Wonderful Wellington

The Longevity of the Chinese Community in Wellington, New South Wales

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Abstract: The town of Wellington in the Central West of New South Wales had a Chinese population almost from its inception and a small number of descendants of early Chinese-Australian families still live and farm in Wellington today. Beginning with an overview of its colonial settlement and the establishment of a Chinese community in Wellington, this paper considers the factors which contributed to the longevity of the Chinese community in Wellington. Chinese storekeepers and market gardeners are shown to have played a pioneering role in the development of the town. Prominent storekeepers and market gardeners, in particular William Mow Funn and William Suey Ling, were not only leaders in the Chinese community but also in the broader community. This paper also argues that the employment of Aboriginal people as labourers and the existence of Chinese-Australian families in Wellington were important factors that allowed the community in Wellington to survive to the present day, when Chinese communities in other rural towns in New South Wales “disappeared”.

Keywords: Chinese-Australian families; Wellington, New South Wales; Chinese storekeepers; market gardeners; race relations

Introduction

Between 2015 and 2017, Barry McGowan and Genevieve Mott researched and wrote a heritage report on Chinese people in the Orange, Cabonne and Blayney Shires of New South Wales. On Barry’s field trips to the Central West, he stayed at my home in Bathurst. When the report was extended to include an addendum on Wellington, I accompanied Barry on a number of trips he made to the town. Together we met with descendants of Chinese families who settled as market gardeners in Wellington in the early twentieth century. Tim Sing Lee showed us the section of Wellington Cemetery in which many graves of Chinese-born people and Chinese Australians can be found. Barry considered the Wellington community to be “one of the most important rural-based Chinese communities in New South Wales, if not Australia, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the present day.” The Wellington addendum was written as a work in progress, and Barry died before a more in-depth study of Wellington could be written. This paper, which draws on the family histories of Wellington Chinese-Australian families that Barry and I befriended, attempts to examine more closely the factors that gave the Wellington Chinese-Australian community its extraordinary character and longevity.

Looking back at what has been written on rural Chinese communities in New South Wales, C.Y. Choi’s pioneering book *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia* can be seen to have laid the statistical foundations for research, but it lacked stories of communities,

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families and individuals. Research by Cathie May on Chinese communities in Cairns and Atherton and by Timothy Jones on the Chinese in the Northern Territory led the way for location-specific case studies, but for a long time New South Wales was neglected until Janis Wilton’s *Golden Threads* project and Michael Williams’ thematic history of New South Wales painted in the broader strokes of regional Chinese communities in New South Wales. Barry McGowan’s research on Chinese labour (especially land-clearing and market gardening) contributed to a greater understanding of the role played by Chinese in the colonial settlement of regional New South Wales. His *Tracking the Dragon* series covered much ground in researching communities in rural South-Eastern and Western New South Wales. Joanna Boileau’s study of Chinese in the Tweed district, and Peter Gibson’s research on Chinese in Wollongong show that while Chinese found work in a number of occupations, market gardening was a mainstay. Research by Sophie Loy-Wilson on Chinese storekeepers illuminated their importance in rural communities. Turning to the Central West, Kate Bagnall and Dinah Hales explored the often overlooked lives of European women in relationships with Chinese men. Wellington had an unusually high number of Chinese-born and Chinese-descended women, who I focus on in this paper. McGowan and Mott’s *Thematic Study of Chinese People in the Orange, Blayney and Cabonne Shires*, Lin Johnston’s Honours thesis on Chinese in the Mudgee district, and my own PhD thesis on Chinese in Bathurst and district add to the emerging picture of interconnected Chinese communities, families and business networks in the Central West.

**Background**

Before flocks of sheep were driven to graze in its pastures, or land was cleared for agricultural use by Europeans and Chinese, the Wellington Valley was inhabited by the Wiradjuri people. When John Oxley and party undertook their 1817 expedition to “discover” the country westward of New South Wales, Oxley described the area between the Lachlan

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and Macquarie Rivers as “thinly timbered with rich intervening valleys, through which flow small streams of water”.\(^{11}\) In a similar area, Allan Cunningham came across grassy country that had recently been “fired by the natives” and was abundantly stocked with kangaroos and emus. Other parts were described as being thickly wooded.\(^{12}\) The earliest descriptions by colonial discoverers of the Wellington Valley leave little doubt that the land was managed by the Indigenous population for hunting.\(^{13}\)

The colonial settlement of Wellington dates to January 1823, when a penal station consisting of about sixty prisoners with a detachment of soldiers under the command of Percy Simpson was established about a mile out of the current town.\(^{14}\) The settlement of the interior was fiercely contested by the Wiradjuri. In response, between August and December 1824, the district west of Mount York was proclaimed under martial law, which legitimised “the Use of Arms against the Natives beyond the Ordinary Rule of Law in Time of Peace”.\(^{15}\) In his *History of Wellington*, Robert Porter, founder of Wellington’s first newspaper, the *Wellington Gazette*, hinted at the dispersal of the Aboriginal population, writing “the blacks were very numerous at Wellington when the settlement was formed, but the thinning out soon commenced.”\(^{16}\) Smallpox was also said to have taken a heavy toll on the Aborigines inhabiting the Wellington Valley, leaving “but few” survivors.\(^{17}\) A Wesleyan mission “to instruct the [remaining] natives in the Christian Faith” was established in the Wellington Valley in 1825.\(^{18}\)

These early British attempts to settle Wellington were a failure. The Wesleyan mission closed a year later and the penal settlement withdrew to Bathurst in 1831.\(^{19}\) A Church of England Mission established in 1832 by the Reverend William Watson and the Reverend J. Gunthe was also a failure, ending in 1840 when the Reverend Watson’s position was terminated following Gunthe’s criticism of Watson’s policy of removing Aboriginal children from their families.\(^{20}\) Watson and his wife then established the Apsley Mission, then Blakes Falls Mission, which lasted until Watson’s death, whereupon the Aboriginal families established a “Blacks Camp” nearby until they were moved onto Nanima Reserve in 1910.\(^{21}\)

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12 Ibid.
Although pastoralists wasted little time in taking up land in the Wellington Valley, the town of Wellington was slow to be established. Up to about 1845, “there was not a house on the land now occupied by the town of Wellington.”\textsuperscript{22} Montefiores was then the farthest out town or village in the north-west.\textsuperscript{23} It had been established as a private township by J.B. Montefiore, an early land grantee in the district, to meet the requirements of settlers and stations on the Macquarie.\textsuperscript{24} The Census of 1851, taken on the eve of the goldrushes, recorded a population of 182 in Montefiores and only 29 in Wellington.\textsuperscript{25}

