

## FACT SHEET

### ITALIAN MIGRATION 1900-1945

*“What did you do?” asked the chiropractor. You have muscles like a man” ...  
Oh dear, how I worked ... But I had to do it, what could one do?’ Mrs S, who arrived  
in Australia during the Depression. From the IHS Oral History Collection.*

#### **Introduction**

Between 1901 and 1912 war, poverty, crop failure and natural disaster saw 500,000 people leaving Italy annually in search of work. While the majority of new arrivals in Australia were from the northern regions of Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli and Tuscany, migrants from Puglia, Calabria and Sicily also made their way to these shores. Many were brought out by family or friends who worked outside city centres clearing forests and building railways or in the agricultural, viticultural, fishing, mining and sugarcane industries. By 1914, there were around 10,000 people of Italian origin in Australia.

It was in this period that Leichhardt in Sydney and Melbourne’s Carlton came to be known as the “Little Italys”. Those who settled in the city were employed in the restaurant industry or as artists, builders, terrazzo workers, food importers, musicians, bakers, tailors and labourers.

#### **Between the wars**

There was a marked rise in Italian migration to Australia between the two world wars. This was the result of a government policy to increase the population, and a decision by the United States to restrict the intake of Italians. Consequently, by 1939 there were over 33,000 Italian-born migrants in Australia. The flow was interrupted by the Depression and by restrictions imposed by both the Australian and the Italian governments.

Italian-Australians survived the Great Depression of the 1930s by pulling together as a community. Many of those based in the cities moved in with friends and relatives living on the land. Amid massive unemployment and social unrest migrants came to be seen as a threat to jobs and cultural identity. In northern Queensland, business leaders and the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU) formed an employment agreement that sought to undermine Italian domination of the sugarcane industry. In Kalgoorlie-Boulder on Australia Day 1934, the accidental death of an Anglo-Australian patron in a fight with an Italian barman was the catalyst for a race riot that killed two and saw the destruction of Italian-owned homes, businesses and mining camps.

#### **The rise of fascism**

From the 1920s onward, Mussolini’s Italy devoted considerable energy to promoting fascism to its citizens in Australia, where local party branches (*fasci*) were established and pressure was applied to join. As late as 1939, Mussolini was still viewed by Australia and other English-speaking nations as a model of modern leadership. There was therefore some pride associated with being fascist and Italian. Many migrants with no real understanding of politics joined the party in a gesture of national pride. In contrast, those Italians who had been forced to escape Mussolini’s Italy made a desperate attempt to draw attention to the looming threat of fascism.

## World War II

By 1940, around 40 per cent of members of the Italian community in Australia were naturalised and several thousands Australian-born. When Italy entered the war in that year on the side of the Axis, the members of this community were declared “enemy aliens” and some 4,700 were interned. From 1940 to mid-1947, voluntary migration between the two nations came to a halt. During the war, the only Italians to enter the country were civilian internees and prisoners of war.

## Italian migration 1900-1945 in the Italian Historical Society Collection

You will find a range of publications, photographs, correspondence and other documents relating to migration during this period in the following collections:

- Candela Collection
- Del Monaco Collection
- Document Collection
- Fashion Collection
- Food Collection
- Franco Collection
- Library
- Newspaper Collection
- Opera Collection
- Oral History Collection
- Photographic Collection

See also the following Italian Historical Society Fact Sheets:

- Contribution of Women
- Internment: Civilians
- Internment: POWs
- Italian migration 1850-1900
- Italian migration 1945-
- Map: Australia
- Map: Italy
- Proxy Brides
- Trades and Professions

## Further reading

The resources listed below can be accessed, by appointment, at the Italian Historical Society.

### Publications

Bella Wardrop, S 1996, *By proxy: a study of Italian proxy brides in Australia*, Italian Historical Society—COASIT, Melbourne, Carlton.

Bosworth, R & Ugolini, R (eds) 1992, *War, internment and mass migration: the Italo-Australian experience, 1940-1990*, Gruppo Editoriale Internazionale, Rome, Italy.

Bureau of Immigration and Population Research 1993, *Migration Oz: an investigative resource kit*. Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, Canberra.

Castles, S et al. (eds) 1992, *Australia's Italians: culture and community in a changing society*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, New South Wales.

