

Lucie Moy Ling

A Woman of Her Times

In Melbourne on 13 April 1874, in the Year of the Dog, a baby girl was born to James and Kim Moy Ling. Little did her parents know that their daughter, Lucie Sophia Kim Oie, would live for more than a hundred years and bear witness to times of great political, economic and social change. Lucie grew up in a loving family and was well respected by the Methodist Church community, yet she was declared an alien in the country of her birth. As a teacher in the Victorian Education Department, she was denied the same employment and retirement entitlements as her male counterparts. On a personal level, she knew the joy of being a wife and mother and also the pain of losing loved ones. This is her story.

Lucie was the eldest of six Moy Ling children, five of whom lived to adulthood. Her father James Moy Ling arrived in Australia from China in 1855 and worked on the Victorian goldfields. He converted to the Methodist religion and ministered to his fellow countrymen in Castlemaine and Bendigo. As a probationary minister, he was appointed to the new Chinese Methodist Mission in Little Bourke Street Melbourne in 1872 and was fully ordained in January 1877 at Wesley Church in Lonsdale Street Melbourne. The Moy Ling family lived initially upstairs above the Chinese Methodist Mission, where Lucie was born, then moved to George Street Fitzroy. Lucie's brother Samuel was born in 1876, but sadly he died in infancy. A second brother Josiah was born in 1877, followed by a sister Laura in 1879. The Moy Ling family then lived for a few years in Castlemaine, where two other children were born - Esther in 1882 and Benjamin (Ben) in 1885. While living in Castlemaine, James Moy Ling took the oath of allegiance on 27 July 1883 and became a naturalised Australian. The family returned to Melbourne in 1886 and began a long association with Carlton, living at 142 Princes Street North Carlton and 35 Drummond Street Carlton, while James conducted services at the Chinese Methodist Mission in the city.^{1,2,3,4}

On 26 August 1889, at the age of fifteen, Lucie began her teacher training at Primary School no. 450 in George Street Fitzroy. This year was of particular significance in the teaching profession because it coincided with the introduction of the so-called marriage bar in the Victorian Public Service, which effectively excluded married women from permanent employment. The gender politics of the marriage bar was probably of little concern to Lucie, who was a teenager at the time, but it was to have ramifications for her a decade later. Lucie was appointed on probation on 11 March 1890 and confirmed by an Order in Council on 14 April 1891. Her assessment reports were variable and she was sometimes described as "rather slow", "rather inactive" and "of a timidly disposition". Teaching geography was not her strong point - she failed the subject twice and had to be re-examined - but she did well in other subjects and was considered "careful", "reliable" and "painstaking". Her progress is perhaps best summed up by the comments: "Hardly suitable for a State School teacher", followed by "More favorably impressed at this visit" and finally "Improves on acquaintance". Lucie, it seems, was a quiet achiever.^{5,6}

1902 was a significant year for Lucie. The Moy Ling family was living at 35 Drummond Street Carlton and Lucie became the owner of a block of land further north at 864 Drummond Street. This would have been quite an achievement for a young female teacher, who was paid considerably less than her male colleagues at the time. In the same year Lucie married Thomas Lem, a cabinet maker who had a business in Lonsdale Street Melbourne. As a result of the marriage bar, Lucie had to resign from her teaching position with the Education Department on 30 September 1902. Of course, Lucie may have been quite happy to give up work and become a homemaker, but the fact remains that she, and many other married women, had no choice in the matter. Another consequence of her marriage to Chinese-born Thomas Lem was that Lucie, though Australian born and educated, was considered of Chinese nationality by marriage.

Lucie and Thomas settled into their new home, named *Kimoie* after Lucie's Chinese name. Their first child Gladys Esther was born at *Kimoie* on 20th December 1903. A photo taken at *Kimoie* a year later shows three generations of the Moy Ling family - James and Kim, their children and baby Gladys. Lucie's sister Laura married tea merchant Samuel Sue in 1905 and they lived nearby at *Canton* in Rathdowne Street. Lucie had a son, Howard James, in 1906 and no doubt Laura helped out with the care of the young children. In 1908 Lucie, along with thousands of other Victorian women, registered on the electoral roll for the first time. Lucie would have been too young to sign the "monster petition" of 30,000 signatures that was presented to Parliament in 1891, however she reaped the benefit of an earlier generation of women who fought for the right to vote in Victoria.^{7,8}



Image source: Private collection of Serena Cheung and Chris Shai-Hee

Lucie and her Family at Kimoie in 1904

Seated: Thomas Lem, Lucie Lem, Kim Moy Ling and James Moy Ling holding Gladys Lem

