



Speech by

ROSA LEE LONG

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 31 May 2001

MR ERNEST FONG ON

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (10.14 a.m.): I rise to note the recent passing of a well-known Atherton resident—a quiet achiever who was loved and respected by many. Ernest Fong On—Ernie to his friends—was born in Atherton in 1913 and grew up there with his parents and siblings Maud, Alice, Grace and John. His father, George, had opened a mixed business in Chinatown on the outskirts of town in 1907. He was also a corn dealer and interpreter for the Chinese community. In 1929 the family went back to China on the last steam boat, the *Saint Albans*, so that the children could further their education. Then in 1935 part of the family, including George and Ernie, returned to Atherton and started a mixed business named Consumer Cash Store. Some years later, when the rest of the family returned, they moved into a business in a store they owned in Main Street. Fong On's Store in the early days was renowned for the peanuts they roasted in a drum in the backyard of the shop.

Ernie was a keen sportsman. He played football and was captain of the local tennis team. He was elected a councillor for the Atherton shire in 1949 and was a strong lobbyist for the first town library and for the local school high top, which enabled local children to live at home instead of being sent away to boarding school. He was an active member of the chamber of commerce and a foundation member of the Tableland Anglers Society, which introduced the first food chain into Tinaroo Falls Dam, which ultimately supported the stock of barramundi now existing in that dam. Being community minded, he helped to establish a hostel for out-of-town children so that they could attend school in Atherton. Another of his achievements was the establishment of the CSIRO.

Ernie married Sadie Chin Tie from Townsville in 1957, and he and Sadie raised their niece and nephew after their mother passed away at a young age. Over the years, the business in Main Street expanded and was eventually sold. Ernie had diversified into a Toyworld shop and became a director of this chain. Ernie had many good friends who attended his birthday parties, the last of which, his 88th, he celebrated two and a half weeks before his death. He was a kind, generous and patient man who had a strong community spirit. He will be sadly missed by all.

Time expired.
