



NEWSLETTER
of the
ITALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
CO.AS.IT. - VICTORIA

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About the newsletter

The newsletter aims to provide, to those who are interested in the history of the Australian-Italian communities, an outlet for the circulation of news, the exchange of information and the notification of future activities.

We welcome your suggestions for items to include in this newsletter, and invite readers to contribute newsworthy articles and short notes.

The Newsletter will be published four times each year. Subscriptions are available at \$10 per year, (postage included).

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NEWS

Exhibition to Italy

In the December - January period the exhibition was on display at Fontanafredda near Pordenone. It was hosted by the Proloco and received a very warm reception. Arrangements were made for transport from Belluno and installation in Fontanafredda by the cousins of the Society's Director. From Fontanafredda interesting material about other immigrants was collected and sent to the Society.

The exhibition is now en route to Calabria where it will be on display in a number of locations in the province which are being arranged by Angela Melia of Bivongi. For the month of August the exhibition will be in Vizzini in Sicily where we anticipate much interest on account of the strong family ties between Vizzini and Victoria.

Exhibition at Centro Assisi

The Australian version of the Australia's Italian exhibition is now on permanent display at the Assisi Centre at 230 Rosanna Road, Melbourne, phone (03) 457 4723, where it can be viewed by members of the public and by school groups and Senior citizens' groups.

The activities kit for schools will be made available and guided tours can be arranged by phoning the Assisi Centre.

The Assisi Centre, set in magnificent grounds and housed in fine buildings is being established as a centre for community and cultural activities for the Italian community of Victoria and therefore truly worthy of a visit.

Rubens Exhibition

For the art lovers a truly unique opportunity will be the forthcoming Rubens and the Italian Renaissance exhibition to be held in Victoria.

The Exhibition will be open to the public from 20th June to 30th August 1992 at the National Gallery of Victoria. During the exhibition staging in Melbourne there will be a programme of lectures and activities by visiting experts which will be open to members of the public. These activities will be advertised in the daily press.

Guided tours in Italian and English will be available upon request by specially trained personnel of the National Gallery of Victoria.

The exhibition was opened in Canberra on the 28th of March 1992 at the Australian National Gallery and will end on the 8th of June 1992.

Italian Museum in New Orleans

Bette Leone Maiuto visited New Orleans, USA, recently and took the opportunity to visit the local Italian Historical Society and has informed us of the following:

The Italian Museum is well situated for visitors in what was once the warehouse district of this very busy port city. It is only a few minutes walk from the historic French Quarter and the Mississippi River. Financed by private donations, the museum is called the "American Italian Renaissance Foundation" and consists of a Research Library, gift shop and Museum. On the day of my visit only the Museum was open, attended by Mr. Evans J. Casso the 78 year old American born son of Sicilian migrants.

The main room contained many individual family displays, for example : photographs of original migrants beside photographs of their descendants, accompanied by a short biography of the family. There were documents and newspaper clippings pertaining to both men and women of Italian bloodline who have achieved success in such areas as Commerce, Industry, Music, Medicine and Law as well as lists of elected Officials, State Senators and Representatives for the State of Louisiana.

In a smaller room was the Italian American Sports Hall of Fame, containing a portrait of each sportsman with details of his particular contribution to his chosen sport. Of the many sports represented, i.e. football, baseball and athletics, the majority of those represented were boxers.



Family Histories display in the Museums' main room.

PROXY BRIDES

by Susi (Bella) Wardrop



A group of young proxy brides travelling to Australia on the Ship Neptuna in 1955

I have been studying one fascinating aspect of the Italian migrant experience - marriage by proxy. This practice was quite common among Italian immigrants. I have interviewed some of these proxy brides and have been fascinated and intrigued by their stories, and by the courage many of these young women showed.

Proxy marriages were first allowed by the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in the 1600s. The practice was generally used only in cases of hardship. Italian men wishing to marry in Australia were certainly in a situation which needed solutions. What Italian parent would allow his daughter to travel to Australia unmarried, with the promise of marriage on arrival! Hence the acceptance of proxy marriages, where the marriage ceremony took place with a proxy groom who was nominated by the real husband in Australia and was frequently the father, brother or close relative of either the bride or groom. Many of these marriages took place in the 1920s and 30s or earlier, but the peak was reached in the 1950s when there was a large influx of immigrants from Italy.

The last recorded proxy marriage in Melbourne was in 1976. The general pattern of Italian immigration was that a young man would leave his home and family to come to Australia in search of a better life.

In some cases, he would leave his wife and children behind, and send for them when he had the possibility to make a home in his new country. But frequently the immigrant was young, male and single. He found himself in Australia in an all male community, not only was there no wife, but no mothers, sisters or female companionship!

For these men wishing to marry there was a real problem: where to find a suitable girl. Certainly not in Australia. So they would try to find a bride in Italy. To return to Italy, find a bride, marry her and come back to Australia was possible only for those who could afford the time and money. A simpler solution was to seek help from family or friends. This was accomplished in several ways. The young man could write to his mother or family and ask them to find a girl in his hometown or village. This conformed to the quite common practice of arranged marriages. In other cases, the Italian man would hear of a suitable girl through friends he had made in Australia, maybe through working together. They would show a photo of a cousin or friend who was available and ready to come to Australia, although sometimes they were from quite different backgrounds. For many girls in Italy the problem of marriage was also significant, as nearly all the young men had emigrated.

The young couple would start to write to one another, exchange photographs, and if all proceeded smoothly they would set about the quite complex procedure of a proxy marriage, with the help of an Italian priest.



A marriage ceremony with a proxy groom in Italy.

