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The *Italian Historical Society Journal* aims to provide, to those interested in the history of Australian-Italian communities, an outlet for the circulation of news and reports, the exchange of information and the notification of future activities. We invite readers to contribute newsworthy articles and short notes. Guidelines for contributors are reproduced on the inside back cover of this issue.

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### FRONT COVER:

Transporting harvested cane to the refinery mills. Queensland, c.1925.

In his series 'Italians in Queensland', Filippo Sacchi gives a poignant account of the discrimination experienced by Italian cancutters at the hands of the Australian Workers Union and the Queensland community during the 1920s. See page 16.

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# signs of italian culture in the urban landscape of carlton

by **ALICE GIULIA DAL BORGO** THIS IS PART TWO OF A RESEARCH PROJECT CONDUCTED BY THE AUTHOR IN MELBOURNE IN 2004 IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MILAN AND WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE ITALIAN AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE (IAI) IN MELBOURNE. THE PROJECT WAS SUPPORTED BY A SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION'S MARCO POLO PROGRAMME. IN CONDUCTING HER RESEARCH, DAL BORGO DREW HEAVILY ON RECORDS FROM THE ITALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION AND ON KEY SOURCES INCLUDING SAGAZIO'S 'A WALK THROUGH ITALIAN CARLTON' (1988) AND 'YULE'S CARLTON: A HISTORY' (2004).

IN 2001, DAL BORGO OBTAINED A DEGREE FROM THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY, MILAN UNIVERSITY, MAJORING IN ENVIRONMENTAL GEOGRAPHY. HER THESIS, 'CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE CIMBRI ENCLAVES IN ITALY,' WAS PUBLISHED IN 2004.

IN 2002, SHE OBTAINED A MASTERS IN MANAGEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND OF THE LANDSCAPE: KNOWLEDGE, COMMUNICATION AND ACTION FROM THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY, MILAN UNIVERSITY. SHE IS NOW UNDERTAKING A PHD IN ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND ECONOMIC REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE MILAN UNIVERSITY. DAL BORGO IS A TUTOR AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY OF MILAN UNIVERSITY.

*To understand what Carlton means to the Italians of Melbourne,  
one must have experience with emigration;  
have suffered the solitude,  
the lack of understanding and at times,  
disdain;  
to arrive in a place and feel completely lost.  
To feel like a nobody.  
Carlton has been the cradle of our  
migration to Melbourne;  
the gathering place for those arriving  
migrants who knew that someone,  
somewhere, was waiting for them,  
that some voice was speaking the same  
language.<sup>1</sup>*

The area known today as Carlton, a suburb at the northern edge of the city of

Melbourne, was originally inhabited by the Wurundjeri people, members of the Woiwurrung language group. European settlement caused irreversible damage to the ecosystem on which the Wurundjeri depended as well as to their social and cultural systems. The colonists claimed Wurundjeri lands for grazing, forcing the traditional owners into areas populated by other clans and into conflict with these communities. Such was the feeling of hopelessness and displacement between the 1840s and 1850s that Wurundjeri parents practiced infanticide. A last vain attempt to regain the land taken by Europeans was met with gunfire. The indigenous community was further ravaged by infectious diseases, such as smallpox, influenza and venereal diseases introduced by the colonisers. By the end of 1850, the remains of the Wurundjeri community had retreated to a small pocket of land to the north of the city. In 1863, by government edict, this group was relocated to a property near Healesville.

The history of Carlton is inexplicably tied to the gold rush and the increasing number of immigrants seeking accommodation in the City of Melbourne. Carlton first appears on a map in the early 1850s as a city extension <sup>2</sup>, drawn by General Robert Hoddle as a rectangular grid not unlike that of the city centre. Although a proposal to create a suburb called Carlton was tabled in the Victorian government gazette of 1852 and the sale of plots of land began in the same year, the area continued to be known as North Melbourne. In the two decades that followed, the suburb was transformed by a combination of planned and, at its farthest reaches, unregulated building. Historians dispute the origins of the name Carlton; what is known is that by the 1870s the suburb had taken on the boundaries which identify it today.

From the 1850s to around 1880, wealthy developers bought pockets of land in Carlton on which they constructed homes and factories in bluestone, brick and wood. During this time, the first of the suburb's characteristic Victorian terrace houses appeared. Throughout the nineteenth century 'reverence for Italy and symbols of Italian culture was reflected in the attitudes of middle and upper class Australians and in their fondness for buying Italian goods and emulating Italian cultural styles'.<sup>3</sup> The bourgeoisie learnt Italian and merchants and farmers built their residences in the 'Italian-style', decorating them with Italian statues, marble and furniture.

Alongside major traffic intersections was a network of secondary streets and lanes and it was here that unregulated building saw the speedy construction of densely packed dwellings amid poor sanitary conditions. These were the so-called slum pockets which would be earmarked for demolition in the 1930s. By the end of World War II, Carlton's demographic makeup consisted mainly of large working class families living in rented Victorian and Edwardian cottages.

From its early days, Carlton has been a neighbourhood of new arrivals: Jews, Italians, Greeks, Lebanese and latterly Ethiopians have made it their first port of call, marking their passage through Carlton with their own indelible style. According to historian Celestina Sagazio, the Italian community established itself in Carlton in three successive waves: the first phase occurred between the second half of the nineteenth century and World War I, the second between the two World Wars and the third after World War II. The earliest arrivals were musicians from Basilicata in the south of Italy, followed by friuliani, trevisani and vicentini from the north. The first arrivals settled in the heart of Carlton and to the south, while those who arrived after World War II, from Sicily, Calabria and Abruzzo, chose the north of Carlton. Together, these migrants formed the Italian community. During the 1950s, the Jewish population began to leave Carlton for other suburbs. These are the years when Italian settlement was at its most conspicuous:

*'In the 1950s and 1960s, Carlton became the first and best known "Little Italy" in Australia. It was in many ways the Italians' home away from home. Some historians argue that by 1960 the various groups of Italian migrants had formed an Italo-Australian community. The concept of community was widely used by Italian newspapers, political leaders and by the public. The term embraced all people of Italian descent living in Australia. It assumed that they had more in common with each other than with other Australians'.<sup>4</sup>*

At this point one may ask why Carlton was the first port of call for many migrants. The majority of Italians migrating to Australia, as well as to other parts of the globe, did not arrive under the Australian government's Assisted Passage Scheme. Instead, they paid their own way, gravitating to those areas where other Italian migrants, sometimes from the same town, had already established themselves. These established *paesani* helped new arrivals

to find work and accommodation. Chain migration, hostility from the Anglo-Australian community, proximity to employment and the lack of assistance from the Australian government were all factors which guided the Italian migrant to Carlton.

Initially, the majority of Italian migrants were male. Those from the north of Italy found employment in the construction industry, while southerners worked in suburban factories, market gardens or in the hospital and cleaning sectors. Many were musicians, grocers, fruit and vegetable merchants, barbers, restaurateurs and bakers. Migrants from Friuli and Veneto were experts in terrazzo making as well as bricklaying and carpentry. Italian women in the main worked from home, taking in sewing or running boarding houses for newly arrived migrants. From the 1950s onward, many Italian women also found work in the clothing and textile industry.

In 1891, Italians represented 1% of the population of metropolitan Melbourne and even by 1914 their numbers did not exceed 100. However, between 1921 and 1947 the Italian population rose dramatically from 237 to 1,612, and in June 1960 the number soared to 5,000 or 20% of the total population of Carlton. Although these are approximate figures for the municipality as a whole, they indicate a growing Italian presence in the area. As affirmed by demographer F Lancaster Jones:

*'In 1945 only 14 shops in Lygon Street between Queensberry and Elgin Streets had Italian proprietors [...]. The 1960 Melbourne directory lists 47 Italian shops in the same area, including nine espresso bars, three hairdressers, three butchers, two electrical goods retailers, two photographers, two estate agents, a chemist, a florist, a motor mechanic, a large emporium, and even an Italian hotel proprietor. Elsewhere in the Carlton area, an Italian priest, Italian doctors and solicitors, and a multitude of Italian tradesmen completed what is for many Melbourne's Italians a home away from home. For by the middle of 1960 at least one-quarter of Carlton's population was of Italian origin'.<sup>5</sup>*

Until 1971, the Italian-born population of North Carlton was 28.5%. Today, this percentage has dropped to 4%. From the end of the 1960s, Carlton Italians moved to the outer suburbs where they built spacious houses on larger blocks. Nonetheless,

the sense of community and village life created by Carlton's Italian community is still evident to both visitors and residents of Carlton.<sup>6</sup>

### ARCHITECTURE: THE CHANGES MADE BY ITALIANS

From the 1950s to the 1960s, newly arrived Italian migrants generally found accommodation in one of Carlton's many boarding houses run by fellow migrants. A modest fee covered the cost of a room (usually shared with others) and a hot meal. Lack of privacy and long working hours were among the sacrifices migrants made in order to buy, in a relatively short time, their own home. Owning a home facilitated the process of *sistemazione* or settling down and enabled migrants to gain a sense of '*... place and a sense of belonging in Australia... a sense of citizenship*'.<sup>7</sup>

The majority of homes purchased by Italian migrants were terraces and small Victorian and Edwardian-style cottages, often run-down or in ruin, which were then renovated in what came to be known as the 'Mediterranean style'. [Fig.1&2]

*'There is an Australia-wide post-World War II immigrant architectural tradition, which (while being regionally diverse and sometimes the subject of unjustified derision) is an identifiable idiom in the history of Australian architecture.'*<sup>8</sup> Typically,

the exterior walls were plastered in green or pink, a practice which recalled domestic architecture in the land of origin. Façades were squared off [Fig.3], porches were repaved with tiles that in Italy were used for paving sunroofs [Fig.4], wrought-iron friezes were removed from the front porch [Fig.5] and picket or wrought-iron fences were replaced with rendered concrete or exposed bricks [Fig.6]. Columns and posts were used to decorate the exterior as evidence of the owner's new found status [Fig.7]. Plants and flowers were grown in pots in the front garden [Fig.8], while the backyard was reserved for the cultivation of vegetables, grapes or olive plants. There was usually a pergola and small sheds where wine was made or tomato sauce bottled.

Interiors too were transformed from the dark and brooding ornate Victorian style to light-filled, clean and minimalist. Wooden floors were replaced with tiles or linoleum, aluminium window frames replaced timber sash windows [Fig.9] and windows were protected with roller shutters (non-existent in Anglo-Australian homes during the 1950s and 1960s) [Fig.10]. Bathrooms were added and spacious kitchens created where outside verandas once stood. Corridors were painted in rose-coloured hues and floral designs and bedrooms were decorated with scenes of Italy. According to Allan Willingham, one of the first places in Carlton to undergo such a transformation was 250 Palmerston

FIG 1: Edwardian home [left] and an example of Italian migrant architecture [right]. 496-500 Rathdowne Street, North Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

FIG 2: Victorian façade [right], and an example of the "Mediterranean" style [left]. 75 Lee Street, North Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

FIG 3: An example of a squared off façade [right]. 635 and 637 Lygon Street, Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

FIG 4: An example of porch paving. 195 Palmerston Street, Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

FIG 1



FIG 2



FIG 3



FIG 4





FIG 5



FIG 8



FIG 6



FIG 9



FIG 7

Street. Its owner, Beniamino Braida, was the founder of Federation Granolithic Company and a migrant of Castelnuovo del Friuli in the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The renovated Villa Castelnuovo was 'a nostalgic evocation of vernacular building traditions of the Veneto'.<sup>9</sup> Sadly, the villa was demolished in 1989, but strolling through the streets of Carlton, one will still find examples of the homes of Australia's Italians, some of them still occupied by their migrant owners.

### URBAN PLANNING: FROM HOUSING COMMISSION TO PIAZZA ITALIA

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the entire borough of Carlton was subject to intense scrutiny by the *Royal Commission of Housing of the People in the Metropolis and in the Populous Centres of the State* which found that numerous buildings, especially those in the south of Carlton, were uninhabitable. The majority of these buildings were



FIG 10

boarding or lodging houses<sup>10</sup> run by widows or families, many of Italian origin, and most serviced newly arrived migrants. The Commission condemned the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of these dwellings and recommended changes to the law which would oblige owners of boarding and lodging houses to adhere to strict sanitary regulations or risk the withdrawal of their operating licence. As a consequence of the Commission findings, the 1919 Health Act came into force. However, as the new legislation

FIG 5: A Victorian home transformed by the removal of wrought iron from the verandah and fence [far right]. A Victorian with its original features intact [far left]. 401 Station Street, North Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

FIG 6: Brick fence. 232 Faraday Street, Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

FIG 7: Exterior columns. 195 Palmerston Street, Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

FIG 8: A remodelled front garden. 635-637 Lygon Street, Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

FIG 9: Aluminium window frames grace the home of Ida and Mario [pictured], who migrated to Australia in 1957. 338 Palmerston Street, North Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

FIG 10: Roller shutters. 90 Macpherson Street, North Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

concerned itself largely with lodging houses, the residents of boarding houses saw little improvement to conditions.<sup>11</sup>

In 1936, the Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board's report was published by the housing reformer Oswald Barnett. Lamenting the deplorable state of its buildings and the poor, immoral and criminal population of Carlton, the report caused political outrage by citing the names of Carlton property owners, including Members of Parliament and other respected members of the community. The government was forced to act, promulgating another series of laws that had little effect.

In 1940, public housing first appeared on the urban landscape in Carlton when the newly formed Housing Commission of Victoria (HCV) constructed a small two-storey building divided into apartments, on public land. This was a precursor of what was to come in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1960, the Housing Commission earmarked 400 hectares for demolition.

*'... houses declared unfit for human habitation had to be vacated immediately and demolished at owners' expense. The HCV paid small financial compensation for reclaimed homes, often amounting to only one-quarter or one-fifth of the price the owners had paid for them. For many Carlton residents dreams of ownership, realised briefly in the relatively cheap housing of the inner city, were erased along with hard-earned savings and hard-won homes'.*<sup>12</sup>

When in 1964, 160 hectares of land situated in the centre of Carlton was included in the Carlton Redevelopment Area and designated for demolition, residents decided the time had finally come to oppose the actions of the Housing Commission and thus the Carlton Business and Property Owners Association was born. However, demolition proceeded. A quarter of the residents whose homes were destroyed were of Italian origin. *'The Italians are moving little by little out of Carlton; the Housing Commission bulldozers and the property redevelopers are taking their place'.*<sup>13</sup> In 1969, when the area between Lygon, Lee, Drummond and Princes Streets was earmarked for demolition, the Carlton Association came into being. In the meantime, 3,788 homes were demolished and 15 to 20 storey buildings went up in their place. Public

housing had burst onto the Carlton urban landscape [Fig.11].

The 1970s and 1980s was a period of opposition and rebirth for Carlton. The majority of migrants who arrived in the area between the two World Wars moved on and their place was taken by newly arrived migrants, artists, students and university professors (from nearby University of Melbourne). Carlton became a bohemian centre for the arts, a suburb where ethno-linguistic riches were tangible. In 1975, the Housing Commission decided not to proceed further with its planned redevelopment of Carlton, thanks in the main to the tireless opposition of the various residents' groups. By the beginning of the 1980s, the Housing Commission, instead of demolishing, began renovating and remodelling Victorian homes which were now seen as an integral part of Melbourne's architectural and historic legacy. Nonetheless, the earlier demolitions left a permanent mark on the urban and social landscape. Today in fact, it is possible to speak of two Carltons: one where the less socially affluent live in public housing, and the other where the more socially mobile live, the *middle class* who, from the 1970s onwards began the process of *gentrification* of the neighbourhood.<sup>14</sup> Today, Carlton is experiencing a new phase

FIG 11



FIG 11: Public housing. Corner Nicholson and Elgin Streets, Carlton, Victoria. September 2004.

of urban development which recognises the architectural and historical importance of the area and the contribution made to this by migrant communities. This is evident in the City of Melbourne's plan *Carlton: a Vision to 2010*. The Argyle Square Piazza Project [Fig. 12] is dedicated to the Italian community and its cultural legacy. The idea for an Italian-style piazza was first mooted by Carlton community leaders in 1997 when the Carlton Bowling Club, which had occupied the Argyle Square site, wound up its activities. The proposal was submitted to the City of Melbourne. The petitioners felt it was appropriate that Melbourne should be the first city in Victoria, if not Australia, to recognise the enormous contribution made by its Italian migrants to the growth and development of the state.<sup>15</sup> The proposal also asked for the Italian government to donate a piece of art, either a fountain or statue, as well as a plaque which would indicate to visitors places and buildings of historical and cultural importance to Italian migrants of yesteryear. In April 1998, Italian community organisations gathered to discuss the project, at the conclusion of which a letter was written to the Mayor of Melbourne asking for his support. Later that year, Council officially endorsed the proposal and the only hurdle which remained was the backing of the State government. Official support from the latter came in December 1998 during the visit to Australia of the Italian President, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro. The optimism generated by the formal recognition of the proposal also raised another question: why not officially name Carlton *Little Italy*, as is the case in many North American cities? After all, it was reasoned, Melbourne had honoured her Chinese migrants with the official naming of *Chinatown* in 1984.

After a period of inactivity, the project is again centre-stage. Three principal objectives have been identified: the creation of a lively public space which mirrors the piazzas of Italy, the creation of a new urban space which highlights the uniqueness of Carlton, and the creation of a space which celebrates the unique contribution made by Italian migrants to Melbourne's cultural diversity. In February 2004, the city council of Milan, Melbourne's sister city, assigned a team of architects to look into the project and donated a bench made of Candoglia marble, the same stone used in the construction of the Milan Duomo. The proposal by the Milanese team envisaged a piazza which would perform an essential role in the lives of Carlton residents. They felt it should



FIG 12

FIG 12: Piazza Italia today. Carlton, Victoria. July 2006.

encourage people to take a *passeggiata*, it should be a meeting place where ideas are exchanged, where the Italian community hosts celebrations and ultimately, it should be a manifestation of Melbourne's cultural diversity. The design includes a colonnade, fountain, and tiered steps. In the centre of the piazza, a large pavement covered in swirling arabesque patterns—like those of a Persian carpet—would symbolise a wish for peace and prosperity for newly arrived migrants.<sup>16</sup> [Ed: A much more modest version of an Italian piazza was officially opened to the public on 29 January, 2006. It features Italian porphyry stone paving and a giant solar clock].

### SYMBOLS OF ITALIAN CARLTON

If it is true that Carlton, and in particular the much celebrated Lygon Street, has lost a lot of the Italian character that made it so unique in the period immediately after World War II, it is also true that signs of Italian culture and tradition are still evident in the domestic and commercial architecture of Carlton and these constitute a strong focal point for tourists:

*'Bartolini, a lecturer in Italian studies at Sydney University, rejects as snobbish the complaints that some Italian shopping zones are not authentic and are examples of façade-ism. 'It is never going to be a perfect little piece of Italy,' he says. 'It's always going to be a translation, an in-between place—just like Australia'.<sup>17</sup>*

I would like to invite readers to take a *passeggiata* around Italian Carlton, using this article and its accompanying photographs as a guide. The *passeggiata* was a popular pastime among Carlton's Italians:

*... during those horrible, gloomy English [Anglo-Australian] Sundays (everything was closed including the cinemas and dance*

halls) ... they [the Italians] introduced the "walks". Dressed to the nines, dapper and even walking arm-in-arm, their presence unsettled the poor passing Australian. From Marino E., 1999, 'Nella Lygon Street degli Anni 50', *Il Globo*, Melbourne, 8 November.

