**Chaldean Cultural Center Museum opens**

By [M Lapham](https://www.thehubdetroit.com/author/m-lapham/) on 05/02/2017

Chaldeans have a long history – 5,000 years – and they plan to show it off to the world.

On May 2 the Chaldean Cultural Center Museum will open at the Shenandoah Country Club in West Bloomfield to tell the world just who they are and what they have done in the world.

It took 14 years to finally open the museum. While the recession of 2008 caused funds to dry up, the delay was also caused by the amount of effort put into it. Thousands of photos were collected, and hundreds of people were interviewed.  Each story and each fact was researched, checked, and double-checked to assure accuracy.

All this was done by the Chaldean Cultural Center.

“We are a community with deep roots and a rich history,” says Francis Boji, chairman of the Chaldean Cultural Center Board. “The museum starts out at 3300 B.C. and it takes visitors through time periods and the progression of Chaldeans throughout history.”

Detroit has the largest Chaldean population in the country.

Given the recent genocide declaration of the primarily Catholic Chaldeans in Iraq last year, it is perhaps appropriate this is the time the community stands up to tell its own story.  To do so they have opened the only museum dedicated to Chaldean history in the world.

The Museum is divided into five galleries:

**Ancient Mesopotamia**

This begins with 3300 BC, which is shown by a tile on the floor. The gallery focuses on the lives of Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Neo-Babylonians, the latter directly connected to Chaldeans.

It talks about Nebuchadnezzar, the most famous of their rulers.  There is also a copy of Hammurabi’s code, which is best known for the phrase “an eye for an eye.” This not only came from early Chaldean civilization, it is also considered one of the earliest examples of a written law.

**Faith and Church**

This gallery picks up at 33 AD and shows the Chaldeans were among the first civilizations to be converted the Christianity, specifically by St. Thomas.

One aspect of note is Chaldeans in Iraq still speak Aramaic, which is known as the language of Jesus.

The replicas in this section are especially important.  One of them is a reproduction of a statue of the Last Supper.  The original was destroyed by Isis, when they occupied Mosel, Iraq.  Sadly, this was a common occurrence.

**Village Culture**

This gallery offers an immersive look at what life was like in a Chaldean village in 1890.  It shows life around the village for the average person from women in the home to farmers in the wheat fields.

Ten vignettes can be watched in a hologram-type display that illustrates the day-to-day life.

There is also a map so visitors can see exactly where this happened in the world.

**Journey to America**

Chaldeans started coming to America in the early 1900s.

The gallery focuses on early Chaldean immigrants, specifically in 1933 Detroit.  Detroit is used because metro Detroit has the largest Chaldean population in the country. Back then, they were likely attracted by Ford advertising at Ellis Island about a $5 a day job, says the Chaldean Cultural Center Director Mary Romaya.

In the gallery you’ll find examples of immigration papers that show Chaldeans coming from places like the Kingdom of Iraq.

There are items from the 1930s including a radio that actually plays a Tigers game from that decade and food packaging pieces, which show how important the grocery industry has been to the Chaldean community.

When the Chaldeans first came to America they not only spoke Aramaic, but also Arabic.  This allowed them to get jobs from other immigrants from the Middle East, who were active in the grocery business. They learned the business and ultimately bought their own.

Chaldean-owned stores were some of the last remaining in the city after the ‘67 riots.  After chains left, they bought up many of the locations.

“We have been an important part of the economy of Southeast Michigan for a long time,” Romaya says.

**Today**

This room has no date. There is a wall of 75 black-and-white and modern-day color photos to show those who have come and settled in the Detroit area. Across from it is a photo montage of children ages 5-15 to demonstrate the future.

There is also a 20-minute video with interviews from many people. This includes the children of immigrants and Dr. Elsie Sengstock, a now-deceased sociologist who wrote about Chaldeans. There are even interviews with more recent immigrants who talk about the current fight just to stay alive in their native country and the struggle to immigrate.

There is also a map that shows how the Chaldeans dispersed into Western Europe, America, and other parts of the world.  It demonstrates how they have had to flee their homeland in recent years and have become an integral part of many societies.

“We have been around a long time,” says Romaya, “and hope to be around for another 5,000 years.”

While the majority of the information for the museum came from metro Detroit, photos and information also came from Chaldean communities in Mexico and San Diego.

Exhibit designers Saylor+Sirola worked in collaboration with Sanan Media who produced the interactive media and films in the Cultural Center.

The museum is at Shenandoah Country Club, 5600 Walnut Lake Rd. in West Bloomfield Township.  It is open to the public on Tuesday from 4 – 8 p.m., Friday from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. There will be curators on hand to help with any further information you may need.

The Shenandoah Country Club was chosen because it is Chaldean-owned, so there has been quite a bit of cooperation. However, the Chaldean Cultural Center remains a separate nonprofit organization..

Private tours and school field trips can be set up by calling 248-681-5050 or emailing info@chaldeanculuralcenter.org.

The Chaldean people have been in Southeast Michigan for a long time and have played an important role, not only in Detroit and our region, but also in our country and the world.  Now they want to share that history with all of us.

*– Photos courtesy of Chaldean Cultural Center*