



# HELM



## Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

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### HAPPY CHINESE NEW YEAR!

Our Chinese heritage goes back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the very first Chinese in NSW came to the country areas to work as shepherds, cooks and farm labourers. The small population grew rapidly in the 1850s after Edward Hargraves found gold in 1851, while panning near Bathurst. Soon prospectors flocked to the area, particularly Hill End and Sofala; many to Nundle, to make their fortune. Further discoveries were made in Victoria. Soon the news spread around the world and many hopefuls came from Ireland, Scotland, England, America and China. But the amount of surface gold which could be found in the stream and river beds began to quickly dwindle and various problems developed: the crime rate was high, corruption existed, a crippling licence tax was introduced. The Chinese were mainly from the southern provinces. Easily recognisable, each man had a pole with 2 baskets and a wide brimmed hat; only a handful of women came. Many worked to repay the businessmen who paid for their passage. By 1861 about 13,000 Chinese were prospecting in the NSW goldfields, hoping to be able to earn enough money to send home. As life became harder and less profitable, hostility towards the Chinese, who were often willing to work long hours for less pay began to creep in, and governments began to place restrictions on immigration. Many Chinese soon realised that not everyone could get rich from the gold fields, and moved to other areas where they could grow vegetables and fish – more traditional ways of earning money. Lake Macquarie was an ideal location. They worked hard with simple tools in market gardens, which required intensive manual labour, built iron packing sheds, and lived in corrugated iron huts nearby.



We are now on **FACEBOOK!** Check us out at:  
**HELM (Heritage of East Lake Macquarie).**  
 Tell your stories will help keep our heritage alive!

- Gold mining 1
- The Chinamens 2
- Chinese New Year 3
- Famous Chinese 4



Kindly supporting the community – including Caves Beach Surf Life Saving Club; this edition of HELM newsletter.

**4972 1066 - NOW AT SWANSEA!**  
**SWANSEA PLAZA ARCADE**  
 Near Coles and Blondies.

## LAKE MACQUARIE CHINESE SETTLEMENTS.

Quite a few Lake Macquarie suburbs had Chinese market gardens –not only Swansea and Belmont, but also Cockle Creek, Wangi, Catherine Hill Bay, Dora Creek, Bolton Point, Marks Point, Arcadia Vale, Marmong Point, Nords Wharf, Warners Bay, Teralba. In the 1850's there was a flourishing fishing business in Belmont, working the channel. Fish were sold to Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne and China, handling some 50 tons of fish a year. Also shark fins and abalone were exported to China. They lived in small cottages and set up sheds for cleaning, curing (by salting, brine, sun-drying) and packing fish. By 1870, only about 20 Chinese were left in Belmont.

*Source: LMCC Comm Hist*



Cockle Creek packing shed; gardens were established along the railway line near the creek  
*LMCC*

## THE CHINAMENS

This area between Rawson and Kahibah St, Swansea was referred to as The Chinamens, because of the Chinese fishermen who settled along Swansea Channel in the mid 1850's. There were 2 groups of about 17 men: one under the control of Mr Ah Tie, the other Mr Hop Lung. They arrived together, settled and worked together in harmony. After building small but comfortable slab houses with shingled roofs; a jetty was essential and work sheds for the drying and tanning of fishing nets. In the early days of cotton fishing nets and hemp ropes, periodic tanning was necessary to prevent rotting. More sheds close to the water's edge were required, where the fish could be sorted after unloading from the pier. Here they were gilled and gutted, backbones removed, but scales left intact. These fish were heavily salted and placed in tubs where the salt quickly turned to brine. After about 2 days, the fish were washed and placed on racks made from poles to dry in the sun. In the event of a shower of rain, the fish had to be turned quickly, scale side up. However, if rain was consistent, they were placed in the sheds. Their livelihood came mainly from catching and curing fish by sun-drying, and then exporting to the various goldfields in NSW, Vic and Qld; and China. The smaller varieties of fish and prawns not suitable for drying were pulped. They were placed in large wooden tubs, salted, then crushed down using wooden clogs on their feet in the same fashion as grape crushing is done in the making of wine.