In many cases, the young couple were already engaged, as soon as the man was in a position to marry he sent for his bride. For these girls there was only the trauma of leaving their family and home to go so far to her new life. In other cases, the couple had known each other as they were from the same or nearby village, so at least they had some idea of what to expect. However, where the girl married an unknown man, there was the added worry of what she would find, and whether her new husband would be as she imagined him.

Among the women I have interviewed, there has been a whole range of experiences and emotions. Most of the girls found that leaving their homes and families was a great sadness. Some felt that life in Italy was very hard and that in Australia it could only be better, and looked forward to a great adventure coming to a new country. In general these girls felt that fate or destiny had decided for them. Some were very young, some came from conditions of great poverty, some came from the North of Italy, others from the South, some had relatives or friends in Australia, while others knew no-one.

The idea of a ship full of proxy brides going out to an uncertain future with, in many cases, an unknown husband seems strange to us today. However, at a

time when the future in Italy seemed bleak, and the idea of arranged marriages was quite acceptable, the general feeling among these girls seems to have been one of expectation. In only one case among the persons I have interviewed to date, was the marriage a disaster ending in divorce. Most of the girls found their husbands to be understanding, and undoubtedly the men were also very nervous when waiting to see their new brides. Many of the girls felt that the fact of not having had a regular courtship and engagement period was a great disadvantage when starting married life particularly as they were so far from home and their mothers.

I am finding that interviewing persons who made these proxy marriages is a fascinating and rewarding experience. I have spoken to some of the priests of the Capuchin and Scalabrinian orders who assisted the Italian immigrants, and also to Australian priests connected with immigration, to understand the background to the period in which these marriages occurred. This facet of the history of Italian immigration in Australia is important and should be recorded as part of the migrant experience.

Among those who read this outline of the research study there will be some who have friends or acquaintances who married by proxy. I hope that they will contact us at the Italian Historical Society and help us to find more people, who would like to tell us their story. Of course, all information and interviews are completely confidential.



A proxy bride in Calabria being blessed by the village priest.

Letter from a subscriber

Upon receiving this informative and entertaining letter, we asked Mr. Bertola if we could share it with our readers. We thank him for his kind permission and trust our readers will enjoy it as much as we have.

Gardiner, 4.1.92

Dear Friends,

I have enjoyed your publication over the last year, which subscription was by my eldest son Patrick, who is doing a PhD on the WA goldfields - Italians etc.

Patrick has been to Melbourne on a couple of occasions researching on the project. He is due for another visit soon.

My late father Giovanni, came to Aussie in July 1927 on his own. Mum (deceased), eldest sister Elvira, myself and a yet to be born brother Alessandro were left (or rather) stranded in Montagna (Sondrio) for seven years before Dad could call us. Beats me how Mum managed, as we were that poor. Dad immediately got caught up in bad luck and the great Depression. His first job of cutting firewood for the Kalgoorlie water pumping station at Mundaring Weir resulted in no payment for the six months' work. He had two mates in the same boat, luckily one of them had a few bob which were used to keep them in stores. It seems, that there were one or two compatriots of older migration vintage, who cottoned on to new arrivals by promising work. These shysters apparently sub-contracted the firewood work and got the likes of Dad in. Anyway, after the bad start, Dad went on land clearing at Southern Cross. Tough work, all hand stuff, chopping down gimblet and Salmon gum with axe and crosscut saw. I think they were paid something like 25/- an acre to cut down and about the same to stack and burn the timber. Lived in tents of course, no fridges, electricity, or fresh food apart from an occasional roo or rabbit! And the bit of

vino would be of doubtful quality too! Anyway Dad sent Mum a couple of bits of money during this period of work as the cocky (farmer) was honest, paying promptly.

Then one day the farmer came to Dad and his mates' tent with the news of the financial crash. The farmer had no more credit, everything caved in.

Dad and mates gravitated to the township of Jarrahdale some 50 km SE of Perth, a timber town, where Mr. and Mrs. Jack Gianatti acted as family to all these stray Italians who where mainly from the same Montagna.

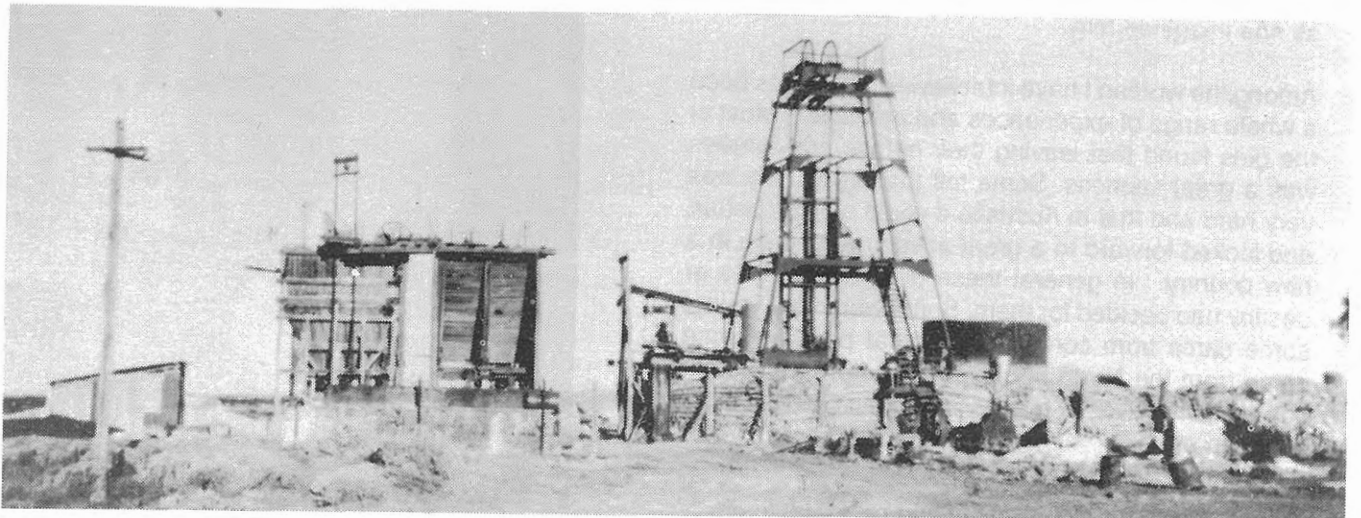
Gianatti and Jarrahdale are synonymous.

