

People will say “Who is Nellie Yip Quong? Never heard of her, why is she so special?” In short, she is woman who lived in a time when mixed marriages were uncommon; in fact, marriages in general, since Vancouver’s Chinatown was often referred to as a “bachelor society.” More importantly, she was accepted into and embraced by this early Chinese Canadian community. In return, she served her adopted community with needed skills: midwifery and translation. She was a social activist who we are today officially recognizing and commemorating.

Nellie Towers was born in Saint John, New Brunswick, in 1882. While teaching English in New York City, she met Charles Yip Quong of Vancouver, a widower, who she married in 1900. They returned in 1904 to live permanently in Vancouver’s Chinatown. This was a difficult time when policies at every level of government targeted the Chinese because of racial intolerance. Because of her English skills, Nellie was an advocate and interpreter for the community. And, yes, she spoke Chinese; in fact, five dialects!

Nellie served as nurse and midwife to a community that did not have access to basic kinds of medical services we expect today. She understood the needs of these women, culturally and in their own language, while delivering approximately 500 babies. As well, for any “unwanted” babies, “Granny Yip” as she was known, served as an adoption broker.

Nellie Yip Quong was an amazing woman of her time, one whose story will inspire future generations.