- 1992, *Italo-australiani: la popolazione di origine italiana in Australia*, Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, Turin, Italy.
- Church, J 2005, *Per l'Australia: the story of Italian migration*, Melbourne University Publishing, Victoria.
- Corrieri, MP 1992, *Italians of Port Pirie: a social history*, Our Lady of Martyrs, Port Pirie, South Australia.
- Cresciani, G 2003, *The Italians in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, Victoria.
- 1988, *Migrants or mates: Italian life in Australia*, Knockmore Enterprises, Sydney, New South Wales.
- 1980, *Fascism, anti-fascism and Italians in Australia*, Australian National University Press, Canberra.
- De Munari Choat, A, Martinuzzi, A & Martinuzzi O'Brien, I 2003, *Italian pioneers in the Innisfail District*, Minerva, Brisbane, Queensland.
- Douglass, WA 1995, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
- Ercole, I and Tence, M 1986, *Victoria's Italians, 1900-45: an exhibition of photographs and documents*, Italian Historical Society—COASIT, Carlton, Victoria.
- Evans, R 1987, *Loyalty and disloyalty: social conflict on the Queensland homefront, 1914-18*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Fitzgerald, A 1981, *The Italian Farming Soldiers: Prisoners of War in Australia 1941-1947*, Melbourne University Publishing, Victoria.
- Gentilli, J 1983, *Italian roots in Australian soil: Italian migration to Western Australia 1829-1946*, Italian-Australian Welfare Centre, Villa Terenzio, Marangaroo, Western Australia.
- Hirst, JB & Potts, D (eds) 1988, *In and out of work: personal accounts of the 1930s*, History Institute, Victoria.
- Huber, R 1977, *From pasta to pavlova: a comparative study of Italian settlers in Sydney and Griffith*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
- Jenkins, L 1993, *The power of the land: a social history of Italian settlement in Lismore*, Northern Star Printery, Mullumbimby, New South Wales.
- Jupp, J (ed.) 2001, *The Australian people: an encyclopedia of the nation, its people and their origins*, Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, Victoria.
- Lowenstein, W 1981, *Weevils in the flour: an oral record of the 1930's depression in Australia*, Scribe, Fitzroy, Victoria.
- Mantello, M 1986, *Now and then: the Sicilian farming community at Werribee Park, 1929-1949*, Il Globo, Carlton, Victoria.

Martinuzzi O'Brien, I 1989, *Australia's Italians 1788-1988*, Italian Historical Society—COASIT and the State Library of Victoria, Carlton, Victoria.

O'Connor, D 2004, *Memories and identities: proceedings of the Second Conference on the impact of Italians in South Australia*, conference papers, Australian Humanities Press, Unley, South Australia.

———1996, *No need to be afraid: Italian settlers in South Australia between 1839 and the Second World War*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia.

Proserpine Italian Research Committee 1998, *A heart in two places = Un cuore diviso: Italian settlement in Proserpine 1908-1988*, PIRC, Proserpine, Queensland.

Ruzzene Grollo, D 2004, *Cooper's Creek, Gippsland: the Trevisani = Trevisani in Australia: Cooper's Creek*, Mure, Thornbury, Victoria.

Sparrow, J & Sparrow J, 2002, *Radical Melbourne: a secret history*, Vulgar Press, North Carlton, Victoria.

Templeton, J 2003, *From the mountains to the bush: Italian migrants write home, 1860-1962*, University of Western Australia, Crawley, Western Australia.

Travaglia, J 1993, *Growing up Italian in Australia*, State Library of New South Wales Press, Sydney.

Walsh, K 2001, *The changing face of Australia: a century of immigration, 1901-2000*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, New South Wales.

### **Periodicals**

*Italian Bulletin of Australia*, vol. 6, no. 4, 16 January 1928, Italian Chamber of Commerce in Australia, Sydney.

*Italian Historical Society Journal* 1993-, Italian Historical Society—COASIT, Carlton, Victoria.

*Vade mecum degli Italiani in Australia: rivista annuale illustrata de Il giornale italiano = Illustrated Annual of the Italian Journal*, 28 October 1937, Italian Newspapers Limited, Melbourne.

### **Internet sites**

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, *Home*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, <http://www.abs.gov.au>

AustraliaDonna Working Group 2006, *AustraliaDonna*, South Australia, <http://www.australiadonna.on.net/italian/index.htm>

Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2001, *One hundred years: the Australian story*, <http://www.abc.net.au/100years/> [This site supports the book and video series of the same name].

Australian War Memorial 2006, *Australian War Memorial homepage*, AWM, Canberra, <http://www.awm.gov.au>

Martinuzzi-O'Brien, I 2002, *Italian Australia Records Project (IARP)*, Victoria University, Melbourne, <http://w2.vu.edu.au/iarp/Default.asp>

Museum Victoria 2003, *Immigration Museum*, Museum Victoria, Melbourne, <http://Immigration.museum.vic.gov.au>

National Archives of Australia 2005, *Welcome to the National Archives of Australia*, Canberra, NAA, <http://www.naa.gov.au>

National Library of Australia 2006, *National Library of Australia online*, NLA, Canberra, <http://www.nla.gov.au>

PictureAustralia 2006, *Looking for images of Australiana? PictureAustralia® is the place to start!*, NLA, Canberra, <http://www.pictureaustralia.org/>

State Library of Victoria 2004, *Pictures catalogue*, SLV, Melbourne, <http://sinpic.slv.vic.gov.au/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>

### **Audio-visual**

*Australia's Italians: 5 interviews* 1988, video recording, Italian Historical Society—COASIT, Carlton, Victoria.

*Collar the lot! Recollections of the World War II Tatura Internment Camps, Australia* 1997, video recording, Tatura Irrigation and Wartime Camps Museum, the Tatura and District Historical Society, Tatura, Victoria.

*Hard work and hope: Australia's Italians* 1989, video recording, Italian Historical Society—COASIT & Equality Press, Carlton, Victoria.

*Images and reflections: the Italian Australians* 1995, video recording, Video Education Australasia, Bendigo, Victoria.

*New heroes, new myths* 1993, video recording, Italian Historical Society—COASIT, Carlton, Victoria.

*Reluctant enemies* 2000, video recording, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney.

Italian Historical Society—COASIT, Melbourne  
1st Floor, 189 Faraday Street, Carlton VIC Australia 3053  
Tel: 61+ (0)3 9349 9020 Fax: 61+ (0)3 9349 1063 Email: [ih@coasit.com.au](mailto:ih@coasit.com.au)