Then Dad contracted typhus and peritonitis due no doubt to the living conditions, and was hospitalized for some months at Perth hospital, for free thank God, as then we had real free medicine for those who could not pay (and no insurance).

Sometime in late '32 my father took off to the goldfields in company with a townsman Filippo Muffatti to search for work. An Italian hotelkeeper, Maffina, of the Main Reef, Boulder, grub -staked them for gold prospecting at Kalgoorlie, for a half share: Dad and Phil could work but were ignorant of gold finding. They had no success there so moved to Mt. Monger 60 km SE of Kalgoorlie, where on re-opening some old workings they struck good paydirt.

Whenever Dad recounted the episode of the gold discovery, it was like all birthdays in one hit! He and Phil could not sleep for days!

Anyway, Dad paid off all the people he owed a quid in no time, got himself some fine clothes (which he kept at the **Home from Home** hotel in Kalgoorlie) which was owned by a Mrs. Gianatti. The fine clothes



The New Milano mine at Mt. Monger

went up in smoke during the race riots. (Patrick has done a thesis on the riots).

The goldmine was a beauty. Rich ore. Dad lost an eye in an accident at the mine which was sold to an Adelaide Co. for 50,000 pounds and 50000 shares in ESCROW for two years. It was called **New Milano**.

On July 22, 1934 we were reunited, landing from the P&O, **Oronsay** at Fremantle. My younger two sisters were born at Kalgoorlie. We lived at Mt. Monger till 1940. Our home was made of whitewashed hessian, hessian floor, bush timber frame and the indispensable corrugated iron roof.



The home at Mt Monger.

The school at Mt. Monger was unique. A story in itself. A Victorian, Mr. Jack Cass was my, and the only teacher.



At the Mt Monger school.

Before leaving the 'fields' Dad bought an orchard property on Chidlow, 50 km east of Perth on the railway.

The war years were not happy ones for us, being under continued surveillance and suspicion. Many Italians were interned. A story in itself. Events that brought little credit to all and in some respects best forgotten.

I married a local lass, Alice Hill, who became a Catholic. In 1951 we moved to Mundaring, built and

lived in a house opposite the Sacred Heart Church. We were part and parcel of the Italian-Australian Catholic community. There were many stone cutters (granite) who were mainly Abruzzi in the area which supplied monumental stone to the city.

Seven children were born to us while we lived in the hills, five boys and two girls. Altogether a busy happy time. I worked on my own, stone cutting, plumbing, building, carting, painting, pruning. We had two half-acre blocks, so we kept a house cow for a few years, this was at the instigation of the first Parish priest of Mundaring, Father Tom Linane who came from farming stock himself. I remember our first cow kicking him to billyoh! She was a wild one alright. I soon packed her off to market, had to. A bad buy!

I spent several years (11) at Mundaring, learning the art of stone masonry (not monumental). Always hankered after a farm, so in early 1962 we moved to Albany where we added the third daughter and sixth son to the family. Did salmon fishing and carting from near Bremer Bay, also did general cartage, some building as well.

In 1965 began buying a 90 acre farmlet to where we moved some 6 miles out East on No.1 highway. At the end of 1967 we applied for and were granted a C.P. block of mallee some 12 miles North of Bremen Bay 185 km from Albany. So my hankering was fulfilled!

In early 1970 the whole family shifted to the farm where I had sited an old timber mill house carted from Shannon River near Northcliffe in the Karri country of the S.West. We plugged away clearing, sowing, reaping and so on and by 1978 we had the block pretty well cleared and developed. Everyone bar Mum drives cars, trucks, tractors and can shoot a gun. Mum is a champ with scones! Also cakes, is perpetually washing and ironing! I always planted several fruit trees wherever we lived and here at the farm is no exception, also a decent size vegie garden as we secured a magnificent supply of water as the first priority when we first landed here.

Farming is a great life. We have been debt free for at least 10 years. The key to real independence and security. My life at farming is satisfying, very much so. Our sizeable family are variously employed, all good workers and we hope a credit to Australia. Mum and I hope to have a bit of a look at the rest of Australia now that two of our boys have the farm, so you might see us on your doorstep one day!

All the best for '92. Sincerely,

Peter Bertola

P.S. There are quite a few gaps in my scribes. I did not realise how much we fit into an average life.

DOCUMENTO D'IMPEGNO FIRMATO DALL'EMIGRANTE E DAL RAPPRESENTANTE DEL GOVERNO DEL COMMONWEALTH IN CONFORMITA' DELL'ACCORDO ITALO-AUSTRALIANO SULLE MIGRAZIONI ASSISTITE

FORM OF UNDERTAKING SIGNED BY THE MIGRANT AND THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN ITALY AND AUSTRALIA FOR ASSISTED MIGRATION

Io sottoscritto
I,

MARIO

Cognome - Surname

BERRA

Cognome - Surname

Francesco
Paternità dell'emigrante - Name of emigrant

dichiaro di essere pienamente consapevole delle condizioni sotto le quali sono stato scelto per un passaggio assistito per l'Australia e in considerazione di essere stato così prescelto dichiaro solennemente che rispetterò le seguenti obbligazioni dopo il mio arrivo in Australia:

(i) di rimanere negli impieghi approvati dal Governo del Commonwealth, per un periodo di due anni dal mio arrivo in Australia;

(ii) di rimborsare l'ammontare dei contributi concessi dai due Governi a me (e alla mia famiglia), qualora io (o la mia famiglia) non rimanessi in Australia per due anni dopo il mio arrivo, tale rimborso dovendo effettuarsi prima della partenza dall'Australia;

(iii) di fare tutto il possibile per imparare la lingua inglese e di frequentare regolarmente i corsi serali organizzati per tutti gli emigranti a spese del Governo del Commonwealth al fine di insegnar loro tale lingua.

