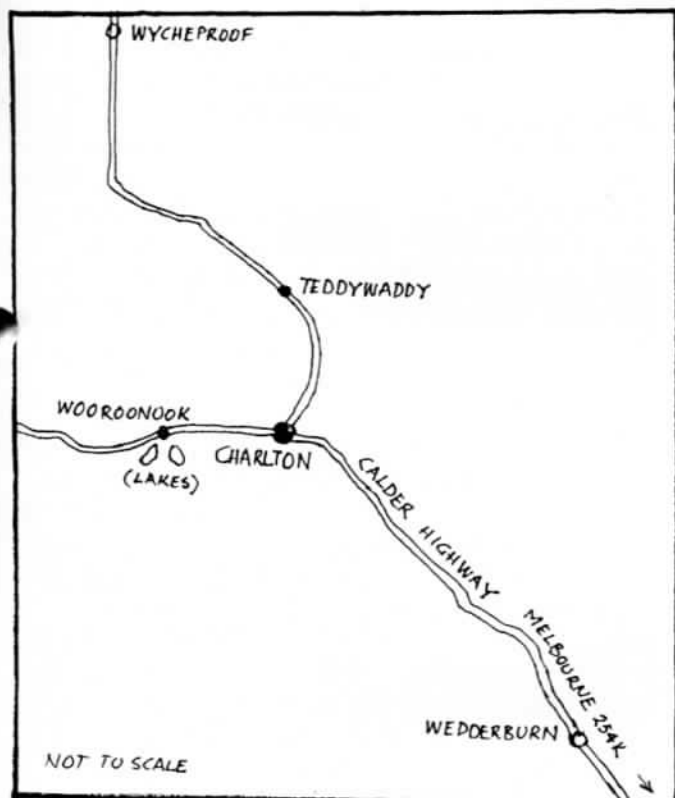


RESTLESS PIONEER FROM SAN GIOVANNI BIANCO

by Dennis Scandolera

The Italian Historical Society wishes to thank Mr Dennis Scandolera of Dunolly who provided the following account of the family of Cristoforo Scandolera, an Italian pioneer in the Charlton area. The original version was given to Tony Pagliaro who made it available for the Society. It has been slightly edited for publication.



In 1957, not long before her death, Catherine Lucy Killeen had her grandson John Killeen drive her out around the Charlton district. She showed him the places where she had lived and told him many things about the pioneer days of Charlton and the history of the Scandolera family. What follows are the memories of Lucy Killeen as she told them to her grandson at that time.

It is not known what year Cristoforo Scandolera arrived in Australia but he may have been here as early as 1861. At various times he was known as Johannes, Giovanni, John, Christopher or Chris. He was the only Scandolera in the area so there was no-one to confuse him with. Cristoforo Scandolera and Mary Anne O'Neill were married in 1870 at Carrisbrook. At the time Chris was a wood splitter living at Emu Flat.

At first they lived at Amherst. Their first two

children were born there, Bettina Helena in 1871 and Catherine Lucy in 1873. However, Catherine Lucy spent her first birthday at Teddywaddy West. This indicates that Scandolera took up his selection in mid-1874. The move of approximately one hundred miles took two weeks. They used horse teams and wagons and drove what sheep and cattle they had.

Settlement was taking place in the Charlton area at this time. Nearly all the early settlers came from either the Maryborough or Ballarat areas. When cash was short some of them would head off to Wedderburn, eighteen miles away and start looking for gold. I don't know if they had much success but a fair bit of gold still comes out of the area.

When you look at settlement around West Charlton, Teddywaddy and Wooroonooke, the names of O'Neill, Heenan, Vanderfeen, Scandolera and Powell appear. All the families were related and lived within a five mile area.

When they first settled, Heenan's was the main base at Teddywaddy. The women and children lived there and the men built a rough hut on each block and lived there, in theory at least. This was to comply with the law of selection. The selector had to reside on the land, cultivate one in ten acres and effect improvements to the value of one pound per acre in the first few years.

In the early days the washing of the clothes was done at Lake Wooroonooke, six miles to the south, where rough wash houses and coppers for boiling the clothes and clothes lines were set up. Monday was wash day but to ensure they had clean water they would go to the lake on Sunday and put water in the coppers and filter it through charcoal and ashes. The next day, when it was time to do the wash, all the mud and dirt were separated and they had clean water.

The settlers also had vegetable gardens down at the lake. The children were dispatched to water the gardens by bucket. This was done on

Sundays after Mass, on wash days and on hot days. Before the gardens were set up they used to eat marshmallow bushes for greens. Meat when it was killed would be cooked and eaten. Then it was served cold for several days afterwards. The rest was salted down in a pickling barrel. They also killed bustard or plains turkeys. Lucy used to say that nothing could beat a possum baked in a pumpkin. Cows were milked and the cream was sold to the town. Butter was made and kept in the cellar or coolgardie safe. They tried to make cheese but it was hard on the gums.

The house that Chris Scandolera built in Teddywaddy was of *pise* construction, or, as it was locally called, "Egyptian brick". The outer walls would have been at least sixteen inches thick and the inner walls at least twelve inches; the roof was bark, but later shingles were cut from red gums. Some galvanised iron was added later.

To clear the land the early settlers used a log roller pulled by bullocks, and fire. But Chris Scandolera cleared *his* land by axe and grubbing. He intended to make money out of this method of land clearing. All the green wood was stacked end to end around a hollow tree. It was then covered in soil and clay and fired in a kiln. Lucy said they had to watch the heap for days to make sure it did not burst into flame. All the charcoal produced was then sold to the Charlton foundry for smelting. This provided a cash flow that most of the early settlers did not have.