It is likely that the first Chinese in the Wellington Valley were brought to work as indentured labourers from the treaty port of Amoy (Xiamen in Fujian province). The \textit{Government Gazette} in 1840 published a list of pastoralists who had obtained de-pasturing licences beyond the settled districts.\textsuperscript{26} Among the eighty-five individuals listed in the Wellington District were Robert Barton and Charles Wray Finch, who each employed three anonymous Chinese labourers from Robert Towns’ ship the \textit{Royal Saxon} in 1853.\textsuperscript{27} Another was William Lee, whose sons John and Thomas advertised in 1855 for a £1 reward each for the return of their servants, Aw Toan, Sim Can, Sim Sui and Ti Kiong, who had left the flocks they were tending at the Lees’ \textit{Baragon} run, west of Wellington. Three were said to be at the Meroo gold fields (Avisford), while one was believed to be heading to Sydney.\textsuperscript{28}

The 1856 Census of New South Wales, taken on 1 March 1856, provides an indication of the number of Chinese in Wellington County prior to the influx of Cantonese gold seekers. Of the 1806 persons in New South Wales who were born in China, 849 were in the settled districts, and 951 in the squatting districts.\textsuperscript{29} More than a third of those in the settled districts – 269 Chinese males, no Chinese females – were in Wellington County.\textsuperscript{30} William Cohen, who had arrived as an indentured labourer from Amoy, was the first Chinese man to father a child on the Western Gold Fields of New South Wales.\textsuperscript{31} Cohen and his wife Sophia (née Walford) raised their family in Mookerawa in Wellington County, where Cohen died in 1920, aged 101.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{23} Ibid.
\bibitem{24} Porter, \textit{The History of Wellington}, p. 4.
\bibitem{25} New South Wales Census 1851, Houses, \url{http://hccda.ada.edu.au/pages/NSW-1851-census-01_44}.
\bibitem{26} \textit{NSW Government Gazette} (hereafter \textit{NSWGG}), 19 February 1840, p. 170.
\bibitem{28} \textit{Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal}, 29 December 1855, p.5, \url{http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article62054002}.
\bibitem{29} In 1847, the colony of New South Wales was divided into “Settled”, “Intermediate” and “Unsettled” districts. The settled area included nineteen counties proclaimed by Order of the Governor in 1829. The settled districts in the Census of 1856 include the County of Macquarie as a twentieth county and Stanley as a reputed county.
\bibitem{30} New South Wales Census 1856, Native Country, \url{http://hccda.ada.edu.au/pages/NSW-1856-census-04_13}.
\bibitem{31} NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (hereafter NSW BDM), birth certificate 7983/1856.
\bibitem{32} NSW BDM, death certificate 3355/1920.
\end{thebibliography}
Thus there was already a small population of mostly Amoy Chinese on the goldfields when Cantonese began arriving on the Western Goldfields of New South Wales in mid-July 1856, five years after the Australian gold rushes had first commenced.\(^{33}\) Gold was not found in the town of Wellington but at Stoney Creek (Farnham), south of Wellington, and at Louisa Creek (Hargraves) to the east. The arrival of the Cantonese parties coincided with gold rushes at these two diggings.\(^{34}\) By the end of 1857, Chinese were the principal workers at Stoney Creek.\(^{35}\) In the mid-1860s, gold workings on the Macquarie River south-east of Wellington were dominated by Chinese parties.\(^{36}\) Chinese storekeepers set up stores at

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\(^{34}\) Kwok, “The Chinese in Bathurst”, p. 83.


Ironbarks (Stuart Town) and Mookerawa, on the junction of Mookerawa Creek and the Macquarie River. The families of William Cohen and another Amoy labourer, James Dong, are considered among the five founding families of Stuart Town. William Cohen Junior married Eliza Lavenia Dong in 1897 and built a home on five acres of land at Mookerawa. Subsequent generations of the Dong and Cohen families remained in the Stuart Town area, where descendant Hilary Cohen still resides with his wife, Carmel.

The first Chinese-Australian couple in the town of Wellington were John Peters and Anne Asgill, whose marriage, carried out according to Church of England rites, was registered in Wellington in 1860. Both were servants. In 1869, when Peters successfully applied for naturalisation, he gave his occupation as baker, but his obituary states that he became the manager of the flour mill. Henry Dunlop’s mill, which opened in 1859 or 1860, was the only mill west of Orange at that time. The couple left Wellington for Dubbo in 1870 where John Peters established a store and became a prominent Mason. When he died in Dubbo in 1900, his obituary stated that sixty years earlier “he had left China with an English missionary and penetrating to western New South Wales had devoted himself to church services for some years.”

Although the Land Act of 1860 opened up Crown Land for free selection, Robert Porter claimed that the town of Wellington remained almost stationary for years, and was regarded as “the sleepiest of sleepy hollows”. He wrote, “the country needed no town. Farming operations were on a small scale. There was only the local market.” A contemporary report in the Sydney Morning Herald also attributed the slow growth and uptake of free selections in Wellington to the absence of a market for produce. Beginning in the 1860s, land in the district was cleared. Although Chinese involvement in land-clearing in New South Wales is mostly obscured in the historical narrative, Barry McGowan’s research has shown that large areas of land in western and south-western New South Wales were cleared by Chinese contract gangs employed by Chinese headmen. While further investigation is required, it can be seen that the successful clearing and sub-division of land in the district correlates with the growth of the Chinese population and the establishment of Chinese stores in Wellington.

37 Mookerawa is also spelt as Muckerwa or Muckerawa.
38 Stuart Town Book Committee, Branches from Ironbarks (Orange: self-published, 1998), p. 34.
39 Branches from Ironbarks, p. 31.
40 With thanks to the families of descendants of William Cohen – Hilary and Carmel Cohen, Norma and Ted Hannelly, and Dinah Hales – for sharing their research on the Cohen family history.
41 NSW BDM, marriage certificate 2761/1860.
42 John Peters, Memorial or Application for Naturalisation, State Archives New South Wales (hereafter SANSW), NRS 905, Colonial Secretary’s Correspondence, 69/05639; Barrier Miner, 9 April, 1900, p. 2, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/44254233.
43 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
In 1864, for example, John A. Gardiner purchased 1,000 acres of the property named *Gobolion*. By 1872, it was reported that his residence, “surrounded by gardens and cultivation paddocks of extreme beauty occupies a favourable site on the river”.49 Gardiner bought various other properties, including *Ellengerah*, near Warren, where Jimmy Goux Yan was employed as a gardener in 1886 by Gardiner’s son, William Gardiner.50 In 1899, 250 acres of *Gobolion* was under lucerne and it was the receiving depot for stock sent from *Ellengerah, the Holmes, the Mole, Buckinguy, Gilengangah*, as well as *Bando Station* in Queensland, all the property of the Gardiner family.51