The photographs included in this article were taken by the author in September 2004.

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### NOTES

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# italian washing 1973

by **VIVIEN ACHIA** IN THIS ARTICLE, THE AUTHOR RECALLS HER FIRST TRIP TO ITALY IN 1973, WHEN SHE MET THE FAMILY OF HER THEN PARTNER ELISEO ACHIA. SHE SPENT MOST OF HER TIME IN THE COASTAL TOWN OF ANZIO, 70 KILOMETRES SOUTH OF ROME. AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN 'THE AGE' IN JANUARY 2001.

VIVIEN ACHIA IS A LIBRARIAN AND FREELANCE WRITER WHO HAS WORKED THROUGHOUT HER LIFE IN MULTICULTURAL SERVICES, ADULT EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT. SHE GREW UP ON A FARM IN NORTH-EAST VICTORIA. AFTER HER FIRST MARRIAGE FAILED, SHE BECAME INVOLVED WITH THE CHARISMATIC, OLDER ELISEO AND TRIED TO BECOME A GOOD ITALIAN WIFE. 'ITALIAN WASHING' FORMS CHAPTER 13 OF HER UNPUBLISHED AUTOBIOGRAPHY ENTITLED, 'LA SPOSA'. SHE SAYS THAT HER YEARS WITH ELISEO ENRICHED HER LIFE AND GAVE VIVIEN A NEW IDENTITY, 'LA SIGNORA VIVIA.' SHE WORKS AS A PERSONAL HISTORIAN FOR THE MEMOIRS FOUNDATION (AUSTRALIA), WHERE SHE HELPS PEOPLE WRITE AND PUBLISH THEIR LIFE STORIES.

Eliseo's family were overjoyed when I gave birth to a son. This baby meant more to Eliseo than he cared to say. His brothers, Gustavo and Benito, both had daughters, so Ben immediately became heir to the Achia family name, and a family favourite from the moment he drew breath.

Eliseo's mother, Anna, was in poor health, and she desperately wanted to see her eldest son again after fourteen years of separation, and to meet her small grandson. It seemed to me that we should go to Italy. Although we had limited money, I badgered Eliseo into booking our trip. My small daughter Elise was suffering from infected ears and tonsils at the time so her doctor suggested we leave her behind, rather than risk flying. My mother was happy to have her stay on the farm with my young sister Andrea. The two small girls would go to school together at my old rural school, Carraragarmungee.

We flew with Qantas, in a jumbo jet I believed was too big to ever get off the ground. Although we travelled economy class, the airline had a reputation for service and safety. As soon as we sat down, the flight attendants

arrived with hot towels and fresh orange juice. I settled into my seat expecting to enjoy myself, with complimentary drinks and food arriving at regular intervals.

Suddenly, between Melbourne and Sydney, the huge plane bucked and plunged in a storm. Terrified, I spent the next twenty-three fearful hours, seatbelt buckled, watching the rivets in the wings and willing the plane to stay airborne. Melbourne in late August was freezing, so for travelling I wore a black skivvy, thick orange pants and a cardigan. In Singapore I was almost fainting in the sauna-like heat, but could not remove my thick black top. I sweated and worried, the more so when the heavy plane bounced several times while landing on the short Singapore runway. I arrived in Italy exhausted and smelling like a tomcat, to be packed into a tiny Fiat with Eliseo's brother Gustavo and his wife Adriana, where my body odour was concentrated in a confined space.

Fiumicino Airport was a disappointment. It looked flat and ordinary, not Italian at all, ringed by eucalypts which I had thought were only found in Australia. Despite my first impressions, I loved Italy and felt instantly at home. As well as my constant delight in actually being there, I loved the weathered stonework, the red and yellow ochre tiled roofs, the glimpses of fountains, ferns, and ancient stone faces spouting water in mysterious courtyards. I loved the family, their warmth and welcome, their wonderful epic meals, the sweet homemade wine, their teasing, their closeness and their sense of occasion.

Surprisingly, Italy was suddenly more real to me than Australia. In Italy there was no concept of Australia, no discussion, no desire to know. One family friend said to me, 'Australia is the end of the earth. After that only ice.' Another asked whether Australia was *pericoloso*, dangerous. 'Yes,' I replied, 'We have many traffic accidents.' He stared at me. He had been expecting stories of feral kangaroos and threatening Aborigines. I was regularly asked to, 'Canta Valse Matilde.'

When I could find no reference to Australia in newspapers or on television news I had an uneasy feeling that it did not exist. A line or two about Gough Whitlam once broke through the general lack of interest. But we saw Australians everywhere we went in Italy. When Eliseo and I emerged from a claustrophobic ascent into the cupola of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, we found two Australians high above the

city enjoying a cold Fosters beer from their backpacks, feet against the railings

In the short time we could spend with the Achia family, I was eager to learn as much as possible about the way the family lived, particularly the secrets behind the wonderful meals they served routinely and seemingly casually every day. What I did not expect though, was to have my mother-in-law teaching me how to wash clothes by hand. I resented spending precious time on something so mundane. I was a reluctant, even sullen learner.

I failed Italian washing. I failed Italian washing in Anzio with the family, and in Tiarno di Sotto with friends. I did not even want to wash in Italy. I wanted to see, taste and smell everything, to gorge myself on Italy while I had the chance, to get on those tantalising trains leaving Rome and go anywhere and everywhere in Europe. Wasting hours washing by hand drove me crazy with frustration.

A woman's washing can tell you a lot about her situation. My mother's washing showed that we had a large family and rudimentary facilities, but that she was fiercely determined to be clean. We grew up on a wheat and sheep farm in north-east Victoria. With two large families to support, the farm never made enough money to provide facilities for the houses. Any money earned was immediately swallowed up by repairs to machinery, bills, fencing, and extra cattle and sheep. We had an uncertain water supply on the farm. If the wind blew, the old windmill turned to fill the huge tank that loomed over the clothes line near the chookhouse. The tank was rusty, and there was no money to replace it. When it was one third full, the extra water poured out through the jagged holes in its round sides, forming black slimy pools underneath which the ducks relished, adding to the mess by shitting everywhere. The mud caused my mother to slip and slide when she tried to hang the washing out. If it was windy, the wooden props which held the clothes lines up would, without warning, jump out of their holes in the ground and dump hours of heavy work in the mud.

The major battles were fought in the laundry, a dark room off the back verandah crowded with dirty clothes bursting out of baskets, muddy boots, greasy coats, cleaning rags, tattered brooms, empty boxes, spent pieces of laundry soap, hairy huntsman spiders, webs and dust. A fine pencil drawing by my grandmother lay forgotten in a mouldy cupboard.

My mother would light a fragrant wood fire under the old copper to heat the water. Nappies, sheets, tablecloths and hankies were put in to boil, bubbling and plopping like a geyser, making clouds of white steam. The adjoining trough was filled with cold water, and the old wringer screwed into position. Using a copper stick, my mother would heave a heavy, steaming, knotted mass out of the grey water, and at severe risk of being scalded, dump it into the cold water to rinse. Then the work of separating items and passing them through the wringer began, with her hands becoming red and swollen, the skin tight and shiny from the boiling water. Wringing was exhausting and required complete concentration, otherwise the pieces would wind through the roller and around it again, making it jam and stop. This laundry was purgatory for a working woman, a steamy, smelly, dark hellhole.

In winter we spent our lives in the kitchen underneath festoons of red white and blue Tarrawingee Football Club jumpers, which my mother washed for the team. These were woollen, smelling of sweat and liniment, and took all week between games to dry. The old black iron stove warmed us, warmed sick animals, cooked our food, dried our clothes, and heated what little hot water we had. There was always something hanging, wet, drying or airing, all over the kitchen and lounge room. The battle with the washing was never won.

At the age of eighteen, I went to the city to study, living in a boarding house in Box Hill. The boarders shared the gloomy old laundry, with times allotted to us for our washing. The washing machine was an old clunker, the troughs gritty and stained, but there was plenty of water, hot and cold, and the Hills Hoist never dumped our washing in the mud. I became soft and complacent. I thought I knew all I needed to know about washing ... until I arrived in Anzio.

Eliseo was both nervous and excited to be home again with his family. He was also anxious about what kind of impression I would make. I was insecure in formal Italian gatherings, likely to be too excitable, or too familiar, or too casually dressed, or when stressed even too tipsy, having nervously drunk too much of the plentiful alcohol. My secret ambition was to meet a few relatives, then escape into Europe. This desire of mine was to be thwarted over and over again.

We certainly met the family! Mamma thoughtfully arranged for us to see different

relatives every day for three months, so we couldn't get away. One cousin welcomed us to his house, and in our honour opened several bottles of his exquisite, sparkling white wine. We were ushered into the sitting room, where a few dead flies lay on the polished wooden table and the window ledges. In a country as clean and houseproud as Italy I was bemused—until Domenico explained that his wife not only milked their dairy cows, but cleaned the local school every day, and worked in their garden. Hence the flies. The poor woman was exhausted.

When I tried to engineer some time away from the family mamma was unsympathetic. 'Where do you want to go?' she asked impatiently. 'The family is here. We have not seen Eliseo for fourteen years, and you want to go somewhere else?'

As I spoke little Italian at the time, Eliseo thought that I would learn from the women of the family, so I spent hours in kitchens, while he sauntered around with the men, talking excitedly and seeing everything. If Eliseo returned and found me enjoying myself, he was angry. 'You eat too much. You drink too much. You talk too much. Don't tell my family anything about us. We don't want them to know we are not married. No dirty linen is to be washed here.' But I was having a wonderful time in my own way and I felt that the Achia family warmed to my enthusiasm for them and all things Italian. However, those trains kept leaving the station in Rome without me, and several times I shut myself in mamma's little stone cottage and cried with frustration.

The women in the family did not work outside their homes. They each had one or two children only, and plenty of time to look after their men. As a wage earner I was used to doing things quickly at home, and taking shortcuts with cooking and cleaning. My sister-in-law, Adriana, however, carefully sprayed and wiped every surface in her kitchen every day. She washed the dishes slowly and carefully, rinsing each item twice in clean water. When we went shopping it took the best part of a morning, but she only bought a few ounces of salami, cheese, some cutlets and a few salad leaves. Therefore, we needed to shop again two days later. I began to think that the Achia women expanded their tasks to fill the time available, to validate themselves as housewives and mothers.

Then came the washing! The family had a washing machine, but it was only used for sheets and tablecloths. Everything else

was washed by hand outside under a fig tree, watched with interest by a donkey. Mamma could see that I did not know how to do this, so she taught me. 'First you put it to soak in cold water in the trough under the tree, add some soap powder, and leave it for two or three hours. Then you rub everything hard using the green soap. Then you rinse it three times in cold water, with the hose. Squeeze the water out and hang it on the line.' This process took all day. Then it took days to dry. Europe was calling. I was washing. My time in Italy was draining away.

We went to Rome for day trips, leaving Ben with Eliseo's mother. If I hadn't done the dreaded washing before I left, I would hide it in the cottage. She always found the dirty clothes and did them while we were away. I imagined her frail body straining, her long red tongue flicking disapprovingly as she dealt with our most intimate things.

On one washing day, I wrenched the plastic basket angrily off the ground, and split it in half. There was a man who came regularly with a truck loaded with household goods, almost toppling over from the weight of pots, pans, boilers, bins, baskets, tins and barrels. I hailed him and selected a washing basket to replace the one I'd broken. Mamma came out of the house.

*'What are you doing with that?' she asked.*

*'I'm buying a new washing basket because I broke the other one.'*

*'Put it back immediately. She doesn't want it.'*

*'I do. Leave it down for me please.'*

*'Put it back. Put it back and go away. We don't need anything today.'*

At a complete disadvantage with my few words of Italian, and outranked by a senior member of the family, I lost the battle, and the basket was strung back up with its fellows. I could have cried with rage, but as I so often did in Italy, I put on an agreeable face, for the sake of peace, and let it go.

Finally, we managed to get away for a few days to Tiarno di Sotto, where Eliseo's partner in their Melbourne bricklaying business, Battista and his wife Matilde, had returned to their families for a visit. This was a mountain village in Trento in the north, with high stone houses, enormous woodheaps to last the snowbound winters, and geraniums in window boxes—welcome patches of red against the grey walls.

We walked the mountain paths that Matilde's father and brothers kept open during the long months of snow. We visited, talked, and drank to excess. Matilde explained that when she was young it was her job in winter to carry bags of sugar and lard to her father and brothers in the higher reaches of the nearby mountains. The sugar and lard helped their bodies to ward off the bitter cold. She thought that this heavy work may have contributed to the damage to her back which later caused her chronic pain.

To my horror, in the midst of all this beauty, I was again ambushed by washing. Matilde and I went to the square carrying our dirty clothes. Here the women took it in turns to wash by hand in a stone trough at the fountain, while others sat on the benches in a circle, gossiped, watched and waited. Red with embarrassment, I clumsily tried to wash our personal things under the unrelenting stares of these matriarchs. I didn't know the best way to rub the clothes on this rough surface, nor how to rinse them. I couldn't tell them that I had other skills and talents. Clean washing was what defined a woman, what counted, and here I was a failure. Matilde said to me crossly, 'You can't do this. Sit down and I'll do it.' When the ordeal was over we took the wet clothes back to the house and climbed up to the top floor. There in a loft, with the pigeons, apples, nuts and preserves, we hung the clothes to dry.

When it was time to catch the bus to leave Tiarno di Sotto in the dark, cold, early morning, we went to the bar. 'Eliseo, the bus is due. We'll miss it if we stay here. The bus stop is down the street. Hurry up.' He was unconcerned and merely smiled. Everyone but me knew that the bus always stopped at the bar, where passengers would fortify themselves against the terrors of the steep roads with grappa and impossibly strong coffee.

After two more weeks with the Achia family, we caught a train to Venice. There we stayed with Irma and Giovanni, the parents of our Carlton friends, Lili and Filippo. We ate delicious meals of fish from the colourful fish markets, teamed with salad and vegetable leaves of all types cooked in oil and garlic.

We set off on foot to see the city. Eliseo and Giovanni dressed themselves like the Italian gentlemen they were, in handmade suits, waistcoats and silk cravats. They strolled and talked. Fifty yards behind them I struggled with Ben. I strapped him into his pusher for the flat parts, then undid

the knots, folded the pusher and with Ben under one arm and the pusher under the other, climbed up and over the numerous bridges. Then I strapped Ben into the pusher and repeated the process. This was necessary because the previous day, loose in Venice, Ben had tried to jump into a canal. 'Salta, mamma, salta?' 'No, non saltare!' For his own good I had to fasten a belt from Eliseo's trousers around his small stomach and hold on. Every so often the two Italian gentlemen would turn back to me, wave airily and say, 'Muoviti!' ('Hurry up').

Although I loved Italy, at the same time I missed Australia keenly. I missed my mother and my daughter, and the orderly, safe predictability of it all. In Venice I bought four small dolls, two each for Elise and my sister Andrea. Back in Anzio I packed them carefully into a shoe box, having walked to one shop for brown wrapping paper, to another for string, then to the post office. The woman serving looked at my neat parcel, then said abruptly, 'Make two parcels.' I was flabbergasted, and could not find words to ask her why. I went outside and burst into angry tears on the footpath. If the dolls were sent separately it was quite likely that, the Italian post being so unreliable, one parcel would arrive before the other. I vented my frustration on Eliseo. His reply surprised me. 'If you had offered her some money, even a dollar, she would have sent them.' 'But this is wrong, I replied indignantly, 'In Australia if I wanted to post an elephant I could, as long as it was well wrapped and clearly addressed.' Several days later I posted the same parcel in Rome without problems.

A cholera outbreak while we were in Italy caused everyone to temporarily cook all green vegetables and salad leaves, and to avoid shellfish. My mother had not received any of my long letters to her, and in the absence of news was afraid that we had succumbed to disease. Using a public phone to call Australia was difficult and we were reluctant to use my brother-in-law, Gustavo's, phone because of the high cost of calls. Some of our letters arrived in Australia after we returned to Melbourne. A scandal enveloped the Italian post around this time. It was alleged that valuables were removed from letters and parcels and the remainder pulped and turned into egg cartons.

Used to waiting politely in Australia, in Italy I was always last to be served in shops. I paid 12,000 lire for a pair of buffalo hide shoes for which my sister-in-law paid 8,000. I had difficulty extracting money from the

bank. I finally asserted myself at the bus stop near the market in Anzio. Adriana and I had finished our shopping and we were carrying numerous bags, along with a wriggling two-year-old Ben and his folded *passegino*. As the bus pulled up, all the women rushed the back door together, making it impossible to climb the steps. I was at the front of the crowd, and they screamed at me. 'Sforza ti, Signora, Sforza ti.' ('Push. Push.') Fed up, I drew myself up and shouted, 'Si sforza, nessuno monta.' ('If you push, no-one can get on'). I then waited for them to form a line behind me.

Eliseo and I spent long days in Rome, walking around the city. In August 1973 it reminded me of Melbourne in summer. The heat and traffic fumes rose up from the roads, and the asphalt on the footpaths was sticky in the heat. The beer in the bars was never cold enough for my Australian taste. Many tiny *trattoria* on the narrow footpaths were blighted by pollution and I refused to eat so close to the traffic. To this day the fumes from the back of buses transport me immediately to the Rome I remember.

Although we were on a tight budget, with little money behind us and no income for four months, I unerringly headed for expensive restaurants. One day in Rome, Eliseo decreed that we would try the *menu turistico* for lunch. This cost 1,200 lire, slightly more than a dollar. We sat down to a small plate of spaghetti with a watery liquid washing around the bottom of the bowl. We ate because we were hungry from hours of walking. Amongst the strands we unearthed small white bones, not a shred of flavour on them after perhaps days of boiling. The *secondo* consisted of one sausage and a few *borlotti* beans. No bread was offered, but there was a carafe of water on the table. If tourists were prepared to accept this meagre fare they were welcome to it, but we had been spoiled by the family and we had never sat down to a miserable meal like this in our lives. We contacted friends in Melbourne and asked them to send us some money.

A combination of the northern hemisphere sun and my contraceptive pill gradually formed a brown mask on my face, leaving grey circles around my eyes. I looked like a fat panda. My sisters-in-law suggested gently that I may like to try some Italian cosmetics. As my weight ballooned with the rich meals we ate every day, Adriana thought a corset may be useful. Over three months with the family I gained eight kilos, making my short white dress even shorter.

My poor clothes: a purple knit safari suit, blue flared polyester slacks, a shiny red cardigan and suede shoes also caused concern. 'Would you like to buy some clothes while you are here? Italian clothes are beautiful.' 'I'm sorry,' I replied, 'But this is not possible. Eliseo has not been working now for months and we do not have the money.'

One holiday weekend Gustavo drove us to Spogna, Eliseo's village in Abruzzo, to visit the medieval house still owned by the Achia family. For our day out Adriana had her hair done at a salon. She wore a black wool pants suit, high heels, gold jewellery and carried an elegant black handbag. I emerged ready to leave in my flared pants, cardigan and flat shoes. Eliseo scowled at me.

