

# battista giudice, 1840 – 1907

**GEOFF GIUDICE** by GEOFF GIUDICE IS A FOURTH GENERATION DESCENDANT OF ONE OF THE EARLY MIGRANTS FROM LOMBARDY, BATTISTA GIUDICE. INTEREST IN HIS ITALIAN ANCESTRY LED GEOFF TO VISIT LOVERO, BATTISTA'S VILLAGE, IN 2000. AFTER HIS RETURN HE PUT TOGETHER THIS SHORT ACCOUNT OF BATTISTA'S TRANSITION TO A NEW LIFE IN BENDIGO IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY.

THE LETTER FOLLOWING THE ACCOUNT WAS WRITTEN IN 1891 TO BATTISTA GIUDICE BY HIS NEPHEW, FATHER POLETTI. IT GIVES A GOOD INSIGHT INTO THE LIVES OF BATTISTA'S FAMILY MEMBERS.

My Italian great-grandfather, Battista Giudice, was born in Lovero, Lombardy, in 1840.

Lovero is located in a very beautiful valley, the Valtellina, which runs beside the Swiss border, three or four hours north-east of Milan. The valley is a very narrow one with steep hills rising sharply on either side. The farmhouses and livestock perched on the hills look as though they have been stuck on to the landscape, the rise is so steep. To get to Lovero one passes through Sondrio and towns such as Tirano, which has a tramcar connection to St Moritz a short distance away and a shrine to an apparition of the Madonna. Lovero is off the main road near the town of Grosio.

At the time of Battista's birth what is now Northern Italy was a fairly dangerous place. Because of its location the Valtellina was a favoured entry point for foreign armies invading the Italian Peninsula, which in the 1850's was a collection of separate states, one of which was Lombardia, Lombardy. One can imagine the effect of living under the constant threat of invasion and occupation.

Battista was one of thirteen children, all born in Lovero. His parents were farmers. When my sister visited the town she asked the town clerk to go through the records to find out what had happened to them. He went through the council and church records and produced quite a lot of information which showed how the family spread throughout Italy and to the new world – Australia and the USA. Everyone of them left the village and there are no direct descendants of Battista's parents there. There are very many members of a particular branch of the family, however, which is called Giudice Paciolata.

Lombardy was under Austrian control when Battista was born. In the 1850's the Austrian

garrison in Lombardy was a very important brake on the ambitions of all those who wished to see Italy free of Austrian influence and united. In July 1858 an agreement was reached between the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, reigned by the House of Savoy and represented by Cavour, the Prime Minister, under the patronage of King Victor Emmanuel II and Napoleon III, Emperor of France, to 'free Italy from the Alps to the Adriatic'. This involved, so far as the North of the peninsula was concerned, chasing the Austrians out of Lombardy and Venetia. In return for French help in doing this the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia would cede to France the border duchy of Savoy and the border city of Nice. Aware of the dangers which this treaty posed, the Austrians tried to pre-empt the situation by launching an invasion of the state of Piedmont in April 1859. The ensuing war between Austria and the Italian States, in particular the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, assisted by their French allies, lasted 3 months.

The Austrians were defeated in battles at Magenta and Solferino. Solferino has been described as one of the bloodiest battles of 19th century Europe. It was as a result of his experience at Solferino that the Swiss Henri Dunant later established the humanitarian organisation the Red Cross. In any event Austria was severely punished for its unsuccessful attempt to take over Piedmont and under the Treaty of Villa Franca was forced to give up Lombardy. The French Emperor stopped short on his promise to free Italy. While Lombardy was turned over to the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, Venetia, including Venice, was left in French hands. Without Austrian support the rulers of the important Northern duchies of Tuscany, Parma and Modena fled and the revolutionary governments, which replaced them, united with the House of Savoy. Over the next two years all of the disparate Italian States, with the exception of Rome and Venice, were politically united under the patriotic King Victor Emmanuel. The Kingdom of Sardinia and Piedmont's parliament was transformed into an Italian Parliament and on March 17, 1861 Victor Emmanuel II became the King of Italy.

To go back a little to 1859, the new rulers of Lombardy appear to have immediately conscripted 20-year-old males for a period of three years. Of course Battista was called up but he was granted an exemption on medical grounds because of a 'crippled left arm'. The official discharge document features the emblem of the House of Savoy, which emblem would soon appear on the

national flag (to be omitted in 1946 when Italy became a republic). After discussion with Laura Mecca of the Italian Historical Society, it appears likely that the injured left arm was a fiction or, most likely, it was a brother or a cousin who was exempted. Bogus exemptions and migration under false identity were apparently common bearing in mind this was in the days before photography.