In 1889, C.H. Barton (Manager of the Commercial Bank in Wellington) purchased *Towri*, a property of 8,000 acres, seven miles north of Wellington. In 1899 it was reported:

> ten years ago when Mr Barton purchased Towri, the place was a wilderness, kangaroos being plentiful. The ground was very heavily timbered and beneath the finest trees was a dense growth of scrub … but a great change has been effected by the owner of Towri. All vestiges of the timber and scrub have long since disappeared and kangaroos are no longer known on the land. The estate is subdivided into conveniently sized paddocks, all substantially wire-fenced.52

A number of Wellington Chinese had worked as ring-barkers or land-clearers prior to taking up market gardening in Wellington. Before moving to Wellington in 1910, Mow Funn and his two Mudgee-born sons William and Alfred Mow Funn went to Nyngan and then Warren, where William Mow Funn worked as a land-clearer.53 George Mar Chew who landed at Cooktown in the 1870s made his way down to Wellington working as a ring-barker.54

Chinese in New South Wales also began market gardening in the late 1860s. The first report of a Chinese market garden in Wellington appeared in 1870 when heavy flooding was said to have totally destroyed a Chinese garden and the gardener’s house on the Bell River flats.55 Wellington market gardener Twa Tee, who had arrived as an indentured labourer in 1850 on one of Robert Towns’ ships, successfully applied for naturalisation in Wellington in 1876.56

53 William and Alfred Mow Funn were born in Mudgee to Mary Ann Ah Tuck (sometimes known as Tucker) and Mow Funn, McGowan and Mott, *True Australians*, p. 278. Mow Funn’s gravestone records his Chinese name as Mo Fan 毛芬. He was from a village in Chang Sheng named Mo Tsuen (武村). The gravestone of George Ah Sing (毛成福) shows him to have come from the same village. *Wellington Times*, 19 October 1953, p. 3, [https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/139113390](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/139113390).
56 SANSW, NRS 905, 76/06998.
In 1879, Wellington was made a municipality and, by May 1880, the railway had reached Wellington. 57 Anticipating its arrival, Hong Wong, trading as Kum Yoon Fong, opened the first Chinese store in Wellington in 1879. 58 Hong Wong advertised that he had opened the large, new, two-storey building nearly opposite Woodley’s Royal Hotel with a splendid stock of new goods. 59 Hong Wong probably had an earlier store at Montefiores, as Kum Yoon Fong of Montefiores obtained a licence for explosives in 1878. 60 Hong Wong died in 1884, and, by 1888, the store was trading as Fong Lee & Co. (芳利) and was managed by Kum Sing Lee. 61 Among the employees brought from China to work in the Fong Lee store were four brothers from Chang Sheng (增城) who arrived in 1888. 62 Wong Wah Shu and Wong Wah Hum stayed in Wellington to work at the Fong Lee & Co. store; Wong Wah Lay/Lee (黃華禮) opened the Yee Lee store in Stuart Town; and Wong Wah Gee (黃華智) went to Cobar, where he opened a store trading under the name of Fong War Lee (芳華利). 63 The gravestone of Wong Wah Lay records that he was from the village of 白石 (Pak Shek) in the subdistrict of 清湖 (Ching Wu) in Chang Sheng. 64

In 1883, five Wellington market gardeners – Tin Kong, Ah Tchee, Ah Chong, James Ah Lun and Yee Sing – all applied successfully for naturalisation. 65 So too did Mount Irvine gardener Ah Sing, who had arrived in New South Wales in 1875, citing his desire to secure freehold property and have the privilege of voting at elections. 66 Ah Sing, like the Wong storekeepers, was from Chang Sheng. The Chinese characters on his gravestone record his name as 毛成福 (Moo Sing Fook) and his home village as 武相 (Mou Seong) in Chang Sheng. 67

The extension of the railway to Wellington allowed market gardeners to expand from growing for the local market to growing commercially for the Sydney market. By the mid-
1880s, the Chinese market gardeners in Wellington were doing very well, if their success is judged by an 1886 report, which stated:

The Chinese gardeners are now selling carrots 18 in round the top, cauliflowers of a gigantic size, and cabbages which would make a meal for an elephant. With one solitary exception, market gardening has passed entirely out of the hands of white men, and the transfer has been a decided benefit to the community.68

Around this time, Chinese in the Mudgee and Wellington district leased land on the large pastoral estates and selections. Ah Sing, for example, leased sixty acres on Mudgee River from Town and Roberts from 1881 to 1890, and twenty-four acres’ house and garden from Clarence Lawson at Lawson Creek from 1893 to 1901.69

While Chinese populations elsewhere were declining, Wellington’s Chinese population grew between 1871 and 1891. The New South Wales Census of 1871 counted 173 Chinese in the Wellington Registry District (total population 3,354), but by 1891, there were 485 Chinese, including one Chinese female in the County of Wellington (total population 16,428).70 In the town of Wellington, the Chinese population grew from ten Chinese males in 1871 to 56 males born in the Chinese Empire in 1891 (total population 1,545).71 The 1891 Census returns, which list the places of abode of Chinese residents – in Hawkins Street and Nanima Crescent on the Bell River, and on Gobolion Terrace and Montefiores Streets on the Macquarie River – suggest almost all Chinese residents were either working as market gardeners or employed by and living at the Fong Lee store. One of those listed was Tom Gardiner of Arthur Street, whose name suggests he may have worked for the Gardiner family who owned Gobolion.72

Cleared land allowed the cultivation of wheat and from 1896 to 1904–05, the area of wheat cultivated in Wellington grew almost sixfold from 11,743 acres to 59,743 acres.73 Lucerne was also grown on the Bell River flats. A newspaper report in 1899 noted, “It is cut six times a year and is the only green crop that can be depended on during the summer in dry seasons”.74 At the beginning of the new century, Chinese market gardeners were growing onions on the river flats on a large scale. It was later recalled:

During the years 1902–1905 there were upwards of 1000 acres under onions in this district. The plantations extended from the Macquarie River banks intermittently to Maryvale on the northern side and to the caves on

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72 New South Wales Census Collectors Books 1891.
The southern side. Over 600 Chinese were working on the plantations and labour was so scarce that employers were forced to meet the train from Sydney each morning in an endeavour to engage men who would alight in search of work... Many of the old hands in the town today will remember the period above referred to.\textsuperscript{75}

