

POSTCARD HISTORY SERIES

Manhattan's Chinatown

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Daniel Ostrom
Foreword by Mary Sham

address only

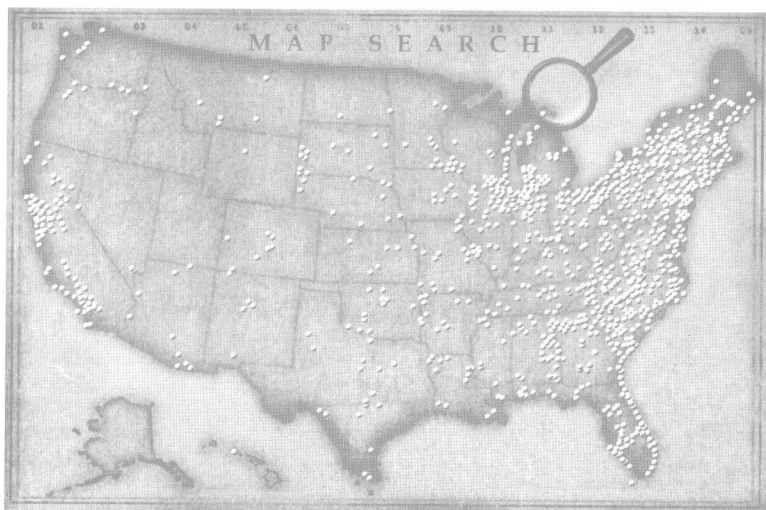


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POSTCARD HISTORY SERIES

*Manhattan's
Chinatown*

On the cover: In this real-photo postcard image taken in 1937, a large crowd of people is gathered along Mott Street. The crowd is engrossed by the orator's words. (Author's collection.)

POSTCARD HISTORY SERIES

Manhattan's Chinatown

Daniel Ostrow

Foreword by Mary Sham



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*Dedicated to my Mom, Barbara. If it were not for her motivation,
this book would never have been written.*

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Unless otherwise noted, all images are from the author's collection.

FOREWORD

Having been born and raised in New York City's Chinatown and having been a teacher for the New York City public school system, I appreciate the educational value that a local history book such as this can provide to the reader. I feel a great sense of love, pride, and devotion for New York City's Chinatown. Having taught school in the Chinatown community for over 30 years, I sense a loss of identity among many of the young people of the Chinatown of today. It saddens me to see that many of them lack that same strong connection to our Chinese heritage that we had when we were youngsters. I feel it is of critical importance that all people maintain a strong tie to their cultural roots, as well as the traditions and teachings of their forefathers. Being familiar with one's heritage can offer much valuable enrichment and may enhance a person's character with qualities such as respect and honor. I find great value in the interesting scenes and historical images that are presented in this fine book and feel it may act as a catalyst to the reader inviting them to delve deeper into their own culture and history.

—Mary Sham



This northwestern view of lower Mott Street was taken in the early 1900s. It displays an unusually immaculate pre-festival Mott Street. Also a rare glimpse of the short-lived Imperial Restaurant at 5 Mott Street can be seen. The Imperial Restaurant was a very early competitor and next-door neighbor of the Port Arthur Restaurant. Notice how similar the two signs are in shape and style.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-19th century, the United States became known to the Chinese as “Gold Mountain” and was attractive for several reasons. The prospect of gold, a high standard of living, as well as an option to send money back home to the immigrant’s family, served as huge incentives in fueling Chinese migration to the United States.

Prior to the 1870s, it was comparably few Chinese who chose to settle in New York City. Most Chinese preferred the well-established Chinese communities of California. It was there that most of the financial opportunities in gold prospecting and in railroad work existed. In 1855, Quimbo Appo had become the first documented Chinese person to live in New York City. He made his living selling teas and tobacco. A few years later in 1858, a Hong Kong merchant named Ah Ken opened a cigar shop on Park Row. He became Mott Street’s first Chinese resident. A few hundred of the very early Chinese to have settled in New York City relocated from Havana. To this day, Havana is famous for being the largest producer of the world’s finest cigars. So it comes as no wonder that one of the primary occupations of the early New York Chinese settlers was as cigar makers. In about 1873, a Chinese named Wo Kee opened Mott Street’s first Chinese retail business located at 8 Mott Street. At that time, Chinatown consisted of only three streets, Pell Street, Doyers Street, and the lower foot of Mott Street. With Wo Kee setting the trend, more Chinese soon followed. Businesses such as laundries, Chinese restaurants, curio shops, and Chinese general stores were flourishing in the enclave. However, up until the 1870s, the Chinese population in Chinatown remained relatively sparse. It was only when anti-Chinese sentiment, fueled by bigotry and racism, surmounted that Chinese migration from the West Coast to New York City began. By the 1880s, New York City’s Chinatown was developing rapidly. New York City chapters of Chinese family associations, as well as Chinese fraternal organizations, were already in place. However in 1882, discriminatory legislation prevented Chinese from settling in the United States and becoming citizens. It also prevented wives and families of Chinese men from accompanying them, thus creating what would become known as “the bachelor society.” It was only after the United States and China became allies in World War II that the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed. Chinese women immigrated to New York City by the thousands and soon returned Chinatown to a community of families rather than single men. Finally in 1965, all discriminatory restrictions on immigration that were based on race were abolished. Today Chinatown is a thriving and vibrant New York City community.