Far left; remains of one of the jetties, adjacent to Chapman Oval, opp. the skatepark  
Left: Chinese fishermen netting.  
*The Australian News. Dec, 1873*

Producing an estimated 70 tons of cured fish a year, their methods of fishing were wide ranging, from handlining to using a variety of nets. Mostly they were large hauling nets which required many hands. They were also known to use mesh or gill nets, sometimes allowing them to drift with the tidal flow of the channel – a technique known as drift netting. The tidal flow in those early days, before dredging and retaining walls, was at a much more leisurely pace than today. They often fished using long prawning nets which also required a lot of labour. As was usual in Chinese settlements, they diversified with extensive vegetable gardens, a little further north towards Coon Island. After filling their own needs, as well as those of the local settlers who were beginning to appear at Swansea, the bulk of their produce was despatched to Sydney along with their fish. These hard-working people were also famous for their cabbage tree hats, usually made at night or in inclement weather. Expertly made, they could fetch as much as 2 pounds 10 shillings (\$3) in Sydney.

Whilst the Swansea community as a whole, held the Chinese in high regard, considering them to be most courteous, hospitable and deeply religious; there were rumblings further afield in the late 1880s and 90s, which led to restrictions on immigration and eventually led to the controversial "White Australia Policy". About this time, the Swansea Chinese community disappeared as quietly as it had arrived.

*George and Noelene Boyd*

# CHINESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS - 2019 YEAR OF THE PIG

**Chinese Zodiac Pigs**



Years of the Pig:  
(If born then, you're a Pig.)

...1923, 1935, 1947, 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019, 2031...

**Lucky numbers**  
2 5 8  
and numbers containing them (like 25 and 58)

**Lucky colors**  
yellow, gray, brown, gold

**Lucky flowers**  
hydrangea, daisy

**Lucky directions**  
east, southwest

**Unlucky numbers**  
1 7  
and numbers containing them (like 17 and 71)

**Unlucky colors**  
red, blue, green

**Unlucky directions**  
southeast

Chinese zodiac or Sheng Xiao (“born resembling”)– a 12 year cycle. Each year is represented by an animal and its reputed attributes. In order the animals are: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, Pig.

The pig is thought to be a mild and lucky animal representing carefree fun, good fortune and wealth. Personality traits of the people born under the sign of the Pig are diligent, compassionate, generous, happy, easygoing, honest, trusting, educated, sincere and brave.

[www.chinahighlights.com](http://www.chinahighlights.com)

## THE SPRING FESTIVAL

The Chinese celebrate their New Year using the lunar calendar dates. The lead up to the festivities is Little Year on January 28<sup>th</sup>. The Spring Festival begins with New Years’ Eve on Feb 4<sup>th</sup>, launching into the main festivities on New Years Day, Feb 5<sup>th</sup>. Each following day has a special significance; concluding with the Lantern festival, Feb 19.

[chinesenewyear.net/calendar](http://chinesenewyear.net/calendar)

Jan 28 <sup>th</sup>	Little year – house cleaning to sweep away bad luck and pray to the stove god
Feb 4 <sup>th</sup>	New Year’s Eve -family reunion dinner; children receive red envelopes; wait for new year
Feb 5 <sup>th</sup>	Greetings and blessings between neighbours; predict fortunes ahead; no sweeping or cleaning
Feb 6 <sup>th</sup>	To the in-laws. Daughters bring family and gift bag of crackers and candy for the neighbours
Feb 7 <sup>th</sup>	Day of the Rat. Crackers and grain left for rats, so that they will not disturb them during the year
Feb 8 <sup>th</sup>	Day of the Sheep. Pray to god of wealth, at midnight open windows to welcome god and feast until dawn. Forbidden to slaughter sheep.
Feb 9 <sup>th</sup>	Break five. Markets and shops open again. Dumplings eaten to bring in wealth
Feb 10 <sup>th</sup>	Day of the Horse. People can start working again; clean bathrooms - send away spirit of poverty.
Feb 11 <sup>th</sup>	Day of the Human. Flower hair ornaments. 7 vegetables porridge. Good weather = good year.
Feb 12 <sup>th</sup>	Day of the millet. Grain and agriculture are highly valued. Pet fish and birds released. Good weather is a sign of a good harvest to come.
Feb 13 <sup>th</sup>	Providence Health. Celebrate the highest god, the Jade Emperor. Must fast and bathe to pray.
Feb 14 <sup>th</sup>	Stone festival. Baked bread for lunch for a smooth year. Can’t use stone tools like millstones.
Feb 15 <sup>th</sup>	Son-in-law Day. Fathers invite daughters and son-in-laws; treated to leftovers.
Feb 16 <sup>th</sup>	Lantern festival preparations for 3 days. Buying lanterns and constructing light sheds.
Feb 19 <sup>th</sup>	Lantern Festival - 5 days. Making and writing riddles on lanterns; many lit hoping to add children