As McGowan and Mott point out, the Chinese gardeners were clearly pioneers in the onion growing industry, with Europeans not entering the industry on a large scale until 1919.\textsuperscript{76} One of the market gardens growing onions at that time was trading as Sing Lee, a common Chinese business name meaning “victory”.\textsuperscript{77} Chan Say Joe (陳西就), one of the Sing Lee gardeners, applied for a Certificate Exempting from the Dictation Test (CEDT) to return to China in 1906. On the CEDT, his name was registered as Joe Sing Lee, but he was known by other Chinese and his family as Say Joe.\textsuperscript{78} Say Joe, from Gong Bui/Bei (江背村) village in Lung Zan (隆鎮), Chung Shan, had been in Wellington since 1894.\textsuperscript{79} According to family folklore, Say Joe’s father, Dung Hoi (澄海), arrived to work as a carpenter in Sydney in the late 1800s and Say Joe and his three brothers, Tommy Pong (Miu Pong 陳妙旁), Ah See (妙脩) and Charlie Sing (Tong Sing 東成), followed.\textsuperscript{80}

Chain migration and naturalisation effectively ended in 1888, when the Chinese Restriction and Regulation Act prohibited the issuing of naturalisation certificates to Chinese for any reason whatsoever and imposed a £100 poll tax on Chinese newly arrived from China.\textsuperscript{81} Although this Act prevented Kum Sing Lee from bringing more relatives from China to assist in the business, nineteen-year-old William Suey Ling (黃瑞麟), born in 1877 in Little Bourke Street, Melbourne, came to Wellington to work in the Fong Lee & Co. store and, by 1896, had taken over the running of the store.\textsuperscript{82} Another Australian-born Chinese, Joseph Ah Youk (or Hang Jay), born in Brisbane in 1885, settled in Wellington around 1897.\textsuperscript{83}

Thus, going into the twentieth century, there was an established community of Chinese men in Wellington. While the first Chinese settlers in Wellington were indentured labourers from Amoy, the inscription on the gravestone of Cheng Ah Kin, who died in 1918 aged 49, shows that at least one Chinese man in Wellington came from the treaty port of Ningbo.\textsuperscript{84} Early Cantonese settlers were from Sze Yap (四邑), Tung Kun (東莞), Chang Sheng (增城) and Chung Shan (中山) districts, with Chang Sheng best represented. The Wellington cemetery contains the gravestones of at least thirty Chinese-born people. It is difficult to account for the total number of Chinese who died in Wellington as Chinese graves were...
exhumed in 1912 and 1935 and possibly later. The 1935 exhumation took place under the direction of Lowe Kut, a representative of the Goon Yee Tong. With the exception of two sample years between 1928–29, official records of exhumations have been disposed of in accordance with New South Wales state archive disposal policy.

Families and Connections with the Village

What set Wellington apart from other rural communities in New South Wales was the number of Chinese-born women in the community. In 1901, before the introduction of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, Wellington County had six females born in China. Although the Immigration Restriction Act was designed to prevent new arrivals from China from entering the Commonwealth, Section 3, Paragraph (m) of the Act allowed domiciled Chinese men to bring in their wives and minor children. At least three Chinese residents of Wellington took advantage of the clause and returned to China and brought back wives in the first years of Federation. Wong Wah Lay went back to China in 1902 and married Fong Lum Day and brought her back to live in Wellington and later Stuart Town. In 1903, at the age of 50, George Ah Sing brought out a bride from China whom he married in a ceremony shortly after arriving in Sydney. His wife, whose English name was Violet, went to live with him at Mount Frome in Mudgee, and later Wellington. William Suey Ling also took a trip to China in 1903, bringing back a Chinese bride named Alice (Sing Ying Ean, born 1888). These three brides were among eighty-eight such women who came to Australia between the introduction of the Act, its suspension in 1903 and its repeal in 1905.

Say Joe married twice. He and his first wife, known in the records as Mrs Joe Sing Lee, applied for Certificates Exempting from the Dictation Test (CEDT) in 1916. Returning to China with her husband, Mrs Joe Sing Lee appears to have remained there. In 1928, at the age of fifty-six, Say Joe married 21-year-old Lee He (李喜) at Christ Church St Laurence Anglican Church in George Street, Sydney, and brought her to Wellington. The marriage certificate states that Say Joe was a widower. Lee He’s occupation was stated as home duties, “c– Quin Young, North Sydney”. Say Joe and Lee He had four children: Tim, Poppy, Tommy and Marjorie.

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85 McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 283.
86 Ibid.
87 SANSW: NRS 4833, Exhumation files, (10/43045), 1 box.
90 Branches from Ironbarks, p. 167. In Remembering Stuart Town, p 3., Hoy Lee stated his mother’s name was Wong Lum Day. Her gravestone in Wellington bears the name Lum Day Lee.
93 Bagnall, “Chinese Australian Families and the Legacies of Colonial Naturalisation”.
94 NAA: ST84/1, 1916/207/71-80.
95 Salona Sing Lee, “Chan”, unpublished manuscript.
Wellington market gardener Joseph Ah Yook married Ruby Chun Tye, one of two orphaned sisters brought up by the Ling family in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{96} Another Wellington couple were Eva Cheuy Hoo and George Loo Sick, who married in 1905 and had a large family. The Chinese wedding garments worn at their wedding are displayed at the Oxley Museum in Wellington.\textsuperscript{97}

By 1919, there were 124 Chinese people in Wellington, which as McGowan and Mott note was a significant number at a time when the rural Chinese population was falling sharply, or defunct in most other Australian country towns.\textsuperscript{98} Headstones in the Wellington Cemetery provide evidence of other couples about which no other information has as yet emerged. When Willie Hong Butt died in Wellington in 1928, his wife erected a headstone which reads: “In memory of my dear husband”. According to the Chinese inscription on the headstone, Willie was born in 1868 in Tung Kun.\textsuperscript{99}

Some of the children of these couples married, creating second and third generations of Chinese men married to Chinese-descended women and cementing connections between these families. George and Violet Ah Sing had two daughters, Louisa and Mary. Louisa married George Coon (Chong Lue Coon, 鍾汝權) in 1919. George, born in China in 1890, had arrived in New South Wales in 1906. He spent three years in Sydney and four in Gundagai, before he moved to Coolah and began working in the Kum Chong War general store (金鍾和公司) owned by his brother. George saved enough money to buy the business from his brother who returned to China.\textsuperscript{100} George lived in Coolah for thirty-three years, where he and Louisa had eleven children, eight of whom survived.\textsuperscript{101} George and Violet’s other daughter, Mary, married Wellington market gardener George Mar Chew in Mudgee in 1918.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{96} Carole Gass, \textit{A Brief Family History}, unpublished manuscript.
\textsuperscript{97} Carole Gass, pers. comm., 21 February 2017. The name Loo Sick is variously spelt as Lousick in official documents.
\textsuperscript{98} McGowan and Mott, \textit{True Australians}, p. 269.
\textsuperscript{100} Najette Coon, “George Coon”, unpublished manuscript, no date, Coon family collection.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Najette Coon, “George Coon”, unpublished manuscript, no date.
Figure 2. Ah Yook girls – Amy, Minnie, Louisa and Norma. Courtesy of Oxley Museum.

