

**The Moose Jaw Tunnels**

Why were the tunnels in Moose Jaw a perfect location for the Chinese immigrants to live and gangsters to operate out of in the early twentieth century?

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The Moose Jaw tunnels are known to have been used by one of the most notorious criminals of the time, Al Capone. These tunnels in Moose Jaw are an important part of Canadian past. A couple of phrases like “The Yellow Peril” and “Scarface” commonly come up when talking about the tunnels of Moose Jaw. Today there are two popular public tours of the tunnels called “The Chicago Connection” and “The Passage to Fortune”. These tours provide a glimpse into what happened to the Chinese people in Moose Jaw, and the gangsters in the early twentieth century. The tunnels have become a big part of Moose Jaw’s past and present, and through the history of them we learn, why they were built, about Chinese people in the tunnels, and gangsters in the tunnels, including Al Capone.

The Tunnels were first built to be used as utility tunnels for the purposes of power and heating. Utility tunnels are “a passage built under or above ground to carry utility lines, such as electricity, steam, water supply pipes, and sewer pipes”. Steam engineers maintained the boilers and used the tunnels to avoid extreme weather changes when they went from building to building to do the boiler maintenance. The original passageways ran from the CPR Train Station to the Maple Leaf Hotel and under main street. By 1908 the tunnels were abandoned by the steam engineers and were left empty.

The “Passage to Fortune” tour is about the Chinese era which started in the early 1900s. Chinese immigrants came to Canada to escape poverty in China and seek a better life. When they came to Moose Jaw, they were employed as servants, railroad workers, miners or laundry workers. The Chinese people hid in the tunnels to avoid “Head Tax”. Because of their low wages, the Chinese were unable to pay Head Tax which was the price the Chinese had to pay to the Canadian government to get into the country. The Chinese also went in the tunnels to avoid the “Yellow Peril”. At the time there were a lot of anti-Chinese people in Moose Jaw. This sent the Chinese people to hide underground to escape the criticism from locals. After many Chinese people were killed or attacked in Moose Jaw, many others chose to go underground to be safe. The tunnels were an ideal place for them to hide because there were boilers in the tunnels that kept them warm. These facts shed light on how badly the Chinese people were treated in the early twentieth century.

The “Chicago Connection” tour is about American Gangsters in Moose Jaw during the prohibition and bootlegging era. The “Chinese Era” was followed by the “prohibition era”. The prohibition era is when it was illegal to manufacture and sell alcohol. Gangsters and rumrunners that came to Moose Jaw used these tunnels in downtown Moose Jaw. The Soo Line Railroad that ran from Chicago to Moose Jaw kept the alcohol flowing through the “dry days”. These underground tunnels were an ideal place to hide the illegal liquor operation. They were also good for running casinos and clubs that had brothels and gambling. Al Capone is rumored

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**Commented [NS5R1]:** could we use minecraft to reanact the days of the tunnels?

to have been in Moose Jaw but there is no proof. When Al Capone came to Moose Jaw it is said that he would have used the Soo Line Railroad. It is for this reason that Moose Jaw was called "Little Chicago". People have claimed to have seen Al Capone in Moose Jaw. There have been two instances people have claimed to have worked for Al Capone. One claimed to have been his barber, and the other claimed to have been his paperboy.

It is often thought that Al Capone had his business running out of Moose Jaw and that the Soo Line railroad company was used to transport the liquor between Moose Jaw and Chicago. A couple of things that could have made Moose Jaw a good spot for "Big Al" are that a major railroad line ran straight from Chicago to Moose Jaw. As well, Moose Jaw was known for having a corrupt police force, making it a good spot for him to lie low while the heat was on him in the United States. Before the railroad was built, Moose Jaw was already known to have been a hub for illegal alcohol and gambling. Moose Jaw also had tunnels running straight from the train station to other parts of the town which would have made it a good place to transport liquor. It is believed that mobsters made millions from illegal liquor and gambling in the tunnels. The police chief, Walter Johnson, also managed to make a small fortune from hush money from the gangsters.

The Tunnels of Moose Jaw impacted Saskatchewan in the past and still does to this day. In the past, the tunnels were used as a place for Chinese immigrants to stay safe and in later years, it was a hub for gambling and illegal liquor selling. Today, the tunnels bring in tourists which in turn brings in money for the province of Saskatchewan and for the city of Moose Jaw. The tunnels have led to the naming of both a hotel called Capone's Hideaway, and a café called Mr. Wong's Café. The tours and stories about the tunnels helped Canadians become more aware of how badly Chinese people were treated and encouraged the documentation of the poor treatment of these Chinese immigrants. The tunnels have influenced people to write books and articles including the "Tunnels of Time" book series written by Mary Harelkin Bishop. This series alone has sold more than 1 million copies. The idea of Al Capone having maybe been in Moose Jaw at one time has put Moose Jaw on the map in North America as a destination to travel to and makes it an interesting destination for visitors. The Tunnels of Moose Jaw are important to Saskatchewan because they teach us about our past and they bring money into the Saskatchewan economy.

The tunnels have become a big part of Moose Jaw's past and present, and through the history of them we learn, why they were built, about Chinese people in the tunnels, and gangsters in the tunnels, including Al Capone. In the past, the tunnels have shaped the way that

people view Moose Jaw, and now they bring tourists into Moose Jaw, which helps other local businesses as well. They have helped engineers' employment with their jobs in the past. They have made people realize how poorly the Chinese people were truly treated in the past. Finally, they explain how the tunnels were a hot spot for illegal alcohol and gambling. So, if you happen to see a sign that says Moose Jaw, you should stop by and tour the Tunnels of Moose Jaw and see for yourself what the past of Moose Jaw is really about.

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