Il rappresentante del Governo del Commonwealth dichiara che

herby declare that I have made myself fully conversant with the conditions under which I have been selected for an assisted passage to Australia and in consideration of being so selected I solemnly declare that I will carry out the following obligations after my arrival in Australia:

for a period of two years after arrival in Australia I shall remain in employment approved by the Commonwealth Government;

I shall refund the cost of contributions by both Governments towards me (and my family) should I (or my family) not remain in Australia for two years after arrival, such refund to be made prior to departure from Australia;

I shall use every endeavour to learn the English language and to attend regularly the night classes which are conducted for all migrants at the Commonwealth Government's expense for the purpose of teaching them the English language.

The representative of the Commonwealth Government hereby declares that

MARIO BERRA

Nome e cognome dell'emigrante - Christian name and surname of migrant

(a) sarà collocato al lavoro in Australia con salario, alloggio e condizioni generali non meno favorevoli di quelle godute dagli australiani nello stesso tipo di impiego;

(b) riceverà comunicazione scritta, nel momento in cui verrà avviato ad un particolare impiego in Australia, del salario e delle altre condizioni che si riferiscono;

(c) avrà la facoltà di presentare domanda per restare in Australia allo scadere dei due anni per i quali è stato ammesso a risiedervi in esenzione delle norme dell' "Immigration Act (1901-1949)";

(d) riceverà prontamente l'autorizzazione per restare in Australia, purché nel periodo dei due anni si sia comportato in modo soddisfacente e subordinatamente al diritto del Governo del Commonwealth di rimpatriare in Italia quegli emigranti, o persone a loro carico, accolti in base all'accordo, che entro cinque anni dall'arrivo in Australia contravvengano alle disposizioni dell' "Immigration Act" del Governo del Commonwealth o altrimenti si dimostrino indesiderabili;

(e) sarà libero, dopo la concessione di tale autorizzazione, di scegliere l'occupazione e il luogo di residenza che preferisce.

will be placed in employment in Australia at wages with accommodation and general conditions not less favourable than those enjoyed by Australian workers in the same kind of employment;

will be informed in writing upon allocation to employment in Australia of the rate of wages and conditions applicable to that employment;

will be able to apply for permission to remain in Australia after the expiration of the two years period during which he has been admitted under exemption from the Immigration Act (1901-1949);

will readily be granted such permission provided that during the period mentioned he has behaved in a satisfactory manner and subject to the Commonwealth Government having the right to return to Italy any migrant and or his dependants selected under the scheme who, within five years of arrival in Australia, contravene the provisions of the Immigration Act (1901-1949) of the Commonwealth of Australia or who may otherwise prove undesirable;

will be free, on such permission being duly granted to engage in such occupation and to choose such place of residence in Australia as he may desire.

Luogo in cui avviene la firma - Place where signed

Data
Date

Giorno - Day

Mese - Month

Anno - Year

Firma del lavoratore emigrante - Signature of migrant worker

Firma del rappresentante del Governo del Commonwealth
Signature of the representative of the Commonwealth Government



N.B. Il presente documento sarà firmato in due copie dall'emigrante e dal rappresentante del Governo del Commonwealth che tratterà l'originale e consegnerà la copia all'emigrante.

N.B. To be signed in duplicate by the migrant and a Commonwealth Government representative who shall retain the original and hand the copy to the migrant

THE ASSISTED PASSAGE CONTRACT

Described in letters written in the first months in Australia.

by Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien

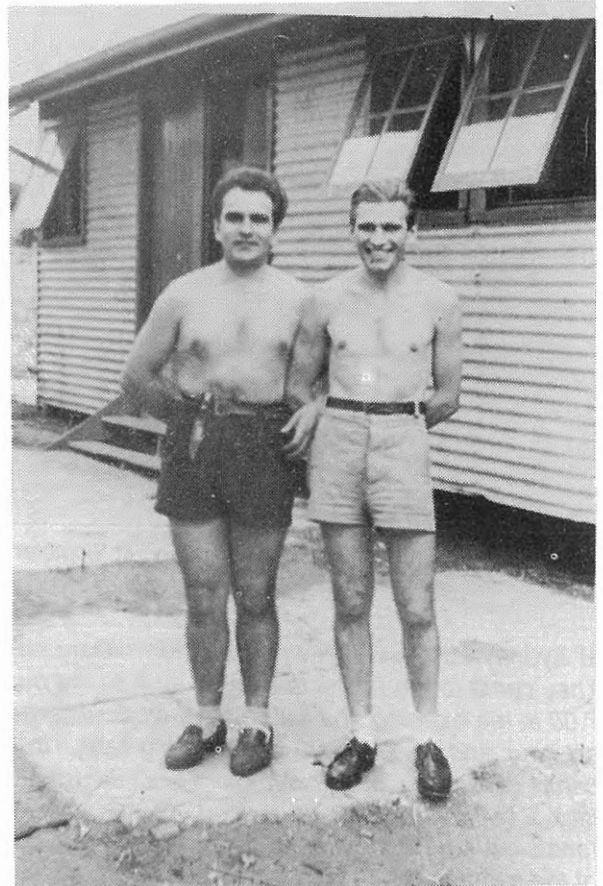
In the days following World War II, when Arthur Calwell, as Minister for Immigration, launched the post-war migration policy, he encouraged immigration from Europe as well as the British Isles. Initially only British migrants and some refugees and displaced persons received assisted passages. Then in 1951 the Australian Government extended the assisted passage scheme to Italian immigrants.