The Reverend James Moy Ling died at *Canton* on 2 February 1911, followed by his wife Kim on 4 March 1912. They were buried together in Melbourne General Cemetery, not far from Lucie's and Laura's homes. Both were sadly missed by their children and the community. But Lucie was to suffer a greater loss with the sudden death of her husband Thomas on 28 October 1914 at the age of 42. He was buried in Melbourne General Cemetery, in the plot adjoining James and Kim Moy Ling's grave. According to the terms of Thomas Lem's will, dated 13 March 1908, Lucie was appointed sole executrix of her husband's estate, valued at £1,171, 18 shillings and 8 pence. This would have been a difficult task for Lucie, but she was most likely guided through the probate process by her brother Josiah, who was Clerk of Courts at Collingwood. The bulk of the estate related to Thomas' cabinet making business, and Lucie was fortunate in that she already owned the house *Kimoie*.^{9,10}

While Lucie was adjusting to her new life as a widow and single mother, the global events of the World War 1 left few families untouched. Lucie's brother Ben made several attempts to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). However, he was rejected as unfit on the grounds that he was "not substantially of European origin & descent". Ben was finally successful in enlisting on 4 May 1917, when the embargo on his non-European origin was lifted. His brother Josiah was a pacifist by belief, but Josiah's stepson Reginald Garratt went to war and was killed in action in France on 11 April 1917. Esther, the youngest of the Moy Ling girls, married cabinet maker Thomas Seed Chung on 3 July 1915 and their only child Morva Kim was born a year later on 19 June 1916. That year saw the introduction of the War Precautions (Aliens Registration) regulations of 1916 and both Esther and Thomas were required to register at the local North Carlton police station. Lucie was also subject to the same regulations, even though she was a widow and technically no longer married to a Chinese-born man.^{11,12,13,14,15,16,17}

World War 1 ended in 1918 and Australia was once again at peace. The War Precautions (Aliens Registration) regulations were lifted and Lucie was no longer considered an alien in her own country. Ben was discharged from the AIF on 11 October 1919 and he returned to civilian life as a clerk, living with Laura and Samuel Sue at *Canton* in North Carlton. Laura became a widow on 1 October 1923, when Samuel was hit by a car while crossing Glenferrie Road in Hawthorn. He died in the Alfred Hospital a few hours later as a result of his injuries, aged 57 years. Samuel Sue was buried with Thomas Lem in Melbourne General Cemetery, and the shared loss of their husbands would have brought the sisters even closer together. A year later, on 4 November 1924, Josiah's stepson George Garratt committed suicide. He had served with the N. & M.E. in German New Guinea (now part of Papua New Guinea), where he contracted malaria, and he was depressed at the time of his death. A letter of rejection from the young woman he loved proved to be the tipping point and he shot himself at the family home *Stanhope* in Ivanhoe.^{18,19}

In 1935 Esther and her husband Thomas Seed Chung, now retired from business, made the decision to leave Australia for Hong Kong, with the option of returning at a later time. They faced the bureaucratic hurdle of applying for exemption from the dictation test, which was introduced by the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 and designed to exclude people of non-European nationality from entering Australia. Esther, like her sisters Lucie and Laura, was born and educated in Australia, but she was considered of Chinese nationality by marriage. The sole concession was that Australian-born Esther was granted exemption for five years, while her Chinese-born husband was granted exemption for three years only. They left Melbourne on the *Tanda* on 2 July 1935, but Thomas was never to return to Australia. World War 2 intervened and he died during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong.^{20,21,22}

In World War 1, Australians fought in distant lands, but the action of World War 2 was much closer to home. Lucie and Laura were once again declared aliens in their own country. Under the National Security (Aliens Control) regulations, they were required to register at the North Carlton police station where, in 1940, they were photographed and finger-printed like criminals. They applied for naturalisation and Laura was declared a "natural-born British subject" on 23 July 1940 and Lucie on 3 January 1941. As British subjects, they were "entitled to all political and other rights, powers and privileges ..." and "... subject to all obligations, duties and liabilities to which a natural-born British subject is entitled or subject ..." But with the threat of Japanese invasion, any person of Asian appearance could have been viewed with suspicion, regardless of their birthplace, nationality or sworn allegiance to a British king.^{23,24}

The immediate post-World War 2 years saw sweeping changes in Australia. Women who had taken the place of men in the war workforce now became wives and mothers, resulting in a "baby boom." Married women teachers, who were granted temporary exemptions during the war, were once again subject to the marriage bar. Within a few years, schools were over-crowded and struggling to keep up

with the baby-boomers and children of newly-arrived migrants, many of whom settled in Carlton and the inner-city suburbs.