PORT ARTHUR RESTAURANT, INC.

OFFICE: WOrth 2-5890

(CHINATOWN)

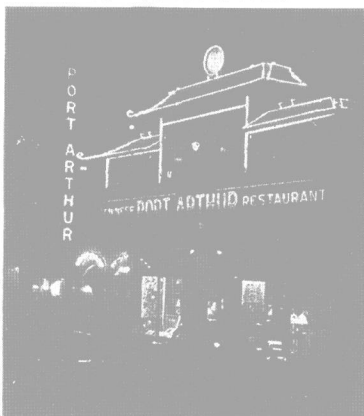
BOOTH: WOrth 2-8864

LUNCH

35¢

DINNER

55¢



A La Carte at all Hours

Special Rates for
Family Dinner

Private Rooms for
Large or Small Parties

Real Chinese Atmosphere

11 A. M. to 1 A. M.

Sat. to 4 A. M.

7-9 MOTT STREET

NEW YORK CITY

This ink blotter for the Port Arthur Restaurant was presented to customers just as postcards were to facilitate new business. One of the attractions was the low priced 35¢ complete lunch and the 55¢ deluxe dinner. This advertising was very effective, especially during the time of the Great Depression when they were issued. The Port Arthur Restaurant emphasized its “Real Chinese Atmosphere” and included a picture of the beautiful front of the building.

The Restaurants of courteous service & tastier Chinese food

LICHEE WAN | LICHEE VILLAGE

荔

11 MOTT ST. CHINATOWN
NEW YORK CITY

枝

TEL. WOrth 2-7748

JERICO TURNPIKE (ROUTE 25)
COMMACK, L.I.

荔

TEL. COMMACK 1202

枝

灣

Complete LUNCH **35¢** De Luxe DINNER **55¢**

Famous Chinese
FAMILY DINNERS
SERVED AT ALL HOURS

LEONG POON, PROP

CHARLES & OSCAR HOH, MGRS

Air
CONDITIONED
OPEN DAY
AND NIGHT



This ink blotter for the Lichee Wan restaurant, which was the Port Arthur Restaurant's competitor as well as next-door neighbor, advertised the exact same prices. The Lichee Wan emphasized its “courteous service and tastier Chinese food” and included pictures of food items. It also advertised that it was air conditioned. It was only in this aspect that the Lichee Wan restaurant surpassed the Port Arthur Restaurant. Air-conditioned restaurants were indeed a rarity in the 1930s.

One

EARLY CHINATOWN BUSINESSES

The Port Arthur Restaurant was established in 1897 and continuously operated for over 85 years. Its original founder was Chu Gam Fai. The restaurant was named after a city in the northeastern China coast where the first victory of an Asian power over a European power occurred in 1894. The restaurant occupied the second and third floors of 7–9 Mott Street. The Port Arthur Restaurant was the very first restaurant to receive a liquor license in New York City's Chinatown. It had many different dining halls. The upper floor was reserved for private parties and banquets, while the lower floor was allocated for small groups or after hour slummers. *Slummers*, a term that started prior to the Gay Nineties, were American tourists in search of exotic adventure. Many local Chinese had their wedding parties and family ceremonial dinners at the Port Arthur Restaurant, as it was well known for its delicious Chinese dishes and delicacies. The Port Arthur Restaurant was equally famous for its authentic Chinese decor. These included inlaid pearl mahogany tables, teakwood chairs, ornate wood carved panels, and windscreens.

Soy Kee and Company was started by Chu Ho, who came to New York City in the 1880s. His store was originally located at 36 Pell Street. The second floor was occupied by the First Class Chinese Restaurant, which remained at that location until 1909. In 1897, he moved Soy Kee and Company to a former horse stable at 7–9 Mott Street and soon shared the building with the brand-new Port Arthur Restaurant. Soy Kee and Company was not only an importer of fine Chinese goods but an exporter as well. The store was well stocked with curios, chinaware, lamps, imported Chinese silks, embroideries, ivory carvings, imported Chinese teas, candies, dried fruits, coffees, canned foods, kimonos, pajamas, and many other items. In 1923, Soy Kee and Company opened on Fifth Avenue in the Dunhill Building where it remained for 10 more years.