*'Where do think you are going looking like that?'*

*'To the mountains. What I'm wearing is perfect for walking on rocky paths and cooking lamb over a fire.'*

*'Dress better. We will meet family and friends there.'*

*'I can't dress better. This is all I've got.'*

The day in Abruzzo became a long ordeal. Eliseo's former mother-in-law had died suddenly the previous week, and Zia Elvira, who we had gone to visit, was her sister. No-one had told Gustavo. I was certainly not welcome there during this period of mourning. Adriana slipped and slid perilously in her high heels on the steep stony paths, lucky not to have a serious fall. In the family house we lit a fire and cooked *castrato*, young castrated ram, over a fire. Italians are not fond of lamb or mutton, but this was a special treat for me. I did not have the heart to tell them that the lamb in Australia was far superior in quality.

After three months with the Achia family, it was time to leave. At the airport Ben ran to Gustavo and threw himself into his uncle's arms. There were tears and promises all round. 'Look after yourself, mamma. Try to eat more. We'll be back in three years.' We were not to know that there were some hard lessons ahead of us, and Eliseo would not see his mother or his family again.

After returning from Italy, Eliseo was restless and discontented. His sense of dislocation and disorientation while he was there spoiled his memories of his former life in Anzio and Rome. Home in Carlton he was caught in an unhappy place between

nostalgia for a life in Italy that no longer existed, and his dislike of many aspects of Australia. When some friends asked Eliseo to build them a house in Kinglake, an hour's drive into the ranges north-east of Melbourne, he found a new energy.

When we drove to Kinglake for the first time we found a pristine environment, with national park consisting of great messmate and mountain ash forests, fern gullies dripping with dew, and air so clean that it was like a cold pure drink. Captivated by the beauty of the hills and the surrounding countryside, we bought twenty-five acres of farmland and moved our family out of Melbourne. First we lived in an eight-metre-long caravan. I did the washing for two adults and three children by hand, using cold water, and hanging clothes on fences and a temporary line, watching in dismay as the afternoon fogs rolled in making it wet through.

A year later, in the basement of a monolithic half-built house, a replica of the old stone houses in Italy, I was still grappling with the washing. Using a trickle of cold water from a hose, I filled the washing machine, emptied it by hand with buckets, and struggled across a muddy building site to hang the clothes out. The winters were cold and foggy. The washing had to be dried by the old pot-belly stove, where we tried to keep ourselves warm. I had a strong sense of *deja vu*. 'Eliseo, we need a clothes dryer. I can't dry the winter clothes this way. Everything is always damp.' He was oblivious to my burdens.

I had pleaded with him to build a simple house, on one level only. He refused. He was determined to prove that he had succeeded in Australia by building a traditional Italian home, even bigger than the family houses in Italy. This enormous structure was putting him under terrible strain, especially as he'd had several knee operations during construction and had to work in constant pain. My problems were trivial by comparison. Washing with an inadequate water supply, and poor facilities, was what women did. This was what they had always done, through countless generations, the strong women of Italy. 'The women in your family didn't have outside jobs, Eliseo. They had the time to wash and cook all day. I get up at five in the morning to heat water to wash the children, and then I drive for one hour to work. When I get home it's dark, and the clothes are wet again.' He was unmoved. He continued to lay bricks as if I hadn't spoken.



The house that Eliseo built, Kinglake, Victoria. The photograph was taken some time between the start of construction in 1977 and completion in 1983.



The wedding of Vivien and Eliseo Achia at the Royal Mint, Melbourne, 1978.

Feeling resentful, I talked to my mother about life and washing. She accepted it as a necessary part of her lot, her contribution to family comfort and appearances. I talked to Italian friends about washing. They saw it, in harder times, as an opportunity to talk and gossip around the fountain in the village. They regretted that the old ways are gone, and that the washing is no longer a shared ritual among friends and neighbours.

It was then that I began to feel more positive about washing, and instead of resenting it, I embraced it. I saw myself as one of millions of women washing through the ages, forming a rich tapestry of coloured threads of loving service. I became one of those threads.

*Vivien is seeking information from anyone who was interned in a camp at Kinglake West during World War II or from people associated with the camp. She can be contacted by email:*  
*vivienachia@yahoo.com.au*

# from our archives: italians in queensland

BETWEEN 1919 AND 1926, FILIPPO SACCHI WAS FIRST WAR AND THEN OVERSEAS CORRESPONDENT FOR THE MILAN-BASED NEWSPAPER 'CORRIERE DELLA SERA'. THE THREE ARTICLES REPRODUCED BELOW WERE WRITTEN FOR THE PAPER DURING SACCHI'S 1925 AUSTRALIAN SOJOURN. AS SUCH, THEY PROVIDE A RARE GLIMPSE INTO THE LIVES OF ITALIAN MIGRANTS ON THE NORTH QUEENSLAND CANEFIELDS DURING THE MID-1920S, AND CHART GROWING HOSTILITY AGAINST THIS COMMUNITY. A PROLIFIC WRITER, SACCHI IS REMEMBERED TODAY PRINCIPALLY AS A FILM CRITIC AND AS THE AUTHOR OF 'LA CASA IN OCEANIA' (MONDADORI, 1932), A NOVEL DEALING WITH THE EXPERIENCES OF ITALIAN MIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA.

TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT COMPLETE TRANSLATIONS OF SACCHI'S ARTICLES HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN AUSTRALIA. THE TRANSLATOR, THE LATE JACQUELINE TEMPLETON, WAS SENIOR FELLOW IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE. SHE DREW ON THE MATERIAL FOR HER POSTHUMOUSLY PUBLISHED, 'FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE BUSH: ITALIAN MIGRANTS WRITE HOME FROM AUSTRALIA, 1860-1962' (UWAP, 2003). BOTH THE ORIGINAL AND TRANSLATED TEXTS FORM PART OF A COLLECTION OF MISS TEMPLETON'S PAPERS DONATED TO THE SOCIETY BY HER COLLEAGUE, JOHN LACK.

*Corriere della Sera*, 10 July 1925

## PART 1: THE OLIVE PERIL

Townsville June 1925

I regret to have to sound the alarm but the matter is so serious that I should be failing the most basic duties of my office if I did not do so immediately: Italy is preparing to invade Australia. None of us ever had wind of it, I know, and yet it is a fact, by now proclaimed and incontestable. It makes one shudder to think that millions of Italians get up every morning, have a shave, drink their morning coffee and go out on their business without the faintest idea that their country is on the point of occupying a continent, nothing less.

*Italian invasion.* It is one of their favourite

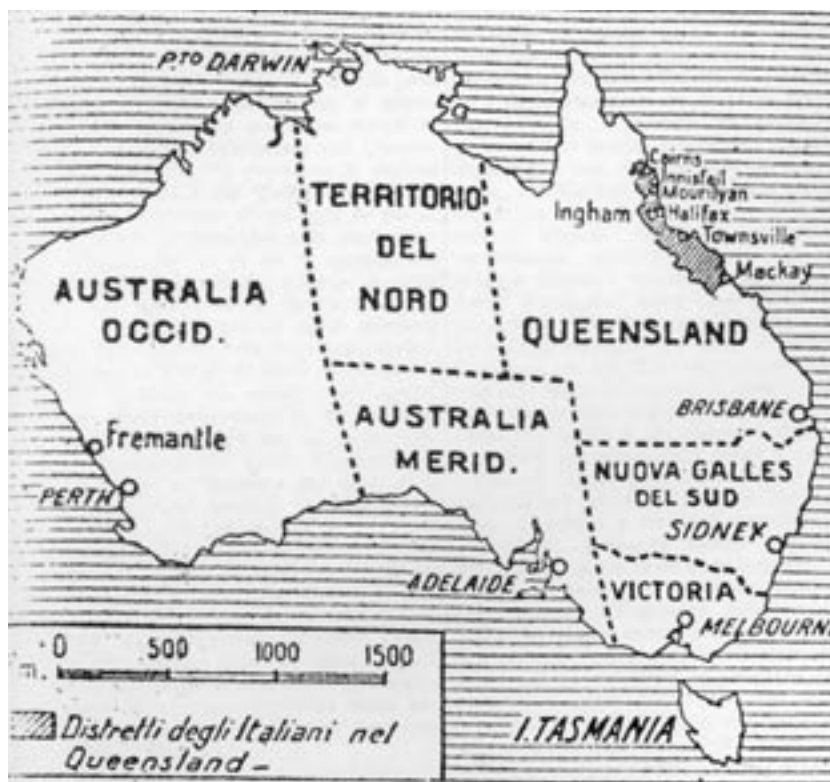
refrains, one of the commonplaces that one hears chanted over and over in what is by now a daily polemic against Italian immigration. Metaphors of journalists over endowed with imagination? No. Here, at the recent congress of the *Australian Native Association*, one of the major Australian political associations which has gained a following of fifty-thousand members from every social class, especially the industrial, commercial and professional classes of Australia, and has at its disposal a capital of 100 million lire for its propaganda, what did the president, Mr Ginn (no, it isn't spelt with just one 'n') come out with in a high point of his opening speech? 'What is the meaning of this sudden intensification of the stream of migrants? Is there perhaps some hidden force at work? Some organised plan for peaceful penetration? Australians, on your guard. Watch out that your apathy does not leave the way for a terrible awakening for your children. We don't want the social and economic conditions of Australia to be undermined by the inevitable inter-breeding with foreigners who are incapable of understanding our traditions, of respecting our flag, of living as those traditions demand and as British subjects do'. The congress closed with a resolution calling for the prohibition of immigration to Australia of races 'not like us and not suitable'. The race 'not like us and not suitable' is the Italian race.

Nationalist exaggeration? Not at all. In Brisbane a congress of socialist trade unions is hammering away and spelling out the accusation of a calculated plan of occupation. 'There exists in Italy,' says the delegate presenting the agenda on the question, 'a combination of capitalists, industrial financier ship-owners, who control an organisation for assisting Italian workers to Australia. One of the conditions for their recruitment is that the industries in which they invest their money should be controlled solely by Italians, that the workforce should be Italian and that the children should retain their Italian nationality. It is a plan to snatch the sugar industry from the hands of the English to give it to the new immigrants, most of whom are but instruments of Italian capitalists'. Poor Italian capitalists—so intelligent—despite themselves! What else? A fleet of steamships, an entire fleet is about to be fitted out with the object of bringing Italians to Australia on the cheap. The genius who made this astonishing revelation is just an Australian who came from Italy. And they say that travel instructs.

You will be flabbergasted. But why all this fury against Italians? I shall explain it to you: to keep Australia 'white'. *Keep Australia*

white is the real catchcry of this crusade. In fact, we are not white, we are 'olive'. *Olive-skinned influx*, it is said. 'The invasion of the Olive Skins' was the headline of a great Melbourne daily evening paper to the announcement of an inquiry on Italian immigration in the northern districts ordered by the Queensland government. And at the congress (another congress) of Australian women, an authoritative speaker, exhorting Australian housewives not to buy fruit from Italian shops even if their prices were more moderate, bemoaned the fact that after having done so much to defend 'white' Australia from the menace of Asiatics 'olive migrants continue to establish themselves in the country'. We are such a degraded race that Australian women are exhorted not to marry our emigrants (we hope they don't, poor boys, for their own domestic happiness). This was said for example at the assembly of the Victorian RSSILA [Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia], which is the association of Australia veterans: 'Marriage of our women with these strangers makes us feel disgust'. Brave comrades! Our blood soils, stains, adulterates their Australian blood. *Pollute, polluted* is the most concise and most brutal expression of this concept. But even those who speak more euphemistically, explain themselves equally as clearly. And what else does it mean, to say, for example, that Australia 'is diluting its pure British blood with blood of foreigners which is unsuited to us'? That is Sir John McWhae speaking, Agent General, that is, official representative in London, for three years, of one of the most important states of Australia [Victoria]; I say this just so you won't think that we don't have any big shots to quote.

On the other hand, they don't even do us the honour of special treatment. As an olive race we are only a sub-section of that great mush of people which here share in the generic term of southern Europeans, *Italians and other southern Europeans*, and it is nice to see how, not to mortify us, they do us the courtesy of putting us in good company: 'emigrants from Greece, from Italy, from Yugoslavia', or 'Maltese, Albanian, and Italians', or this one which is even finer, 'Italians, Greeks, Albanians, Yugoslavs and others'. The argument is that since this group of southern Europeans represent, through tradition, culture and *standard* of living, levels much lower than that of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic peoples, Australia must favour immigration from these and prevent immigration from the former. 'We have,' writes a rich Melbourne businessman, who in his idle moments amuses himself with southern European anthology, 'a



vague contempt for these foreigners with a dark skin, often beneath normal in stature, gesticulating and impetuous'. And a newspaper explains, in the manner of Hamlet, 'Do we want to populate our territory with Nordic or with Latin people?' Rhetorical question. With Nordics, by Bacchus!

This history of the superiority of the north against the south went so far beyond the limit that the Catholic Archbishop, Mannix, now in Rome on a pilgrimage, intervened in a discussion held at a large catholic congress to warn his compatriots that after all, some of these southern European beggars, had made Rome, the Papacy, the Renaissance, and a few other trifles. They don't know. They don't know anything. This

Map showing the distribution of Italian migrants through the cane districts of north Queensland. The plate accompanied Filippo Sacchi's article, 'Italians in Queensland: Bottom of the class', which appeared on the front page of the *Corriere della Sera*, 14 July 1925.

Manlio Sardi's Australian Workers' Union (AWU) card. Cowley, Queensland, 1937-1938.

is the reassuring side of the whole business. They have ideas of Italy that make one despair of the future of humanity. A few months ago, the commanding officer of a cargo ship which was to leave Fremantle for Italy with frozen meat, turned up before one of our consular representatives to ask if the ports of Venice, Trieste and Naples were really capable of being entered by his steamship. It fell to a friend of mine in Sydney to feel prompted to say that after all, Italy didn't come out of the war so badly since she annexed Trento, Trieste and Sicily. In Sydney, a friend of mine heard someone say to him that after all, Italy hadn't come out of the war so badly since she annexed Trento, Trieste and Sicily. I found one or two cases of people who, seeing one of our books or newspapers, expressed their pleasant surprise at finding that we have the same letters of the alphabet and the same characters as they do.

A few days ago at Ingham, a migrant from the Veneto told me indignantly that an English workmate had asked him whether in Italy they had railways as in Australia. The fellow from the Veneto replied: 'We have better ones than yours, sons of bitches'. Oh well, patience, they are not even informed on the specific field in question, emigration. They are really convinced that Italy is pouring out all the surplus of her over prolific population onto Australia. Do they in fact know how many Italian migrants, cause of all the stir, landed in Australia for the whole of 1924? There were 4,286. They are staggered when told that in 1923 we sent 93,000 emigrants to Argentina for example or 183,000 to France. And it is for these 4,286, this infinitesimal percentage of Italians, healthy people, model workmen, who come offering two solid arms and a willing heart, that commissions are stirred, congresses get agitated, newspapers work themselves into a sweat, because here in Australia, where 99% are of British blood, where even the very latest statistics of January show that 73% of immigration continues to be British, with ugly words the door is slammed shut in the face of a kind of second yellow peril (the olive peril), of the ally of yesterday, the friend of today, the third great European power, Italy.

I speak bitterly, and feel sorry for those Australians, and they are many, who don't share those ideas at all, and who deplore that campaign of denigration, who wish fervidly to see Italians settle in their country. But this hullabaloo has to end, and there is only one way to make sure that it does: to speak plainly. All the protests of our consular

authorities, all the efforts of the Federal Government—it is only right to recognise that it does not miss an opportunity to try to bring to an end or put a brake on that rash language—get nowhere. Only a reaction of our public opinion can restore a sense of international responsibility to that section of the press and Australian politics who have lost it. These things *should not be said*. We have the sacrosanct right to expect that before talking about us they should know us; that before insulting us they should at least learn to distinguish us by name. There are books, if they will buy them. There are statistics, if they will get hold of them. And above all, let them come and see us as we are at home. The demagoguery over Italians has gone on for a year now and there has not yet been a newspaper in Melbourne or Sydney capable of sending a correspondent here to study the problem in depth. If the Italian papers spend hundreds of pounds to send journalists to Australia, the Australian papers could spend nine-and-a-half to send one as far as Cairns.

The problem of foreign immigration, for a country like Australia, is enormously complex, and no one contests the right of Australians to take those precautions and those necessary adjustments to avoid sudden changes and crises which are damaging to everyone. But I maintain that a well considered examination of the facts would clear the ground of an infinity of absurdity and prejudice and would, in the interests of Australians themselves, put the question on a much more serious plane. One of the allegations that gets the Australian working masses worked up for example is that our people work, as they say, at cut rates, that it is at much lower pay rates than those fixed by the unions. Well. I have come here, I have spoken with labour organisers, I have asked them to give me names, to cite facts. They admitted that there could have been, all told, three or four cases. On the contrary, I have found, if anything, that Italians get themselves paid better than Australians. I have before me today a letter from a mining proprietor requesting three Italian miners: the pay offered is 21/- a day, that is two-and-a-half shillings more than the established rate. So the Italians aren't depressing the labour market, they are lifting it. Another complaint is that our labourers sometimes accept pay settlements at the end of the season, or even annually instead of weekly, as exacted by the English. Here too, the unions, confronted with this example, do not consider these as formal contracts within union guidelines, but consider them, in most cases, a rudimentary form of savings deposit. Moreover, how many poisonous insinuations do we hear against the supposed low moral and social level

of our migrants? And just yesterday an ill-mannered and vulgar attack by a protestant pastor, a certain Reverend Whittle, provoked indeed a violent retort from our consul-general Grossardi. That gentleman went to a meeting of the New Settlers League, another extremely extensive association with about 800 branches and which among other things—let it be noted—was created and subsidised by the Federal Government, to say that the level of morality of the southern Europeans is inferior to that accepted in Australia, and that there were districts in north Queensland which were becoming centres of corruption, caused by the introduction of Italians. I don't know what morality the Reverend Whittle is alluding to. I have spoken to priests, bankers, lawyers, English businessmen, and all of them had nothing but words of praise for the honesty and punctuality which the Italians, who enjoy the widest trust, carry on their business. I have found that at Ingham, at Innisfail, at Halifax there are hundreds of our labourers out of work (and so Queensland is not a mecca as many at home in Italy believe), who pay their own living for months, and have a very tough life, and quite a few are even camping in the woods as they travel around, so as not to use up their small savings straight away; and yet, although we are in towns where no one closes the door of the house, you never hear of a theft. I know that in one town in which Italians are at least a third of the population, the police registered 650 cases of British drunkenness in three months, while they registered only 22 Italian cases. The Reverend Whittle would do well to think rather about his own parishioners if it is true what one of his colleagues high up in the hierarchy, the Anglican Archbishop Lees, said 15 days ago in a congress of protestant churches: 'There is too much juvenile criminality in the Melbourne community. Unhealthy dwellings, too little life in the open air, drunken parents are the predominant factors'.

And now we can even change the subject.

