

Locals contribute to research

More history shared on early legal pioneer William Ah Ket, who was born in Wangaratta OUR EXPERTS ARE LISTENING

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LAST month the Wangaratta Chronicle ran a story about an early legal pioneer William Ah Ket, who was born and raised in the rural city.



The research into William's life by associate professor Andrew Godwin from Melbourne Law School generated a lot of interest among readers, with some contacting him to share information on the first Australian lawyer of Chinese descent.

"I was contacted by members of the Wangaratta Historical Society, a great nephew and great niece of William and the granddaughter of one of William's clients in Tallangatta," he said.

"William's great niece noted that William's sisters had managed tea rooms in Wangaratta and were skilled seamstresses.

"The secretary of the Wangaratta Historical Society confirmed that the society had information about William in its files and mentioned the remarkable life that William's father and mother had led.

"William's father, Mah Ket, immigrated to Australia in 1855 to build a new life and serve the Chinese community.

"In addition to giving William a grounding in Chinese language and culture, Mah Ket encouraged him to continue his mission as a bridge between the Chinese and non-chinese communities in Australia.

"He also worked hard to give his daughters an education and encouraged them with their achievements.

"A moving story about William came from a lady whose grandparents had established a bakery in Tallangatta in 1915.

"After her grandfather died of cancer in the late twenties, William helped the grandmother and her three sons to save their bakery business.

"William thereafter came to be known as the family's saviour.

"It is not known why William stepped in to provide help to this family; it is possible that he did so on a pro bono basis.

“Coincidentally, I also discovered that the grandchildren of William’s youngest sister, Ada, had known the grandfather of Andrew’s wife, Angela (nee Vine), in his capacity as their family doctor.

“After a long service as a surgeon with the British army in British Malaya, Dr Edwin Vine moved to Mansfield to establish a general practice in 1950 and lived there until his death in 1971.

“William’s great nephew fondly recalls the time when he was a child and they took their pet dog to Dr Vine after it had hurt its leg.

“After treatment, Dr Vine bandaged up the dog’s leg and the dog made a full recovery.” Professor Godwin said he was “extremely grateful” to the Wangaratta Chronicle and its readers for sharing their knowledge about William.

“I look forward to the lifting of the current travel restrictions so that myself and my wife can return to Wangaratta,” he said.

“In addition to collecting information about William and the Ah Ket family, we also hope to collect information about our own personal connection with the local community through Dr Vine.

“Angela herself has a direct connection with the local community as she lived in Tallangatta between 1972 and 1976 when her father, the Reverend Michael Vine, was the local Anglican minister.”