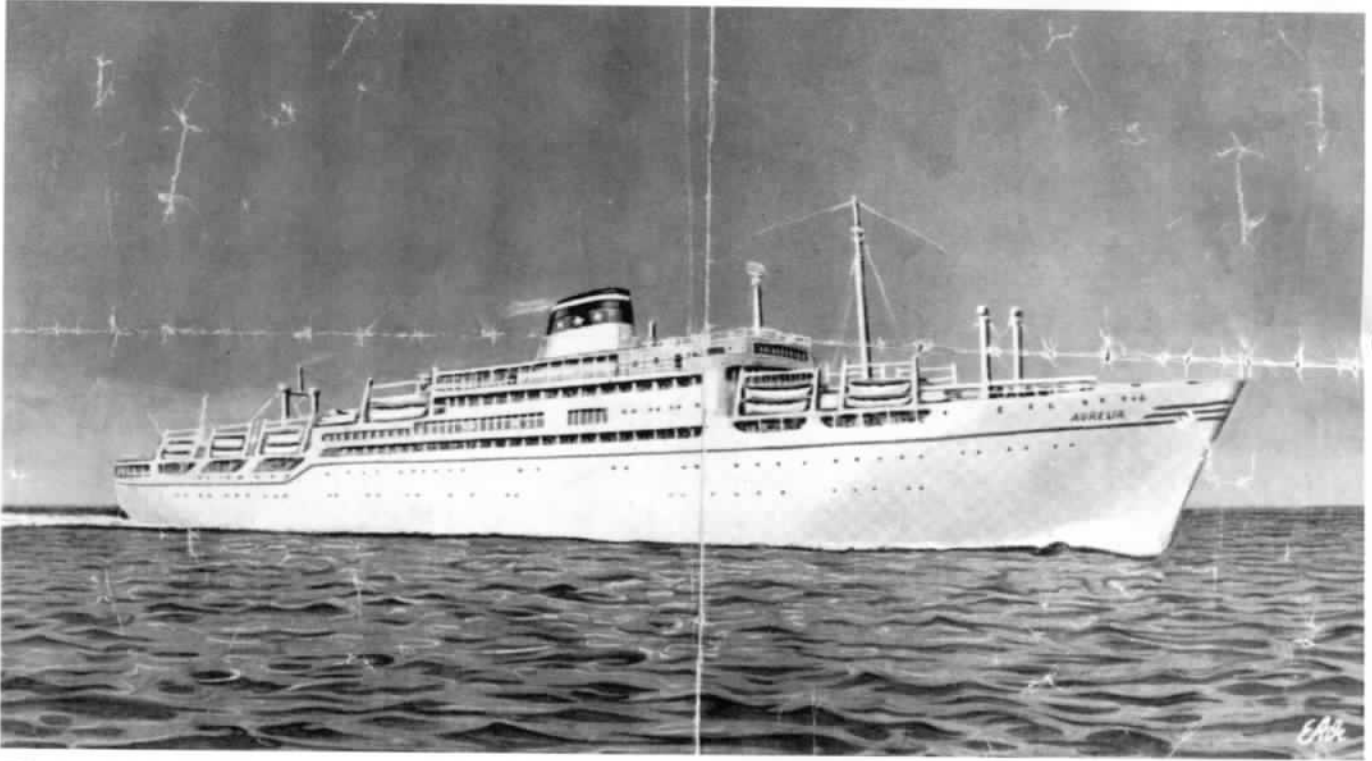


Emigrant Ships

by Maria Tence

The Society wishes to thank New South Wales University Press for permission to use extracts from *Emigrant Ships to Luxury Liners* by Peter Plowman. The book, published in 1992, is a valuable source of information on the history and voyages of numerous ships that brought hundreds of immigrants to Australia. The *Aurelia* is the second ship profiled in this series.



The *Aurelia* (Collection of the Italian Historical Society).

This vessel was originally named *Huascarán* and was built for the Hamburg-America Line. It entered service in April 1939. With 6951 gross tonnage and a service speed of 17 knots, she was primarily a cargo ship but could accommodate up to 58 passengers, servicing the trade ports from Hamburg to the west coast of South America via Panama.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, *Huascarán* was taken over by the German Navy and converted into a submarine depot ship. She survived the war, was seized by the Allies and prized to Canada.

In September 1947, the *Huascarán* was refitted to carry 773 passengers and renamed *Beaverbrae*. She was intended to carry migrants from Europe to Canada and return with a full cargo. Over the next six years, *Beaverbrae* made 51 round trips between Canada and European ports.

As the demand for migrants passed on that route declined, the *Beaverbrae* was sold to the Cogedar Line in 1954 and renamed the *Aurelia*. She went to Trieste for rebuilding as a passenger liner carrying 1124 passengers. A few of her cabins were renovated with private facilities and new amenities including an outdoor swimming pool and a theatre. On 13 May 1955, the *Aurelia* left Trieste for her maiden voyage to Australia, but later that year her terminal became Genoa. Then Naples, Messina, Malta and Piraeus were added to her itinerary. *Aurelia* made four round trips to Australia per year transporting thousands of Italian migrants.

The caption of an image of the ship, held in the collection of the Australian Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Canberra, reads *The gleaming white Italian migrant liner Aurelia ties up at the Cairns wharf in warm, tropical*

winter sunshine. On board were 1200 Italian migrants attracted to Australia by high wages, universal 40-hour week and full employment. At Cairns, 552 brawny cane-cutters and 100 women and children left the ship. The rest left the ship at southern ports.

In 1958 *Aurelia* was withdrawn for further alterations when her original diesels were replaced and her superstructure enlarged. She then entered a new service to Australia from Bremerhaven with her first departure in June 1959.

Aurelia operated through Suez, or round Africa when the canal was inactive until the end of 1964, departing Rotterdam, crossing the Atlantic through the Panama Canal, across the Pacific to Auckland then to Sydney, returning through the Suez.

The closure of the Suez in 1967 combined with a decline in the migrant trade to Australia eventually brought about the end of the Cogedar Line service to Australia. In September 1968 the

Aurelia left Rotterdam on her final voyage, departing Sydney for the last time on 29 October. On her return to Europe, *Aurelia* was refitted for service as a cruise ship accommodating 470 passengers. This cruise program finished in May 1969 when she then made six round trips to New York. As returns were poor, the vessel was sold to Chandris Cruises in September 1970 and renamed *Romanza*.

The ship was rebuilt, installing private facilities for 650 passengers in one class. On 1 April 1971 *Romanza* left Venice on her first cruise where she spent her subsequent career cruising the Mediterranean. In 1976 she came to an abrupt end when the company went bankrupt and then *Romanza* spent most of 1977 cruising out of Brazil. In 1979 she ran aground in the Aegean Sea and was refloated after two days. She was repaired and returned to her Mediterranean cruising circuit. In 1988 she was reported to be under charter as a floating hotel in the Canary Islands.



Italian cane-cutters disembarking from the *Aurelia* in Cairns in 1956. (Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs photograph).