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*Corriere della Sera*, 14 July 1925

## PART 2: BOTTOM OF THE CLASS

Innisfail June 1925

It is incredible the way that the bolting of doors against us in America has created prejudice against our migrants in Australia. Even the well-disposed can't manage to get away from the idea that if after half a century of experience the United States has

come to a particular conclusion there must be good reason for diffidence. '*Remember the USA*', they say it and they print it in the papers—remember the United States. Not long ago that famous inquiry carried out by some commission or other of American university professors, into soldiers of the American army of diverse national origins, with the object of classifying them according to their mental capacity, had huge circulation. As you know, in the final ranking, the Italians turned out to be the people with the lowest intelligence (inferior by 63.4%), only just overtaken by the Poles. Getting angry is pointless—here they believe in this nonsense. An Australian friend of mine, with whom I spoke of all this business told me that years ago he had read the result of an inquiry of that sort, by those very same professors. Its object was to measure the predisposition to criminality of the various nations. The Irish had the highest percentage, and do you know who had the lowest? The negroes. I'd just like to ask: now that the American university professors have measured everyone else's intelligence, who will measure the intelligence of the university professors?

In any case, let's consider the 63.4%. But it seems that those who are at the bottom of the class are trouncing even those promoted without examination. We are bound to think so, when every day one hears patriotic Australians making great lamentations about the invasion of these Italians who are replacing the English in the plantations. 'The Italian migrants', wrote one of the patriots yesterday, 'are buying up all the plantations, and the Australian planters are getting out'. Since Australia is a civil country in which no one can ever push anyone out of his house without legal permission, the procedure has to be a little less simple. And so the Queensland Minister for Agriculture, McCormack, spelt out to me the reasons that the flow of our people causes concern to the government of which he is a member, although it is favourably disposed in principle to their coming: 'Five years ago barely 20% of proprietors were Italian, now in certain districts 60% of them are. We are moving towards an entire control of the sugar market by the Italians. Since naturally the Italian employer prefers the Italian labourer, you can see how this situation presents serious dangers for the British workers in a not far distant future. Furthermore, this intrusion into the market is no chance conquest, and if such displacement is taking place, there has to be some deeper reason'.



One of the earliest surviving photographs of an Italian cane-cutting gang. Back row, from left: G Nizza, Federico and Giuseppe Pallanza, Severino Ferraris and M Poggio. Front row, from left: Dando Bianco, Pietro Tibaldi, Camillo Zavattaro and Pietro Cantamessa. Halifax, Queensland, c.1909.

Nothing opened my eyes so much as the first day that I went through the district. I had taken a goods train because before the Monday there were no other trains going direct, and there I met up with an Englishman, a railway technician, who was employed on various works along the line. We crossed Ingham in the early morning. Speaking English he told me he too had a little sugar plantation.

*Here in Ingham?*

*Here in Ingham. I actually came from London 14 years ago as a railway employee, you know. Then I put aside a small sum and I felt like buying myself a farm. But I only held on to it for a few months. The life didn't suit me. An Italian came and paid £600 more than I had paid so I gave it to him. It was worth 3,100 then. Can you believe it? He threw himself into it and improved it so much that twelve months later he sold it for 9,000. They are all doing that. I know one man who bought land for 10,000 and who sold it off in lots a few years later for 36,000. And they are buying, my word, how they are buying! Look over here, on this part of this stretch there were once six English farmers. Now there is only one, all the others are Italians. On this side too, they are Italians. Here it was empty land. No one would look at it. Too difficult to work. Look. Beautiful cane. Never been cane before. But it's a life that I don't like. I've still got 42 acres at Mackay that I bought as a bargain, you see. There they are and I don't know what to do with them. As soon as I have the chance I'll give them away, and that's all.*

I don't mean to say that there are not English people who make magnificent planters but it's certain that in general they don't have

the feeling for the land that our people do. They don't have a comparable agricultural tradition. To understand the English one has to bear in mind that they are the ones who made the great industrial revolution of the modern world. Put them in front of a loom, and they exceed the superfluous. Put them in front of a furrow and they barely achieve the necessary. They don't have the tenacity, the patience, the passion of our people. For that reason, they lose out (you always lose when you love less). At Cairns they showed me the 'English' fields in which by December they had already finished the planting. For an Italian who scratches and turns and digs his field right up to April, and doesn't put in an inch of new cane if he isn't first sure of every clod, that is a crime worse than killing someone. And I saw the effects of these two different systems. I was at the farm of a big Italian planter in Victoria [probably the Victoria Mill area near Ingham] and I was observing two cane fields, one of an Italian, the other of an elderly Englishman who had the adjoining farm. The fields were barely divided by a road, and the Englishman's had two-year-old cane, and yet it was the same effect as looking at two figures of that picture: 'I sold on credit' and 'I sell for cash'. There is one particular spot where the Englishman's property projects into the Italian's. This year my man had already nibbled at 20 acres. I am sure that within a couple of years he will have gobbled the rest too.

And this is beyond dispute: that the name and the work of the Italian is by now indissolubly linked to the history of the colonisation and development of these lands. The cultivation of sugar in Queensland is one of the most extraordinary experiences of acclimatization and adaptation that the white race has ever carried out. The sugar growing districts are low alluvial lands extending over a considerable proportion of the coast, between Mackay and Cairns, approximately between 17 and 21 degrees of southern latitude. It is tropical, with a tropical climate. High temperatures, extreme humidity; periods of torrential rain alternated with days of scorching summer heat. Certain points in the north have been compared to Calcutta. When after the very first attempts in 1828, introduction into the country of sugar cultivation on a grand scale began, it was never for a moment thought that one might employ any but a coloured workforce, especially for the fatiguing operations of cutting and transporting from the field. *Coolies*, Aborigines and *kanakas*, natives of the Pacific islands that is, were imported *en masse*, and introduced on the plantations.

But this importation soon clashed with other exigencies of a political nature which by degrees were coming to impose themselves on Australian public opinion. Isolated in the middle of an ocean, in direct contact with a world of diverse races which were spreading enormously and prolific, this handful of whites, which then didn't touch 4 million, scattered over more than 750 million hectares, soon felt that if the door of the house remained open to the infiltration of coloured people, they would inevitably find themselves exposed to the danger of losing their numerical superiority. The White Australia policy became popular, and is still the immovable cornerstone of their system now. The Act of 1888 against the Chinese was the opening shot in this inexorable movement. In 1900 there followed the *Pacific Islanders Act* which closed Australia to the *kanakas* too.

It was a terrible blow for the Queensland planters. The industry was thought lost. Chambers of Commerce, farmers' associations, committees were convened urgently in all the centres of the district to protest against this prohibition and to call for it to be revoked. The opinion of a royal commission was made known: sent to study the problem, it had solemnly declared that 'there was absolute unanimity among all the technicians and the experts interviewed, that *the white man cannot cultivate cane*'. That same year a competent and impartial observer, Leroy Beaulieu, wrote that he couldn't see how it was possible to make Queensland profitable without a coloured workforce. The *kanakas* were considered so indispensable to the plantations that although the law was laid down it was reckoned wise to close an eye for a certain time and let them enter clandestinely, so much so that in 1905 for example, 8,450 were still on the land. That notwithstanding, production immediately came to a standstill.

Let us take as an index the area under cultivation, since production is influenced by too many complex facts, while the area is solid fact; it is land that is alive, wrested from Nature, won for Man and for the marrow. In 1905, the sugar-growing area is 134,107 acres (about 60,000 hectares): in 1907, it is 126,810. When did it start to pick up again? After 1910, that is, after the regular upward movement of our immigration to Australia, and consequently to Queensland, began (naturally, there have always been Italians in Queensland, and the leader of our community, Regazzoli of Halifax, originally from Lodi [Lombardy] came here for example in 1873). Here are the figures of this increase: in 1910, there were 883 immigrants; in 1912, 1,632 immigrants and



Eugenio and Felice Regazzoli pose with friends in front of one of several businesses owned by the brothers. Halifax, Queensland, c.1885.

in 1913, 1,963 immigrants. The next year the war [World War 1] stopped them at 1,642. The sharp decrease was in 1915, with 643. So already that first wave is enough to bring, in five years, the 141,779 acres of cultivated land of 1910 to the 167,221 acres of 1916. But the astounding leap came only after the war, when immigration became invasion. In 1918, there are 160,534 acres of cultivation, in 1923 there are 219,965. These 24,000 hectares of increase are almost exclusively the product of Italian work. Today *kanakas* no longer exist in Queensland; whites cut down the forests, whites break up the earth, whites sow the cane, whites cut it. But the Queensland which in 1901, with the coloured workforce, was producing 90,000 tons of sugar, today with the white workforce produces 400,000!

I maintain that Australians would never have been able to achieve this magnificent redemption of one of the richest and most beautiful parts of their land from the fatal invasion of the coloured races without the cooperation of the Italians. However, this collaboration could not have been the same held with the *kanakas*. The Italians came to Queensland as free men, with all the rights of free men, including that of winning with their own hands their own economic independence. What they have done, and which the Australians seem sometimes to look upon as little less than an illegitimate invasion, is nothing other than the exercise of this right. If the Australians want a white force in Queensland, they will have to resign themselves to the likelihood of seeing the wage-earner of today becoming the master of tomorrow. That is exactly what has happened with the Italians. Their contribution is no longer just assistance with the hard manual labour;



Canecutters R Cavallaro, P Zaia, Alfio D'Urso, M Bonanno, L D'Urso, Giuseppe Lizzio and Salvatore Zappala. Innisfail, Queensland, 1923.

it is organisation, technical improvement, intelligence about the land. Pass through all these districts, and you will find phalanxes who are by now the trustees of the agricultural traditions of the region. Names like Zavattaro, Bellerio, Comba, Cattaneo, Olivero, Ferraris, Russo, Capra, Cattana, Vedasto, Gandossi at Ingham; like Regazzoli, Francantoni, Fracchia, Plebani, Vignolio, Capisano, Venturi at Halifax; like Cataldo, Zampatti, Dalla Vecchia, Maccarone, Martinuzzi, Cantamessa, Celidone, Pasquali, Bullini, Signorini, Stella, Biletta, Calí, Pagano, Cao, Bianchi, Rizzo, Croato, Bombardieri, Valmadre, Moraschi, Cataldo at Innisfail-Mourilyan; like De Martini, Gaspare, Tenni, Omodei, Vanini, Rossetti, Costantino, Saraceni at Babinda; like Prandolini, Ghirardelli, Ravizza, Ciodalla at Cairns; like the hundred others, big and small, who I am sorry not to remember and to have to leave out; they are for the banks, for the refineries, for the English businessmen synonymous with solid savings, capacity for hard work, for solvency and competence. And this is the people, these are the exemplars of the race that the sportsmen of the University of Columbia or of Atlanta failed for mental deficiency.

Yet to compensate, history will record them, and forget the professors.

*Corriere della Sera*, 17 July 1925

### PART 3: A BIT OF A DESCRIPTION

Ingham June 1925

It is hard to say how many there are. I have heard it calculated as 10,000 and it would be a third of all our emigration to Australia. Here in the Ingham district they did a kind of private census and the result was 1,930. With subsequent arrivals, one could reasonably say that this year they have climbed to 2,500. The total population of the district is about 7,000. You can see more or less the proportion.

These 10,000 Italians are for the most part concentrated in the districts of Ingham, Innisfail and Cairns, that is, over an area of eight thousand square kilometres - a total population of twenty-six thousand (according to the 1921 Census). They are therefore still strongly concentrated but one is speaking of a population that is not urban but rural, and clustering does not mean crowding. There are no cities. Cairns, end of the line of the Great North Coast Railway and gateway to the islands, is first. The other centres are nothing. Two or three larger stores, a few shops, a few branch offices of banks, a couple of cinemas, of Greek cafes, of Chinese fruit sellers, is the obligatory equipment of these skeletal habitats. The most conspicuous part are the hotels; at Halifax there are four of them, I think, for about 20 houses. But the hotel is the bar, the place you meet, where business is done, etc. and then the cutters go there to stay in the intervals between one job and the next. When this nomadic population takes off, there are no Italians in town. Always bear this in mind, that the Italian of Queensland is ever a man of the land, and lives on the land.

Even after he has become rich, he stays. The kind of migrant who having made his fortune on the land moves to the city and becomes bourgeois and commercial, is practically unknown here. Nor is there any tendency to repatriate. This explains the relatively modest proportions of their remittances home. The banks, for example, annually deposit about £75,000 generated in the Ingham district, of which however, the greater part is destined as passage money for new migrants. The director of one of the banks which works most with Italians tells me that he knows only one client who makes regular remittances with the intention of capitalising in Italy. The reasons are complex: exchanges, markets, but also to some extent the technology and organisation of the sugar plantation industry

here in Queensland, which requires liquid reserves, leaving the sugarcane farmer without big margins of disposable funds.

The typical form of agricultural contract in the Queensland plantations is called *lien on crop* or *crop-lien* or in short, mortgage on the harvest. It works like this: the buyer of the property pays to the seller only a deposit in cash, generally for a minimum amount (it is said that £300 is enough for a farm of £10,000-12,000) as soon as he takes possession. The remainder is divided into a certain number of annual instalments, payable together with the interest, on the cane crop. The *crop-lien* concluded, this is registered in the Supreme Court as an ordinary mortgage, by which the vendor of the property automatically remains, until the debt is totally discharged, the effective owner of the harvest. The *crop-lien* is communicated to the refinery that gets the cane of the farm that has been sold, and it [the refinery] is obliged and directly responsible for withholding, from time to time, until the debt is totally discharged by the new proprietor, the instalment amount owed to the old proprietor and to pay it directly to him. Close to this and now becoming more widespread under the influence of the Italians who prefer it, is the other, simpler form of agreement which is called *order*: a simple letter in which the buyer undertakes to pay the vendor a predetermined percentage (usually 40%) of the proceeds of the annual crop. This agreement which falls not on the cane as with the *crop-lien* but on the by-product of the harvest is stipulated personally between the buyer and vendor without the intervention of the refinery, naturally gives much less security to the vendor than the other arrangement. This is a noteworthy indication that the presence of the Italians in the market place has been influential in creating a greater trust. However, even with these various forms of agreement, the fact remains that the planter finds himself caught in a long and often complicated chain of commitments to be fulfilled, which even if they have the advantage of setting him up on his own more quickly, bind him for quite a few years to the land and contribute to keeping him there.

On the plantations only cane is cultivated. It could be that the present crisis may lead to some fundamental experimentation in different varieties of farming; until now, where there is land, there is sugar cane. It is a kind of cultivation that keeps the farmer tied up for the entire year. Every year there is generally a part of the farm in which new cane has to be planted. The Italian method is always to do



three ploughings, one in September-October, one in December, the third in February-March. At the end of March-April, they plant. As soon as the cane is at a certain height, a series of auxiliary operations begin—hoeing, weeding of the furrows, etc.—some of which have to be repeated as many as eight or ten times. In June-July the cutting starts. The government inspector who controls the refinery in a particular area (every refinery has its own inspector) fixes with the tributary farms owners, the distribution of teams of canecutters and the order of the work so as to assure the quantity of the cane that will flow through to the factory each day. The cutting goes on until January. The settling up begins in February and ends with the complete realisation of the stocks. It seems this year that the refineries are guaranteeing 43/- a ton on 60% of the harvest (domestic consumption) and 20/- for the rest (excess of production which has to be exported). It is not a very high price, especially if compared with those of the past years, and the new arrivals, who have paid dearly for their land, don't have a brilliant start.

Generally, the Italian farmer prospers. The wealth of the Italians in the Ingham district is valued at £1 million, that is, more than 150 thousand lire, based on the average value of £3,000 per farm; for Innisfail, at £1.5 million which is too much. They are risky estimates and there is always that blessed complication of mortgages, but they are offered as indicators. Put between one and five million the fortunes of the most prosperous, naturally a minority; between 300 and 500 thousand lire the average. Taxes are high. Here there are two, state and federal, and they hit income and business [alike]. I shall quote this example: seventy hectares, two thousand

Antonio Ficarra stands in front of the bridge built by farm owners Dominic Rotondo, Francesco Antoni and FG Buffa. Horsedrawn rail trucks were used to haul sugar cane across the bridge to the mill. Stone River, Ingham, Queensland. 1901.



TOP: Transporting sugar cane. Queensland, c.1920.

Farmers transporting harvested cane by rail trucks to the refinery mills. Queensland, c.1925.



tons of cane, average production £4,000, profit calculated £1,600. Annual pay £191.11.6 that is, about 12% of pure profit. In Australia it is the sugar plantations which yield more in taxes to the state than any other category, except stock-raising.

They are almost all fortunes built on nothing. And it is only in the last few years that the emigrant who brings capital has become frequent: farmers who sell land in Italy to come and buy it here. The great nucleus are all ex-labourers. For three or four years they work in the open, clearing land, planting and squeezing money out of their every muscle. Having accumulated their £300 or £400 of savings which are enough to make a deposit immediately, they cast their eyes on a little farm and install themselves. If luck helps them a little, the way to wealth is open to them. But they remain attached to their origins. They say, 'I began with a pound', or, 'I began with one field'. They wear tie pins made of gold and in the shape of a canecutters scythe, like a badge, their badge of the *self-made man*. They feel the

moral value of their money, that little bit of power they have won by themselves and which gives them, strangers in a strange land, the right to speak and to exercise authority. Among themselves they give each other high-sounding titles such as 'King of Innisfail', 'Emperor of Mourilyan', as a bit of a joke, a bit also because it tickles them. They don't lose their balance. They keep those solid fundamental qualities of our rural populations: tenacity, spirit of sacrifice, economy, tempered, however, by a certain breadth and understanding which has come from contact with a wider world, and which often saves them from the other side of these qualities such as selfishness, mistrust and narrow-mindedness. And like their life, simple but decorous and in whom the traditions and customs of their *paesi* mingle with more modern and less proletarian forms of Anglo-Saxon life. They punish themselves the whole day in the field, driving the tractor up and down, but when they go home in the evening they have a shower and after supper they come down to town in their car to go to the cinema. At table, the main dishes are always the great dishes of our indigenous cuisine, but among the smoking mountains of macheroni, the tons of salad groaning with oil, of the abundance of vegetables, cups of tea and slices of buttered bread are passed around. And the children are called Toni or Mariolin and play 'schiavi' [slaves] on the threshing floor, but in the morning they go to school on horseback and always say *please*. They live in comfortable houses built on top of a kind of palisade of thick beams which keep them off the ground, all of timber, with verandas sheltered by lattice work and roofs of galvanized sheet metal. Paw-paw, banana, orange and mango trees provide a little shade around the house.

It is a healthy colony. We have other healthy colonies, but this is the youngest and has the health of the young: that full and irresistible youthful health which is like the morning smile of Nature. There are no blemishes. The rogue, the ruffian, the libeller, the usual chronic phylloxera of colonial life has not yet made an appearance. They have no political divisions because their opinions are the same. They have no bitter personal divisions of the type that create havoc elsewhere. They have no Capulets or Montagues. Their relative regional homogeneity contributes to the maintenance of cohesion. It is still a colony at the aristocratic stage, the colonial child of a certain city [words missing] almost like the colonies of ancient Greece. An old man said to me: 'Ten years ago Halifax was all Conzano [the Italian town], Ripple Creek was Rovato, Macknade was Ostiglia. Now

Conzano is at Ingham, Brescia and Mantua are at Halifax'. This gives a bit of an inkling of the life here.

