

THE GARIBALDI CLUB

Home to the Italian settlers in Wellington

This edited extract is taken from pages 71 to 85 of the book Alla Fine Del Mondo - To The Ends of The Earth by Paul Elenio, published by the Petone Settlers Museum and the Club Garibaldi in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1995 to commemorate the centenary of the founding of the Club Garibaldi in 1882 and to tell the history of Italian migration to the Wellington region. All the illustrations used in this article have been taken from the book.

Giuseppe Garibaldi is the most popular hero of the Unification of Italy during the 19th century. This period is also known as the "Risorgimento". He was named "The hero of two worlds" for his involvement in uprisings for the unification of some South American countries. News of his courageous battles and of his ideals of unity and freedom crossed the world and gained him many admirers and supporters, especially in the English speaking world. In 1861 the Italian and Australian communities of Melbourne expressed their admiration for Garibaldi by sending him a gift of a Sword of Honour. It was with the financial assistance of his friends in the British nobility that Garibaldi bought the island of Caprera, off the coast of Sardinia, where he retired and died on June 2, 1882.

A month after Garibaldi's death, a group of Italian settlers living in Wellington met to form a club, which they named in his honour. The founders of the club included several anti-clerical and republican followers of Garibaldi who had preferred to live in exile rather than be subservient to the King of Italy.

One of Wellington's leading newspapers of the time, the *New Zealand Mail*, reported on July 8 1882:

Some of the Italian residents in this city have taken preliminary steps towards the formation of a club on a similiar basis to the Working Men's Club already existing in this city. They propose occupying premises in Courtenay Place suitable for the purpose, and to adopt the title of 'The Garibaldi Club'. At a meeting held on Saturday last the following officers were elected for the first six months: Signor Cenci, President; Signor Innocenti, Vice-President; Mr George Robertson, Secretary; Signor Calcinai, Treasurer; Messrs Agorio and Cimino, Councillors. On the motion of Signor Frandi, Dr Diver was unanimously elected Honorary President, and a deputation was appointed to wait on him to ask his acceptance of the office.

Membership was not limited to Italians. George Robertson, the Secretary, was of Scottish origin.

He was born in Livorno, where his engineer father was engaged in building a railway, and came to New Zealand in the 1870s. He was a fluent speaker of Italian and assisted the Italian community for many years, being rewarded by the Italian Government with the title of Cavaliere for his efforts.

The new club adopted the motto '*Fratellanza, Educazione, Lavoro*' - Brotherhood, Education, Work. It was registered as a friendly society in 1883.

The fledgling club seems to have done well in the first few years. George Robertson was to write a letter to the Registrar of Friendly Societies in March 1884: "*The institution is still steadily progressing both financially and otherwise.*" That year's income totalled £366 13s 6d, £153 being members' contributions and £213 13s 6d received from bar sales. By 1888 the club had dwindled to a few members and had no assets. The President, J.H. Pagni, explained to the Registrar of Friendly Societies:

The few members that are left now, have bound themselves together in order to keep the name of the institution alive, with the hope that we will be able to restore it to its former condition.

The club struggled on through the 1890s, with membership reaching a high of 43 in 1892 and a low of 13 in 1894. Funds remained at about £5

throughout this period. In 1899 the club moved to Vivian Street, and refurnished rooms there at some expense.

With the beginning of the new century, the club entered a period of growth. In the first five months of 1900, membership doubled to 54. By the end of the year there were 78 members. Clubrooms were established in Ghuznee Street from 1903, first at No 3 and then at No 1. Over the next few years alterations were made to the clubrooms and more furniture was bought.

A syndicate for importing Italian food was formed on 3 August 1901 and named *La Previdente*. The goods imported included oil, wine and cheeses, staples of Italian cooking which the community couldn't buy in shops in Wellington. The activities of this syndicate continued for many years.

Shareholders			
23	Jacquillo	Giovanni	16
24	Pellicani	Luigi	16
25	Leoni	Francesco	16
26	Lucchesi	Fortunato	16
27	Landi	Giulio	16
28	Scapicchi	Orlando	16
29	Marchetti	Antonio	17
30	Arzuffo	Bonifacio	18
31	Arzuffo	Francesco	18
32	Milesi	Giovanni	18
33	Milesi	Luca	18
34	Arzuffo	Luigi	20
35	Arzuffo	Luigi	18
36	D'Annunzio		18
37	Baggi	Giovanni	20
38	Baroni	Antonio	21
39	Baroni	Angela	22
40	Baroni	Barolo	23
41	Paladino	Raffaele	23
42	Baroni	Francesco	23
43	Baroni	Felice	23
44	Robertson	Don. Giorgio	23

Some of the shareholders of the food importing syndicate, 1917. (Private collection)

The club's income came from memberships, entrance fees and socials. It provided facilities such as a bar and library, with books and newspapers. A billiard cloth was bought in 1916 at a cost of £8. In the first year receipts from billiards were £19 1s 6d. Steadily growing

receipts from billiards in subsequent years indicated that it was a popular activity.

