

## THE PINZONE BUSINESSES IN STAWELL AND ARARAT

by Joe Pinzone

*Joe is the son of Vince and Josie Pinzone. In this article he honours the memory of his father and tells the story of the contribution of the Pinzone brothers to the development of Ararat.*

Vincenzo (known as Vince) Pinzone was the son of Giuseppe and Giuseppa nee Gemmola. He was born in Lingua, Salina, on the Aeolian Islands, north-east of Sicily. He sailed to Australia from Naples on 28 June 1913, aged 14, on the Orient steam ship *Ophir*. Soon after his arrival in Melbourne, he worked in his uncle Charlie Gemmola's fruit shop in Ballarat. A few years later, with the experience he gained, he went into business with his cousin Charlie Strangio in a small fruit shop in Main Street, Stawell, at the foot of the Grampians.



*Vince Pinzone soon after his arrival in Australia in 1913.*



*The Wimmera Café in Stawell soon after its opening.*

In 1917, he was called up as a reservist to serve in the Italian Army during the First World War. He was attached to the Australian Army and sailed to Europe aboard an Australian troop ship. On arrival in Southampton, England, he fell ill with the Spanish flu which was raging at the time and was transferred to a hospital tent where several of his companions perished. After he recovered, he was sent to the Italian Army to serve on the border with Austria, taking supplies to the front. For his war service he received a certificate of thanks and appreciation from the Italian Government.

Vince returned to Stawell in 1919 to continue to run the fruit shop business in partnership with Charlie Strangio. In 1924 they built nearby the exclusive Wimmera Café in which they served meals and sold fruit and vegetables wholesale and retail. The café soon became well known, as it boasted the most modern soda fountains imported from the United States. It became the social meeting place for the people of Stawell and the district, most of them graziers and farmers of anglo-celtic origin. During the famous annual Stawell Gift foot running carnival, the café did a roaring trade, sometimes remaining open until 4.00 am.

Many of Vince's and Charlie's relations worked in the café, including Vince's brother Gaetano, known as Tom, his sisters Celie, Sera and Nancy,



*The sumptuous wedding of Josephine Taranto to Vince Pinzone in Sydney in 1928 demonstrated the wealth of the community from the Aeolian Islands in Australia at the time.*

his other brother Joe and his cousin Jack Costa, who was only sixteen when he arrived in Stawell in 1925. Jack drove the horse and dray for deliveries as far as Halls Gap in the Grampians and picked up goods for the café at the Stawell railway station. Soon after his arrival, Jack became popular in town for saving a small girl from drowning in a dam used by the gold miners.

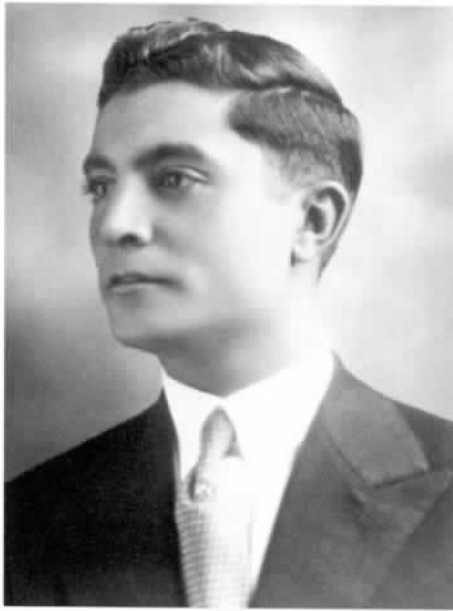
On 7 June 1928 Vince married Josephine (Josie) Taranto at St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney. Josie was born in Korumburra, Victoria, on 1 June 1907 to parents also from the Aeolian Islands, like Vince. Soon after Josie's birth they moved and settled in Erina via Gosford, New South Wales, where they had an orchard and grew vegetables. After a brief honeymoon in the Blue Mountains, Vince and Josie made their home in Skene Street, Stawell. Their first child, a girl, died of meningitis in infancy. Two boys followed, Joe born in 1930 and Bob in 1932. From 1935 to 1946 four more sons were born.

Vince was a keen football follower. His love for

Australian rules started, as the story goes, when he ran a stall at the Stawell Football Club home games at Central Park. He was donating oranges to the Stawell players for refreshment at three-quarter time. His allegiance to his home team continued for many years, even after he moved to Ararat years later.

In 1933 due to ill-health Vince, sold his share in the Wimmera Café to his partner Charlie Strangio. On the advice of his doctor he took a long holiday and sailed to Italy with his wife Josie and sons Joe and Bob to visit Vince's parents. The family returned to Australia in 1934 and in 1935 Vince bought the Plaza Café at the west-end of Barkly Street in Ararat. The shop also carried a small stock of fruit and vegetables.

