

## **Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy**

### **Ontario Genealogical Society Conference**

**May 29, 2009**

I am very happy to be here this evening to take over as Honourary Patron of the OGS from my dear friend Senator Lorna Milne, who has served so ably during her term, and advanced the interests of genealogical research through her initiatives on Parliament Hill.

Interest in genealogy is part of my heritage. Like all ethnic Chinese, I need to know from which part of China my ancestors are from, and where my ancestral villages are, both on my father's and on my mother's side. I remember an Anglo Canadian friend once asked me how come I have an ancestral village and she didn't. And, another friend from England who asked how I managed to trace my ancestry that far back. That may be because we come from a very old civilization, and we have had a written language for about 5 thousand years, which by the way, is a living language today. I can personally trace my ancestry back about 2000 years, and it is because we have a written ancestral record which is up-dated every few generations. This is not unusual in many Chinese families.

In order to be interested in genealogy, one must love historical research. As Senator Milne mentioned in her introduction, I have a Ph.D. in history from the University of Toronto. In fact, all my degrees are in history. I also have written a number of books, some of which have focused on my own family's history in Hong Kong and China, and some on the Chinese Diaspora in Canada.

You can guess that I am a book worm, and I love research, because it is so thrilling to get hold of old documents or personal letters written ages ago! At the same time, oral history is of equal importance. For anyone who is researching the past, you hope you can get in touch with those of platinum age who still have sound minds and good memories. When I do my research, the tape recorder is always with me.

Ultimately, genealogical research is really about getting the stories of your ancestors, and learning about their connection to a time and place in the

past, and the continuation to your present. This exercise makes our lives so much more interesting.

I am delighted to see that the number of resources here in Ontario available for genealogical researchers is increasing every year, besides what's available through the OGS. For example, 2 weeks ago, I was at an Asian Heritage Month event at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, and the Library was promoting its recent launch of new genealogical research materials for Chinese Canadians. Among them is a digitalized database of Head Tax Certificates, sorted by name. Other immigration records are also available. Each individual's story encapsulates the larger Chinese Canadian experience which began way before Confederation.

In Ontario, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario shares the immigration and ethnic history of Ontario with all our citizens. In addition to being a physical building, more and more of its resources are available online. An example is an innovative school programme which invites students between grades 5-8 to collect family stories to present to their teachers, their peers and their communities. This helps the students to understand their place in Ontario's history, and to engage them in the history making process.

With the diversity of our population in Ontario, the work of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, with its extensive partnerships, and its travelling exhibitions, as well as programming for citizens of every origin, can be very helpful to members of the OGS.

Personally, I wish we had an organization like this in Hong Kong when I was researching my ancestors, because I have a great grandfather, on my mother's side, who is Scottish, by the name of John Maxwell. I wasn't able to get any information about him before he arrived in Hong Kong. It would have been so nice if I could have found out what his life was like in Scotland, and why he went to Hong Kong to work.

I would also like to mention the Virtual Museum of Asian Canadian Cultural Heritage, funded by Dept. of Canadian Heritage, of which I am the Honorary Chair of their Board of Advisors. It had its soft launch in April, and the official launch is on June 4<sup>th</sup> at York University. This website <http://www.asianheritagemonth.org/> aims to forge links, and greater understanding, of Asian Canadian communities across Canada. This can

certainly be of interest for some of the OGS members who have Asian ancestry.

As I assume the role of Honourary Patron, I look forward to working with OGS to promote genealogical research, and help you in your mission to disseminate the wide variety of genealogical resources available in Ontario. I will spread the word about the good work you are doing, and help you to reach out to new communities.