

Community
History Walk
Sydney's
diverse people

CITY OF SYDNEY



Community History Walk

Sydney's diverse people

This walk will take you to the city's south into what was once the industrial backyard of Sydney. Its first buildings were factories, workshops and housing for some of the city's poorest citizens. Later it became a warehousing and market precinct, before transforming into a diverse, multicultural hub.



Allow about 1–2 hours for this walk.

Start at **Spanish Club (former) (1)** at Kent House, 88 Liverpool Street.

1

Spanish Club (former)

The number of Spanish migrants who arrived in Sydney from the 1950s was small by comparison with other post-war migrant groups, but Sydney's Spanish community established a firm downtown foothold when the Spanish Club opened its doors in 1962. For 50 years the Spanish Club occupied the grand Federation-era warehouse at 88 Liverpool Street. Around this hub, a colourful network of Spanish restaurants, delicatessens and nightclubs developed, earning the area the nickname Little Spain. The concentration of Spanish businesses has diminished in recent years, but this is where generations of Spanish and Latin American visitors and migrants have found a sense of familiarity.



Head west along Liverpool Street and cross over the pedestrian walk and bridge over Harbour Street. The **Chinese Garden of Friendship (2)** is on your left.

2

Chinese Garden of Friendship



Chinese Garden of Friendship, Darling Harbour, 2005
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The Chinese Garden of Friendship at Darling Harbour celebrates the sister state relationship of Guangdong province and NSW. In 1988 the gardens were a bicentennial gift to the city of Sydney from the ancient city of Guangzhou in southern China, the region where most of Sydney's early Chinese came from. The location of the gardens here also reflects longstanding Chinese

connections to the markets in Ultimo and Haymarket. The gardens were built on another significant industrial site. In the 1870s, Thomas Mort built a freezing depot here for his Fresh Food and Ice Company, using techniques pioneered by engineer, Eugène Dominique Nicolle. These Australian innovations in refrigeration revolutionised the country's export trade as well as its eating habits. The new technology also changed the face of Ultimo: the goods yard was soon surrounded by big commercial dairies, cold stores and a skating rink.



Walk south from the gardens until you reach Darling Square, which offers a range of shops, eateries and bars, as well as Darling Square Library. Otherwise, walk east up Goulburn Street until you reach the corner of Dixon and Goulburn streets, where you will find **Trades Hall (3)** on your left.



Detour: Darling Square

There has been a Chinese presence in Sydney for over 200 years. Many of the early Chinese Sydneysiders were market gardeners and traders. Between 1909 and 1915, the City Council built new produce markets on reclaimed mudflats at the head of Darling Harbour, close to the railway and wharves. Chinese traders and importers rented market space and stores from the council. Shops and restaurants followed, especially in Dixon Street which became the focus of Chinatown. Rooms above these shops sometimes became home for the Chinese traders and for retired gardeners who were unable to return home to China. Chinatown was refurbished in the 1980s as multiculturalism was embraced in Australian public life.



Trades Hall



Trades and Industrial Hall and Literary Institute Association of Sydney, Illuminated Address, 1906 (Drawing: State Library of NSW)

Trades Hall was designed by John Smedley and began construction in 1888 as a purpose-built facility for trade unions to meet in the pursuit of common goals. Today it is the headquarters of Unions NSW. The interiors still retain some early 20th century signage and the building houses a large collection of trade union banners used in May Day and Labor Day street marches. Step inside and imagine the raised voices singing 'The Internationale'.



Opposite the Trades Hall is the traditional paifang archway that will take you into **Dixon Street (4)**, the heart of Sydney's Chinatown.

4

Dixon Street



Opening of Dixon Street pedestrian mall, 1980
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Dixon Street, the centre of Sydney's Chinatown, is marked by ceremonial paifang gates, banners and signage for the many restaurants and businesses in the area. It was once home to many of the old clan associations who were actively involved in the welfare of the Chinese who came to try their luck in the goldfields during the 19th century.



Continue south along the street until you reach **50-54 Dixon Street (5)** on your left.