Naturally, the increase in migration has brought a greater mixture. A contingent which has been notably reinforced is the Sicilian. The Sicilians are at Mourilyan mainly. There is a road that at first they called Telephone Line and that now the Italians call San Alfio because they are all from that town. I asked a Sicilian about this town that was so prolific. 'On my honour,' the good lad replied, 'On my honour, which more than that of my wife's I revere, I have never heard of it. I think it is near Catania. One of them came here, made his fortune, wrote home. Now they are all here, so I think that not even the mayor is left in town'. The Sicilians are a little bit of a nightmare for the Australians, more than anything because of their extrovert exuberance, farthest from the Anglo-Saxon spirit, like gesticulating too much or shouting too much. Observations of a man from Comasco [in Lombardy]: 'They yell, oh Lord how they yell!' But they are excellent farmers and quite a few have done magnificently, like those Russo brothers who represent one of the most powerful families in the colony.

Aside from the Sicilians, other southerners are scarce: a few from the Abruzzi, the rare Neapolitan, you don't hear anything about the others. There's Gaspare from Rome, one of the lords of Babinda who still rolls a Trastevere accent and apostrophises to the great dome from a distance of 12,000 miles, as if he could see it before him. There are Tuscans especially from the island of Elba; emiliani, sardi, genovesi like the gigantic Rossetti—he too, one of the elders who began as a miner in the west, at Mt Isa, where he was famous for his tremendous boxing ability which he would employ single-handedly against entire gangs, every time he heard someone say something negative about Italians. Italians from the Veneto region are at Innisfail in particular, with people from Vicenza the most prominent. Heading the list, Charlie Dalla Vecchia, another of the old guard, the man who owns the only brick building in the district after the station and the post office, as popular in the bars and on the plantations of the Johnson River as the beer and the jokes he



Transporting harvested cane to the refinery mills. Queensland, c.1925.

tells. There are trevisani, veneziani, friulani and those from Mantua and Brescia are too numerous to count. However, the most formidable group are still the piemontesi. They are the backbone of the Italian colonisation of Queensland. Look at the district of Ingham. All the older people, the pioneers, the masters, are piemontesi. From Piedmont is Frank Castrastellero (32 years in Queensland) made Justice of the Peace for his profound knowledge of the country and his prestige with the English and his co-nationals. From Piedmont is Vignolio (35 years in Queensland) who has retired from the plantation and lives in Halifax with his orchard, his trained parrot and the fine table he keeps where he welcomes you with a broad smile on his honest Canavesian face against a background of mysterious barrels—oh dear—of Barbera wine. From Piedmont is the slow and serious Zavattaro (18 years in Queensland), head of a dynasty as solid as his build. From Piedmont is Fracchia (20 years in Queensland), one of the most characteristic figures, I think, of the Australian sugarcane plantations who has the last farm in Macknade, right in the middle of the sands and the scrub of the Herbert River where wild horses graze and crocodiles wander. He lives there amongst many others from Casalmoferrato exactly as if he had come out of a farmhouse on the main road of Alessandria.

This is the profile, more or less, of the Italian of Queensland. Now put him into shirtsleeves, on horseback riding the endless and rustling expanse of this sea of intense green cane, the same colour green as the green the new world must have been on the day of Creation, under a torrid sky, and search there for the likeness.

# family history: a new resource for family historians: microfilms of vital records from the *archivio tribunale*

by **ALAN POLETTI** ALAN POLETTI IS A RETIRED PROFESSOR OF NUCLEAR PHYSICS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND. OVER SEVERAL YEARS HE HAS BEEN GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT MIGRANTS FROM VILLA DI TIRANO (PROVINCE OF SONDRIO) TO AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND. HE REPORTS ON A VALUABLE RESOURCE FOR FAMILY HISTORIANS.

## INTRODUCTION

The Family History Library Utah has recently made available microfilms of the registers of births, deaths and marriages (*anagrafe*<sup>1</sup>) for many provinces in Italy, in particular for the years 1866-1929 for the provinces of Sondrio, Como and Lecco.<sup>2</sup> Many of the earliest Italian immigrants to Australia were from these three provinces. These *anagrafe* thus represent an amazing resource for family historians seeking to trace the lives of these immigrants. It is all the more amazing because previously information from these registers had only been obtainable as *estratti* (extracts) of the records of interest by writing directly to the *comune*. (The *comune* is the smallest unit of local government in Italy. There are 78 *comuni* in the province of Sondrio. Each one maintains its own *anagrafe*.)

The universal civil registration of births, marriages and deaths was instituted when Italy became a unified state. In the province of Sondrio they date from 1866. These are the earliest civil registers available except for those from a brief period (1813 to 1816) when the province of Sondrio was ruled by the French. For each event, two identical *atti* (records or deeds) were produced by an official of the *comune*. One was retained and the other sent to the Court Archives (*Archivio Tribunale*) in the provincial capital.<sup>3</sup> It is these records that have been microfilmed. They are, of course, all in Italian and some, because of very poor handwriting are virtually unreadable. However each *atto di nascita*, *atto di morte*, and *atto di matrimonio* generally follows a standard pattern, so that even if your Italian is not so good, it is generally possible to extract the information you want.

## HOW TO FIND THESE MICROFILMS

The website is <http://www.familysearch.org>. Click on **library**, then **family history library catalog**, then **place search** and find the *comune* of your interest. You should get it underlined in blue, click on the underlined blue until you see a button at the top right

## FILM NOTES

Note - Location [Film]

Nati 1866-1903 - VAULT INTL  
Film [2140288 Items 2-4]

Nati 1904-1910 - Pubblicazioni 1866-1910  
- Matrimoni 1866-1907 - VAULT INTL  
Film [2140289 Items 1-5]

Matrimoni 1908-1910 - Morti 1866-1910 -  
VAULT INTL Film [2140290 Items 1-3]

Allegati 1866-1871 - VAULT INTL  
Film [2140462 Items 5-6]

FIG 1

hand corner: **view film notes**, click on this and then go to the bottom of the screen to get a **printable version** and print out. Fig. 1 shows the first few lines of the film notes for Villa di Tirano. Those for other *comuni* will be similar.

The first film has all of the births (*nati*) for the *comune* from 1866 to 1903. The second has further births and the banns (*pubblicazioni*) as well as marriages (*matrimoni*). Further marriages as well as deaths (*morti*) are on the third film. The fourth film has on it the annexes to the registers (*allegati*). These contain documents related to the registers, such as the advice of a birth etc in another *comune* or a foreign country or deeds submitted at the time of registration of an event.

With some luck there will be a Family History Center<sup>4</sup> of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints near you. Take your print-out to them and request the films of your interest. They then make the request to the Family History Library in Utah. After some time, they will advise you that it is available. You will then need to examine the films at the Center and you may find that they will be available for only four weeks.

## COMMENTS ON MATERIAL ON THE FILMS

It will take a little time to sort out where to find the records of interest. For instance, Item 1 of the first film listed in Fig. 1 is actually deaths in Villa di Chiavenna (1866-1910). As each event was reported it was entered into the Register and given a sequential number. At the end of the year, an alphabetical index was then prepared and this was placed after the records for

that year. Sometimes these indices are missing or they are only partial. Sometimes individual records are, by mistake, not indexed. For the years 1866-1875, all records were entirely written in longhand. Paper was expensive and every line of every page is used. Those for 1875 and subsequent years used pre-printed forms so that the format is clearly defined. For the years in the earlier period, it will be very difficult to decide just where a particular record begins. If you need records from these years, I suggest that you first look at some of those from the years 1875 and after. This will help you to find just where in the record is the material you need.

To assist with the decipherment of these records, I will discuss several of them in detail. These are all from years subsequent to 1875. I have chosen them for their clarity and tried to find records relating to people who migrated to Australia. I begin with an *atto di nascita*.

## BIRTH CERTIFICATES (ATTI DI NASCITA)

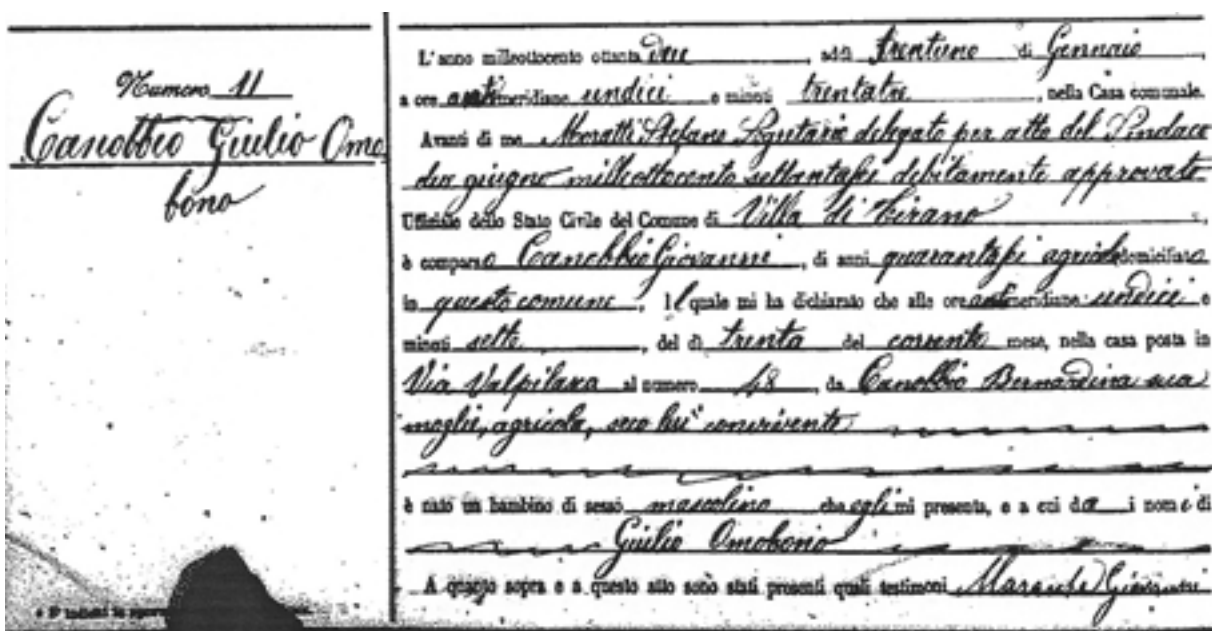
### BIRTH CERTIFICATE OF GIULIO OMOBONO CANOBBIO (BORN 30 JANUARY 1882)

At first sight, this is a little confusing because it is in two pieces. However, the *atti di nascita* were displayed three to a double opening. This one was the second on such a double opening. It began toward the bottom of the left hand page and continued at the top of the right hand page.

Now let's examine this *atto di nascita*. The first two lines give the date (31 Jan 1882) and precise time, not of the birth, but when the birth was reported to the *comune* official Stefano Moratti by Giulio's father, Canobbio Giovanni, age 46, occupation *agricola* (farmer or farm worker), resident of Villa di Tirano, as indicated in line 6. Lines three and four give Moratti's name and say exactly why he is approved to record the birth. The *comune*, Villa di Tirano, is given in line five. Finally lines seven to nine give the precise time of birth (11.07 am on the thirtieth day of the current month, 30 January 1882), place of birth, Via Valpilasca 48, and his mother's maiden name (which happens in this case to be the same as her husband's) Canobbio Bernardina *sua moglie, agricola, seco lui convivente* (Giovanni's wife, *agricola*, who lives with him). So her marital relationship to the person reporting the birth is given as well as her occupation and the fact that she is living with Giovanni. The following two lines give Giulio's sex, record that he has been presented to the official and the names Giulio Omobono given to him by his father. Two witnesses are named (last line of Fig. 2a and the first two lines of Fig. 2b). Moratti then states that he read out the *atto* to Giovanni and the two witnesses and then all four signed.

Years later Giulio had given two precise dates for birth. Pity they were not accurate. Giulio was a bit of a character. When he was registered as an alien in 1915 he gave

FIG 2A: First part of birth certificate of Giulio Omobono Canobbio (born 30 January 1882).



## ATTI DI NASCITA

di anni *cinquantadue* *presente* *Canobbio Paolo*, di anni  
*ventifive*; *pizzicando* entrambi residenti in questo Comune. *Letto il presente atto*  
*a tutti li intervenuti questi lo hanno messo sottoscritto*  
*Canobbio Giovanni*  
*Masaroni Giovanni*  
*Canobbio Paolo*  
*Masaroni Stefano*

FIG 2B: Second part of birth certificate of Giulio Omobono Canobbio.

his date of birth precisely: 28 December 1882. In 1940, he applied for naturalisation in Western Australia and again gave a precise date of birth: 25 November 1880. The official dealing with the application was a careful man and in a letter to Canobbio, enquired which of the two dates was correct. Unfortunately, Canobbio's reply is not in the file. Both dates were wrong, as we have seen. Note, too, that in these records, the family name is given first and never with a separating comma from the given name. In many early passenger lists this caused many problems. A name like Poletti Giovanni would often be written on these lists as Giovanni, P. [Ed. This is still the practice in all the Italian official records].

### MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES (ATTI DI MATRIMONIO)

In the following *atto di matrimonio* both bride and groom are *villaschi*. [People from Villa di Tirano are *villaschi*. This very concise method of referring to people from a given *comune* is widespread: Sondrio = *sondriesi*; Tirano = *tiranesi*; Bianzone = *bianzonaschi*; etc.]

#### MARRIAGE OF ANTONIO ZANOLARI TO MARGHERITA BRUSASCHI-TURA (15 JUNE 1902)

Each *Atto di Matrimonio* has a page to itself. This one in Fig. 3 is Antonio Zanolari's marriage to his first wife. Antonio migrated to Australia in 1921 with his second wife, Domenica Agata Romaior-Re and his son Beniamino Giovanni by his first marriage. Both Domenica and Beniamino naturalised in Australia, although Antonio did not.

These *atti* come straight to the point. The date of marriage (15 June 1902) is in the first line. The official, Dr Carlo Gotti, then explains why it is he who is doing the job. The printed form

then takes care to point out that he is suitably dressed (*vestito in forma ufficiale*)! Next, the name of the groom: Zanolari Antonio (his age: 28, occupation, place of birth and residence is then given, together with his father and mother's names). His wife comes next: Brusaschi Tura Margherita, age: 36 with similar information. Why 'Tura'? It is the *sopranome* of her family. We would write it as Brusaschi-Tura, Margherita. The printed section following the names refers to the publication of the banns (*pubblicazioni*) and to the reading out of the three articles in the civil legal code concerning marriage. Then there is the 'will you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife?' etc and their names appear again. Two witnesses were present. Finally the entire *atto* was read out and all five signed.

Another member of the family, Giovanni Brusaschi-Tura was one of the earliest *villaschi* to arrive in Australia. Eight years after his arrival in 1858, at the age of 39 he married and settled down to farming at Dunach, near Clunes, 30 km north of Ballarat.

The next *atto di matrimonio* involves a *villasco* (Mosè Morelli) and his bride who is from the *comune* of San Giorgio di Nogaro in Udine province. The marriage was in San Giorgio.

#### MARRIAGE OF MOSÈ MORELLI TO ELVIRA LOLLIS (6 APRIL 1921)

Mosè and Elvira arrived in Brisbane in 1925. Previously they had lived in France and then in Varese with a child born in each place. Two further children were born in Ayr, Northern Queensland. Although naturalised in 1931, he was interned for four months in 1940 and then re-interned from 1941 until 1943. During his internment, Elvira who was very much his equal in their business partnership had to take sole charge of their storekeeping business in Cairns.

The *atti di matrimonio* for each year were

**ATTI DI MATRIMONIO**

L'anno millesimovecento 1921, addì quindici di giugno  
a ore undici e minuti cinquantasei, nella Casa Comunale  
di Villa di Tirano, aperta al pubblico.  
Avanti di me Gatti D.<sup>o</sup> Carlo ufficiale in carica  
senza altre cariche

Ufficiale dello Stato Civile, vestito in forma ufficiale, sono personalmente compariti: 1° Zanolari Antonio, di anni ventotto, agricola  
nato in questo Comune, residente in questo Comune, figlio di Antonio  
residente in questo Comune, e di Margherita Comarica residente  
in questo Comune; 2° Brusaschi Tura Margherita agricola  
di anni ventasei, nata in questo Comune, residente in questo Comune  
figlia di Innocenzo già residente in questo Comune e di Piera Maria  
Margherita, residente in questo Comune, i quali mi hanno richiesto di  
unirli in matrimonio; a questo effetto mi hanno presentato i documenti sotto descritti, e dall'esame di questi, non che di quelli già prodotti all'atto della richiesta della pubblicazione, i quali tutti  
muniti del mio visto, inserisco nel volume degli allegati a questo registro, risultandomi nulla ostare alla  
celebrazione del loro matrimonio, ho letto agli sposi gli articoli centotrenta, centotrentuno e centotrentadue  
del Codice Civile, e quindi ho domandato allo sposo se intende di prendere in moglie la qui presente  
Brusaschi Tura Margherita e a questa se intende di  
prendere in marito il qui presente Zanolari Antonio  
ed avendomi ciascuno risposto affermativamente a piena intelligenza anche dei testimoni sotto indicati ho  
pronunziato in nome della legge che i medesimi sono uniti in matrimonio. A quest'atto sono stati presenti:  
Biancotti Daniele di anni ventiquattro agricola  
Leggio Antonio di anni ventisei cufore  
entrambi residenti in questo Comune. Il documento presentatomi è il certificato  
delle pubblicazioni eseguite in questo Comune  
nei giorni uno ed otto giugno  
del corrente anno, da me rilasciato  
in data di oggi.  
Sotto il presente atto agli intervenuti,  
li ho fatto questi miei sottoscritti:  
Zanolari Antonio  
Brusaschi Margherita  
Biancotti Daniele  
Leggio Antonio  
Gatti Carlo ufficiale

Numero 16  
Zanolari Antonio  
Brusaschi Margherita  
rita

usually in three sections: *Parte I* (marriages in Villa di Tirano), *Parte II, Serie A* (marriages involving a *villasco* but that took place in another *comune* in Italy) and *Parte II, Serie B* (marriages in foreign countries, again involving at least one *villasco*). The extract in Fig. 4 is from an *atto* in *Parte II, Serie A* for 1921.

Picking up the correct date of the event is

again a problem. This *atto* contains three dates: the first (on the first line) is when the official in Villa received it, the second (9<sup>th</sup> line) is the actual marriage date (6 April 1921) while a third towards the end of the *atto* and not in this extract is that when the official in San Giorgio di Nogara (in Udine) sent it to Villa di Tirano. The first paragraph of the *atto* states when and by whom it was

FIG 3: Marriage certificate of Antonio Zanolari to Margherita Brusaschi-Tura (15 June 1902).

**ATTI DI MATRIMONIO - Parte II. - Serie B.**

L'anno millenovecento ventuno addì sei di aprile  
 nella Casa Comunale di Villa di Tirano  
 in San Giorgio Confederazione Svizzera Canton Grigioni del Pudore

Ufficiale dello Stato Civile del Comune di Villa di Tirano avendo ricevuto dall'Ufficiale dello Stato Civile del Comune di San Giorgio copia dell'atto di matrimonio l'ho per intero ed esattamente trascritto:

L'anno millenovecento ventuno addì sei di aprile  
 a ore quattro quattro quattro e minuti quattro nella Casa Comunale di San Giorgio Confederazione Svizzera Canton Grigioni aperta al pubblico.