Chris was a handy man in the blacksmith's shop. At Powell's they still have the original smithy where ploughs and all agricultural implements were made and repaired.

He had tried to establish a vineyard at Amherst but found the climate too cold (In more recent times Dalgetys established vineyards in the area for cool climate grapes). When Chris moved to Teddywaddy the grapes went in early. At one time there were twenty acres under vines. He concentrated on dry reds and whites. The main white variety was Golden Chassels. He supplied altar wine to the church in Charlton over many years. Fortified wines came later as there was little demand for dry wines locally.

The water came from wells, leached through beds of gypsum to purify it. Prior to getting the wells down Chris had to dig a dam. Apparently he did that with a wheelbarrow, a pick and a shovel.

Before 1883 all the wheat they grew had to be carted to St. Arnaud or to Inglewood. In 1883 when the train line came to Charlton the task was

made easier. One of the jobs the children had was to turn the handle of the winnower to separate the grain from the chaff.

Lucy went to the Rock Tank school which would have been a good three and a half mile walk. One of the pupils was a "Pompey" Elliot, later a Brigadier General in the First War and President of the Senate.

In 1885, after some years' settlement at Teddywaddy, the itchy feet syndrome set in again with Chris. He sold 299 acres to Joseph Postich and they went to check out the new settlement at Mildura. They crossed the Murray River at Euston on a punt. Lucy was a child of eleven at the time and could remember the crossing vividly. Her mother, Mary Anne Scandolera had a child on the way up there. This was probably Mary who was born about 1886 although her birth was never registered. Another child was born in Mildura in 1891. The settlement in Mildura was all right but, as there was no railway, it was a major problem to transport out produce. So by 1891 they were back in Wooroonooke.

After Lucy finished school in 1887 she was taken on, at the young age of fourteen, to train as a teacher's assistant. In those days you couldn't be called a teacher until you were at least sixteen. In the 1890s Lucy taught at St. Joseph's school in Charlton. She used to talk about her life as a young girl there: walking into Wycheproof nine miles, Wooroonooke six miles to go to dances and then back again in the early hours. A lot of the country was still not cleared and there were still a few blacks in the area.

Life in the country was tough and death was always around them. The Scandoleras were luckier than many families of the time as only three of their children died in childhood. Ellen Francesca was tragically burnt in 1878. She was two years old at the time. In 1883 Christopher Angelo was drowned at the tender age of three months. Then Peter, the eldest son, died in 1895. He was seventeen when he was kicked in the head by a horse. He was taken to the Vale of Avoca Hotel in Charlton where he lay for a week before his death. The following is an account of the accident as reported by the local newspapers:

The Charlton Tribune, Saturday, January 5, 1895
We regret to learn that a very sad accident happened yesterday morning to Peter Scandolera, the eldest son of Mr. J.C. Scandolera, farmer at Teddywaddy. It appears that Scandolera was kicked on the back of the head with great violence by a horse. He was brought to Charlton where

Dr McEniry found he was suffering from a very serious compound fracture of the skull. In the afternoon Drs McEniry and Cowen performed the operation of trephining, but on account of the extensive laceration of the brain very little hope is entertained of the patient's recovery. Up to going to press there was no improvement in his condition.

Peter Scandolera died on January 11, 1895. The Powell boys carried the coffin from the church to the cemetery, no mean feat as it is a mile and a half. Probably the only photo of Peter was taken in October 1894 when his sister Bettina was married.

His father was devastated by the death and later the family sold out again and moved to Gippsland where Mary Anne's brothers had settled in the early 1880s. Tom Powell bought their farm. On the journey, the Scandolera family drove their horse teams through Melbourne in the early hours. However it was far too wet in the area they had selected. They moved back north again and bought back the original section. They never paid for it and that is why the Scandolera name does not appear on any of the land maps.

Mary Anne died in 1898 of pneumonia at the age of 44 years. She was well respected in the community and remembered by neighbours as always being there in times of crisis. She was a good horsewoman and highly valued as a nurse although she had no formal training. A photo of Mary and Chris taken at their wedding, now in Dennis Scandolera's possession shows her to have been a woman of fine appearance.

After her death Chris was totally lost. He was left with a young family - the youngest was about five years. The older girls, Bettina, who lived nearby, and the Powells all gave a hand.

In 1908 Chris headed off to Italy, but the family wouldn't let him take his young son Jimmy. It is believed he went in search of his sister who had migrated to Brazil and on becoming a widow had returned home. His plan was to bring her out. He also wanted to introduce new grape varieties into his vineyard and make it a wholly commercial venture. However it was not to be. Chris died in Italy after an accident on the ice. He is buried in the mountain village of San Giovanni Bianco, where he had been baptised in 1843.

The Charlton Tribune, May 29, 1909

We regret to report the death of Mr. Giovanni Scandolera, a former well known resident of Charlton West. About twelve months ago Mr. Scandolera sold out and returned to his native

Italy. He was in delicate health at the time and word has been received that he passed away last month.

Mr. Scandolera, who was 62 years of age, arrived in the State when about 17 years of age. He was engaged wood carting at Mt Grennock near Talbot and about 30 years ago selected land at West Charlton, where he remained up till the time of his departure. He leaves a grown family, two of his daughters being Mrs. John Powell and Mrs. Killeen of Charlton.

The last of the vintage wine was made there in 1910 and a bottle of port from the last batch was drunk at Powells every Christmas, the last one being consumed in 1955. The clearing sale was held out there in 1910. The small barrels full of wine were sold for removal, but the big casks were emptied and left there. Dust storms filled in the cellars and now the only reminder of a pioneer family's endeavours is a peppercorn tree.

