

# Chinese Islanders

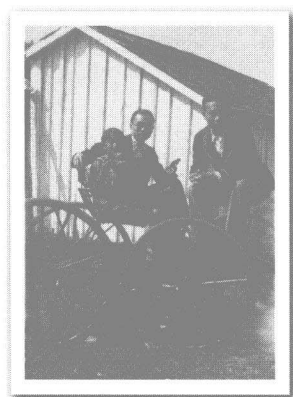
# 爱岛华人史

Making a Home in the New World

ng-Min Chiang

# Chinese Islanders

Making a Home in the New World



姜宏民

Hung-Min Chiang

Island Studies Press  
Charlottetown 2006

**Chinese Islanders: Making a Home in the New World**

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Project co-ordination: Laura Lee Howard  
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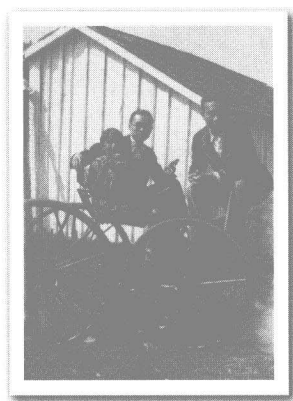
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献给



## DEDICATION

Dedicated to the people of Prince Edward Island,  
whose co-operation made this project possible.





# 爱岛华人史

— about the Chinese title of this book

A common Chinese name for Prince Edward Island is

爱德华王子岛

(which reads as *ai de hua wang zi dao*).

爱德华	(ai de hua)	=	a phonetic rendering of Edward
王子	(wan zi)	=	prince
岛	(dao)	=	island

In the present book, however, only the first and last characters 爱 and 岛 in the six-character Chinese name 爱德华王子岛 are retained to designate Prince Edward Island (a common method of abbreviation in Chinese). Hence the title of the book is 爱岛华人史 (ai dao hua ren shi).

爱岛	=	Prince Edward Island
华人	(hua ren)	= Chinese
史	(shi)	= history

Since the first character, (爱), happens to mean "love" in the Chinese language, (爱岛) (ai dao) has both the meaning "love island" or "island-loving." Thus, the current title (爱岛华人史) could mean A History of Chinese on Prince Edward Island, A History of Chinese on Love Island or A History of the Island-loving Chinese. A title with three layers of meanings may be quite fitting for a book chronicling Chinese immigrants' long struggle to make this beautiful Island their new home.

\*This book has adopted the Simplified Chinese in recording Chinese names even though they were originally written in the Traditional Chinese.



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## *Illustrations: Chapter Dividers*

### *Chapter 1*

Top: Gravestone of Louisa Maria Hooper, born "Louiza Maria Esperanza" the earliest known Chinese Islander; (inset) excerpt from Cundall diary (Photos by H. M. Chiang)

Bottom: A Chinese family in China, 1898 (Chiang family collection)

### *Chapter 2*

Top & bottom: Chinese railroad workers (Courtesy of the Chinese Canadian National Council's Chinese Canadian Cultural Online Project: [www.ccnc.ca/cccop](http://www.ccnc.ca/cccop))

### *Chapter 3*

Top: Aerial view of Charlottetown city core, circa 1935 (Courtesy of Friendly Pharmacy)

Bottom: A lonely married Chinese bachelor (Courtesy of the Chinese Canadian National Council's Chinese Canadian Cultural Online Project: [www.ccnc.ca/cccop](http://www.ccnc.ca/cccop))

### *Chapter 4*

Top left: George Ling with daughters Anne, Jane, and grandson Michael, 1975 (Annette Ling family collection)

Top right: Harry Thom with son Daniel, circa 1929 (Courtesy of Leah Doyle)

Bottom right: Rosemary Ling with her half-brother Zhaobo in China, 1980 (Courtesy of Rosemary Ling)

Bottom left: Zhaobo's letter to his father, 1937 (Courtesy of Rosemary Ling)

### *Chapter 5*

Top: Edgar and Effie Chan, after attending a wedding in Summerside, 1944 (Courtesy of Blanche Hogg)

Bottom: Prince of Wales College Hong Kong students with their snow sculpture, "The Amity Bridge," 1968 (Special Collections, Robertson Library, UPEI)

### *Chapter 6*

Top: Annelies Barkema with daughter Aili at The Great Wall (Courtesy of Barkema family)

Bottom: Mei Lin (left) and Lian Barkema in PEI (Courtesy of Barkema family)

### *Conclusion*

Top: David Kong (right) and the author discussing the Chinese Islanders project, 2004 (Photo by Michelle Kong)

Bottom: Peacocks, the Chinese symbol of dignity and beauty (H. M. Chiang collection)

## Foreword



Hung-Min Chiang set out to write this history of the Chinese Canadian community on Prince Edward Island because, as he was told, "no one else would do it."

What a daunting task it must have been.