Avanti di me Luigi Luigi Luigi

Ufficiale dello Stato Civile, vestito in forma ufficiale, sono personalmente compariti:

1.° Mosè Morelli, celibe di anni ventuno quattro,  
 nato in Villa di Tirano, residente in Atto Luigi,  
 figlio di Fido, residente in Villa di Tirano,  
 e di Giacomo Maria, residente in Atto Luigi;

2.° Lolli Elvira, vedova di anni dicinove quattro,  
 nata in quattro quattro quattro, residente in Atto Luigi,  
 figlia di Giovanni Luigi, residente in Atto Luigi,  
 e di Luigi Luigi, residente in Atto Luigi;

i quali mi hanno richiesto di unire in matrimonio; a questo effetto mi hanno presentato i ..... documenti sotto descritti e dall'esame di questi, nonché di quelli già prodotti all'atto delle pubblicazioni, i quali tutti, meno del mio visto, inserisco nel volume degli allegati a questo Registro, risultandomi sulla ostare alla celebrazione del loro matrimonio, ho letto agli sposi gli articoli centotrenta, centotrentuno e centotrentadue del Codice Civile, e quindi ho domandato allo sposo se intende di prendere in moglie la qui presente Lolli Elvira e a questa se intende di prendere in marito il qui presente Mosè Morelli ed avendomi ciascuno risposto affermativamente a piena intelligenza anche dei testimoni sotto indicati, ho pronunciato in nome della legge che i medesimi sono uniti in matrimonio. A quest'atto sono stati presenti:

FIG 4: Marriage of Mosè Morelli to Elvira Lolli (6 april 1921).

received in Villa di Tirano from the *comune* of San Giorgio. The rest of this extract is similar in form to the first paragraph in the previous *atto di matrimonio*. Of course, all of this and the rest of the *atto* received from San Giorgio had been carefully transcribed. The original copy from San Giorgio was then inserted in the *volume degli allegati* (the annexe) of the births, deaths and marriages register.

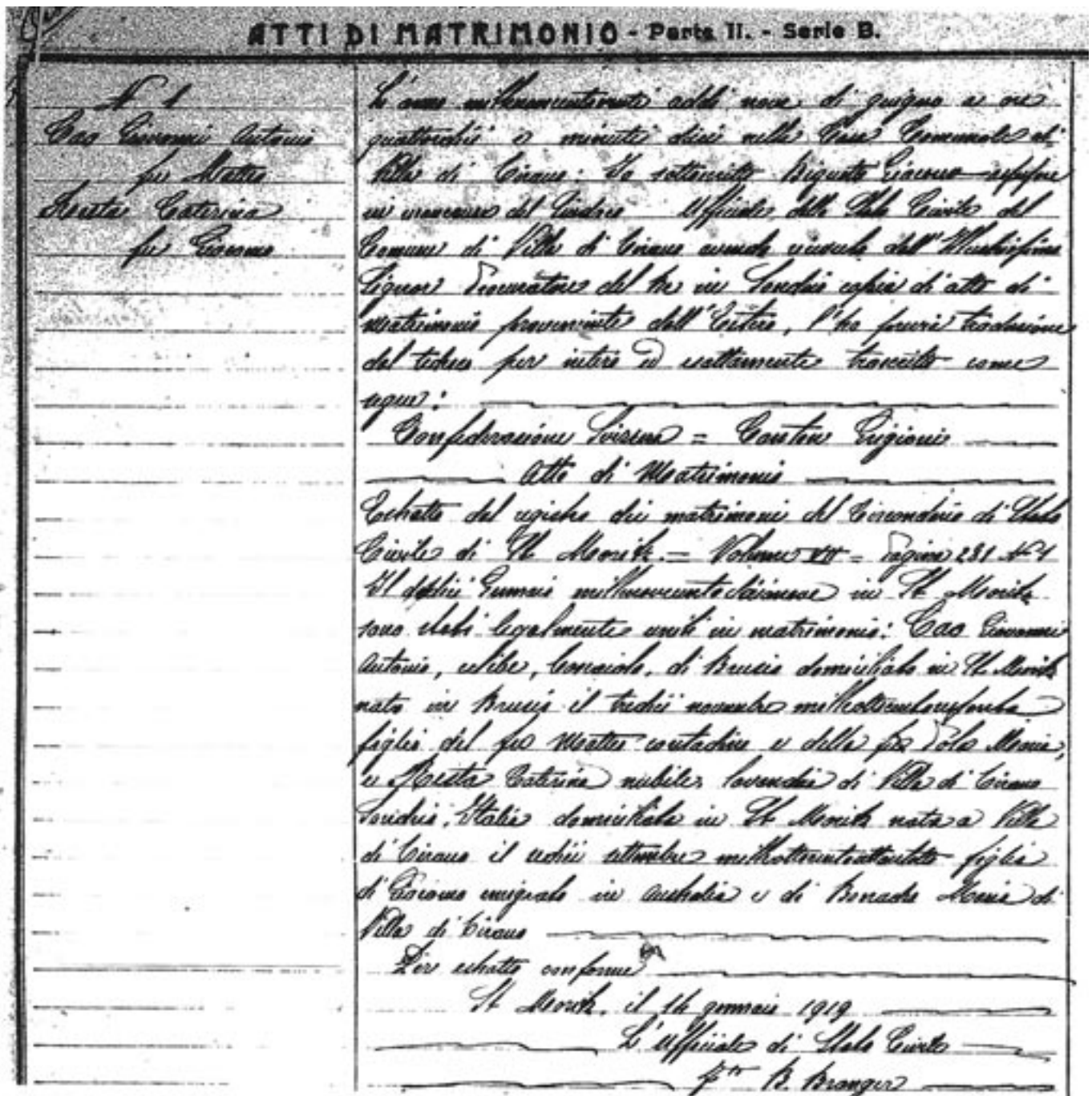
Now an *atto di matrimonio* involving a *villasca* (Caterina Resta), but the marriage was in a foreign country (*all'estero*), in this case in Switzerland.

#### MARRIAGE OF GIOVANNI CAO TO CATERINA RESTA (12 JANUARY 1919, ST MORITZ, SWITZERLAND)

Fig. 5 is an extract from this *atto*. It is from *Parte II Serie B* for 1920. Since many *villaschi* went to work in Switzerland, there were generally a few like this each year.

There is now no pre-printed form to help in its decipherment, but the general shape is similar to the previous *atto*. Again, the image is an extract only and again there are three dates, two of which are in the extract. The one on the first line (9 June 1920) is when the advice was received in Villa di Tirano. The actual marriage date and place is on the fourth line of the transcript after *Confederazione Svizzera = Canton Grigioni*, that is 12 January 1919 in St Moritz. Following this, the names and attributes of each one of the couple are listed. Unlike most other *atti di matrimonio*, their actual birth dates are given: respectively 13 Nov 1860 and 11 September 1888. Caterina's parents were Giacomo (*emigrato in Australia*) and Bonadeo Maria.

Giacomo and Maria Bonadeo had married in Villa di Tirano in 1876. He had then emigrated to Australia in 1882, but obviously had returned to Villa di Tirano by 1888, before again emigrating to Australia.



## THE BANNS (PUBBLICAZIONI DI MATRIMONIO)

Much of the information in the banns is also in the *atti di matrimonio*, but in addition, the ages of the fathers of the bride and groom are given. This is often a useful check and sometimes a clue as to where to look for the parents' births in the archives. In addition, the bride and groom must furnish copies of their own birth certificates and if a parent has died, their death certificate. These are then placed in the Appendices to the Register (*Allegati*). I have not so far had a chance to examine the *Allegati* in the microfilms, but they are likely to be very useful.

## ILLEGITIMACY AND WHAT WAS DONE ABOUT IT IN CIVIL RECORDS

Of the 339 births recorded in Villa di Tirano in the years 1897-1900, about 5% were to either or both an unknown father and an unknown mother. This was for births in the *comune* which had been formally reported. We all understand how the father could be 'unknown', but an 'unknown' mother? The answer lies in the Civil Law of the Kingdom of Italy. It was provided that if a mother did not wish her name to be registered, she just declared that she did not consent to be named: *donna che non consente di essere nominata*. Sometimes, the child remained illegitimate, but legitimacy could be achieved in two ways:

FIG 5: Marriage certificate of Giovanni Cao to Caterina Resta (12 January 1919, St Moritz, Switzerland).

1. If the couple subsequently married they could declare at that time that the child was actually theirs.

2. The second involved the drawing up of a deed by a notary stating that one or other (or both) of the parents recognized that the child was theirs, (an *atto di riconoscimento*). These *atti* appeared in *Parte II Serie B* of the year in which they were enacted. This could be several years after the birth.

### LEGITIMISATION AT THE TIME OF MARRIAGE

The simplest case is when the parents although unmarried, both came to the *casa comunale* to declare the birth. The parentage of the still illegitimate child was established at that time. Sometime later if the parents married, the child could be legitimised. Again, this could be some years hence. For instance when Maria Agostina Cattalini was born 27 February 1902, her father Pietro Cattalini and mother Maria Bignotti reported the birth, but it was not until their marriage 29 May 1904, that she was legitimised in their *atto di matrimonio*.

Matters became a little more complicated if the name of neither parent appeared on the *atto di nascita*. This was the case for

Bortolo Orma (born 18 May 1902) who was subsequently legitimised as Bortolo Poletti at the time of the marriage of his parents, Bortolo Poletti and Maria Manoni on 30 December 1904. Figs. 6 and 7 illustrate this case.

Fig. 6 illustrates several features of the *atti* for an illegitimate birth. Although it was almost always the father who reported the birth and presented the child to the official, sometimes if he was not able to (or did not wish to), it was the midwife (*levatrice*). In this case it was Domenica Biancotti who reported the birth and presented the child. The mother did not wish to be named, and in the absence of the father, a family name had to be invented. This was done by the official recording the birth, probably after consultation. In all cases these invented family names were unknown in the *comune* or its neighbours. In this case Bortolo was the given name with Orma as the family name. Following the names of the witnesses, in this *atto* it is further noted that *la dichiarante* (Domenica Biancotti) has promised to care for Bortolo and has asked for him to be given back to her. The official did this. Of course the implication is that Bortolo will be cared for by the mother. But Bortolo was later legitimised at the time of his parents' marriage and we now examine an extract from their *atto di matrimonio*.

FIG 6: Birth certificate of Bortolo Orma (18 May 1902).

7 **ATTI DI NASCITA**

Numero 34  
Orma Bortolo

Il giorno 18 del mese di Maggio dell'anno 1902 alle ore otto e minuti zero nella Casa Comunale.

Avanti di me Lambertini Agostino agente delegato per la registrazione ufficiale della Stato Civile del Comune di Villa di Pisano e compare Biancotti Domenica di anni trintaquattro levatrice domiciliata in questo Comune la quale mi ha dichiarato che alle ore otto e minuti zero del di dieciotto del presente mese, nella casa posta in Alfianco al numero ... ha dato alla luce una figlia non nominate.

è nato un bambino di sesso maschile che essa mi presenta, e a cui dà il nome di Bortolo il cognome di Orma.

A quanto sopra e a questo atto sono stati presenti quali testimoni Bona Agostino di anni trintaquattro acordo Botta Domenica di anni trinta acordo entrambi residenti in questo Comune. La dichiarante avendomi fatto domanda di relazione a lei il predetto bambino promettendo alla prima dei suoi indisposti voleri di provvedere all' allevamento e di rendere conto all' autorità del predetto bambino secondo la questa dichiarazione che ho conseguito alla medesima.

La presente atto a tutti gli intervenuti questi ho firmato con otto scritta.

IL CANCELLIERE ...

IL CANCELLIERE ...

Adi 18.5.02 in Orma  
è deceduto

*Manoni Maria* a questa se intende di prendere in marito il qui presente *Poletti Bortolo* ed avendomi ciascuno risposto affermativamente a piena intelligenza anche dei testimoni sotto indicati ho pronunziato in nome della legge che i medesimi sono aniti in matrimonio. A quest'atto sono stati presenti: *Morelli nat. D. Luigi* di anni *quarantacinque* *maggiore* o *Promajor de Antonio* di anni *trinta* *accolata* entrambi residenti in questo Comune. Il documento presentatomi è il certificato delle pubblicazioni eseguite in questo Comune nei giorni *dieci* e *undici* corrente (da me rilasciato in data *dieci* oggi). Gli sposi alla presenza degli stessi testimoni hanno avuto altri figli che dalla loro unione naturale nascono. Il figlio che come nato da ignoti genitori venne denunciato il giorno *ventuno* di maggio dell'anno *mil novecento due* (1902) da questo ufficiale di Stato Civile il quale lo appellò *Bortolo Orma* e mi hanno dichiarato che col presente atto lo riconoscono per proprio figlio all'effetto della sua legittimazione. Letto il presente atto a tutti gli interuenti questi lo hanno messo sottoscritto

FIG 7: Marriage certificate of Bortolo Poletti to Maria Manoni (30 December 1904).

In Fig. 7 which is an extract from the marriage of Bortolo Poletti to Maria Manoni (30 December 1904), I have left out all of the formal part which is of the same form as that in the marriage of Antonio Zanolari to Margherita Brusaschi-Tura (Fig. 3) and instead focus on the notes following this. The section of interest is that beginning: *Gli sposi alla presenza degli stessi testimoni ...* (The bride and groom in the presence of the same witnesses ... Note the long 's' in *stessi* = the same and *altresi* = also - very confusing!) It is in this section that Bortolo Poletti and Maria declare that Bortolo Orma is their son. They do not give his date of birth, but instead give the date (20 May 1902) of its registration. Finally, by this declaration, he is legitimised.

#### MARGINAL NOTES AND THEIR USEFULNESS

The extract from the *atto di nascita* of Bortolo Orma in Fig. 6 shows clearly how marginal notes in these *atti* can give some very useful genealogical information. Unfortunately, most were not as clear as the ones in this *atto*. The first marginal note records his marriage to Ida

Brauchi in Varese on 2 May 1937. (This note was not placed here until 1943. Mussolini came to power in 1922, the 'XXI' after 1.3.43 signifies that it is the twenty-first year of the Fascist era). The next note says that Bortolo was legitimised by the marriage of Bortolo Poletti to Maria Manoni, although the date is not given. Finally the last note records his death in Varese, 18 May 1950.

Here are two other examples of the usefulness of marginal notes. The only marginal note on the *atto di nascita* of Anna Morelli (born 11 Aug 1883) states that she married Pietro Pasetti on 4 September 1903 in Australia. This *atto* together with information on Pietro Pasetti from the *liste di leva* leads to a substantial revision of the family history of this couple<sup>5</sup>. Often these marginal notes recorded naturalisations. And sometimes renaturalisations! The one marginal note on the *atto di nascita* of Pietro Arminio Biancotti (born 25 August 1901) is *in data 19-4-1956 ha ottenuto la naturalizzazione Newzelandese*.

This clearly identified a certain ‘Peter Biancotti’ who was known only from hazy recollections of my own family.

### LEGITIMISATION VIA AN *ATTO DI RICONOSCIMENTO*

**MARIANNA RADA (B. 25 FEB 1915) /  
MARIANNA ANDREOTTA (RICON. 19 FEB 1918)**

In the *atto di nascita* (#22 of *Parte I*, 25 Feb 1915) the midwife, Ida Carenzio reported the birth of Marianna Rada, unknown father and *donna che non consente di essere nominata*. There were no marginal notes. She was legitimised three years later in the *atto di riconoscimento* (#1 of the *Atti di Nascita, Parte II - Serie B*, which is shown in Fig. 8.

If we remember the way these *atti di nascita* are laid out, finding the information we need is not so difficult. The date (10 May 1918) when this deed was entered in the Register is on the first line. The official, Emanuele Tavelli then explains why he is authorised to act. Then on line 6, he says that he has received an *atto di riconoscimento* drawn up by Dr Luigi Torelli (a lawyer in Toglio) dated 19 Feb 1918 and with the number 7525. In this deed (we are now at line 10), Andreotta Cristina di Giacomo, spinster, farmer (*agricola*), born and resident in Villa di Tirano declares that she is the mother of the (girl) child born (*data alla luce*) 25 Feb 1915 as recorded in the Register at # 2, *parte I*. (it was really # 22—a small mistake) and named Marianna Rada. Tavelli then goes on to say that he has checked his copy and that he has also placed Torelli’s original *atto* in the Appendices to the Register and signs the deed.

If you had really been looking for Marianna Andreotta, you would have had a hard time. The only place where she is only indirectly mentioned, is deep in the above *atto*. Almost certainly, Marianna’s mother married the following year. The civil marriage of Re Delle Gandine Abbondio *fu* Martino to Andreotta Cristina di Giacomo took place in Villa di Tirano 21 Jan 1919.

The case of Antonio Biancotti, (born 12 August 1912, Villa di Tirano) is an interesting one. The *atto di nascita* reveals only the birth of a certain Antonio Biotti, son of *ignoti*. In the National Archives of Australia [A435, 1947/4/211] we find in a letter dated 16 May 1947 that Antonio Biancotti (born 12 August 1912, Villa di Tirano) came to Australia ‘in the company of his mother when 8 mths old and reckons he disembarked at Cairns in Apr 1913. In addition, his father was Antonio Giuseppe Biancotti, resident of Babinda, naturalised at Melbourne 19 May 1915’.

However, from the Military Draft Lists (*liste di leva*) in the *Archivio di Stato* in Sondrio, on the 31 January 1933, Antonio Biotti (born 12 August 1912) was declared to be *renitente*—that is he had not turned up for his Draft Board interview.