Under this scheme the Italian immigrant was financially assisted by having part of the cost of the passage paid by the Government. The immigrant undertook to repay the balance of the fare (about half), and was required to work in approved employment for a period of two years. This contract did not guarantee work, although many had believed when they accepted the offer to come to Australia that they were signing a work contract.

The Italian assisted immigrants who pioneered the scheme found many unexpected difficulties during their initial two years under contract. Australia experienced a recession in 1952, and the anticipated industrial expansion and the jobs the immigrants expected were not to be found. In addition, the immigrants were housed in rudimentary hostels and camps, often in remote parts of the country, reminiscent of the wartime arrangements many were migrating to forget. These circumstances led to riots at Bonegilla and other centres in 1952 and to demands for jobs or repatriation to Italy.

Mario Berra and his brother Pino left from Venezia on the **S. Giorgio** in October 1952. They and their fellow shipmates were taken to Rushworth, a Holding Center in northern Victoria, then to Villawood hostel in NSW where they made friends with other newcomers, especially a group who had dis-embarked from the **Castel Felice** a few weeks earlier. On their arrival they found that employment prospects were not what they had been led to believe. The contract signed by Mario (and the other assisted immigrants) had implied that work would be available: *The representative of the Commonwealth Government hereby declares that **Mario Berra** will be placed in employment in Australia at wages with accommodation and general conditions not less favourable than those enjoyed by Australian workers in the same kind of employment.* When after weeks or months there were no jobs available there was real distress, because the repayment of the debt owing for the assisted passage could not be met. This state of affairs was regarded by many of the immigrants as a breach of their contracts.

Letters were exchanged between the two brothers Mario and Pino and a third brother Franco who joined them two years later, and their friends Egidio and Ezio. In the pages which follow I have given extracts from some of the letters which record the conditions as these young men found them. About three months after his arrival Mario Berra was sent to work as a cook for the Department of the Army at Singleton, NSW. The first letter was sent to him there by his



Mario, right, and Pino Berra at Rushworth at the end of 1952.

friend Ezio Manzini, who had come on the **Castel Felice** and remained at the Hostel at Villawood in Sydney. Ezio wrote to Mario on 29 February 1953 about the situation at Villawood and the other camps:

Dear Mario,

Please excuse the delay in replying to your much appreciated letter. I hope you forgive me for replying so late. I inform you that I am in excellent health and hope that both you and your brother are also. Last week we changed jobs and have been working out



Mario Berra photographed his friends working at Singleton in 1953. Brother Pino is in the centre, Egidio Cattani is behind him, Milani is in the front row on the right and Ghiselini in the back row on the right.

of Sydney for over a week in another military camp. They come to the hostel to pick us up with the bus at 7.00 in the morning and we finish at 4.30. It takes us an hour and so we save on the train fare. In that camp everything needs doing. They've turned me into a builder, Milani and the others are building a tennis court. Toto is a carpenter. There are 20 of us at the camp and 12 are from the **S. Giorgio**, three are from the **Castel Felice** and so for the time being we really can't complain.

Fifteen days ago, all the unemployed at this hostel were sent off to pick grapes for 6 weeks. About 100 accepted the job. The others refused because they want a two year contract or to be repatriated. As you probably already know, the case against the Government has already begun and if you bought the **Fiamma** you would have seen a photograph of the Commission at Bonegilla, Cowra and Villawood. ... Based on rumours, the lawyers are quite confident that we will win the case and either obtain a two year work contract or repatriation with all expenses paid. They have assured everyone that within a month we should know the outcome of the matter. As you

know, should they decide to repatriate us I'm not leaving. Last week we had a visit from the employment office and they took down some personal data from those who wish to go cane-cutting. They said they would come back every Thursday so I'm going to stay home those days and will apply for the job...

Not long after he received this letter, Mario Berra saved his fare and travelled to Melbourne to look for work and visit his fiancée. He found accommodation in Carlton, at 113 Drummond Street, and obtained a job at a factory. He had had no experience working on heavy machinery, but was put on as a press operator in a company making Electrolux fridges. His brother Pino, who had come to Australia with him, remained at Singleton, still working for the Army. Pino wrote on 8 March 1953:

Dearest Mario,

I received your letter yesterday informing me that you have been hired on a definite basis at the factory. I'm so pleased that everything went well for you and

let's hope that in the future everything continues to get better and better. What I do want to tell you is to please be very careful and watch your hands. There's always some sort of danger lurking around when you use those machines and make sure that nothing terrible happens to you.

On my part, I'll inform them here that you won't be coming back (tomorrow is Monday) and I'll collect your little earnings for you and by next Saturday I'll send you your trunk and suitcase with everything I can possibly gather. ... Everything up here is proceeding as usual. I'm sending you herewith two letters I received from home during the week ... Would you please send last weeks' **Fiamma** to Piero because I'm sure that it's a little easier for you to do it. I've sent him all the previous issues...

