

From the Flowery County to New Gold Mountain

By Margaret White

Chinese traders had visited the north coast of Australia from the 1750s, probably earlier, searching for sandalwood and *bêche de mer* (sea cucumbers). Following the British settlement of Australia in 1788, small numbers of Chinese men began to arrive as indentured labourers or coolies and in a few instances, as free settlers. This helped to provide a much-needed labour force in a developing country. After British convict transportation was abolished in New South Wales in 1840, British and Chinese agents responded by shipping indentured labourers from China's densely populated southern provinces, around Canton, present day Guangzhou.



Charter's Towers 1899

The impetus to emigrate from China was fuelled by natural disasters, poverty and political and social unrest following the British Opium Wars (1839-1842). In the 1840s, as news of gold strikes reached China, increasing numbers went overseas, taking advantage of the expanding fleets of merchant vessels to venture to California's Old Gold Mountain, *chiu chin shan*. After restrictions on Chinese immigration were introduced in America in the 1840s, tens of thousands opted for New Gold Mountain, *tsin chin shan*, in Australia, where gold strikes occurred in the 1850s and 1860s. The number of Chinese in Australia quickly reached 50,000; a number maintained up until Federation in 1901. 'Chinatowns' or Benevolent Societies, often based on clan or district ties, quickly developed across Australia to support the newcomers.



Sarah Lampan née Moloney
maternal great-grandmother c 1884

My story begins when as an adult, I first learned of my connection to China. My maternal great grandfather hailed from the Sun Hui district near Toishan, a part of the Four Districts or See, nicknamed the Flowery County, around Canton. Aged sixteen, in 1857 he was sent by his father on a paid passage to Australia to seek his fortune. William Chan Yong Lam Pan, landed illegally in Port Robe, South Australia,



From the left: Margaret, her grandmother Violet holding baby Carolyn, her grandfather Charles Last holding the middle sister, Anne

because his ship's master did not wish to pay a ten pound poll tax levied on each Chinese passenger to Australia. He then walked overland some 400 to 500 kilometres, working his way en route and eventually reaching Melbourne, Victoria. Here, following in his father's footsteps, he was apprenticed to herbalist, Wing Chun Tong of Evergreen Hall while teaching himself to read and write English. He found solace with other Cantonese-speaking immigrants at the See Yap Clan Temple.

After hearing rumours of new gold strikes in Queensland in 1868, William decided to travel 3,000 kilometres north, purchasing supplies of herbs from his employer with instructions for more to be forwarded later. Life was far from easy as resentment, fear, mistrust and misunderstanding against the Chinese began to build. Moving to Charter's Towers, he decided to set himself up with a garden and store while continuing his healing role. In fact, Chinese market gardeners were probably responsible for saving many European settlers from scurvy as most were subsisting on tinned foods, flour and sugar. William Lampan (his anglicised surname) became a respected herbalist or doctor and a leader in the Chinese community of Charter's Towers, heading the See Yap Benevolent Society, the See Yup Clan Association. He was Grand Master of a branch of the Yee Hing, a Chinese Masonic Society which was anti-Manchu and supported Dr Sun Yet Sen, the father of the Chinese Republic.

By this time William had decided to make Australia his permanent home. He desired a wife and a son and heir following Chinese tradition, but there were few Chinese women. Whatever racial feelings there were about intermarriage in the community, he married Mary



Sze Yup Clan Temple, South Melbourne, Victoria, 2010, photo by Margaret White

Jane Mc Donnell in 1876, qualifying for naturalisation in 1879. Unfortunately, she died in 1881 from gastritis. His second marriage was to petite, dark-haired and luminous eyed, Sarah Moloney in 1884, and a family of four girls and two boys quickly followed. One of those daughters was my grandmother, Violet Magdalene Chan Yong Lampan, born in 1885. This was a very happy and prosperous period in my great-grandfather's life.



Plaque on Charter's Towers Hill

Tragically, Sarah died at only 36 years old in 1901, leaving my great-grandfather with six children between the ages of two and sixteen. He became increasingly temperamental and difficult with the burden of sole parenting and the children bore the brunt of his strict upbringing. He resigned from all his positions of responsibility which were becoming meaningless as the heavy restrictions on the entry of Chinese to Australia, their naturalisation and their participation in various trades, resulted in a rapid decline of the Chinese in Australia.

The Lampan children began leaving home. My grandmother eventually became a governess in Melbourne, where she met and married my grandfather. William Lampan died in 1910, but his legacy lives on. Some of his descendants still reside in Charter's Towers and he is remembered in a historical plaque atop Tower's Hill. The former White Australia Policy finally ended and the significance of the Chinese contribution to Australia's historical and cultural life was recognised. Today, many Chinese immigrants continue to make Australia home.

A family photograph of my sisters and me with my maternal grandparents clearly speaks of my grandmother's Chinese ancestry. I gaze at my mother, my uncle, my sister and my cousins and wonder how I did not notice before. Of course, moving to Asia with my family highlighted the link and set me on a quest of discovery.



Wedding in Guangzhou 2008

If my mother were alive today, I wonder how she would have reacted to the news that her eldest grandson, Nicholas, had married a Chinese girl, Betty Lu Xu, from Guangdong in 2008 - the same province that my great-grandfather had left so long ago. As for me, I feel that in some way a circle has been completed in my family's identity and history. A little Dragon granddaughter is to be born in January.

Margaret White lived in Singapore from 1991-2011, was a former president of FOM and continues to be engaged with the society. She resides in Sydney, Australia.



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