5

50-54 Dixon Street



Looking south along Dixon Street showing the Eastern Restaurant and Lean Sun Low Café, photograph by Ivan Iwe, October 1959
(Photograph: State Library of NSW, courtesy ACP Magazines Ltd)

This site has housed the Loon Fook Tong, Loong Yee Tong and Goon Yee Tong clubhouses since 1916. The clubhouses were built to serve people from the districts of Zengcheng and Dongguan, both in Guangdong Province, China. In 1918–36, 52 Dixon Street housed the offices of *The Tung Wah Times* newspaper and the NSW Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1913–65. The Eastern Restaurant operated at number 52 from 1952 to 1966. Lean Sun Low Café occupied number 54 from 1922 until the 1990s, and offered banquets, Chinese cakes, barbequed meats and its popular wonton soup.



Proceed south on the street until you reach **Kwong War Chong Building (6)** on the corner of Little Hay Street at 82-84 Dixon Street.

6

Kwong War Chong Building

This brick building was built in 1910 for the merchant, Philip Lee Chun, and his import and export business, Kwong War Chong and Company. Among the business' many offerings were tea, rice, oil, silk, satin, porcelain and lacquer ware, and fruit and vegetables. The business also provided postal services, money transfers, and immigration paperwork and translation services to the city's Chinese migrant community. In 1971 Eva Lee and Wong So Lin Pang, who lived in the premises with their families, opened the famous Hingara Chinese Restaurant, which operated on the site until 2017. The building is one of the oldest surviving buildings in Chinatown with direct associations to the Chinese Australian community.



Walk west along Little Hay Street until you reach Kimber Lane, where you will find **In Between Two Worlds (7)**.

7

In Between Two Worlds



Kimber Lane featuring *In Between Two Worlds* by artist Jason Wing
(Photograph: Paul Patterson, City of Sydney)

In 2011 Kimber Lane, a dingy service lane running parallel to Dixon Street, was transformed by Sydney artist Jason Wing. By night the silver figures light up the lane and the cloud murals with an otherworldly blue glow. The half-human, half-spirit figures, inspired by the Aboriginal and Chinese heritage of the artist, represent our past, present and future ancestors.



Proceed south to the end of Kimber Lane until you reach Hay Street.

8

Haymarket



Hay and Sussex streets, Haymarket, c1919
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The area around Hay Street has been known as Haymarket since the 1830s. At that time it was on the outskirts of town and featured Sydney's main cattle and hay market. In the 1860s, fruit and vegetable markets were built here. Market gardeners, including many Chinese, would bring their produce to market and stay overnight in the nearby boarding houses.



Circumnavigate **Paddy's Markets (9)** walking along Hay Street, and turn into Quay Street.

9

Paddy's Markets



The former No 1 Vegetable Market building on the corner of Hay and Thomas streets, c1909 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The Municipal Markets were designed by the City Council architects, Robert Brodrick and James Merriman. The series of market buildings, including vegetable, fruit, poultry and fish markets as well as cold storage works, were constructed in 1909–12. They were the source of all the fresh produce in the city and provided accommodation for about 310 carts with horses and a similar number of stalls on benches. It became known as Paddy's Markets and still trades today, even after the development of the multi-storey residential and commercial complex above – Market City.



Walk south-east along Quay Street until you reach the intersection at Ultimo Road and can see the **Sydney Markets' Bell Tower (10)**.

10

Sydney Markets' Bell Tower



Municipal Markets, Quay Street, Haymarket, 1930
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The foundation stone for this market building is dated 1910. Most of the building has been demolished, but the tower was conserved in 1985 when new university buildings were constructed on the site. On one of the old cart openings on Quay Street you can still see the painted name of A Yee, a firm of produce agents.



Diagonally opposite from the bell tower you will see a 3-storey brick building – **Aaron's Hotel (11)**.

11

Aaron's Hotel

This building at 37 Ultimo Road is one of the most intact of the old market buildings. Also known as the Wing On Building, it was leased to this large Chinese firm for many years. The Wing On Company began in Sydney in 1897, importing nuts, tea, rice, fireworks and ginger, and eventually it became a major retailer back in China and Hong Kong.



Continue east along Ultimo Road and until you reach **The Kuomintang (KMT) (12)** at 75-77 Ultimo Road.

12

The Kuomintang (KMT)



A luncheon at the Kuomintang rooms, Haymarket, photograph by Sam Hood, 1942 (Photograph: State Library of NSW)

This building has functioned as the headquarters of the Chinese Nationalist Party of Australasia (Kuo Min Tang or KMT) for over a century since its construction in 1921. It was designed by the Irish-born architect and civil engineer, Francis Ernest Stowe. In 1923–49 it housed the *Chinese Times* newspaper and its offices contain one of the largest and most significant archival collections related to KMT's history outside of Asia.