When Mario settled in to his job he began preparing for his brother to join him. The two brothers kept in regular contact, and in his reply Mario described his first Easter in Australia, and mentioned that he was still awaiting payment for some of his work at Singleton. He wrote from Melbourne on 6th April 1953:

Dearest Pino,

Here we are and it's already Easter (that time of the year that brings back such fond memories of wonderful food and snacks at Chiesa Pesio) and consequently at our very first Australian Easter. I hope that you've had a nice time just like I have. I've been on holidays since Friday but tomorrow I start work again. Back to routine. Melbourne celebrated Good Friday in a grand manner. I had a wonderful day at that skinny lady's house - the one I spoke to you about in my previous letter. We made a lot of noise, had a lot to drink, a light snack at dinner time and a frenzied mad rush at midnight in order to catch the last train. On Saturday I played "housewife". I washed and ironed my clothes etc. Yesterday, I was invited to spend the day at Claudia's house and so between lunch and dinner, we ended up spending the whole time at the table until very late in the evening. Demetrio, who's a wonderful cook made me try some of his most famous dishes. The only problem was that my stomach, as you know, just couldn't cope with the mountains of food ... Today, Monday, I'm going to watch a soccer match between Juventus (Melbourne's Italian Soccer Team) and a local Czechoslovakian team and so with this I end my tales of Easter.

I haven't received mail from home either but as soon as I do I'll send them to you. I've got an enormous amount of newspapers to send you and if I manage to come home before 5.00 p.m., one night this week I'll mail them to you. (The post office was closed during the Easter break). I've already begun looking for a decent room with two beds so that when you arrive you can lay your heavy bottom on a nice soft

mattress. Last Wednesday I received a very good wage and between "super-production" 2.5 pounds, overtime 3.3 pounds and basic salary 16.3.6, clear of taxes I earned 18.12.6 but had to pay 2.9 pounds in income tax. As you can see I've really been working hard but at least I earned 4 pounds more than my normal earnings. Next Wednesday I'll only be getting the usual 11.8 because of the holidays. I spent nearly 3 pounds on buying a present for Claudia and one for Fulvia. I wanted to buy something for everyone else in the family but decided only to get one for each of the girls otherwise it would have been "goodbye to a hard week's work". I bought Claudia a jumper and Fulvia a beautiful chocolate Easter egg. The family was extremely pleased and they said that in May when it's my birthday they're going to organise a big party for the both of us because you should be here by then! As far as your job is concerned, Demetrio says that you've got

21st Instalment

Assisted Migration { N^o 10413
Credit

To be completed and sent by the Bank who receives payment to Sydney Office of:

Australia and New Zealand Bank Ltd. } Delete
Bank of New South Wales } names
Commonwealth Bank of Australia } not con-
cerned

Please credit the account of ICLE

Istituto Nazionale di Credito per il Lavoro
Italiano all'Estero - Roma

the sum of L/A

payment made today by
Surname (Cognome)

Christian name (Nome)

Father's name (Paternità)

For said amount of L/A
we credit your account with us.

Date, stamp and signature of bank

ICLE-ROME

We have today credited you with:

L/A covering 21st instalment

of Assisted Migration Credit N^o 10413

(Date, stamp and signature of Bank)

PART 3^a

Docket for the immigrants' repayment by installments of the debt incurred as an assisted immigrant.



BITTER MIGRANTS LEAVE FOR HOME



Hostel Italians plead for work

To The Editor
SIR, We, the undersigned, are Italian assisted migrants representing about 90 of our compatriots who all arrived in Australia during the past six months.

Our position is a difficult one and we therefore turn to you so that it may be brought to the notice of the public.

We came to your country for one reason only: to create with our work a new life and, in this way, to become an asset in the expansion of Australia. We were employed by the Federal Government for a brief period and we have all been unemployed for eight weeks.

We have not had the opportunity of planting those roots without which our initial position as immigrants will never have the possibility of changing.

In a few words, the little we earned has gone to provide for the needs of our families and for necessities. We have now made new debts and we are reduced to accepting subsidies from our Consul and offers of clothing from the Italian community. On 5/ a week we are not even able to go about seeking employment.

We know that the Government in Canberra has our problem under consideration. At all events, we wish to bring our point of view to your notice.

We were engaged, after a long procedure, to come to Australia as selected manpower, involving a debt of £90, repayable within

20 months. We feel that there is a moral obligation towards us. We did not come to your country but we believe instead there is a special case which we could increase of productivity by close collaboration with Australia.

Yours, etc.,
LUIGI NUCCI.
DOMENICO RESCIGNO.
VINCENZO CORSANO.
TOMMASO SCHIAZZA.
DINO VALLORANI.
PIETRO MILONI.
GIOVANNI DI PAOLO.
RENATO PIZZINATO.
Breadmeadows, Mary-
byrnong and Williamstown
hostels.

THESE ARE some of a contingent of 70 unemployed Italian and Maltese migrants who sailed for Italy in the San

Giorgio yesterday. They spoke bitterly about Australia and her migration policy. Many told of distressed families in Italy and Malta because they could not send money home; of high rents paid here and of walking the streets for weeks without finding jobs.

PAUL VASSALO (left) said that his wife and seven children in Malta had intended to follow him to Australia. But he had lost his job as a driver and they had sent their last £50 for his passage money. He added: "The Australian Government should not bring people here unless it can offer them definite jobs while they are settling into the country."

Others in picture are: EMMANUEL ELLON, 21: "I've been here six months and out of work for three. Migrants are still coming out. I think it is a disgrace."

CHARLES BORG, 19: "I've been here 10 months, and out of work for a month. Once you lose a job it's almost impossible to get another."

N. BONNICI, 20: "I arrived seven weeks ago and haven't had a job. I'm going home before all my money is gone."

CHARLES BRINCAT, 18: "I have not had a job in five months. I'm convinced there is no chance for a migrant at present, that's why I'm going."

nothing to worry about, because even if the job isn't available by the time you get here (as I sincerely hope), it will be available a short time afterwards. The most important thing is that you can manage to make yourself understood a little in English. In the meantime, try to speak as much as you can with the soldiers and naturally study a little! - get my message?

...
I still haven't received any cheque from Singleton, so could you please try to find out what is happening about payment for my week's work in Villawood and the other one in Singleton.

