Vancouver’s Chinatown had many restaurants for a wide range of tastes and pocketbooks. Ho Ho Chop Suey, Ho Inn, On On, BC Royal Café, Hong Kong Café are among the many establishments whose names will evoke memories for those who dined in Chinatown. With a new wave of immigrants and changing eating and dining patterns, they are now a part of the city’s history. Chinese restaurants have always served members of its own community but also the larger non-Chinese population. The one restaurant that is among the longest serving was the W.K. Gardens.

The W.K. Gardens operated by the Lim brothers (Harold and Wilbert) and their silent partners was originally located at 127 East Pender Street. It eventually closed, then re-opened at 173 East Pender Street. Earlier incarnations (and addresses—across the street) include: WK Chop Suey House, Wah Cue Chop Suey, W.K. Oriental Gardens, New W.K. Chop Suey.

Besides its length in business, the W.K. Gardens to its diners was most notable for its banquets and, in its latter years, dim sum served Hong Kong style. This was the restaurant to dine and dance [see “Pagoda” menu cover (ca. late 1930s)]; to celebrate births, graduations and weddings; or to attend organised functions [see special menu for “Canadian Women’s Press Club” (1949); Lions Club (1955); Rotary Club (1968)]. In its heyday, you could see the rich and the famous, as well, including Mr. and Mrs. John David Eaton to mark the launching of their vessel, Hildur (May 27, 1959), and the Right Honourable L.B. Pearson (October 29, 1965).

The W.K. Gardens served many and if you talk to the average Vancouverite of a certain age, someone in their family will have dined or celebrated a life event there. It was very much a landmark restaurant in its cuisine (training chefs and establishing a certain dining sensibility), and, of course, in affecting memories—of Chinatown and food.