No group of Islanders would be harder to document than these few Chinese settlers, who, for obvious reasons, preferred to remain anonymous and to live below the social horizon, leading "quiet inconspicuous lives." There were few records, fewer accurate ones, no personal biographies for guidance, few letters, and no survivors from the "early days." Added to that was a "discontinuing of generations"; that is, a period of decline between the 1940s and 1960s when the community came close to disappearing. This last factor shattered the links in the chain of social and family history that could have been so helpful in a work like this.

Nevertheless, Chiang has accomplished a series of minor miracles. With archeological precision, he has assembled and interpreted almost every piece of evidence available and has provided us with a coherent picture of the trials and triumphs of this tiny community which has existed on the Island in three different centuries. The letters, the sites where the early Chinese ran their businesses, the photos: each one bespeaks much hard work and keen insight. And, though he graciously acknowledges the help that local people gave him, in the end this work is his.

The most moving part of the book is in the description of individual cases, in Chapter Four. The depictions of young men—lonely, lonesome for

"home," strangers in a strange land, isolated, and often racially oppressed—is powerful and touching.

It is difficult to recount the history of any minority group such as the Chinese without becoming focused on the racially motivated trials they faced in their daily life. Often, these sad references are the only ones we have, and as a folklorist I can add one to the list. This is a reference in "The Prince County Jail," a traditional Prince Edward Island song from the 1930s still known in West Prince County. The inmates of the Summerside jail, with their crimes, are listed, and they include "Old Ezra Durant is in here with us now / For beating two Chinamen up in a row."

These were the realities of the Chinese community, and the author does not avoid them. Yet, he recounts them with a serenity that carries with it the sublime sadness of the human plight. And this, in my opinion, is the work's great strength.

First works are always difficult just because they are first works. This book, for the reasons I have mentioned, presented even more onerous problems than most. Yet, I cannot think of anything of importance that Chiang has not covered. Other research will turn up small items, but this first work on the Chinese on Prince Edward Island will be definitive for a long time.

—*John Cousins*

## *Preface*



During the week before the Christmas holidays, 2000, I was asked to write an article on the Chinese community on Prince Edward Island. This urgent request from a local publication was relayed to me by David Kong, then the president of the Chinese Canadian Association of Prince Edward Island. The article in question was expected to cover, among other things, a history of Chinese settlement on Prince Edward Island. "The deadline is sometime after the New Year," I was told.

With my meek knowledge of history and a fast-approaching deadline, I hesitated, but after being told "nobody else would do it," I consented. It was not until I embarked on the project that I realized why everyone else had declined this assignment. Unlike many other cultural groups on the Island, Chinese Islanders had never been a focus of any study. Most Islanders are lucky, since they can walk into any library on Prince Edward Island, shake the shelves, and books that relate to their ancestors will fall in their laps. Not so with the Chinese. Even though the Chinese have been here for more than 150 years, there are no references to them in any Island history books, not even as a footnote. Equally strange is the apparent absence of grave sites and death records for the early Chinese immigrants.<sup>1</sup> If the old Chinese ever existed, they all seemed to have vanished into thin air, existing only as ethereal ghosts without names or addresses.<sup>2</sup> With no leads to guide me, I felt like "searching for a needle in the vast ocean," to use a common Chinese expression.

After an agonizingly slow start, I managed to gather just enough information by the following spring to come up with a draft. However, before

I had a chance to submit it, the magazine that asked for the article folded, and I was left with the paper and no prospect of publication. Fortunately, the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island came to the rescue and adopted the orphaned project with timely funding from Canadian Heritage. Since then, the project has taken off, and, thanks to the contributions of many Islanders, the book now contains much more information than was originally thought possible.

It would be less than candid to say I knew the significance of this project from the beginning. The truth is that the importance of this undertaking did not dawn on me until I began to unravel some of the mysteries of the lost generation of Chinese Islanders. It was only then I began to see a larger picture, and the search was on. The situation I found myself in was not unlike a boy scout expecting a leisurely Sunday excursion, suddenly realizing he is on a serious search-and-rescue mission.

Every immigrant has a story to tell. This book is, in a sense, the voices of the Chinese community from the past and the present. It must be said, however, that the book's coverage is rather uneven. A substantial portion of the book is devoted to the early Chinese settlers, for several reasons. The most important reason is that there is a great urgency in discovering and preserving their heritage before it is lost forever. Even as the project was in progress, several key individuals passed away, taking with them memories and knowledge of the past. Second, though few in numbers, the early Chinese immigrants with descendants still living on the Island provide us with an opportunity to study the development and adaptation of immigrants over several generations, not just one or two—as is the case of more recent immigrants. Third, although it is difficult to gather information about individuals who are no longer living, they help provide us with a more complete picture, as we are not obliged to present only the positive, meritorious side of their lives.