...
Please give my regards to the officers and the Captain (that way you'll remind them about my cheque). Please do not send my regards to the little one in the kitchen.

A week later on 13 April, 1953 Mario wrote again with more information about the work situation in Melbourne:

Dear Pino,

Only today am I replying to your letter of last week because I wanted to wait until I received mail from Italy: in fact tonight, on my way back from work (at 8.20 p.m.), I found only one letter from Cuneo but everyone wrote something in it. I also received a letter from Pino and one from Auntie. I've already replied to Pino's letter (last week) and will write back to Auntie during the week.

No news on my part. My work continues and tonight I worked until 7.30 so that in just one night I already

have 3 hours overtime owing me in order to compensate for last week when I had none. Today is the last day of the week and so I should receive this evening's overtime the day after tomorrow. I think that for 3 continuous hours of overtime I should earn about 30 shillings. I'm also going to work until 7.30 tomorrow night and so on for the entire week so that by the end of next week I should have about 13 pounds. Just to change the subject, I still haven't heard anything about the weeks salary owing to me from Singleton together with liquidation, interest and so on.

I've sent you some newspapers and if you've already read them all, it's just your bad luck because you won't be getting any more for another week. As for the letter received from Gardinenghi please tell him that as far as I can see and as far as those I've spoken to that have been here longer than me, the general opinion is that things seem to be getting better and better all the time. In fact now, even in Melbourne it's a little easier to find work compared to five or six months ago. The only difficulty is the language barrier but if one can manage to make himself understood a job can be found within one day. This is also why I'm surprised that so many people are applying to be repatriated. They're just nostalgics and have no backbones. Pino also told me that M... M... has gone back. He was a real no-hoper who didn't want to do anything. He considered himself too clever and now he goes around telling everyone that he didn't make any money in Australia because he didn't want to. I'll end this letter here wishing you all the best. I embrace you and send you kisses. Love, Mario.

Lo incontravo un'altra volta Franco, ma quella volta lui era sul tram ed io ero a piedi: l'altro giorno stoncia con me due a cercarmi: io ero da Claudio, e poi che uno di questi zig lui (da come me lo ha descritto uno della pensione).
Melbourne 13 Aprile 1953.
Saluti da parte di Claudio e Fulvia.
Coda tutta la sacra famiglia.
Carissimo Pino,

Rispondo solo oggi alla tua della settimana scorsa, perché ho voluto aspettare per ricevere posta dall'Italia: infatti stasera, al ritorno dal lavoro (alle 8.30 p.m.), ho trovato, in una sola lettera proveniente da Cuneo, gli scritti di tutti quanti; ho pure ricevuto una lettera da Pino ed una dalla Zia: a Pino ho già risposto, (la settimana scorsa), ed alla Zia scriverò in settimana.

Notizia da parte mia nessuna: il mio lavoro continua sempre dispendiosamente: stasera

A number of other friends and companions returned to Italy, while yet others went to north Queensland for work. Most of them, including Egidio Cattani, decided to try cane-cutting at Ingham. He wrote on 29.5.1953 to tell the two Berra brothers, who were now together in Melbourne, about conditions and prospects in the sugar areas, as he and his companions found them:

Dearest friends,

On the 10th at 12.30 we arrived in Ingham where I thought I had found a piece of our Italy. Wherever I would stop I could hear our language being spoken. I had already heard a little about Queensland but I never imagined it to be like this. Here in Ingham they say that about 80% of the population is Italian. Many of them have been here for a number of decades and have obtained important social and economic positions. The majority of shops are owned by them. Moreover in every shop there is someone who speaks Italian, perhaps sons of Italian migrants etc. We spent five days in Ingham and were staying in a hotel that is owned by Veneti, then with the Consul's assistance we arrived here - about 12 miles from Ingham (Lannercost).

*I didn't write sooner because I had hoped to be able to give you some details about the cutting. With a sad heart I'm still not able to do so. It seemed that we could begin from one day to the next. Today after having signed on at the Mill we were informed that until the beginning of July, there won't be any possibility of commencing. From what's being said around this is due to strikes on the part of the employees of the Mill. At the other Mill, they've already started working. We're very happy about the farm. The cane is beautiful and they say that the contract is good. The boss seems to be a very nice person. I think he's English. We live in a new house built by us and it has every comfort. The bus that goes to town comes by and is about 60 metres away from the house. In the past few days I've had the possibility of meeting up with Celestino and the others from Parma that were staying in Villawood and nearly all those from **S. Giorgio** and more or less half of those from **C. Felice**. Many of them still haven't found work and some have gone back home...*

I nearly forgot to tell you. Saputo is the luckiest to have found work in town in a hotel as a Chef. He has a contract for a year and his salary is also very high...

Cane cutting was seasonal work, with the season lasting about six or seven months. As well, living and working conditions were tough. Egidio again wrote to the brothers, who were now living at 179 Drummond Street, Carlton, on 16th August 1953. This time he reported his experiences cutting the cane, and his thoughts about whether he felt it was worth the hardship.

My dearest friends,

I hope again that you'll forgive me for my silence and I reply to your much appreciated letter. My long delay in replying to you doesn't mean that I'm forgetting our treasured friendship but for a series of factors and things that only by speaking to you both could I possibly explain. I also wanted to wait a while so that I could give you some details on the cane-cutting and those famous pounds that you Pino desired so desperately. Cane cutting is an extremely hard job not just for the first few days but continuously. It's dirtier than shovelling coal and murderous and bear in mind that it's not that hot yet. They say that it becomes unbearable as the weather gets hotter and that many people resist the heat and fatigue. You also know what it's like when you finally manage to get a contract. It's not hard to imagine. We work from dawn to dusk and every night before dinner we all have a bath (and what a bath it is) helping one another like brothers so that we can all begin to look decent again. However, the first month we all earned 57 pounds each and I can tell you that it's just not enough. If we weren't so desperate nobody would cut cane for that amount of money. The older people say that you shouldn't think about the first month too much. In fact next month we'll be earning more. I don't know how much more. I'm telling you that it's not enough money because there are more expenses to be paid such as rent and clothing. The older ones tell us that our clothes will tatter and tear in no time.