Retrace your steps and turn right onto Thomas Street. Walk north along the street and then turn right at Hay Street where you will find **Golden Water Mouth (13)** at the corner of Hay and Sussex streets.

13

Golden Water Mouth



Golden Water Mouth by Lin Li
(Photograph: Jamie Williams, City of Sydney)

The *Golden Water Mouth* sculpture on the corner of Hay and Sussex streets stands at the entrance of the 'village' of Chinatown, marking the place where, in a traditional Chinese village, a wooden pagoda would be built to protect the rivers and ensure wealth to the village. The artwork by Chinese-Australian sculptor Lin Li was installed in 1999. Said to represent positive energy and good fortune, the sculpture incorporates the Shui Kou elements – or 5 natural elements – of wood, water, earth, fire and gold to harmonise the natural environment with the urban environment. Water flows from the golden sculpture to symbolise money and life. The use of gold leaf provides a historical link to the early Chinese settlers in the gold fields that surrounded the site of the tree's original location in Condobolin, NSW.



Walk along Hay Street and cross over George Street.

14

Hay Street Chambers (Museum of Chinese in Australia)



The Hay Street Chambers on the corner of George and Hay streets, c1900
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The little sandstone building on the corner of Hay and George streets was built in 1875 as the Southern Branch of the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney. Since then the ground floor has hosted a wide array of businesses, including a café, a shoe shop, a martial arts practice and a video store. In 1990 the Council restored the building and in 1992, it opened as the Haymarket Branch of the City of Sydney Library. It was replaced in 2019 by the Darling Square Library. The old bank building will soon become the Museum of Chinese in Australia.



Walk east along Hay Street for the neighbouring building on the corner of Parker Lane.

15

Cyril's Fine Foods (former)



Cyril's Delicatessen, photograph by Mark Stevens, 12 March 2000
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

When a southern Italian couple opened a coffee shop in Haymarket in 1961, Sydneysiders who hankered for good espresso finally had somewhere to go. In 1956 Czechoslovakian immigrant, Cyril Vincenc, established his eponymous delicatessen on the next block. Both European businesses thrived for many decades, with Cyril's shop closing in 2015. Here in Sydney's Chinatown in the 1950s and 60s, it was possible to detect the early stirrings of the multicultural food movement which later transformed Australian food culture.



Walk through the covered plaza on the northern side of Hay Street into Campbell Street. On your right is the **Capitol Theatre (16)**.

16

Capitol Theatre



'The Harem set', Capitol Theatre, photograph by Sam Hood, 1930s
(Photograph: State Library of NSW)

This building was designed by George McRae and completed in 1893 as a fruit and vegetable market. It was located next door to older markets that had been on the site since the 1860s. Originally a single-storey building, the Belmore Markets was rebuilt with an extra floor in the early 20th century, and used as a circus venue, a cinema and a theatre. If you look up, you will see that the terracotta pediment is decorated with fruits and surprisingly, choko vines – a humble vegetable which has now all but disappeared from the menu. By the 1980s the building had become very rundown. It was restored by Ipoh Garden for the City Council in the early 1990s. The exuberant 1920s interior, imported from the United States, is intended to evoke a romantic courtyard with a ceiling lit to imitate a star-studded night sky.



Head past the theatre along Campbell Street and turn left onto Pitt Street. You will find the premises of the **Chinese Women's Association (17)** on the corner of Pitt and Goulburn streets.

17

Chinese Women's Association



Chinese dragon ball, photographed by Ivan Ive, June 1947
(Photograph: State Library of NSW, courtesy ACP Magazines Ltd)

The Chinese Women's Association was set up in 1954 by Shu Kan (Phyllis Wang), wife of the Chinese Consul in Sydney. The association met at the KMT building (12) and for larger gatherings, at the Chequers Restaurant at the corner of Pitt and Goulburn streets. Phyllis Wang was instrumental in organising social activities for the Chinese community including fashion parades to raise money for Chinese and Australian charities. She was also an organiser of the annual Sydney Dragon Ball from the 1940s, which was the main social event for the Chinese community from when it started in 1938 until the late 1970s.



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