Since the information on the life of the early Chinese is so scarce and difficult to come by, I have tried to chronicle every single incident that came to my attention. For instance, I have tried to quote in full relevant newspaper articles whenever possible, regardless of their nature, good or bad; at the very least, I have tried to insert a reference to them. I hope that such a full presentation will give the reader a general sense of how the Chinese on Prince Edward Island lived and how they were received by the local community.

The final part of the book introduces more recent immigrants. Since there are quite a few of them and the space does not permit me to introduce each individual in depth, the main objective is to present the general trend and overall picture.

The present research is basically spadework. The work, as it stands, will contain errors and omissions. It is hoped that these deficiencies will be

corrected by future researchers. If the publication of this book can stimulate interest and discussion and serve as a springboard for a more comprehensive and definitive work, this book has served its purpose.

## *Acknowledgements*

It would be impossible to list all the people who have helped with this project. I am grateful to David Kong, who talked me into taking on what was supposed to be a little holiday writing project. Since then a number of people have come forward to support the project in various capacities, including Claire Arsenault, Harry Baglole, Leigh Gao, Ann Howatt, and Irene Novaczek. The Institute of Island Studies and the Department of Canadian Heritage have provided structural and funding support.

My thanks are also due those who helped during a difficult initial stage, including William MacMicken, Marilyn Thomsen, and Gary Ramsey. I am grateful to all the staff members at the diamond mine known as the Provincial Archives and Record Office of Prince Edward Island. Without their courteous service, I would not have had the joy of finding diamonds in the rough.

I want to thank all of those who allowed me to interview them and record their stories. My special thanks go to the descendants of early Chinese Islanders: Rosemary Ling, John Ling, Lorne Yeo, Leah Doyle, and Annette Ling and her many children. Many other Islanders from all walks of life shared their memories of the early Chinese, adding new dimensions to the stories. I regret that stories of many recent immigrants, collected and considered, were eventually omitted from the present volume due to space limitations.

A number of people went out of their way to help: Alek Choo, Monica Wu, and David Kong provided the past records of the Chinese Canadian Association of Prince Edward Island; Waldron Leard shared information regarding the early Chinese in Souris; Donna Collings unearthed a pristine Chinese laundry business card at the Garden of the Gulf Museum, Montague; Fred Horne uncovered a Chan's Restaurant menu, Summerside; Jean MacKay and David and Sophia Wong went extra miles gathering materials related to Chinese residents in Summerside; and Boyde Beck and Anna MacDonald gave me an opportunity to present initial findings at the 2002 Island Lecture Series.

The following people read the manuscript at various stages and offered many useful suggestions: Godfrey Baldacchino, Ru-Ying Chiang, John Cousins, Yvette Doucette, Banseng Hoe, Frank Ledwell, Gordy McCarville, Edward MacDonald, Don Rasmussen, John Smith, and David Weale.



Countless people helped me in other ways. They include Jolene Chan, Tracey Comeau, Zhiliang Ding, Venona Fraser, Leroy Gauthier, Allan Graham, Marion Hannaford, Bill Hogan, Warren Hood, Arlene Hood, Lucy Lin, Dian Ling, Simon Lloyd, Jason MacNeil, Todd Saunders, Huijun Sun, Claire Trainor, and Frank Zakem

Then, there is a team of very dedicated people whose services I depended upon heavily and regularly.

- Catherine Hennessey, a historian and guardian of Island heritage, generously shared numerous materials from her collections. Much of her information has become the backbone of this book.
- Gary Carroll, my fellow treasure-hunter at the PAROPEI, helped me find gems, sometimes in most unlikely places. An experienced researcher, he also helped me decipher any handwriting I had trouble making out in old documents.
- Faye Pound amassed the information on the early Chinese in Summerside, with help from Jim Schurman, Paul Schurman, and John McNeill. Faye also took me on a guided tour of Summerside, deepening my understanding of this historic town.
- Gordy McCarville provided important information on Charlottetown. Without his contribution, the section on Charlottetown would have much less grounding.
- Christine Gorman is a selfless, devoted volunteer. She systematically combed through old newspapers from 1890 through 1913 for anything and everything related to Chinese Islanders. With enthusiasm and energy she worked tirelessly until her untimely death in February 2006. She shall be forever remembered.
- Jane Ledwell had an unenviable task of editing a long and often uneven manuscript written by a novice writer with English as his second language. She worked with much understanding, patience, and tender loving care.
- Laura Lee Howard was at once a co-ordinator, consultant, research associate, cheerleader, and then more. This project had its share of ups and downs, but she persevered through them all, expecting little in return. Her optimism, steadfastness, and devotion have all left an indelible mark on the project.
- Laurie Brinklow co-ordinated the project during the early stages, and then helped nurture it to completion with wisdom and sagacity.
- Graphic designer Ron Walsh believes a book should have a character of its own, and thoughtfully designed this book to reflect its contents. He has also patiently accommodated my innumerable last-minute revisions that would surely drive most other people to despair.