順旅

PORT ARTHUR

inc.
7 and 9 Mott Street
Telephone Worth 2-5890 **NEW YORK**

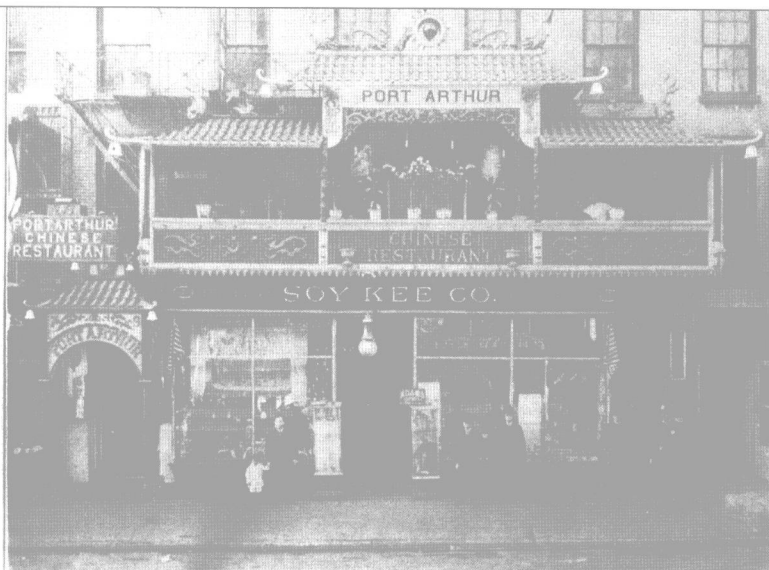
Subway Station: Worth Street.
Elevated Station: Chatham Square.

迎 恭

OUR SPECIAL LUNCHEON IS SERVED EVERY DAY
FROM 11 A. M. TO 3 P. M.
EXCEPT SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS

This image displays the dinner menu for the famous Port Arthur Restaurant, which was located at 7-9 Mott Street. It had been a dining institution in Chinatown since 1899. This menu displays pricing representative of the 1930s.

SOY KEE CO., 7-9 Mott Street, New York.



FRONT VIEW OF STORE.
COMPLIMENTS
OF

SOY KEE & CO.

7 AND 9 MOTT STREET --- NEW YORK
WHOLESALE - RETAIL

Easy to reach near corner Chatham Square and Worth Street

Two successful businesses on Mott Street during the early days of New York City's Chinatown were Soy Kee and Company and the Port Arthur Restaurant. They were located above one another at 7-9 Mott Street, as depicted here in one of a series of postcards put out by Soy Kee and Company in 1899.

PORT ARTHUR RESTAURANT, 7-9 Mott Street, New York.



THE KITCHEN.

COMPLIMENTS
OF

SOY KEE & CO.

7 AND 9 MOTT STREET --- NEW YORK
WHOLESALE - RETAIL

Easy to reach near corner Chatham Square and Worth Street

This postcard shows the gas-lit kitchen of the 1899 Port Arthur Restaurant. Typical of the time, one can see the ventilation intake area over the stove is non-screened. The ducts themselves were constructed of the same ornate pressed tin sheeting that was commonly used on tenement ceilings of the day.

ARTHUR RESTAURANT, 7-9 Mott Street, New York.



A FAVORITE NOOK.
COMPLIMENTS

OF

SOY KEE & CO.

7 AND 9 MOTT STREET --- NEW YORK
WHOLESALE - RETAIL
to reach near corner Chatham Square and Worth Street

The Port Arthur Restaurant was divided into several different rooms, each designed to fit the individual need of the clientele. This small area, described as a favorite nook, was ideal for use as a dining room during slow off peak periods and would most suitably oblige a sparse, wee hour's crowd. It would also be used to accommodate a small private party.

PORT ARTHUR RESTAURANT, 7-9 Mott Street, New York



THE MAIN DINING ROOM.
COMPLIMENTS

OF

SOY KEE & CO.

7 AND 9 MOTT STREET --- NEW YORK
WHOLESALE - RETAIL
Easy to reach near corner Chatham Square and Worth Street

The Port Arthur Restaurant's main dining room contained the main entrance and the cashier's counter. It was the first room as well as the last room to be seen by the patrons. It was cooled by huge ceiling fans like the one pictured. In the cooler months, the blades would be repositioned to re-circulate the heat away from the ceiling.

PORT ARTHUR RESTAURANT, 7-9 Mott Street, New York.



THE EAST HALL,
COMPLIMENTS
OF

SOY KEE & CO.

7 AND 9 MOTT STREET --- NEW YORK
WHOLESALE - RETAIL

Easy to reach near corner Chatham Square and Worth Street

Of all the Port Arthur Restaurant dining rooms, the East Hall was the most ornately decorated. Like the other rooms, it also displayed teak and mahogany inlaid marble, and inlaid mother of pearl tables, teakwood chairs, and intricately hand-carved teakwood room dividers, as well as decorative lanterns and chandeliers. For entertainment, the east hall had a baby grand piano.

SOY KEE CO., 7-9 Mott Street, New York



THE RECEPTION ROOM IN STORE,
COMPLIMENTS
OF

SOY KEE & CO.

7 AND 9 MOTT STREET --- NEW YORK
WHOLESALE - RETAIL

Easy to reach near corner Chatham Square and Worth Street

This postcard shows the reception room for the Soy Kee and Company. It was not only a richly ornate waiting room bordered by Chinese windcreens and an elaborate altar table, but also a conference area where well-healed proprietors sipped tea with clientele as business was discussed.