Lila Lousick, daughter of Eva and George Loo Sick, married Mow Funn’s son, Herbert Tuck in 1930. Thomas Lou Sick married Ruby and Joseph Ah Yook’s daughter Minnie in 1922. There were also marriages outside of the Chinese community. In 1945, Bill Lousick married Violet Rose West, a Wuramunga woman he met at Dubbo Hospital. William Mow Funn married Eileen Wray in 1946.

Michael Williams argues that it was not the intention of Cantonese huaqiao (華僑, overseas Chinese) who went to work in the Pacific ports of California, Sydney and Melbourne between 1849 and 1949 to settle in the labour destination. The normative pattern was to “return home with glory”, often after decades of living abroad. The pattern of coming and going with the ultimate plan to return to China can be seen in the lives of Wellington Chinese-Australian families.

Kum Sing Lee of Fong Lee & Co. returned to China in 1904, with his Chinese wife and six-year-old daughter, Louisa. In China, Louisa married a Chinese herbalist named Ng Chock Ching, who had formerly lived in Wellington. When the political situation in China became unstable, Louisa returned to Australia with her husband and two sons. On entry, Louisa and her husband had their surname registered as Chock Ching, while their son Ng Yook Tong was registered as George Yook Tong. Another son who had difficulties

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103 Ibid.
104 McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 294; Gallois, "The Wellington Project", p. 46.
105 McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 298. They were married as William Ah Tuck and Eileen Wray, NSW BDM, marriage certificate 15816/1946.
106 Michael Williams, Returning Home With Glory: Chinese Villagers Around the Pacific, 1849 to 1949 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018).
108 Ibid.; NAA: SP42/1, C1938/8611.
entering Australia had to live with family members in New Zealand for some years. The Chock Chings settled in Wellington, adding another four children to the family, including Allie Chock Ching.

In May 1913, Say Joe and his brothers bought just under eight acres of land together on Section 7 of the Bell River at Wellington. All the brothers but Charlie Sing, who had a store in Sydney, worked on the garden. Despite owning land in Australia, Say Joe may have intended to return to China permanently in 1924, as that year, he and his brother Tommy placed an advertisement in the *Tung Wah Times* advertising their garden for sale. Unable to sell the market garden, Say Joe took out a mortgage in 1929, apparently to buy out Tommy’s share. Say Joe’s brothers, Tommy, Charlie and Ah See, all returned to China. Only Say Joe remained in Wellington. He died in 1937, only a year after his wife.

George and Mary Mar Chew had no children of their own, but they fostered Lee He and Say Joe’s son Tim Sing Lee (Chan Wah Toe). In 1948, George and Mary left Wellington, taking twelve-year-old Tim with them, and returned to George’s village of Sha Chung (沙涌), near Shekki in Chung Shan. They had not been there long before the Communist Revolution drove the Mar Chews and Tim to leave China again in 1950 to return to Wellington.

George Coon of Kum Chong War took trips back to China on a number of occasions, beginning in 1924. In 1936 or 1937, George sold the Coolah store and returned with his family to George’s village in China in Bei Tao (增城), Chang Sheng, near Tung Kun, where George had inherited land and a lychee farm. His two eldest sons, William and Thomas, had been sent there earlier to receive a Chinese education. George built a house in the village, but in the year it took to build, the Japanese invaded China and requisitioned the house to use as a headquarters. George sent Louisa and the children back to Australia, where he joined them a year later, having lost everything escaping from Japanese-occupied China. On their return to the Wellington district, the family lived temporarily with

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110 As told by Allie Chock Ching to Salona Sing Lee. Salona Sing Lee, pers. comm., 30 April 2018.


112 Salona Sing Lee, “Chan”, unpublished manuscript, no date.

113 Ibid.

114 Salona Sing Lee, “Chan”, unpublished manuscript, no date. According to Tim Sing Lee, Tim’s brother Tommy and his sister Poppy also accompanied relatives back to China but they too returned to Australia in the 1950s. Tim’s other sister Marjorie remained in Sydney with the family of a Chinese herbalist named War Sing Howe.


the Ah Sings in Molong Road, while George grew potatoes in Neurea to pay off his debt, before renting and later buying land on the Bell River flats.118

Thus it might be seen that were it not for the intervening factors of war and the Communist Revolution, the Coons, the Sing Lees and the Mar Chews might have returned permanently to live in China.

Chinese cultural traditions were maintained in Wellington. Say Joe built a (still-extant) pig oven on his block on the Bell River flats near the cemetery. When Say Joe died, Joseph Ah Yook took over his land, eventually relocating to Simpson Street in town, where he built a pig oven and was in charge of the annual Ching Ming ceremony.119

Connections to ancestral villages also remained strong. In 1947, George Coon revisited China accompanied by his sons Tom and Bill. Both married Chinese-born women in China, both of whom gave birth to daughters. Tom and Bill returned to Wellington in 1949 with their Chinese wives, Jean and Jane, and Chinese-born daughters, settling in Wellington where they raised their families working as market gardeners on George Coon’s land.120

Remittances continued to be sent to China. Tim Sing Lee recalls that when George Mar Chew began receiving a pension in 1952, to his wife’s dismay he sent every penny to one of his nephews in Hong Kong.121 Letters sent to the Yee Lee store in Stuart Town show that Fong Lee maintained an interest in business affairs of his relatives in Australia. A letter from Fong Lee to the Yee Lee firm, addressed “to my good nephew”, provided advice on tax increases on goods.122 Another envelope is addressed from Wong Hung Tsau to his nephew Wong Wah Lai.123 Tim Sing Lee married Salona Leung, the grand-niece of George Mar Chew in 1976. Salona was born in Hong Kong but her grandfather was born in Chuk Sau Yuen (竹秀園) village in Chung Shan.124

Chinese Stores
Throughout these comings and goings, Chinese stores remained a constant in Wellington. Janis Wilton and Sophie Loy-Wilson have both argued the importance of Chinese stores to the development of rural towns in Australia, and this is well illustrated by the example of the Chinese stores that served the town of Wellington from 1879 up until the year after William Mow Funn’s death in 1953.125

In 1891, Fong Lee & Co. was one of only two stores in Wellington.126 The customer base was not exclusively Chinese. In December 1916, it was stated that at Fong Lee & Co., there was “not a want of the housewife that could not be satisfied”.127 William Suey Ling

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120 Salona Sing Lee, “Coons: From 1919 to 1970s”.
122 Correspondence between the Yee Lee store and relatives in Pak Shek and Sun Tong, unpublished manuscript in the collection of Hilary Cohen, Stuart Town.
123 Ibid.
125 Janis Wilton, Golden Threads; Sophie Loy-Wilson, “Rural Geographies and Chinese Empires”.
127 McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 275.
managed Fong Lee & Co. from 1896 until a few months before his death in 1936, when the store was voluntarily wound up.