On 6 December 1861 Battista was granted a travel pass for a journey of 15 days to go to Poschiavo, a town not far away in Switzerland. This was a trip, which was in fact to take 3 months, and was one from which he never returned. His passport was stamped at Basel on 13 December 1861 and at Lorith on the Rhine on 16 December. From there he went to Liverpool in the United Kingdom and took ship on the vessel the *Star of India*, arriving in Melbourne in March 1862 at the age of 21.

We do not know why he left, or why he chose Australia. The choice may have been affected by the fact that civil war had recently broken out in the USA. One could speculate that life in pre-unification Lombardy had fewer attractions than the goldfields of Victoria. Certainly Lombardy was a hot spot and of great strategic importance at the time of unification, being situated close to Austria. In any event to the goldfields he went. So far as we know he went straight to Bendigo. His sea chest was made of wood with reinforcing steel bands. At some point it was converted to a seat by the addition of a couple of strips of wood, which made the curved top flat, some padding and material. The chest is still in my possession.

In 1862 Bendigo was a very young town indeed, the Town Council having been formed only 6 years before in 1856. Coincidentally in that year, 1856, Rosa Lang was born in Bendigo. She was one of the very early natives of the town. On 4 November 1880 Battista and Rosa Lang were married. He was 40 and she was 25. He was described on the marriage certificate as a miner although we know that at some point he lost an arm in an accident of some kind and would not have been fit for hard physical work and that he had a successful retail business, which included sales of wine he made himself.

We know that he lost his arm sometime around 1890. I have speculated that it was his right arm. There are two pieces of evidence for this. One is that a family photograph taken well after 1890 clearly shows either a left arm or a very good



**REGIA DELEGAZIONE MANDAMENTALE**  
**DI TIRANO**

**Corteo di Passo**

Per *Giudice Battista di Michele*

Domiciliato a *Lovero*

Età, anni *22* Occhi *castani*

Professione *apicoltore* Naso

Statura *ordinaria* Bocca *regolare*

Capelli *castani* Viso

Marche particolari

Il suddetto viaggia solo

e si dirige a *Poschiavo*

Vale per la durata di *giorni quindici = 15*

S'interessano le competenti Autorità a lasciar liberamente passare il suddetto e ad accordargli assistenza nelle eventuali emergenze.

Tirano il *6 Dicembre 1861*

Il R. Delegato Mandamentale  
*G. Langgini*



imitation. (This photograph, incidentally, also supports to some degree the view that the notation on the document exempting him from military service referring to an injury to his left arm was a fraud.) The second is that his signature on the papers he signed for his naturalization in 1895 is extremely shaky and looks very much like the signature of a right hander who was forced to write with his left.

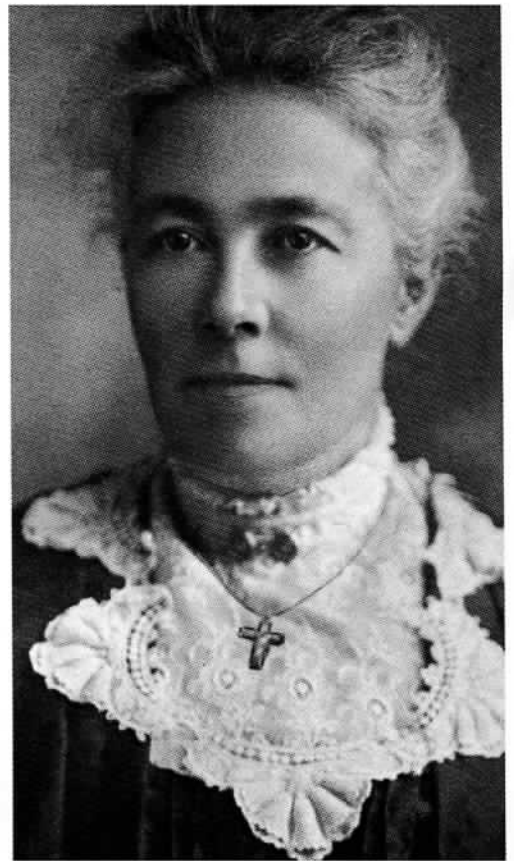
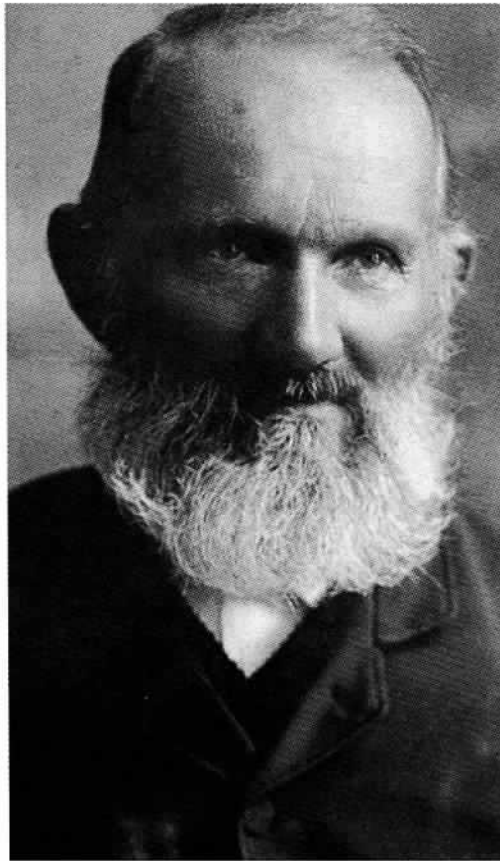
In a letter, which one of his daughters Rosina wrote in 1951, she said this about her father Battista:

*My father at 21 came to Australia and settled in Bendigo and joined the gold diggers for a time - but he was not lucky. He was more successful at wine production in addition to a general store named Lovero Cash Store. How I remember those loads of luscious grapes arriving each season for the wine making.*

It appears that Battista was fairly successful and managed to provide well for his children. Writing again in 1951,

Battista's visa issued at Tirano on 6 December 1861 for travel to Poschiavo.

Portraits of Battista and his wife Rosa.



Rosina described, in a reminiscence, what the family home was like in Kangaroo Flat, Bendigo:

*When visiting Kangaroo Flat I pass on my way along High Street, the spot where my childhood home was. There are some very fine homes on the land, but in their place I see in my mind's eye, the once lovely garden – the flowers, the many fruit trees, peaches, pears, apples etc. The trellis of vines with hanging grapes, the summer house (where I used to enjoy reading), the buggy house covered with honeysuckle and the mulberry tree – I was never much of a climber – but that tree proved irresistible. Now, of that entire garden, one pear tree remains. It was a mass of white blossom the last time I saw it as with a tear and a thought 'Woodman spare that tree' I pass on.*

Battista and Rosa had 7 children, 4 daughters and 3 sons. Considering he was 40 when he married, Battista certainly made up for lost time in a big way.

One son and three daughters moved to California and married there, displaying the same interest in migration which had led their father to Bendigo from Lovero. The three sisters married three brothers.

The fourth and youngest daughter, Rosina, received a proposal of marriage while in California but declined on the basis she

had an expectation of a proposal from a Bendigo man. She returned to Australia but the proposal never came. Sadly she died a spinster in her late eighties. She used to proudly show me a bracelet which she had received from this fellow, whom she described as her 'beau'.

Among the family possessions is a letter written by Battista's nephew in 1890. It contains some interesting passages which give an insight into the family and to what it was like to live in Italy at that time. A translation by my friend Angela Rodd some years ago accompanies this history.

My wife and I visited Lovero a few years ago, in 1999. There are few modern buildings. The village is very old and distinctly un-tourist. No doubt because of the cold the buildings have been constructed with thick stonewalls and few windows. From the outside the village is not a particularly welcoming sight. The graveyard is absolutely full of Giudice. A name, which occurs almost as frequently, is Della Bosca. The retired men of the area were working on a voluntary project to restore the local church which has some fine frescoes and a rather interesting ossuary, an enormous collection of bones from hundreds of skeletons, heaped under a rough shelter at the rear of the church, as best we could understand, a repository



The family of Battista and Rosa Giudice. c.1900.

for the bodies of victims of a plague. But we are not sure about that. We were told incidentally that the church is being restored for the village, not for tourists.

#### LETTER FROM FATHER EMILIO POLETTI

Como, April 26th, 1891

Dearest Uncle Battista,

*I remember having written a rather sour and bitter letter some years ago, because your silence indicated that you had forgotten about your mother and your family, but your behaviour later on, and the ample declarations of dearest Uncle Cosimo, have assured us that you have not forgotten your relatives at all, that you nourish the most grateful memories and the most lively affection for them, therefore I feel obliged to retract that letter, and to ask you to excuse me if any of my expressions have ever offended you.*

*Indeed, we remember you affectionately, and especially my mother always has her Battista in her heart and on her lips: therefore you can imagine her sorrow, and that of all of us, when we heard the sad news of your poor amputated arm; and since distance makes things seem worse, we were weeping as if you were already dead, so that your last letter to Uncle Cosimo, which assured us that you were partly healed, was a great comfort to us. May the Lord be praised and thanked.*

*Poor Uncle! God knows how much you have suffered, but what I don't doubt is that you*

