

Community history, Chinese

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Pioneers

Lilyan Chan (1916-2006)

I grew up in a two-storey house in Cavenagah Street in Darwin's Chinatown, next door to the Don Hotel. On Sundays we would sit on the upper verandah to do embroidery, while our cousins visited. My older sisters learned knitting and crocheting from the Greek girls, like the Manolis sisters. My mother, Low See, had bound feet. It was very difficult for her to move around. She couldn't do housework. So my father, who operated stores and restaurants, brought out two women from China to work for us. They did everything for Mum and her children.

She was the youngest daughter of Northern Territory pioneer Yuen Yet Hing (died 1917), and the wife of Harry Chan, the first person of Chinese descent to become Mayor of an Australian city: Darwin in the mid-1960s.

(From interview with Diana Giese, ORAL TRC 3684, 1998, *Post-War Chinese Australians* project, National Library of Australia)

Leslie Yuen (1925-2004)

I worked as a delivery boy for Willie and Alberta Pak Poy at the Yam Yan grocery. I also used to stack the goods and clean the fruit and vegetables. At five every morning, my mother would wake me for my job at the Imperial Café, where I waited tables from quarter to six to quarter to nine. Then I hopped on my bike to go to school. I returned at lunchtime to serve again, then back to school at half past twelve—just like a yo-yo. After doing my homework, I would serve dinner at the café between six and eight. I earned ten shillings a week. My mother gave me sixpence for the pictures at the Star Theatre.

He was the grandson of Yuen Yet Hing and the son of Charles Ernest Yuen.

(From interview with Diana Giese, Des Yuen and Daryl Chin, ORAL TRC 3541, 1996, Chung Wah Society/National Library of Australia joint project, part of the *Post-War Chinese Australians* project)

Nellie Fong (1916-1998)

Nellie Fong: I can still remember, years ago, when Aunty Selina Hassan, she had her daughter, and for nine years she couldn't have any more babies, and the mother happened to meet my father. She said: 'Mr Chan, could you give something for my daughter so that she can become pregnant?' Which he did. He got some of these herbs and said: 'You boil that and do this and do that' and for her to drink for so many weeks and all that.

And a couple of months later, she said, yes— she's pregnant.

Diana Giese: Can you remember what these herbs were?

Nellie Fong: No I do not. I wish I knew. I'd make a fortune!

Nellie, her husband Tommy and their daughters ran a large market garden south of Darwin which supplied many of the vegetables eaten by the military forces stationed in the Northern Territory during World War II.

(From interview with Diana Giese, Des Fong and Melanie Chin, ORAL TRC 3543, 1996, Chung Wah Society/National Library of Australia joint project, part of *Post-War Chinese Australians* project)

Ray Chin (b. 1923)

Ray Chin: My mum, she worked as a machinist. She made trousers. In those days mostly all cotton goods. You buy a pair of tailor-made shorts for about seven shillings and sixpence to eight shillings. You get measured up in the morning, and two hours later it was all ready. Whoever measure it up get two-and-six a pair, and the long pants extra five shillings...She also started making other clothes.

Diana Giese: How did she learn to do that?

Ray Chin: She picked up pretty quick. Only takes a woman with a machine—they all cut out. They cut along the line, then she follows the line.

Diana Giese: Where did she work? On the verandah or inside the shop?

Ray Chin: She works at home. She is a bright woman, because at that time my grandfather owned the business and we had about 40 people working in the business and Chin Gong, my uncle, was employed at 10 pounds a month. So you don't get paid weekly. Only book entry, and you withdraw your money when you need it. The company supplies your food, two meals a day.

When my mum started making clothes, making the shorts or long pants, she made two pair a day, worth five shillings, and then she made four pair, 10 shillings a day, and later she got six pair a day. We say 15 shillings a day, five, six days a week. So she was earning more than the general manager...After that, all the other ladies started taking on sewing too.

Chin Gong became one of the Northern Territory's most successful entrepreneurs. Ray Chin's grandfather, Chin Toy, arrived in Australia in 1880 and became an apprentice tailor. In 1886, he started his own tailoring business, Fang Cheong Loong, and it became one of the largest tailoring, drapery and import/export businesses in the town. Post-War, Chin Gong established W.G. Chin and Sons in Darwin's main street, and in subsequent years developed the Chin Building (1956), Chin's Arcade (1959) and Chin House (1963).

(From interview with Diana Giese, ORAL TRC 3542, 1996, *Post-War Chinese Australians*, National Library of Australia)

(For more about Ray Chin, see Diana Giese's *Courage and Service: Chinese Australians and World War II*, Australian Chinese Ex-Services National Reunion, Sydney, 1999, under **Books written, Courage and Service**, www.dianagiese.com.au)