Fong Lee & Co. was not the only Chinese store in Wellington, however. Next to Fong Lee & Co. was a greengrocer store run by Stanley Wong Yin Key. He may have been a relative, as when he died in 1944, the Ling family paid for his gravestone in the cemetery.128 Another business owner was Chan Yue Hong (who adopted the surname Hunt), who had an import-export business in Wellington.129 Yet another Chinese storekeeper, Young Lee, was noted in 1917 “for his readiness to assist in all the charitable work of the town”.130 In 1910, at the age of 21, “Willie Funn” (William Mow Funn) opened a drapery store called Way Chong & Co. in partnership with Cobar businessman Thomas Robert Lowe (Moo Sing Lowe). The business was probably located on the block of land on Lee Street purchased by Lowe in 1909.131 William Mow Funn and Lowe had most likely worked together in the drapery section of the Wong Wah Gee store in Cobar.132 The Wellington drapery was wound up in 1912, and Lowe transferred his land to grocer Wong Hoy Chun.133

Figure 3. Fong Lee & Co. Store, Wellington. Photo courtesy of Oxley Museum

130 McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 289.
131 Sue Tuck, pers. comm., 25 July 2019.
William Mow Funn opened a mixed business on Lee Street, which he ran up until the early 1930s when he bought the Bridge Hotel and converted it into a general store named the Macquarie Fruit Exchange.\(^{134}\) His store enjoyed an excellent reputation, with the Wellington Times commenting in 1940, "if public opinion can be accepted as a reliable guide, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it can, the general merchandising store of Mr W. Mow Funn in Lee Street, is one of the highest class of its kind through the west."\(^{135}\) The store remained in business until 1953 when William Mow Funn died and Mrs Mow Funn and family left Wellington a few months later.\(^{136}\)

![Figure 4. William Mow Funn’s first store on Lee Street, Wellington. Courtesy of Oxley Museum](image)

**Market Gardens**

A reason for the longevity of the Chinese community in Wellington is that Chinese market gardens were recognised as a great boon to the town. In 1886, it was reported:

> Before the Chinese gardeners settled here we had to pay half-a-crown each for cauliflowers and if the season proved very dry no vegetables of any kind were procurable, with the exception of potatoes; but now whether the season by good or bad, thanks to the Chinese method of irrigation, vegetables are abundant and of moderate price.\(^{137}\)

In 1907, Tommy John was leasing ten acres of land from the Clifford Estate on the Wellington flats. He had one other man working for him, to whom he gave two acres to work instead of payment. In 1907, they produced 130 tons of onions from the land.\(^{138}\) Chinese also entered into share-farming agreements. Between 1900 and 1904, the area

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\(^{134}\) McGowan and Mott, *True Australians*, p. 278.


farmed on the share system grew from 1,133 acres to 4,284 acres, before falling to 3,498 acres in 1905.\textsuperscript{139}

Besides the Sing Lees, the Lousicks and the Coons, who owned land on the Bell River flats, William Mow Funn owned land on either side of Gobolion Street adjacent to the Macquarie River. Those who could not buy land were able to lease from Chinese landowners, which offered them security of tenure. When Say Joe died, William Mow Funn, then later Joseph Ah Yook, leased Sing Lee’s land as a market garden.\textsuperscript{140}

In other towns, insecurity of tenure drove Chinese market gardeners off the land. For example, in October 1894, Parkes Council sent a deputation to the Minister for Works seeking to eject Chinese market gardeners in the vicinity of the water reserve. The Minister for Works gave instructions to the Crown Solicitor to take necessary steps to remove the Chinese. Although the Chinese market gardeners resisted for some months, in February 1895 they were finally evicted. One of the men tried to commit suicide in his desperation to remain.\textsuperscript{141}

The 1914 case of Ah Mow vs Bestwick in Bathurst illustrates the risk of sub-leasing land.\textsuperscript{142} John Honeyman was leasing ninety acres of land near Bathurst and sub-leasing twelve acres to Ah Mow. During the period of the sub-lease, the land was sold. The new owner, Edward Bestwick, gave Ah Mow a deadline by which to quit the land. When he failed to do so, Bestwick ploughed over Ah Mow’s crops. Ah Mow sued Bestwick for his losses. Although the court found in Ah Mow’s favour, he was awarded only £10 of the £600 in damage he had claimed and the judge refused to grant costs.\textsuperscript{143}

Another reason for the success of Chinese market gardens in Wellington was that William Mow Funn, who had market gardens on the river flats from at least 1912, was an acknowledged pioneer of agriculture in the town.\textsuperscript{144} By 1915, he was winning prizes for his pumpkins and marrows in the Wellington Show.\textsuperscript{145} In 1928, he installed a motor-driven pump for irrigation purposes on his Macquarie River gardens and employed many Chinese men, some on a permanent or semi-permanent basis, and others on a casual basis.\textsuperscript{146} In 1939, he employed spray irrigation on the Bell River flats, pumping river water through giant sprays.\textsuperscript{147} He proved himself so capable and trustworthy that he earned a contract from the Department of Supply for vegetables during World War II. According to Tim Sing Lee, William Mow Funn would arrange a carrier to pick up of vegetables from different properties.\textsuperscript{148} He was also a leader in mechanising farming. In a 1940 article titled “Outstanding Yield of Local Potatoes”, the Wellington Times wrote:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Porter, The History of Wellington, p. 56.
  \item Sue Tuck, pers. comm., 25 July 2019; Carole Gass, pers. comm., 26 February 2017.
  \item See National Advocate, 26 October, 7 November 1894, and 15 February 1895.
  \item McGowan and Mott, True Australians, pp. 272–273.
  \item Tim Sing Lee, pers. comm., 29 March 2019.
\end{itemize}
Mr W. Mow Funn of Wellington has achieved a remarkable production yield of eight-and-a-half tons to the acre … it is interesting to note that this crop was taken off with a mechanical digger drawn by a tractor, which vastly increases the acreage that can be covered in a day.149

William Mow Funn shared his farming know-how with the rest of the community. In 1945, a demonstration of the International Harvester Company Pty Ltd’s potato-growing equipment was held at his garden.150

Figure 5. Potato harvest time, Photograph courtesy of Ray and Sue Tuck.