*have offered all your sufferings to the Lord, and, resigning yourself fully to his divine will, you have acquired precious merits for eternal life. Uncle Cosimo, who is a very good man but blasphemes every now and then, on hearing about your accident, exclaimed: 'Look what he earned by being so religious and by being a gentleman'. I, with due respect, scolded him for having talked like this, which more than being blasphemous is actually swearing. Is not God the master of doing what he wants with us, his miserable creatures, without having to give us reasons for this actions? On the other hand, who is there who has not committed sins during his life? Once, a single sin could have earned hell for us, but however it is the immense goodness of God which makes us suffer something in this world to gain us mercy in the next.*

*And also, ought the good always be rewarded in this world? And is it not perhaps better to go to paradise with only one arm, than to hell with two? Besides, God sometimes purposely allows the wicked to prosper and the righteous to suffer in this world just to test our faith: guai a quelli che da si poco si lascian scandolezzare (Shame on those who refuse to accept God's will). At every painful encounter, let us bow our heads and say 'God desires it, may His holy name be blessed'.*

*Now I will give you our news which is certain to please you. I am the director and a teacher at the Maggiore Seminary, and my duty is to instruct those clerics who are already trained, and are ready to celebrate Mass. You see, the duty of giving clever, good priests to the*

church is very important, and therefore greater than my poor powers; but with the help of God one presses on. For eight months between November and July I am at Como, and I am kept very busy; but then I have four months of holidays, and I spend these, to my great consolation, in the bosom of my family. I always enjoy the best of health. I have my 13 year old younger brother Attilio with me; I make him study priestly matters but I don't know if he will succeed because he is still young, and a bit cheeky. Father and mother are still at Villa, they enjoy good health, and between the doctor and me, we make sure they lack nothing. Besides, they deserve to be rewarded for the sacrifices they have made for us. Living with them is Clorinda, who is now 16 years old, but so grown up that she looks 20. I have put her in boarding school for 3 years, and I assure you that, more than being just a young girl, she is an angel.

Uncle Bartolo is always the most peaceful man in the world; he eats and drinks and ... *lascia andare l'acqua in giù ed il fumo in su.* (lets the water run down and the smoke go up).

Your uncle the priest is chaplain at Lovero, and they like him very much. Your brother Paolo is a doctor at Mazzo, he excels at it and earns 6,000 francs a year. But more importantly, he has remained a good Christian, and is in a position to give a good example. So far he has just 2 children who are growing up good, beautiful and charming. The Lord blesses his own. Aunt Giovannina is always being of use to Sondrio, and is so extraordinarily fat that she suffers from it. Aunt Menighina, what with her husband Giacomo, who is a man of no importance, and her children, for whom she cares little, causes much misery between them. Poor Aunt Ostina, who had the misfortune of marrying a brutal husband, spends her days in the greatest unhappiness and ruins her body and soul: she could not be more unfortunate than this. Aunt Caterina, whom I like especially, was fortunate to marry Clemente Meruzzi, who is rich, honest and devout: but, as everyone has a cross to bear, so has she. The poor thing has 2 stepchildren who give her some sorrow, and I fear that they will give her more trouble in future.

I cannot tell you anything about the 3 uncles at Lovero, as it is 6 months since I have seen them. Regarding the general news in these parts, I will tell you that things are going rather badly. We have an evil government which not only fleeces us with taxes, but what is worse, persecutes the Church and our holy religion in every way, and faith, especially in the city, is always put last. The Lord is weary, and continues to send punishments.

For some years the seasons haven't been good and the vines have a new disease whereby the leaves drop before their time and the grapes

are mouldy: then it seemed that a remedy had been found, but during the winter a very intense cold dried up a great number of vines, whereby the harvest this year was seriously affected: further to this there are taxes and a thousand other expenses which the majority don't know how to avoid. And what is worse, people are so blind that they no longer understand that it is the finger of God, and they persist even more in doing evil. Therefore I predict, I don't doubt that soon tremendous punishments will come which will purge the world of much wickedness

Regarding you, dearest uncle, I heard with great pleasure that you have maintained the love of our holy religion alive in your heart, and that you are bringing up your children devoutly. The world passes, and life escapes, and at the moment of death nothing will matter to us - whether we have been rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy, lucky or unlucky - except that we have been good Christians. You there do not have the convenience of attending church like us, but remember that God is everywhere, and make a Sanctuary of your home, and gather your family together every evening to recite the holy Rosary. Don't let a day pass without reciting this beautiful prayer, and also, always remember St. Joseph. Let Jesus, Joseph and Mary be beloved by you both in life and in death, and I assure you that if we do not see each other again on this earth, we will undoubtedly find each other in Paradise.

Send me two lines in reply, and address it to Villa. Give my warmest greetings to your wife, my most beloved aunt, who, they tell me, is such a good woman. Give a kiss to your dearest little children for me, and I promise you that I will always remember you all in the Holy Sacrament of Mass.

I send you an affectionate kiss and embrace, and declare myself always your dearest and most affectionate nephew,

Father D. (Don) Emilio Poletti