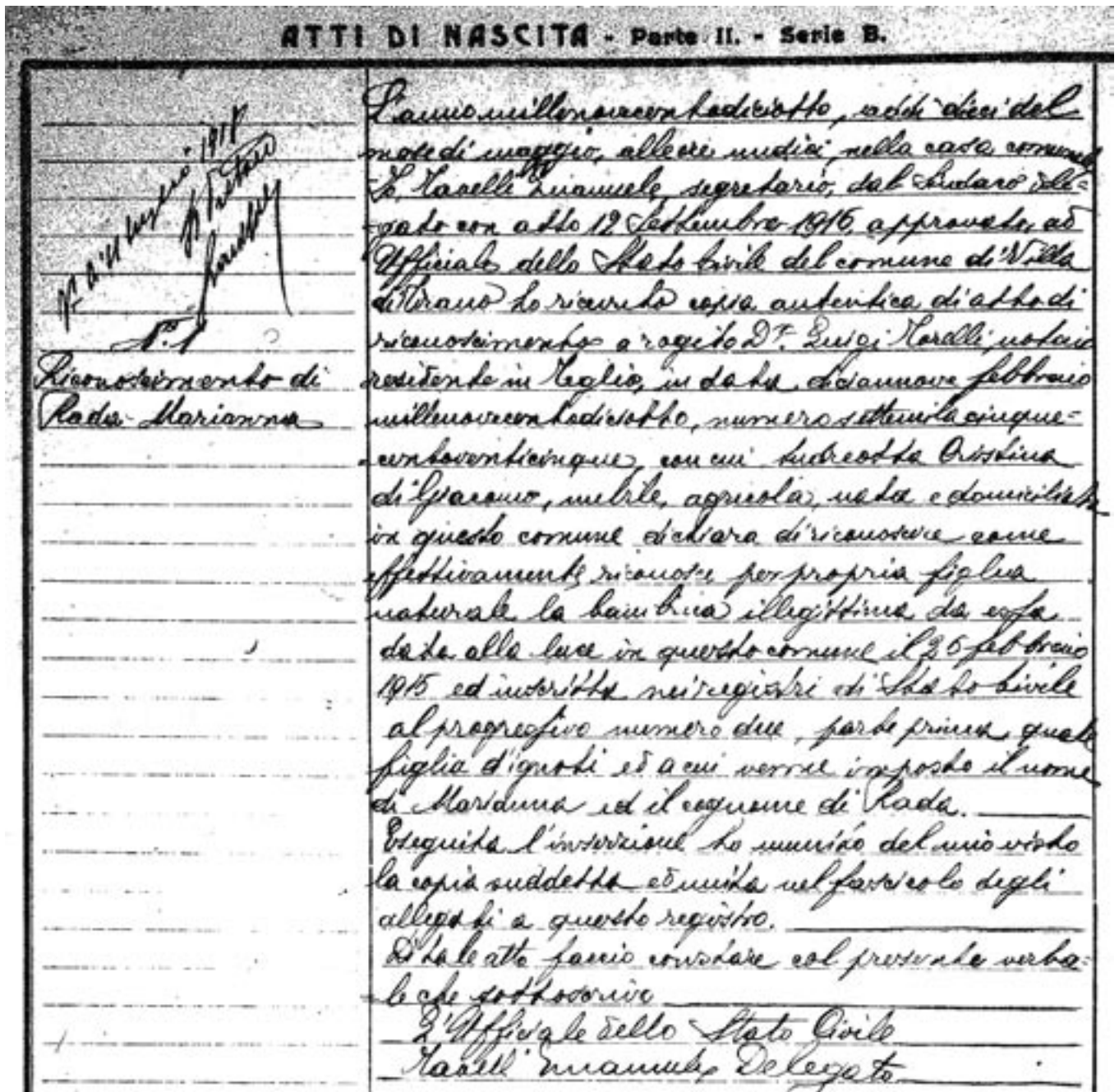
To further confuse things, the marriage in Queensland on the 26 March 1913 between Antonio Biancotti and Anna Teresa Svanosio is recorded. What is going on? All becomes clear with an *atto di riconoscimento* in the *atti di nascita*—*Parte II—Serie B*, no. 4, dated 3 August 1922. It covers a page and a half, but in it Anna Svanosio di Giacomo and married to Antonio Biancotti declares that she is the mother of Antonio Biotti and that his father was Antonio Biancotti. Although it was only a few months after his birth that his parents married, it was ten years before he was legitimised.

Sometimes, as with Bortolo Orma, a marginal note on the original *atto* refers to the subsequent legitimisation. This was the case for Bello, Arturo (born 8 June 1899) and recognised as the son of Maranta, Maria *fu* Giovanni in 1904 and for Farfalli, Fedele Enrico (born 27 Feb 1886) and recognised as the son of Poletti-Meotin, Maria di Domenico in 1897. Lovely names they dreamt up!

### CHURCH WEDDINGS AND CIVIL MARRIAGES

For most of the first sixty years of the existence of the unified Kingdom of Italy, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the new state was far from cordial. In matters of marriage, the State recognized only civil marriages and the Church only church weddings. Consequently the dates of the two could differ quite widely. Of five marriages in the years 1871, 1876, 1878, 1902 and 1907 in Villa di Tirano for which I have details of both church and civil marriages, the differences were 4 months, 2 months, 6 months, 3 days and 1 month respectively. In all cases the church marriage preceded the civil marriage. These time differences could have some awkward consequences: Giovanna Poletti was born 18 June 1878. Her parents were married in Church on 12 February 1878 while their Civil marriage took place 7 August 1878. In the eyes of the Church she was the daughter of a married couple and her baptism is so recorded. For the Civil authorities when her father reported her birth, she was illegitimate, while her mother had little option but to refuse consent to be named.

It was not until the signing of the Lateran Treaty between the Italian State and the Catholic Church, 11 February 1929, that this messy situation came to an end and



the Italian State recognised religious marriage as valid in civil law. This change is reflected in the marriage register for 1929 for Villa di Tirano: the *atti* for ten of the thirteen marriages recorded in the last four months of the year are transcribed from the reports forwarded to the civil authorities by the parish priests of Stazzona and Motta and the arch-priest of the San Lorenzo in Villa di Tirano.<sup>6</sup> These were in *Parte II—Serie B* and have the same ‘shape’ as the *atto* we have just discussed in Fig. 5. The date of the marriage comes after the official, as usual, says who he is and why he is authorised to do the job. He also gives the origin of the *atto*. Then follows the

transcription of the *atto* received from the priest.

#### WAS THE BRIDE PREGNANT?

As well as children born to a couple before they were married, family historians also need to realise that despite the Church’s admonitions, age-old custom and the normal behaviour of young people and those not so young, meant that a significant fraction of the first children born to a marriage were ‘unexpectedly early’. For instance, of the 63 civil marriages celebrated in Villa di Tirano from 20 March 1896 to 20 March 1900, about 13% were in this category. A complication of course, as mentioned above, is that the church

FIG 8: Legitimation of Marianna Rada.

marriage could well have been a few months before the civil marriage.

### A SAD LITTLE TALE

Giovanni Scaletti was born 27 September 1878 in the *contrada* of Santa Cristina on the mountain slopes above Stazzona. A marginal note refers to his marriage to Anna Maria Poletti-Dus on 26 September 1909. A son, Luigi, was born 4 August 1910. In May 1912 he left Villa di Tirano for Western Australia where by 1916 he was a miner at Boulder. Perhaps he had meant to return home before then, but war intervened. A year later, on 17 September 1917, while working at the Horseshoe Goldmine in Boulder, he was killed by a rock fall. The Australian authorities thought he was single, but were not sure. His death was not formally recorded in Villa di Tirano until 1929 when his widow and his brother brought a copy of his death certificate to the *casa comunale*. This was faithfully translated and placed in the *atti di morte Parte II, Serie B* for that year.

### DEATH CERTIFICATES (ATTI DI MORTE)

For a particular person, these are often the hardest to find. Indices spanning many years may need to be scanned, but they can be very useful. In the *atti di matrimonio*, I have encountered a surprising number of 'Australians', some of whom were even naturalised, who returned to Villa di Tirano and married. Evidence from the *liste di leva* often shows that they settled down in Villa di Tirano after their marriage for that is where their sons were born. So—if you cannot find the death of your 'Australian' ancestor in Australia—perhaps they died in the *comune* of their birth.

After 1875, the usual format was for two *atti di morte* to be displayed on each page. As an illustration of the information in these, I have chosen that for Caterina Tognola who died in Villa di Tirano at the age of 38 on the 24 October 1918.

This *atto* was no. 74 and the official made a mess of the name of Caterina's father in the right hand margin. It is indeed Pietro as in the body of the *atto*. Again the date (25 October 1918) in the first line is that when the official, Emanuele Tavelli recorded the death. The actual day of death given at the end of the ninth line (*ieri*, yesterday) is defined with respect to the first date. The date of death is thus 24 Oct 1918. Lines 6-8 give the name of the two people reporting the death and then, following the time of death, on the

tenth line the place of death is given as Contrada Morelli. Caterina's name (Tognola Caterina), age (38), occupation (*agricola*) and place of residence (*questo comune* = Villa di Tirano) follow. Next, her father, Pietro (Tognola is implied) who is dead (*fu*), his occupation when alive (*già agricola*) and place of residence. Following this, her mother, (Gosatti Domenica), also dead. The last statement at the end of line 15 gives her husband's name (*coniugata a Paini Stefano*). Note that the witnesses who have signed with Tavelli at the end are not the two people who reported the death.

### EQUALITY OF THE SEXES?

In the *atto di morte* above, we see that Caterina's death is reported under her maiden name. This is still the case today. To a certain extent "Women's Lib" was alive and well in rural Italy many years ago.

There were also some impressively strong women. At 10 am of the second of June 1903, Domenica Marantelli Colombini appeared at the *Casa Comunale* of Villa di Tirano to register the birth of her illegitimate son, Giacomo Giovanni born 5 days before. She must have been quite determined to have the child registered as hers for she had walked the eight kilometres from her home in the Contrada of Dosso although she had not brought the child as she should have. However, the official forgave her in view of the distance she had come and accepted the word of the midwife concerning the birth and the sex of the child and it was duly registered. Of course, since she was unmarried no father's name could be given. She then set off to return to Dosso, not only the eight kilometres, but a climb of 350 metres. All of this five days after the birth of the child. We still do not know the name of the father. Two years later, she married Andrea Orgnoni. As well as that inner strength we see above, she was clearly an extremely capable mother. Four sons she bore to Andrea appear in the *liste di leva* as well as Giacomo Giovanni

### DEATH RATES 1915–1920

Of the 579 deaths recorded in the *atti di morte* for the *comune* of Villa di Tirano in the years 1915-1920, 38 were of soldiers who had died at the front or from wounds. (The deaths of many others soldiers who had died in this period were only to be recorded in later years). But it was the influenza epidemic of 1918 that took the greatest toll. The average number of civilian deaths per year for the five years excluding 1918 was 76. In 1918, it was 162, over twice as many. Was Caterina Tognola, whose death is recorded in the

**ATTI DI MORTE**

L'atto sottoscritto adatto, un coniugato, a 18/10/18  
 a ore due e quindici nella Casa Comunale  
 Avanti di me Carrelli Emanuele, segretario per delega  
mauro Rastubolo, 18/10/18, appredato (Ultimo della  
 Stato Civile del Comune di Villa di Tirano, sono compariti  
Pola Stefano di Giuseppe, di anni quarantotto april  
 domiciliato in comune Adini, Inverio, di età  
quarantotto, april, domiciliato in comune Adini, i quali mi hanno  
 dichiarato che a ore undici e minuti tarata di ore  
 nella Casa posta in contrada Anelli al numero  
 è morta Caterina Caterina april tarata  
april, residente in questa comune, nato  
 in questa comune, da fu Pola april april domiciliato in  
in comune, fu Paolo di Damiano april  
 domiciliato in questa comune coniuga fu Pola  
 A questo atto sono stati presenti quali testimoni Damiano Vincenzo  
 di anni quarantotto, april, Regno Italiano  
 di anni cinquantatré, curatore, april residenti in questa Comune.  
 Letto il presente atto a tutti gli interessati lo hanno essi meco sottoscritto  
Pola Stefano Adini Cristiano  
Damiano Vincenzo  
Carrelli Emanuele Ufficiale Delegato

FIG 9: Death certificate of Caterina Tognola (24 October 1918).

atto di morte we have discussed above, an influenza victim? She was relatively young, she had married just eight years before, food was short and was probably still nursing her youngest son who was born 31 March 1918.

## CONCLUSION

It is now quite straightforward to track down ancestors in the vital records of many English speaking countries. Computer searchable indices are becoming more widely available: those from Victoria and NSW being the most extensive of the Australian indices. The Scottish records are even more accessible: having identified a record of interest in an index, a digital copy can be downloaded from

the net. For most parts of Italy, things are much more difficult. However the microfilms I have been discussing have improved accessibility immensely for *comuni* in many provinces. Even if you do not speak Italian, now that I have explained where to find the information you want in the *atti*, you should be able to use them. Good hunting! One last comment: the ages given in these *atti* are extremely reliable and must have been checked by the official against the *atto di nascita*. In Australian records, especially for those born overseas, this is not necessarily so.

You can contact Alan Poletti via e-mail at: [a.poletti@xtra.co.nz](mailto:a.poletti@xtra.co.nz) or by mail: 11 Tole Street, Ponsonby, Auckland 1001, New Zealand.

## NOTES

- 1 I have used Italian terms quite often. These are always in *italics*. I hope that I have explained each one the first time I have used it.
- 2 Hans Fumberger alerted me to the existence of these microfilms. Hans, although Australian, is living in Zurich and has recently been tracing and identifying the large number of Italian-speaking people who have migrated from the Poschiavo Valley (Canton Grigioni, Switzerland) to Australia as well as people from German-speaking Andeer and its surroundings (also Canton Grigioni) who have similarly migrated to Australia and New Zealand.
- 3 I thank Riccardo Borserini for explaining this. Riccardo's family came from Stazzona (Villa di Tirano). He now lives near Como.
- 4 A big thank you to the volunteers of the Takapuna Centre in Auckland for their kindness and help.
- 5 Note on Peter Pasetti, *Italian Historical Society Journal*, Vol 8 No. 2, 2000, p. 35.
- 6 Again thanks to Riccardo Borserini for explaining this.

# family history

## poschiavini in australia, a cd compiled by hans fumberger

Reviewed by  
**ALAN POLETTI**

FOR ANY FAMILY HISTORIAN WHOSE ANTECEDENTS MAY HAVE COME FROM THE ITALIAN-SPEAKING PART OF THE CANTON OF GRAUBÜNDEN IN SWITZERLAND (*CANTONE GRIGIONI*), EXAMINATION OF THIS CD IS A 'MUST'. THIS PART OF THE CANTON, CONSISTING OF THE PRESENT DAY *COMUNI* OF POSCHIAVO AND BRUSIO LIES TO THE SOUTH OF THE BERNINA PASS. UNTIL 1797, IT AND THE DISTRICT OF VALTELLINA IMMEDIATELY TO ITS SOUTH, WERE RULED BY THE GERMAN-SPEAKING *GRIGIONI*. AT THAT TIME, VALTELLINA, A PART OF THE PROVINCE OF SONDRIO, JOINED THE TRANSALPINE REPUBLIC, BUT THE *POSCHIAVINI* VOTED TO REMAIN AS PART OF GRAUBÜNDEN CANTON. BY 1860, AFTER 50 YEARS OF AUSTRIAN RULE, THE SHORT-LIVED TRANSALPINE REPUBLIC WAS PART OF THE KINGDOM OF ITALY. PEOPLE WITH A COMMON CULTURE AND LANGUAGE HAD ALREADY BEEN SEPARATED FOR SEVENTY YEARS BY AN ARTIFICIAL BORDER ONLY THREE KILOMETRES NORTH OF THE TOWN OF TIRANO IN VALTELLINA. HOWEVER, FAMILY TIES AND A SENSE OF BEING PART OF A COMMON COMMUNITY ENSURED JOINT VENTURES AND CONTINUED INTERACTIONS ACROSS THIS BORDER. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE PAPER *IL GRIGIONE ITALIANO*, PUBLISHED IN POSCHIAVO ON 11 JANUARY 1860, WE HAVE:

*Yesterday another contingent of 25 emigrants crossed the Bernina Pass heading for Australia. There were 4 from Poschiavo, 13 from Brusio and 8 from Valtellina. There was even a young woman engaged to be married. She was tired of battling the storms of love and had resolved to defy the stormy seas to join her fiancé.*

The young woman was Maria Mazzolatti from Villa di Tirano. She married Andrea Pianta from Brusio two weeks after she arrived in Melbourne on board the *Red Jacket* on 27 April 1860. He had arrived two years before.

Hans Fumberger was born and educated in Australia and now lives in Zurich. His grandfather, Christian was on the *Shalimar* when it arrived at Melbourne in 1861. Christian was from Ausserferrera in the Schams Valley (also in Graubünden canton), but to the north of Chiavenna in the province of Sondrio. The material which Hans has assembled on this CD provides a huge extension of the data compiled by Joseph Gentili and contained in the latter's pioneering work *Swiss Poschiavini in Australia* (Geowest 25, UWA, 1989).

The thoroughness of Hans' work sets the standard by which all similar enterprises will be judged. In essence, he has examined all of the relevant records available in Switzerland and has then compared them to the information in records available in Australia.

It is unusual for Registers of Passports to survive for more than a few decades. Fortunately, Hans found that the passports issued by the *comune* of Poschiavo for the years 1853 to 1914 are still available. His spreadsheet 'Lista d'passaporti' [Lista dei passaporti] lists them all. Unfortunately, Registers of Passports issued in Brusio after its separation from Poschiavo in 1851 have been lost.

Another source which Hans has exploited, and which supplements the passport list, is that obtained from the Graubünden canton *Amtsblatt* (Gazette). A would-be emigrant had to announce his impending departure so that anyone to whom he was indebted could get their claim in before he got away. These 'Grida d'emigrazione' are especially useful for descendants of people from Brusio. Over 500 are listed in Hans' spreadsheet.

Following the identification of an emigrant, the relevant vital records (births, deaths and marriages) in both Australia and Switzerland were then examined by Hans and the information compiled and added to his main table entitled 'Emigrants'. He has examined all the relevant Australian naturalization files and this information is also included in the spreadsheet 'Nats'.

Where possible, he has tracked down the Civil Registry records of the migrants in Australia. These are in the spreadsheet 'BDM'. Marriages of the migrants in Poschiavo and Brusio are in the file 'Marriages'. For anyone who needs to reconcile baptismal names in church records (which are often in Latin) with the Civil records, he has provided a table of equivalences. Some are hardly obvious: Luigi = Aloisius, Giuseppe = Josephus, Giacinto = Hyacinthus, etc. In separate folders, Hans has provided thumbnail sketches of each migrant and extensive family trees. The CD also contains information on the much smaller number of migrants from the Schams Valley.

It has been an immense labour. For family historians it is a gold mine. For social historians, after much analysis it could be even more valuable and useful. We owe Hans a great debt. He has kindly donated the CD to the Italian Historical Society. You can make an appointment to view the CD, by calling the IHS on (03) 9349 9019.

# italian historical society news

## ARRIVEDERCI!

Dear Subscribers and Friends of the Society

After twenty years at the Italian Historical Society, the time has come for me to retire and to pursue other personal interests.

I joined the Society in June 1986 for what looked like a temporary job to replace the then co-ordinator Maria Tence and to assist Dr Ilma O'Brien with the research and preparation of the bicentennial exhibition *Australia's Italians 1788-1988*. I came from a commercial background, having previously worked for ten years for the Melbourne office of the Italian Trade Commission. Almost ignorant on the theoretic principles of an historian, I had, however, a determination and passion to record the history and the contribution of my fellow Italian migrants.

After twenty intense and rewarding years the collection has grown from 1,800 photographs to 8,000. These images are the pride of the Society and of the hundreds of donors who generously responded to our appeals to ensure that their family story was recorded and preserved. The collection is also the pride of my past and present colleagues, namely Gabriella Belgiovane, Lorenzo Iozzi, Marcella Manzini and Elsa Paulin. They have worked endless hours interviewing, identifying and cataloguing the material.

The Society enjoys the success and excellent reputation it has today also thanks to people like Doug and Joan Campbell, Maria Tence, Bette Leoni Maiuto, Anna Scariot, Clare Gervasoni, Mark Donato and Tony Santospirito. They have generously assisted me and given many hours of their time and expertise. Authors Tony De Bolfo and Jacqui Templeton have deposited into the collection a large amount of their research material which is now extensively used by other authors, scholars and researchers.

Important agreements for research and repository purposes have been established with the Department of History at the University of Melbourne, the State Library of Victoria and Museum Victoria. I acknowledge the support of Associate Professor Alan Mayne, La Trobe Librarian Diane O'Reilly, Manuscript Librarian Jock Murphy and Museum Victoria Senior Curator Moya McFadzean.