The success of the Chinese market gardeners must be considered all the greater for persevering in the time before the construction of Burrendong Dam in 1967 put a stop to the repeated flooding of the river flats. On numerous occasions over the years, flooding caused ruinous damage to the crops of market gardeners.151

Another important reason for the success of the Chinese market gardeners in Wellington was having the support and labour of family members. For example, when the Mar Chews returned from China in 1950, George Coon gave them two acres of his land to grow tomatoes for the canneries.152 Tim Sing Lee and Mary Mar Chew did most of the gardening, saving money to prepare Say Joe’s garden for use and put aside a deposit for a tractor.153 Bill Coon assisted Tim in obtaining a bank loan to buy a tractor in 1954.154

151 McGowan and Mott, True Australians, pp. 272–74.
152 Salona Sing Lee, "Chan", unpublished manuscript, no date.
153 Ibid.
154 McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 290.
Women not only provided partnership, cultural continuity and children but were also an essential part of the labour force. When Mary Mar Chew lived with her parents at Mount Frome, she used a horse and whim to raise water from the river.\(^{155}\) Minnie Lousick recalled that all the children helped out in the garden and her mother carried some of the water cans.\(^{156}\) Alf and Ruby (née Lousick) Bow worked their market garden together. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Bows, the Coons and Tim Sing Lee grew beans and tomatoes for Rosella’s and Edgells’ canneries under contract. The Coons and Loo Sicks were the biggest growers. The Coons employed fifty to sixty pickers, who were paid by the bag. In the 1960s, Edgells paid £19 a ton for tomatoes and 13 shillings a bushel for beans. Pickers were paid three shillings a bushel.\(^{157}\) After Alf Bow’s death, Tim Sing Lee entered into a share-farm arrangement with Ruby. He worked the machinery and did the carting; she did the watering. The harvesting was done by hired labour.\(^ {158}\) Bill Coon’s wife, Jane, also worked in the gardens. When Jane died, a eulogy given at her funeral recalled, “Among the rows of vegetables, straw hat on head, hoe or knife in hand, she toiled hard, often under a hot sun, chipping weeds and thinning out and harvesting crops”.\(^{159}\)

Aboriginal people provided another crucial source of labour to Chinese gardens. By 1900, most of the larger pastoral and agricultural stations had been broken up under Closer Settlement, forcing the former Aboriginal residents either onto reserves and stations or into town fringes. Many found work on the smaller properties, but they could not live there.\(^{160}\) Around 1928, Aboriginal families begin living on “The Springs”, an old Aboriginal camping place on a travelling stock reserve south of Orange.\(^ {161}\) When, in the early 1940s, the Cabonne Shire Council and Aborigines Welfare Board engineered the removal of the Aboriginal families living at The Springs, some families found refuge living on Chinese market gardens.\(^ {162}\)

Joyce Williams, born Marguarite Riley at Nanima Mission in 1926, lived on the Mar Chew and Bow property after moving from The Springs. Her uncle, Paddy Riley, also had a hut on the Mar Chew property. According to Joyce, other Aboriginal people lived on the Chinese properties, such as those belonging to Alf and Ruby Bow and Bill and Violet Lousick.\(^ {163}\) Violet Lousick’s daughter Janet Henman recalled that there were twenty to thirty humpies on the Lousick gardens, one of which was owned by Charles Lousick.\(^ {164}\) Almost all of the Wellington Chinese gardeners in the 1940s and 1950s employed Aboriginal labourers. Carole Gass said, “when I was growing up we used to employ them from the Mission. Charlie Ah Yook used to take a truck to the Mission (Nanima) and bring back workers. They would do the picking. Very few white Australians would be willing to do...

\(^{155}\) Tim Sing Lee, pers. comm., 27 May 2017.
\(^{156}\) McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 281.
\(^{157}\) Tim Sing Lee, pers. comm., 27 May 2017.
\(^{158}\) Ibid.
\(^{159}\) Eulogy given by Gwenda Coon at Jane Coon’s funeral, in possession of Kathy and Barry Coon.
\(^{160}\) NTSCORP, Orange Aboriginal Heritage Report, p. 55.
\(^{161}\) Ibid., p. 62.
\(^{162}\) Ibid., p. 79.
\(^{163}\) Joyce Williams interview by Juanita Kwok and Barry McGowan, 6 April 2018 at the Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service, unpublished manuscript.
\(^{164}\) McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 280.
the picking. It was too menial.”165 The Coon families employed fifty to sixty Aboriginal workers and Tim Sing Lee, between thirty and forty. Tim and the Coon brothers would drive out to Nanima Reserve, pick up the workers and return them at the end of the day, with melons and vegetables.166 Violet Lousick remarked that it was nothing to have about fifty people on the truck: “We were happy to keep the people fed and knew that they were happy.”167

Both Carole Gass and Tim Sing Lee maintain that Aboriginal workers were paid equal wages to other workers and this is corroborated by Aboriginal elder Joyce Williams.168 According to Joyce, Aboriginal people worked for the Bows, Coons and Lousicks, Tim Sing Lee and the Mar Chews, and they were lent money on the basis that it would be paid back later. Joyce recalled that when Aboriginal people working for the Tyacks (a European family) asked for extra money, the family said they could not afford it. The Aboriginal workers walked out and went to work for another European family, the Toyer family, who gave them vegetables but would not pay extra. Later, Aboriginal people worked on the Chinese gardens, where they were paid fairly.169

McGowan and Mott also interviewed Chinese descendants who recounted how Chinese and Aboriginal people socialised together. Janet Henman recalled that many Aboriginal people would use the big shed on their property to play two-up, cards and socialise generally. They would also attend each other’s funerals.170 Violet Lousick’s Aboriginal heritage undoubtedly had an influence in the close relationship between Chinese and Aboriginal families in Wellington. She and Joyce Williams jointly set up the Aboriginal Medical Service in Wellington.171 Besides Bill and Violet Lousick, there were other intermarriages between Chinese men and Aboriginal women. The Ah Sees are a well-known Aboriginal family with many branches of the family living in the Central West. Even today, Chinese– Aboriginal connections continue. Barry and Kathy Coon’s daughter Najette married into the Towney family, another prominent Aboriginal family in Wellington.

**Relationships with the Community**

Economic inter-dependencies and friendships were also maintained with European farmers. After Ruby Bow’s death, Tim Sing Lee entered into a share-farming arrangement with a neighbour, Sid Darney. Tim, who had trained as a motor mechanic, ploughed and did most of the machinery work while Sid did the irrigating. They shared the profits, working as partners until Sid died in the late 1980s.172 With the money he saved, Tim was able to buy additional blocks on the Bell River flats.173

Tim Sing Lee’s relationship with Sid Darney was not unusual in Wellington where Chinese Australians enjoyed comparatively good relations with the broader community. In 1899, a

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167 Ibid.
168 Joyce Williams interview, 6 April 2018.
169 Ibid.
171 Joyce Williams interview, 6 April 2018.
172 Salona Sing Lee, “Chan”, unpublished manuscript, no date.
173 Ibid.
Chinese man named Ah Kin was elected on the Stuart Town Progress Committee, defeating several prominent townspeople. In the following fifty years, Chinese continued to hold office in committees and sporting bodies in the town. William Suey Ling was Treasurer of a number of committees including the Hospital Committee, and in 1948, William Mow Funn was elected one of three Vice Presidents of the Vegetable Growers Association. The committee also included Ron Coon and Thomas Lousick.