During the Second World War the business went through lean years because of rationing of goods. However, the fruit and vegetables side and the milk bar trade kept the business afloat. There was enough petrol for the shop's Fargo truck to travel to Ballarat's wholesale markets for provisions once a week.



*The Pinzone brothers. From top: Joe Pinzone b. 1897, Vince Pinzone b. 1899, Tom Pinzone b. 1908.*

When Vince started the Plaza Café in Ararat, his brothers Joe and Tom were already running the Bon Ton Café at the east-end of Barkly Street. The BonTon was later renamed Town Hall Café and the Plaza became Pinzone Bros. Café. Both cafés sold wholesale and retail fruit and vegetables, confectionery, served morning teas and supper, and had soda fountains. The Plaza Café sold Swallows ice-cream and the Town Hall sold Peter's ice-cream, although in the early days Joe made his own ice-cream with a machine in the basement of the Bon Ton Café. In 1933 Joe returned to Lingua to marry Maria Acunto from the neighbouring town of Santamarina. Upon their return to Australia they took up residence behind their café in Ararat and they had five children.

In 1939 Vince and his brother Tom bought from their brother-in-law Joe Natoli, another combined fruit shop and milk bar in Ararat's Barkly Street, where Robert Bates' Majors Mensland shop is now located. Tom ran this shop with the help of two employees Les Kelly and Pat Farish. Tom's friend Val Canty also helped out on a Sunday.

During the Second World War there was a large camp of American soldiers in Ballarat and many of them came to Ararat on leave. They were very good customers for Tom. They were very fond of milkshakes and were responsible for introducing the first thick shakes in town as they would ask for a large amount of ice-cream to be added to their shakes. Some of these soldiers were Italian-American and often mistook Pat Farish's mother, who did the cleaning for the shop, for Tom's mother. They would beg her to cook a plate of spaghetti, but at that time not many Australian women knew how to cook spaghetti!

Between 1939 and 1946 there were three Pinzone shops in Barkly Street, Ararat, commonly known as the 'Pinzone's Top Shop' run by Vince, the 'Pinzone's Middle Shop' run by Tom and the 'Pinzone's Bottom Shop' run by Joe. The middle shop was sold in 1946 to the Pinzones' cousin Vince Gemmola and his son Vince Jnr, whilst the bottom shop was sold in 1964 by Joe's widow, Maria. This left only one Pinzone shop in Ararat, which continued to operate under the brothers Vince and Tom, who were both excellent salesmen. Like the Wimmera Café in Stawell, Pinzone Bros. milk bar became a meeting place for the locals to socialize. It was particularly popular with young single people and courting couples after the pictures and dances on a Saturday night and after church on Sunday morning.

The shop underwent many renovations and expansions during its years of operation to cater for changing conditions. A tobacconist shop was annexed to the business and groceries were added to the choice of goods for sale. It had expanded into a very large mixed business, trading seven days a week. It was the forerunner to today's modern supermarket. Vince Pinzone built, perhaps, the first cool room in Ararat, with the help of carpenter Peter Jensen. It was constructed of timber and insulation and driven by a condenser in the basement.

Although it was rough by today's standards, it worked very well and was a great boon for storing fruit and vegetables and other perishables. A fruit ripening room, mainly for ripening bananas was also constructed in the basement.

In the late 1950s seven of the Pinzone family members were in partnership in Pinzone Bros: Tom and his wife Connie (nee Natoli) from Sydney and Vince and his sons Joe, Bob, Vince jnr. and Eric. Vince's wife, Josie, had to cater for two shifts of hungry men at mealtime, and often a large extended family of relations. She also provided the staff of the shop with morning and afternoon tea. The aroma of her cooking would waffle into the shop from the kitchen and send

both the customers and the staff mad with hunger. Tom's wife Connie who had a wonderful outgoing personality was quite popular with the customers. Music was her special gift. She was a talented piano player and had a good singing voice. She used to entertain visitors, family and staff in the lounge of the shop's living quarters.

Over the years many Ararat people worked in the shop. Many started their working lives there after school, before going on to make their mark in life. One was John James, the Carlton Football Club Brownlow Medallist, who delivered orders on the shop bike. Some employees gave good service for a number of years. The most notable was Mrs. May Clark, nee McKenzie, who worked at the shop from the age of 14, and became regarded as a member of the family. She worked at the shop for twenty years until she married and then returned some years later for another three years.

Tom and Connie left the partnership when they moved to Sydney with their family in 1964. Vince Pinzone, the founder of Pinzone Bros, died while on holiday in Italy in 1972. The business was carried on by his sons Joe, Bob and Vince jnr. for the next few years, who sold it in 1978.

Pinzone Bros. closed down on 12 July 1998 to make room for a modern redevelopment.



*The family of Joe Pinzone in their fruit shop in Barkly Street, Ararat, c.1955.*