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PREPARED AND DELIVERED BY: G Cumming

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MEI QUONG TART
(1850 - 1903)

Quong Tart was a notably picturesque character, a successful businessman and a philanthropist.

He was born Mei Guang Da in 1850 in Xin Ning, some 100 kms west of Canton, in the Province of Kwantung, China.

His father was a prosperous merchant who sold ornaments and artefacts and was sufficiently wealthy to have his sons educated by private tuition.

At the age of nine, Mei Guang Da accompanied his uncle Guang Yin, who was in charge of a party of Chinese labourers, who were heading for the New South Wales goldfields at Braidwood, 200 kms south-west of Sydney.

At that time it was common practice for the Chinese to borrow money from credit syndicates to pay their way to the Australian goldfields with the syndicate representatives ensuring repayment whether they found gold and prospered or not. The syndicate frequently had greater control over the Chinese miners than the police.

At Sydney in 1859, the young lad in answer to the immigration official's question, gave his correct name in his boyish treble voice as Mei Guang Da. To the anglo-saxon ear of the clerk this was understood to mean "I am Quong Tart" and so the anglicised name Quong Tart became his name in Australia for the remainder of his life.

The gold mining camps must have been something of a cultural shock for the young lad. The sight of large, brawny men some with red hair, prone to settling disputes by fighting, and eating and carousing in strange ways, must have been almost terrifying when compared with his quiet, rural and cultured Chinese upbringing.

Even the Chinese behaviour of playing fan-tan and smoking opium was a new experience.

Quong Tart's uncle found him a job with Thomas Forsyth and his wife in their general store at Bell's Creek, some 20 kms from Braidwood.

Here, young Quong not only learned basic accounting and business practice but also a great deal about the needs of a remote and small, struggling community.

He also learned English, with a thick Scottish accent, from the Forsyth's from Argyllshire and the many other Scots in the area.

