

## FACT SHEET

### ITALIAN MIGRATION 1945-1970

*'Where we lived ... the war had destroyed everything—our house and our farm. So we had to start again.'* Lucia, who left the south of Italy for Australia in 1963. From *By proxy: a study of Italian proxy brides in Australia* (IHS—COASIT, 1996).

#### Introduction

The suffering caused by the Second World War and the widening economic gulf between the north and south provided an impetus for many Italians to seek a better life elsewhere. The Italian government of the 1950s and 1960s, struggling to feed, house and find employment for its citizens, actively promoted migration to Argentina, Canada and Australia.

At the same time, Australia was embarking on an industrialisation and population program which would open the door to mass migration. Initially, British or 'white' migrants were favoured, but when quotas could not be filled, the Australian government turned to southern Europeans.

#### Patterns of migration

Between July 1947 and 1950 over 33,000 Italians migrated to Australia. The following decade saw the arrival of over 170,000 mostly southern Italians, including displaced people from the region ceded to the former Yugoslavia. The majority of migrants settled in the inner suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney. Around 80% were sponsored by relatives or *paesani* (people from the same region), some of whom had arrived in Australia before the Second World War. Work was already waiting for them and they were quickly absorbed into local Italian communities.

Between 1951 and 1968, around 42,000 Italians arrived under the assisted passage agreement between Australia and Italy. Those selected came on the condition that they took whatever work and accommodation was offered for a period of two years. Many were recruited in Italy for projects like the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme. Others were sent to the steelworks in Newcastle and Wollongong, or employed in the engineering and textile factories that were springing up in major cities.

Initially, the assisted passage scheme targeted young men. However, by the 1960s, social commentators were expressing concern that, starved of female companionship, these men would become a public menace. It was also felt that assimilation would be more successful if migrants were settled in family units. In an attempt to address these concerns and to meet a shortage of domestic labour, the scheme was opened to women and family members.

For those who arrived under the scheme, conditions were not always what they had been led to expect. Migrant hostels, like Bonegilla on the NSW Victoria border, were often isolated from town centres, locals were hostile, food and customs unfamiliar. Furthermore, the beginning of the assisted passage scheme coincided with a downturn in the Australian economy. In 1952, faced with unemployment and forbidden to seek jobs independently, Italians at Bonegilla and other migrant hostels around the country rioted, demanding they be given work or repatriated to Italy. The Australian government responded by suspending the assisted passage scheme till December 1954.

Until the 1960s, there were no national, ethno-specific welfare services for arriving migrants. Support was provided on a local level by volunteers from within the Italian community, often with the help of political organisations or the Catholic Church.

### **The settlement process**

The massive influx of Italian migrants in the 1950s contributed to the expansion of what came to be known as “Little Italys” in the major cities. By the 1960s, whole precincts were devoted to Italian businesses, shops, entertainments, coffee bars and restaurants. Italian social clubs sprang up across the country. Italian-Australian soccer teams, such as Perth’s Tricolore, Sydney’s Marconi and Melbourne squad Juventus, attracted a growing fan base. This period saw the consolidation of what is now recognised as a unique Italian-Australian culture and which found its expression in food, language, cultural practices and festivals.

From 1947 to 1954, the Italian-born population in Australia more than trebled, to 119,897. By 1961, it had reach 228,296, peaking at around 288,300 in 1971. Migration from Italy to Australia sharply decreased in the late 1960s with the recovery of the Italian economy and is now negligible. Today, the Australian-born generation of Italian parentage outnumbers the Italian-born.

### **Italian migration 1945-1970 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:

- Borsari Collection
- COASIT Records and Archives
- Document Collection
- Fashion Collection
- Food Collection
- Library
- Mangiamele Collection
- Newspaper Collection
- Oral History Collection
- Photographic Collection
- Santospirito Collection

See also the following Italian Historical Society Fact Sheets:

- Contribution of Women
- Italian migration 1850-1900
- Italian migration 1900-1945
- Map: Australia
- Map: Italy
- Proxy Brides
- Statistics on Italians in Australia
- The Arts
- 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, Carlton, Victoria.

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

Broome, R 1987, *Coburg: between two creeks*, Lothian, Port Melbourne, Victoria.

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

Bureau of Immigration Research 1991, *Birthplace, language, religion 1971-1986: Local government areas by birthplace*, vol. 2A, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

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———1991, *Birthplace, language, religion 1971-1986: summary data: total Australian population, the overseas-born component and average annual growth rates by local government areas and statistical regions*, vol. 5, Commonwealth of Australia, 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.

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.

Dell'oso, AM 1998, *Songs of the suitcase*, Harper Collins, Pymble, New South Wales.

Di Lorenzo, G 2001, *Solid brick homes and veggie patches: a history of Italian migration to Moonee Ponds*, History Department, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria.

Douglass, WA 1995, *From Italy to Ingham: Italians in north Queensland*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.

Genovesi, P, Musolino, W, et al (eds) 2000, *In search of the Italian Australian into the new millenium. Conference proceedings, Melbourne 24–26 May 2000*, Gro-set, Thornbury, 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.
- Lack, J & Templeton, J (eds) 1995, *Bold experiment: a documentary history of Australian immigration since 1945*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Loh, M (ed.) 1984, *With courage in their cases: the experiences of thirty-five Italian immigrant workers and their families in Australia*, Italian Federation of Emigrant Workers and their families, Coburg, Victoria.
- Martinuzzi O'Brien, I 1989, *Australia's Italians 1788-1988*, Italian Historical Society—COASIT and the State Library of Victoria, Carlton, Victoria.
- McDonald, P 1999, *Community profiles: 1996 Census: Italy born*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Canberra.
- 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.
- Penrose, H (ed.) 1994, *Brunswick: one history, many voices*, Victoria Press, South Melbourne, Victoria.
- Price, CA 1979, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Ruzzene Grollo, D 2004, *Cooper's Creek, Gippsland: the Trevisani = Trevisani in Australia: Cooper's Creek*, Mure, Thornbury, Victoria.
- Templeton, J 2003, *From the mountains to the bush: Italian migrants write home, 1860-1962*, University of Western Australia, Crawley, Western Australia.
- Sluga, G 1988, *Bonegilla: a place of no hope*, History Department, University of Melbourne, Victoria.
- Travaglia, J 1993, *Growing up Italian in Australia*, State Library of New South Wales Press, Sydney.
- Vasta, E 1985, *If you had your time again would you migrate to Australia? A study of long-settled Italo-Australians in Brisbane*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Walsh, K 2001, *The changing face of Australia: a century of immigration, 1901-2000*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, New South Wales.
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- Yule, P (ed.) 2004, *Carlton: a history*, Melbourne University Publishing, Carlton, Victoria.

Zampaglione, G 1987, *Gli Italiani in Illawarra: quaderni di "Affari Sociali Internazionali"*, Franco Angeli, Milan.

### **Periodicals**

'The Australian Family: the Italians', *The Bulletin*, lift-out, Bulletin series: Part 6, 7 August 1976.

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

### **Internet sites**

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

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

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.

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

*Love's brother* 2004, video recording, Film Finance Corporation Australia, distributed by Palace Films.

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

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

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