Esther returned to Australia from Hong Kong and went to live with Laura at *Canton* in Rathdowne Street. Lucie, now in her 70s, watched the world from her home at *Kimoie* and reflected on her life. As the eldest in the family, Lucie was to outlive all her siblings and her own daughter Gladys. Her brother Ben died on 8 October 1946, and sister Laura a few years later on 24 February 1950. Gladys, who suffered from Parkinson's disease, died on 29 June 1954. Josiah and Esther died within three months of each other on 21 September and 22 December 1965. All were buried in Melbourne General Cemetery.²⁵

Lucie celebrated her 100th birthday on 13 April 1974 and she signed her last will and testament on 21 June 1974, leaving one share of her estate to her son Howard Lem and three shares to the World Wide Evangelisation Crusade. She had left *Kimoie*, where she spent most of her adult life, and was living in High Street Windsor at the time. Lucie died two years later on 24 June 1976, aged 102 years. She was buried in Melbourne General Cemetery, a short distance away from her parents, husband Thomas, brother Ben, sister Laura, and her daughter Gladys. Her son Howard Lem, a jeweller and canary fancier, died on 13 December 1981, aged 75 years. Like his mother, Howard left a substantial part of his estate to the World Wide Evangelisation Crusade. Lucie lay resting in an unmarked grave for decades. In 2007 descendants of the Moy Ling family arranged memorial plaques for Lucie, and also for her sister Esther and baby brother Samuel, who were buried together in a different section of the cemetery.^{26,27}



Photo: CCHG

Kimoie in 2015

864 Rathdowne Street North Carlton

CCHG thanks Serena Cheung for sharing the story of the Moy Ling Family.

Notes and References:

- ¹ Biographical information sourced from Victorian birth, death and marriage records and contemporary newspaper accounts.
- ² The Methodist Chinese Church, Ian Welch, Department of Pacific and Asian History, ANU, 2010
- ³ Naturalisation record of James Moy Ling (NAA: A712, 1883/Y7284)
- ⁴ Building ownership and occupancy information sourced from land title records and Melbourne City Council rate books (Smith and Victoria wards).
- ⁵ Teacher Record Books, no. 12051 (VPRS 13718)
- ⁶ Dwyer, Donna. *The married woman, the teaching profession and the state in Victoria, 1872-1956*, PhD thesis, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, 2002
- ⁷ *Kimoie* was designed by architect J. Thornlowe and built by John Hardy. (Notice of Intent, No. 8681, 2 June 1902)
- ⁸ Women's Suffrage Petition
<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/the-history-of-parliament/womens-suffrage-petition>
- ⁹ Melbourne General Cemetery burial records
- ¹⁰ Probate file of Thomas Lem (VPRS 28/P3/493/136/663)
- ¹¹ Attestation paper of Benjamin Moy Ling (NAA: MT1486/1, MOY-LING/BENJAMIN)
- ¹² Attestation paper of Benjamin Moy Ling (NAA: B2455, MOYLING BENJAMIN)
- ¹³ Every Week, 10 May 1917, p. 7
- ¹⁴ Reginald Charles Garratt's date of death was reported as 11 May 1917 in newspapers, but his grave registration confirms the date of 11 April 1917.
- ¹⁵ Alien registration application of Esther Chung (NAA: MT269/1, VIC/CHINA/CHUNG ESTHER)
- ¹⁶ Alien registration application of Thomas Seed Chung (NAA: MT269/1, VIC/CHINA/CHUNG THOMAS)
- ¹⁷ Alien registration application of Lucie Lem (NAA: MT269/1, VIC/CHINA/LEM LUCIE)
- ¹⁸ Inquest deposition file of Samuel Sue (VPRS 24/P0/1043/1923/1095)
- ¹⁹ Inquest deposition file of George Jewell Ashton Garratt (VPRS 24/P0/1062/1924/2246)
- ²⁰ The Immigration Restriction Act remained in force until 1958, when the dictation test was abolished.
<http://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/websites-mini/journeys-australia/1900s20s/immigration-restriction-act/>
- ²¹ Certificate of exemption from dictation test (NAA: B13, 1935/13982)
- ²² Certificate of exemption from dictation test (NAA: B13, 1935/14448)
- ²³ Alien registration application of Laura Sue (NAA: B6531, NATURALISED/1939-1945/SUE LAURA)
- ²⁴ Alien registration application of Lucie Lem (NAA: B6531, NATURALISED/1939-1945/LEM LUCIE)
- ²⁵ The Victorian Education Department marriage bar was repealed in 1956 and married women teachers were admitted to the superannuation fund in July 1975. However, they did not have the same retirement benefits as male teachers until 1982, 93 years after the marriage bar was first introduced.
- ²⁶ Probate file of Lucie Sophia Lem (VPRS 28/P8/21/813/978)
- ²⁷ Probate file of Howard James Lem (VPRS 28/P12/220/908/953)