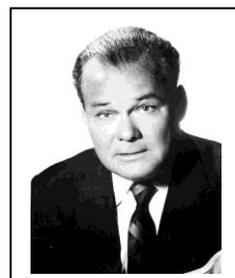


## SOME SIGNIFICANT CHINESE AUSTRALIANS CONTRIBUTING TO OUR HERITAGE

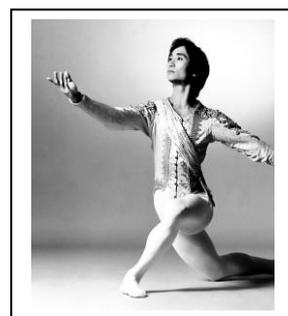
**BING LEE** Born 1908 in Yantai, a fishing port city on the East Coast of China. After studying commerce and working in the merchant navy, he came to Sydney in 1939, planning to work for 3 years, leaving his family behind. He was stranded here by WWII. His family fled to Shanghai, then Hong Kong as refugees after Japan occupied China; finally reaching Australia in 1949. He established a fruit and veg shop in Fairfield; then in the 50s after TV had arrived he established a small electric repair shop and sold TVs, especially to migrants. He adapted the Monty Python song “I like Chinese” to “I like Bing Lee”. Whilst strongly believing in assimilating, he was still very traditional. He was joined by son Ken, who helped to expand the business into a multi million franchise; now run by Yenda, Ken’s wife, and son Lionel.



**L J HOOKER** Leslie Joseph was born in 1904 in the suburb of Canterbury in Sydney to Ellen Tingyou, who died when he was 8. Raised by her family, including his Chinese born grandfather, James Tingyou, he started work as a clerk when 13, and bought his first property at 16. Due to the White Australia Policy he kept his heritage a secret and changed his name by deed poll to Hooker in 1925; thought to be a version of his step-father’s name – Harry Hook Yin, (changed to Hookin). He opened his first real estate office in Maroubra in 1928 and business grew rapidly with his flair for marketing, and eye-catching logo; eventually becoming one of the biggest in the industry, continually exploring new avenues. In 1973 he was knighted in recognition of services to commerce and the community. His story and Chinese roots have been traced by his family and published in “*LJ Hooker the man: the untold story of an Australian Icon*”.



**LI CUNXIN** was born in 1961 into a very poor family. He was randomly selected to attend the Beijing Dance Academy. For 7 years he undertook a harsh 16-hours-a-day training regime. He was offered a scholarship to study ballet in Houston, after which he defected to the USA. In 1987 he married Mary McKendry from Rockhampton. They moved to Melbourne with their 2 children and Li became the principal dancer with the Australian Ballet. In 2012 he became the artistic director of the Qld ballet; after being named Father of the Year in 2009. His autobiography, “*Mao’s Last Dancer*”, was published in 2003; a children’s edition, “*The Peasant Prince*”, was also released.



**VICTOR CHANG** The pioneering heart surgeon was born in Shanghai. He designed and developed an artificial heart valve and an artificial heart. His legendary surgery included performing the first heart transplant on Fiona Coote in 1984. The healthy 14 year old was struck down by a viral infection which weakened her heart and she had to be placed on life support. After 2 years the transplant began to fail, which led to a second transplant. Fiona is the longest surviving heart transplant recipient in Australia. Awarded Companion of the Order of Australia, his greatest legacy is the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute, 1996.



One of his famous quotes:

**“Whatever you give, if you give it freely and without conditions, it’ll come back to you two fold.”**

*The Chinese Experience in Australia. Di Dunlop; wikipedia.*

### Disclaimer

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WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR YOUR IDEAS FOR MORE HERITAGE STORIES!!!