During my time, we were fortunate to acquire important collections from the Borsari, Candela, Del Monaco, Briglia, Santospirito and Bonollo families. They contain unique



Laura Mecca

material which not only records the personal experiences of individual migrants, but also gives a valuable insight into the daily lives, the work and the contribution of Italian migrants to Australia.

The acquisition and cataloguing of the Italian Diplomatic Archives collection was a major financial effort made by our umbrella organisation CO.AS.IT. The work of experts such as Dr Louis Green and Dr Gerardo Papalia, with the translation and the summary of 8,000 microfilmed pages, have made the collection accessible to the wider community.

The IHS Journal is entering its sixteenth year of publication with this issue. At times it has been hard to meet deadlines with such a scarcity of available articles. I would especially like to thank our regular contributors Professor Des O'Connor of Flinders University and Dr Alan Poletti for their support. The future of the Journal very much relies on availability of articles and subscriptions. Please continue to support it.

My involvement in our last major project concluded my period at the Society. The preparation and research for the publication *Per l'Australia: the story of Italian migration* has been one of the most rewarding and emotional experiences. It was a project that had been in my mind and my heart since the beginning of my work at the Society. I always wanted to give back to the Italian community snippets of their story to appreciate and hand down to their descendants. I wanted the wider Australian community to learn more about Italian migrants. This has been achieved with the book. Julia Church was employed to write the text and it was very moving to see how a person of English background could embrace and love the project so much. Her contribution and the assistance

received from editor Tracy O'Shaughnessy of Melbourne University Publishing (MUP) ensured the success of the book now into its third reprint.

I leave the Society in the capable hands of my colleagues Julia Church and Elsa Paulin. Photographs and family histories will continue to be collected and added to the wealth of history on Italian migrants deposited at the Society. I hope that the next generation will pick up from where we left off and ensure that the Italian story in Australia continues to be recorded and interpreted.

Last but not least I want to thank Sir James Gobbo, Honorary President and founder of the Society, for his endless and generous commitment. To Mr Giancarlo Martini-Piovano and to CO.AS.IT's committee go my gratitude for their financial support. Without CO.AS.IT there would not be an Italian Historical Society today in Australia!

And to all the donors of material with whom I have been in contact for the last 20 years, I say thank you and goodbye!

Laura Mecca

University Street entrance of the Italian Historical Society, Carlton, Victoria, 2006.

The new reading room at the Italian Historical Society, Carlton, Victoria, 2006.

## NEW PREMISES FOR THE IHS

The Society is now settled into its spacious new home at 54 University Street, where it shares space with the Italian Resource Centre. Researchers and family historians will appreciate our comfortable reading room with its extensive collection of publications devoted to Italian migration. Visitors can either enter via University Street or from the COASIT building at 189 Faraday Street, Carlton.



## PER L'AUSTRIA GOES INTO ITS THIRD EDITION

The third edition of the Society's popular publication, *Per l'Australia: the story of Italian migration*, will come out in paperback for the Christmas 2006 market. Retailing at a competitive \$39.95, the book will retain the 268 page, full-colour format and high production values of the hardcover original. Copies will be available from all good bookshops from November. You can still buy hardcover copies, at the special price of \$50, from the Italian Historical Society.

## RMIT ITALIAN CINEMA PROJECT—CAN YOU HELP?

With assistance from the Italian Historical Society, Associate Professor Deb Verhoeven of RMIT University is leading a major research project focused on Melbourne's Italian cinema audiences and venues from 1949 until 1980. The project is supported by the Australian Research Council, as part of a larger study titled *Regional markets and local audiences: case studies in Australian cinema consumption, 1927-1980*.

Currently in its earliest stages, Verhoeven's enquiry is sourcing information on the establishment, operation, audience experience and eventual closure of the Italian cinemas around Melbourne. The period of research is framed by two significant events: the first television broadcasts in 1956, and the introduction of SBS-TV in 1980.

Verhoeven was surprised to discover that so little had been recorded about this vibrant period of Melbourne's cinema history. 'Almost nothing has been written on the cinema experiences of Australia's postwar migrants. Yet during a period typically associated with cinema closures, many popular venues in Melbourne ran as successful businesses.' Verhoeven is particularly interested in the ways in which cinemas and film events contributed to shaping the migrant experience in Melbourne. One of the major venues of the 1960s, La Scala in Footscray, described itself in promotional materials as *il centro ricreativo della comunità Italiana*, the recreational centre of the Italian community. 'For film historians this is a period usually noted for the rise of foreign-language art films. This project will redress an imbalance, by focussing on the success of foreign language popular films—the comedies, dramas, and historical epics—rather than reducing all Italian film screenings to academic discussion of neo-realism.'



Research has just begun into key venues for Italian film, such as La Scala; Adelphi (North Carlton); Cinestar (North Melbourne); Cinema Italia (Clifton Hill); Metropolitan (Brunswick); and Vesuvio (Newmarket).

The researchers are very keen to hear from anyone who remembers working in or attending one of Melbourne's Italian cinemas. 'We would like to know why you went to the cinema, and with whom; how you travelled there; what happened on the afternoon or night of any particular screenings that you remember, and about your favourite films and stars,' says Verhoeven. 'But we are equally interested to speak with people who didn't attend screenings, to ensure that we record the reasons why going to the movies was not an option for some. And we look forward to hearing from audiences who might have seen Italian movies in a country town or regional centre.'

If you would like to contribute to the project please contact:

Cynthia Troup (Cinzia), in the School of Applied Communication, RMIT University, on (03) 9925 9990, or by email on [Cynthia.troup@rmit.edu.au](mailto:Cynthia.troup@rmit.edu.au)

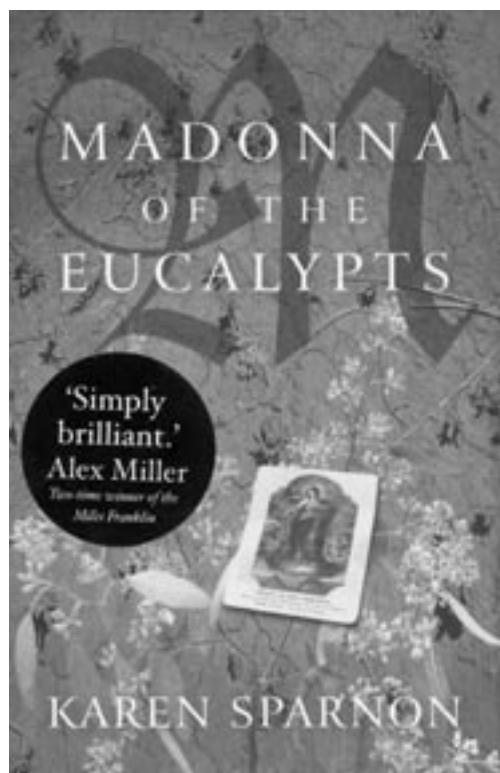
Associate Professor Deb Verhoeven is an Australian film historian and film critic for *The Deep End* on ABC Radio National. Her most recent book is *Sheep and the Australian cinema* (MUP, 2006).

Nino Borsari, Gina Lollobrigida and Fanny Borsari on the judging panel for the Miss Cinema Awards at the Royal Ballroom, Royal Exhibition Building. The prize was a return trip to Rome, where the winner would undergo a screen test with a leading Italian director. Carlton, Victoria, 1974.

# publications received

THE FOLLOWING PUBLICATIONS HAVE RECENTLY BEEN PURCHASED BY OR DONATED TO THE SOCIETY. THE IHS IS COMMITTED TO ACQUIRING ALL CURRENT PUBLICATIONS IN THE FIELD OF ITALIAN-AUSTRALIAN HISTORY.

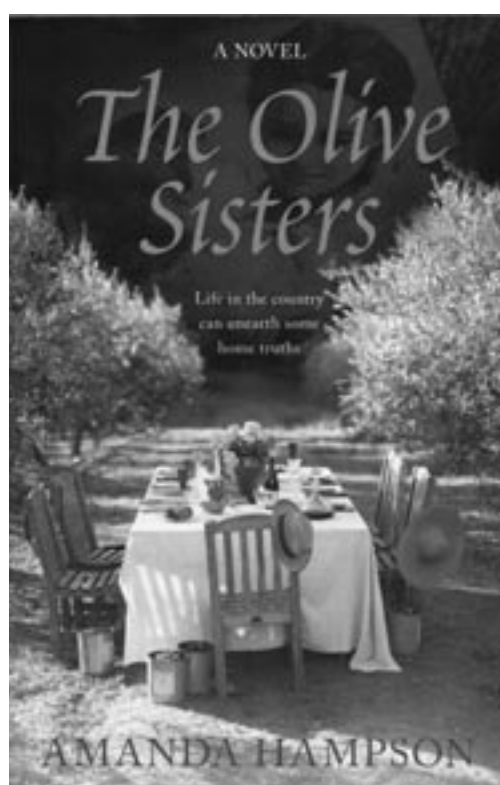
## BOOKS IN ENGLISH



### MADONNA OF THE EUCALYPTS

BY KAREN SPARNON,  
TEXT PUBLISHING, MELBOURNE, 2006.

When the life of their newborn baby, Delfina, is saved, Angelina and Fortunato give thanks to the Madonna del Terzito, patron saint of the family's hometown on the Aeolian island of Salina. Delfina grows up and marries Nino, her childhood sweetheart. The novel charts the young woman's migration experience from her island paradise to her new home in Mildura, where her husband has already settled. When Delfina arrives with her two daughters in 1926, she brings not only the figurine of the Madonna, but also a shocking secret.



### THE OLIVE SISTERS

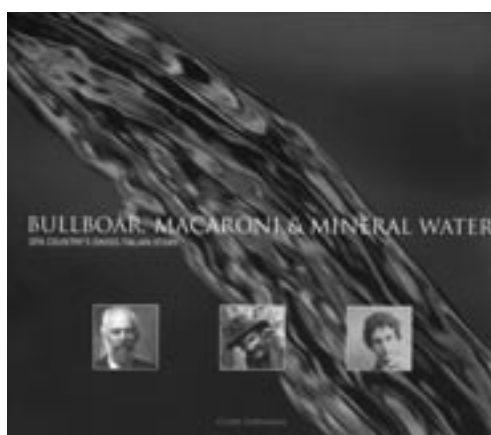
BY AMANDA HAMPSON,  
PENGUIN, CAMBERWELL, VICTORIA, 2005.

When her Sydney business goes into receivership, former marketing director, Adrienne, is forced to retreat to the NSW countryside and the abandoned olive grove and farmhouse once owned by her Italian grandparents. Here she slowly comes to terms with her tragic past and builds a new life which honours and celebrates her Italian heritage.

### BULLBOAR, MACARONI & MINERAL WATER: SPA SOUNTRRY'S SWISS-ITALIAN STORY

BY CLARE GERVASONI, HEPBURN SPRINGS SWISS ITALIAN FESTA, HEPBURN SPRINGS, VICTORIA, 2005.

During the Victorian gold rush, over 2,000 miners of Swiss-Italian descent made their way to Hepburn Shire in search of the elusive grand strike. Many remained when the boom ended, settling on small farms and establishing businesses. These pioneers helped shape both the physical landscape and the community. Their presence still resonates in the local architecture, place names and local culinary specialities. Lovingly compiled by the descendant of one such settler, this valuable addition to Australian migrant history features biographies and photographs of pioneers and their families.



### MARTINO'S STORY

BY LYN CHATHAM, PETER BRUNO, HIGHTON, VICTORIA, 2005.

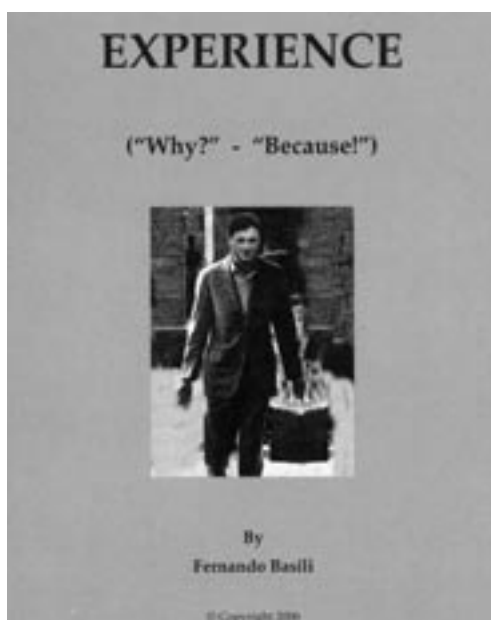
Shortlisted for the 2005 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, this moving biography recounts the life of Martino Bruno, who was captured at Tobruk during WWII and transported to Australia as a POW. One of the 'farming soldiers' assigned to work on remote Australian properties, Martino was entrusted to the Dickson's cattle farm near Winchelsea. He soon became a part of the family, and recounts his delight at their gift of a bicycle, which—in contravention of the law—gave him some freedom to explore and visit fellow POWs billeted in the area. Martino was repatriated in 1947 and returned to his home near Salerno to marry his childhood sweetheart. In 1951, with the help of the Dickson family, Martino, his wife Anna Maria and their newborn daughter, Lucy, migrated to Australia. Illustrated with photographs and documents.

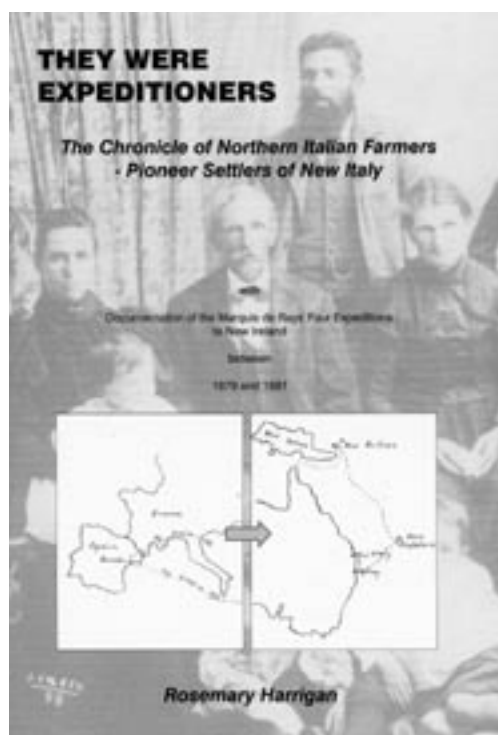


### REAL LIFE: A MIGRANT'S EXPERIENCE

BY FERNANDO BASILI, SELF-PUBLISHED, PETERSHAM, NSW, 2006.

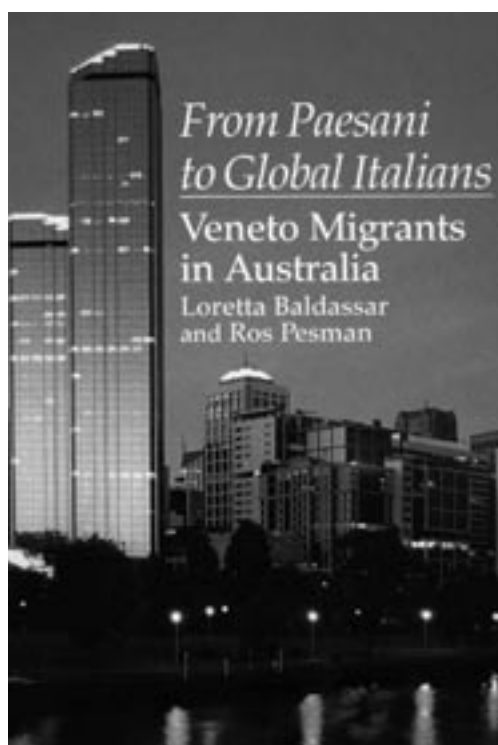
Fernando Basili's autobiography focuses on what he calls his *uncareer* as a migrant in Australia, and on the attitude of the Italian authorities towards those citizens who have made their home on the other side of the world. Illustrated with photographs and documents.





**THEY WERE EXPEDITIONERS: THE CHRONICLES OF NORTHERN ITALIAN FARMERS-PIIONEER SETTLERS OF NEW ITALY WITH DOCUMENTATION OF THE MARQUIS DE RAY'S FOUR EXPEDITIONS TO NEW IRELAND BETWEEN 1879 AND 1881**  
BY ROSEMARY HARRIGAN, WERRIBEE, VICTORIA, 2006.

This fascinating source book opens with the Marquis de Rays' four colonising expeditions to New Ireland, a tropical island north-east of New Guinea. Passengers on the third expedition were mostly northern Italian farmers whose hopes were dashed when they reached the so-called island paradise. Decimated by hunger and disease, the survivors finally found their way to Sydney and eventual settlement on the Richmond River in northern NSW. Here they established *la cella Venezia*, later renamed New Italy. The author, a descendant of the colonists, draws extensively on archival material in Australian repositories to create an informative picture of the events leading to the establishment of this unique community. Illustrated with maps.



**FROM PAESANI TO GLOBAL ITALIANS: VENETO MIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA**  
BY LORETTA BALDASSAR AND ROS PESMAN, UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA PRESS, CRAWLEY, WA, 2005.

The Italian language version of this book was reviewed in the last issue of the IHS Journal. The authors explore the history of the veneti in Australia and changes wrought on this community by time and by attitudes among the second and third generation.

# ITALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

## SCOPE

The journal of the Italian Historical Society is produced for a general readership. Preference will be given to articles which increase an understanding of the history of Italian immigrants and their descendants.

The editors of the IHS Journal accept unsolicited articles. However, we reserve the right to decline publication. We welcome articles from professional and amateur historians and writers. All items submitted are subject to editing. There is no payment for contributions.

The IHS Journal is published twice yearly. Deadlines for articles are:

|                |            |
|----------------|------------|
| June issue     | 30 April   |
| December issue | 30 October |

## MANUSCRIPT PRESENTATION

1. Send one electronic copy of the article, either as an MWord attachment to an email or on disc/CD to:

Italian Historical Society—COASIT, Melbourne  
1st Floor, 54 University Street, Carlton VIC Australia 3053.

2. Articles should be of no more than 6,000 words, wordprocessed in MWord, 12 point, double-spaced, including endnotes.
3. Articles should be preceded by an abstract of no more than 100 words.
4. Illustrative material is to be supplied in the form of black and white, medium resolution jpgs (300 dpi). All images are to be clearly captioned. The author is to supply evidence of copyright clearance.
5. Authors are to indicate sources and references where appropriate by the use of numbers at the end of the relevant sentence. These numbered endnotes should be grouped at the end of the article.
6. For general style conventions please refer to *AGPS Style manual for authors, editors and printers*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition. All bibliographic citations should follow the Author-Date style as outlined in the above publication. For example:

**Citing books** (author, followed by year of publication, title of book in italics, edition, publisher, place of publication)  
Castles, S et al. (eds) 1992, *Australia's Italians: culture and community in a changing society*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, New South Wales.

**Citing periodicals** (author, followed by title of article in single quotation marks, title of journal in italics, volume number, date/year of publication, page number/s)  
Battaglini, AB, 'The Italians', *The Italian Historical Society Journal*, vol. 9, no. 2, July-December 2001, pp. 5-9.

7. Contributors should retain copies of all materials submitted.
8. Please provide a 150 word biographical note with your contribution and ensure that this includes your full name, postal address, contact phone numbers and email address.

We look forward to receiving your article. All enquiries can be referred to:

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1st Floor, 54 University Street, Carlton VIC Australia 3053  
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