

Early Days at Kwong Sing and Company

by Stanley Young

Editor's note: In 1980 Stanley Young noted down a number of his memories of the Kwong Sing store in the 1920s and 1930s. They were written in no particular order. They have been reorganized and placed under sub-headings, and occasionally some minor corrections have been made to expression.

Name of the store

The original name of the store was Kwong Sing War. This was changed to Kwong Sing Long which was later changed to S.Kwong Sing & Co. This was further changed to Kwong Sing & Co (Glen Innes) Pty Ltd.

Work routines

After breakfast at 7.30am, the staff would start work at the store by sweeping the front footpath, shaking the coir mats in the front of each door and filling the crockery bowls which were under the legs of the display tables with water to stop ants. The calico sheets covering the clothing and dress fabrics also had to be taken off and folded each morning.

The display windows were cleaned each week and all the brass fittings were polished.

There was no morning tea break and the store closed for lunch between 1pm and 2pm. Wednesday was half day trading and Saturday the store was open from 8am to 8pm.

On Wednesday afternoon when the store was closed we bottled wines and tinned honey and did other packaging of groceries.

In the evenings after dinner we went back to the store to fill the fixtures and to spread damp sawdust on the bare wooden floors before sweeping them.

The wooden floors were periodically washed, scrubbed and hosed down.

Goods and Services

Farm products sold included rock salts, salt licks, fertilizers, corn and chaff, oats bran and pollard, chicken feed. Corn was crushed by machinery. Home made butter made by farmers was sold in the store, also fresh farm eggs which were packed in sawdust or wrapped in newspaper.

When placing their orders, farmers purchased 150lb sacks of flour, 72lb bags of sugar. No 'Self raising flour' was sold. Instead, baking powder was purchased to add to plain flour. Citric acid and tartaric acid was bought for home-made cordials. Caustic soda and washing soda was bought for soap making. Laundry soap was sold in 1 1/2 or 2lb bars.

Other goods sold included patent medicines eg. Bidomac, Mother Seigles Syrup, Fullers Earth, Comfort Soap, Warn's Wonder Soap, Doans Backache Pills, California Fig Syrup, Senna Leaves, Indian Root Pills, Heenzo, Scotts Emulsion, Lane's Emulsion, Pinketts, Tooth powder.

Kapok was imported to make pillows and mattresses at the rear of the store. Hardware was imported from America. Dress materials were from Manchester in England through an agent and clocks came from Germany. One of the clocks is still in the home of one of the members of the Young family. From China came silks, napery and men's hosiery.

There was a dressmaking and millinery service. Milliners, Miss Leach and Miss Lake, were available on the premises and there was also a dressmaker.

A section of the premises was occupied by a dental surgeon, M.H.Sinfield.

A horse and cart home delivery service was used for town and district deliveries. It was a usual practice to add a small gift of 'boiled lollies' to each order. At Christmas time, a gift of a bottle of wine was included. Some customers were given a ham or a Christmas cake.

Chairs were supplied at the counters for customers' comfort.

In the shop lane between East Avenue and Grey Street, parking sites for horse and sulkies were available to customers and there was a horse stall. Horse feed, chaff and corn were 6d a bucketful.

Sales and Marketing

Coupons were given for cash sales. Each coupon had a face value of 6d and a coupon was given for every sale of £1 in any department. Purchases of tobacco, tea, sugar and butter were not included. Coupons could later be redeemed for goods excluding groceries. For example, 10 coupons were worth 10 shillings.

Groceries sold on credit were charged a little extra but if the account was paid within thirty days a discount of 2 1/2% was given.

Suppliers

Warehouses which were associated with the store included Sargood Gardiner, Paterson, Laing and Bruce, Robert Reid, John Keep and Company, D. & W. Murray, J. Ireland and Company, Briscoe and Company, W.C. Douglas.

Staff Facilities

Accommodation was provided for several Chinese assistants in rooms above the shop, and also for the Chinese cooks.

A kitchen and dining room was provided to cater for the Chinese members of the staff, and rice and Chinese groceries were imported direct from China.

Christmas parties were held each year for staff, friends and customers, after work on Christmas eve.

There was a chicken run at the rear of the store where chooks, ducks and fowls were kept. The cooks made Chinese sausages, sun cured fish, pork, chicken, ducks and made their own noodles bouncing up and down on a bamboo pole on top of a table with one end of the pole attached to the table.

Wages and Conditions

Wages in the 1930s averaged £3/5/- a week. There was no holiday pay, no long service leave, no sick leave and no shop heating.

Staff

Some of the staff:

Mr O'Hara (driver of a two horse lorry), Billy Hilton (driver of a one horse dray) Bert Defraime, Lance Defraime, Mr Goodhew, Arthur Lee Chew, Mew Cum, G. Tarn Gar, Mr Thornton, Fred Jack, Colin and Matt Handley, Wally Bow, Stan Chung, Miss Hogbin, Mary Quirk.

Tattam Clapp, Churchill, Ledger, Harry Fay, Harry Yee, Walter Gett, Arthur Yee, Jimmy Hoon, Bing Fay, Eddie Fong, Roy Kemble, Jimmy Shay (Sheah), George Lay, Oscar Gar, George Woo.

Staff picnics

Joint staff picnics with the Hong Yuen store of Inverell were held at Half Way Point on Inverell Road. Later staff picnics were held at the foot of Grafton Hill, at Beardy River and at Yarraford Bridge.

Building and Fittings

Long before electricity was installed by the municipal council, the store installed a Rushton Hornsby Engine of 32 horsepower for the 110 volt generator.

Underground tanks and three wells were established at the rear of the store.

Branch stores

A branch store was established during the 1930s. Named Sincere Co. Cash and Carry, this became known as the 'Busy Bee'. It was situated opposite the town hall.

Another branch store was set up on the corner of Ferguson and Lambeth Streets, and another in the township of Torrington.

Goods were also supplied to a small store in Stannum.

Other Chinese stores and businesses in Glen Innes

Another Chinese store, War Lee & Co. [Warley & Co] was established on the corner of Grey and Wentworth Streets by Messrs Harry Hon, Charlie See, Billy See. After the store ceased trading a picture theatre was erected on the site. Mr Hon started a business in Grey Street opposite the Town Hall then, after ceasing business there, he started Sun Sun & Co. in Tenterfield.

George O Chee had a fruit shop adjacent to Kwong Sing's wine department.

Another fruit shop, Sing Lee & Co, traded opposite O Chee's in Grey Street.

A Chinese vegetable garden existed near the gas works in Lang Street.

Another vegetable garden existed near Furracabad Creek Bridge on Wellingrove Road.

Learning Chinese

A Chinese teacher was brought out from China by my father, Percy Young, to tutor his children in Chinese. Classes were held in the afternoons after their normal state school hours, and also on weekends.