I think that if we ever had a choice to come here or not, I would really reconsider my decision. I can't begin to tell you how many of the newly arrived all returned home after the first week. Those of us still here are going to try to make the best of this situation and work right up to the end, unless we encounter health problems. We all get along very well and this is quite difficult among gangs. We have a very nice boss and he's very pleased with us all. He tries to help us as much as possible. Just to give you an example, he never goes to Ingham by car or truck without coming by and asking if any of us would like to go with him (so that we can save the bus fare). He's been to see the Consul, Count Lalli on several occasions telling him that he's very pleased with us and is forever thanking him. The others say that our gang is full of stupid people for putting up with all the hard work. I must tell you softly in one ear however that we had considered abandoning this job at the very beginning.

What are you both doing? I hope you're all well. I was so pleased to hear that you Pino have found a secure position just like Mario who was able to find a job in Melbourne. Are there still many unemployed? ...I'll sign off now and together with all my colleagues wishing you all the very best. Your very dear friend. Egidio Cattani.



With friends in Melbourne at a ball at the Exhibition Building in 1953 are Mario Berra, front left, behind him his fiancée Claudia, and behind Claudia is Pino Berra.

Grape picking was another seasonal occupation which, for want of more permanent employment, was taken up by many of the immigrants. Mario's brothers tried their hand at this in 1954 and described their experiences in the final letter reproduced here, dated 27 February 1954, to Mario and his bride, Claudia. It was written by his brother Franco from Red Cliffs near Mildura:

Dear Mario and Claudia,

...The first week of grape picking went by in a flash and both Pino and myself have more or less accustomed ourselves to this country lifestyle (healthy but uncomfortable) and we no longer have problems with aches and pains and fatigue due to hard work. Should we have listened to our hearts though, we would have gone back the Monday evening after our first days' work. In fact, that first day we cursed the grapes, the vineyards and the sun and whoever had told us that you could fill 100 boxes in no time. By Tuesday things were looking a little better and now after a week it's as though we've done nothing else all our lives. As far as earnings are concerned, the first week, we earned about 22.10 pounds gross each. But now, after a little practice we should be averaging about 25 and perhaps (with some difficulty) even more. To be able to earn that much we should be filling about 600 boxes per day (between the two of us), working six days a week. (Saturdays and Sundays, on the contrary to what we had hoped, we only work mornings. So far, we haven't worked on weekends for various reasons, but mainly because 1) we weren't skilled enough, 2) there were four of us

working and often there were only 20 odd boxes left to fill. The second explanation from now on should no longer exist because the other two left yesterday and only Pino and I are left. After the other two men left yesterday, we've rearranged our barracks. As far as our board is concerned, we can't really complain. When we get up from the table our stomachs are full even if we've only eaten goat...

By the end of his two year contract, Mario was established in a steady job in Melbourne, he had married his fiancée Claudia with a son, and the young family had made their home at 811 Drummond Street North Carlton. Mario remained with the factory for three years, and then worked as a fur cutter for a furrier in the city before becoming a delivery man and then a merchandising representative. He and the other young men who remained in Australia established their new lives as best they could, showing considerable versatility in the wide range of occupations they undertook.

As a postscript, in 1967 Mr. Mario Berra in partnership with his brother Franco established a coffee manufacturing and distribution business. Since 1973 **Coffee Mio Pty Ltd** has been located at 811 High Street Thornbury.

Mr Mario Berra has treasured the letters all these years and has made them available to the Society, where they are a valuable addition to our collection.

Editor's Note: These letters were translated by Gabriella Belgiovane.

GIOVANNI CERA COLLECTION

The Italian Historical Society has recently been honoured by news of the donation to its collection of memorabilia belonging to the late Giovanni Cera.

The Society is most grateful to the executors and beneficiaries of the estate of Giovanni Cera for placing this material in our care. The large number of personal items, photographs, letters, documents, music, musical instruments, tools etc., will form the Giovanni Cera Collection.

This donation will enable the Society to retain a permanent record of the contribution of Giovanni Cera and his brother Rino to the Italian community in Victoria and to the wider Australian community through their life and activities, many of which related to music.

All of the Cera material and his workshop are of great historical importance and record not only the life and achievements of Giovanni and his brother Rino as musicians and instrument makers, but also document an important aspect of the life of the Italian community in Melbourne in the period between the wars and in the post-war period.

Giovanni Cera was born in 1901 at Camporovere in the Alto Piano d'Asiago in the Vicenza province. The Asiago area was a battle-field during World War I and as a result of this dislocation many decided to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. Giovanni first went to France where he worked as a musician, then decided to migrate to Australia. Travelling with his father, he arrived in Victoria in 1924 and after a short stay in the country-side lived in Lygon Street, Carlton. He married Antonietta Pangrazio in 1925, and they moved to Swanston Street in the city before returning to live in Carlton where they established their permanent home.

It was at his house in Carlton that Giovanni made many wonderful and original instruments - guitars and mandolins, and also restored instruments for collectors, colleagues and friends. While he is best remembered for his musical performances, his compositions and musical arrangements are not as widely known.

His contribution is warmly appreciated by the many who were fortunate enough to know him or to have heard his music.



Giovanni Cera and Mario Costa enjoyed a song during the harvest of grapes grown in the backyard in Carlton in 1990. Mario Costa, brother-in-law to Giovanni Cera, is a retired Cordon Bleu chef. He also makes musical instruments.