rear yard



Outside view of the shadow box addition



Bay window blinded with vinyl siding



Coffered ceiling above gateway