No doubt Wellington was not “wonderful” for all its Chinese residents, particularly the unmarried, non-English-speaking men, who bore the greater brunt of legislative discrimination and social racism. As McGowan and Mott describe, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Chinese in Wellington were subject to the usual gambling and opium raids, theft of vegetables and unprovoked assaults. William Mow Funn had to write to the Chinese Consul-General to establish if it was necessary for him to register under the War Precautions Act (Alien Registration Regulations 1916). As he was born in Australia and therefore a British subject, it was not necessary. During World War I, William was informed that as he was not “substantially of European descent” he could only join the military in a non-combatant capacity. Chinese Australians eager to prove their loyalty resorted to changing their names or enlisting elsewhere. William’s brother Charles enlisted as Charles Tucker and claimed he was born in Western Australia. He died at Gallipoli.

Notwithstanding the discrimination they faced, the Chinese in Wellington were not socially ostracised by the press to the degree they were in other country towns such as Bathurst. Although around the time of Federation, several racist letters and columns appeared in the Wellington Times, these were the exception. The norm for the Wellington Times was to acknowledge the contribution to the town made by its Chinese residents. The difference between attitudes expressed in the press towards Chinese market gardeners in Bathurst and Wellington is startling.

The charitable works of Chinese storekeepers and market gardeners also did much to establish good relations. In 1920, Chinese growers were selling pumpkins in small ton lots to owners of starving stock. They were incensed when a speculator bought up a hundred tons of pumpkins from them and began re-selling them at a higher price. The Chinese representative was quoted as saying, “It will come hard on poor people to have to pay more for this useful vegetable, especially when the bread bill is such a big item”.

In the mid-1930s, in failing health, William Suey Ling announced his retirement and imminent departure from Wellington. Council resolved to hold a public meeting to determine in what manner Ling’s service to the town should be recognised. The Wellington Times reported:

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175 McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 274.
176 Ibid., pp. 285–89.
There was not a public movement in which he was not always to the fore, both as a worker and with practical help ... he was associated with practically every sporting body ... and his work as a treasurer to these bodies was invaluable ... right through the years he has always associated himself with the public life of the town and district while his generosity was known far and wide ... The movement which has thus been started will no doubt have the wholehearted support of every individual in Wellington and district.181

On 6 January 1936, Ling was entertained by the residents of Wellington at the School of Arts Hall and a presentation was made to recognise his services to the town. In an article titled “Fine Citizen Honoured”, among the many testimonials reported, perhaps the greatest compliment paid was that “his private and individual life was an example to all good Britshers”.182 In December 1935, Fong Lee & Co. had resolved to voluntarily wind up the business.183 It was suggested in one of the testimonials given at the farewell that the liabilities the company had incurred were due to Ling’s excessive generosity.184 When Ling died in 1936, his obituary writer described him as one of the most public-spirited men the town had ever known, concluding, “It will thus be seen what an estimable citizen Wellington has lost, and how hard it will be to close the gap caused by his death.”185

William Mow Funn also garnered the respect of the leaders of the town and its residents. In July 1951, life membership of the Vegetable Growers Association was bestowed on him in recognition of the enthusiasm and vigour with which he had supported the association since its inception.186 When he died in 1953, it was stated:

He was a truly generous man and Wellington is the poorer for his sudden passing. His large funeral represented every section of the community, and was regarded as a fitting tribute to one of Wellington’s best-loved citizens.187

Conclusion
A number of factors contributed to the longevity of the Chinese community in Wellington. The first is the pioneering role of the early Amoy settlers. Secondly, Chinese store-keepers were well-established in the town from its earliest times and served the town throughout the period under discussion. Thirdly, Chinese grew vegetables in Wellington, both on their own and as share farmers, and they were pioneers of irrigation and mechanisation. The close relationship with Aboriginal families was of mutual benefit, allowing Aboriginal families to survive outside the Mission system and giving Chinese market gardeners access to a workforce when labour was in short supply. The leadership, charitable works and civic participation demonstrated by Chinese residents, particularly William Mow Funn and William Suey Ling, contributed greatly to the acceptance of the Chinese as a valued

185 McGowan and Mott, True Australians, p. 295.
186 Ibid., p. 274.
187 Ibid., p. 299.
part of the community. Perhaps the most important factor in the continuity of the Chinese community in Wellington was the existence of families, which allowed the community in Wellington to survive when other Chinese communities in rural towns disappeared.

Driving west into Wellington today, Wellington Caves marks the beginning of miles of perfectly flat, graded farming land along the Bell River to its junction with the Macquarie River. Much of this land was worked by Chinese market gardeners from the late nineteenth century to the mid and late twentieth century. In the middle of these farming lands is Wellington Cemetery, which has a well-tended Chinese section, with the graves of over sixty Chinese people and more in the general section. On Nanima Crescent, the main street of Wellington, you pass the building which housed the Fong Lee & Co. store. Around the corner on Warne Street is the Ling family home and warehouse, and only a few doors up is the Oxley Museum. The museum’s collection of artefacts from the Fong Lee & Co. store, donated by the Loo Sick and Ah Yook families, is one of the most significant collections of Chinese-Australian heritage in an Australian museum. Artefacts from the museum, together with descriptions by Carole Gass of their use, are pictured in Janis Wilton’s *Golden Threads* book.188 Crossing the bridge over the Macquarie River to leave town, you pass what was another large area of market gardens on the Macquarie and the site of William Mow Funn’s store on the corner of Gobolion Street. Tim Sing Lee, now in his eighties, and Barry Coon in his sixties, still grow lucerne on their land on the Bell River flats, where their families once had market gardens. They may be the last generation to do so, as their children have not taken up farming and most members of the younger generation have left Wellington.

![Figure 6. Salona Sing Lee, Barry Coon, Kathy Coon, Tim Sing Lee and Marjorie Coon, Wellington 2016. Photo by Juanita Kwok](image)

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188 Wilton, *Golden Threads*, pp. 74, 75 and 77.
Although the rich Chinese history is not immediately evident on visiting the town, in 2018, Wellington held its inaugural celebration of Fong Lee’s Lane. The Fong Lee warehouse was used as the stage, on which the local kung fu school gave demonstrations and Aboriginal dances were performed. School children paraded lanterns made in the classroom through the crowds. Anticipating a few hundred people, the organisers, who included Tim Sing Lee, were surprised when Fong Lee’s Lane was attended by over 2,000 people, including descendants of the Ling family. It was a celebration of the Chinese heritage of Wellington that would have made Barry McGowan very happy.

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