Charitable collections were part of the club's work. Throughout the First World War regular donations were made to the Italian Red Cross. There were special collections for local needy as well as for the Italian earthquake in 1915. Money was collected not only from members, but also from the wider Italian community in Wellington.

By the end of 1918 membership stood at 111, the first time it had reached over 100. The following year the club moved to 93 Taranaki Street, where it remained until 1929 when it moved to 270 Wakefield Street. The 1920s and 30s was a period of growth, although membership fluctuated from year to year. By 1939 there were 220 members.

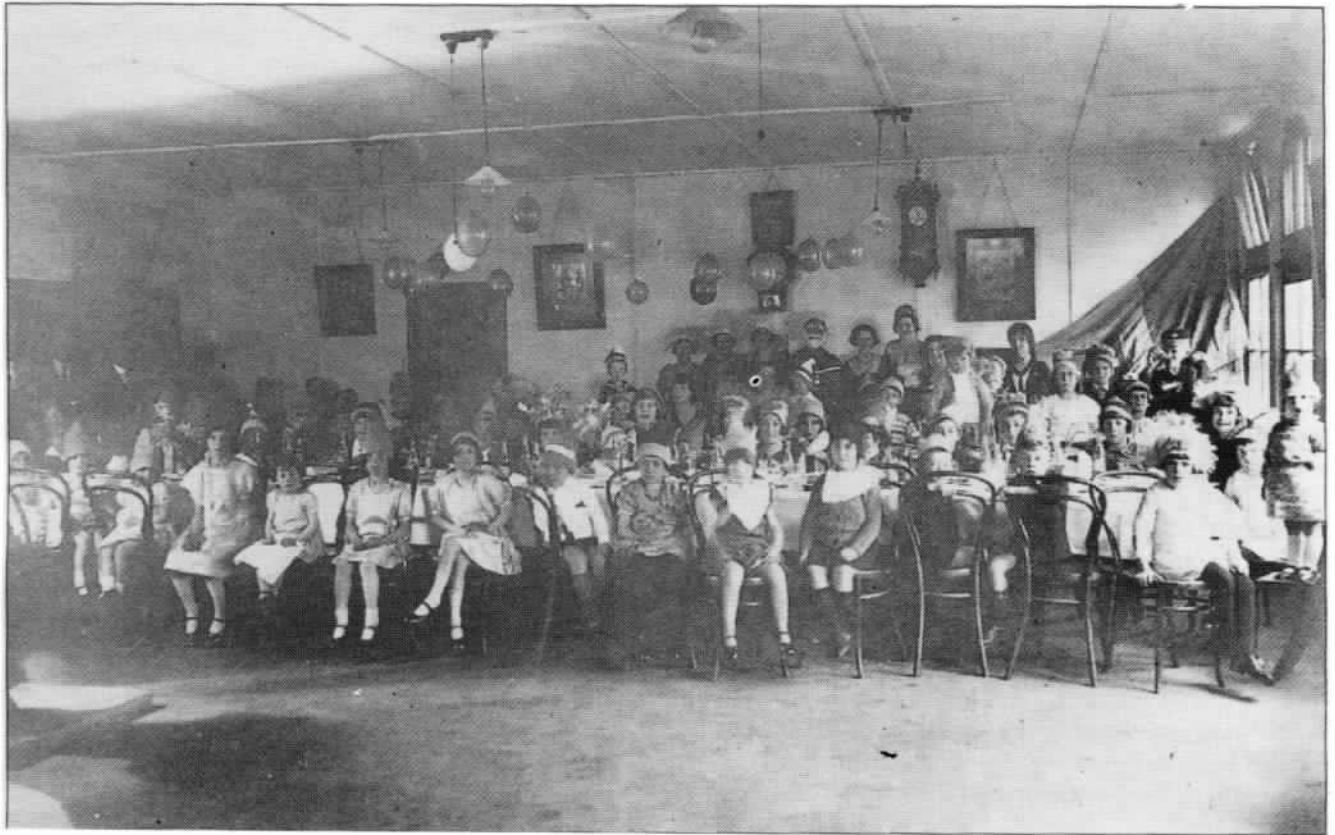
Men aged 21 or more were eligible for membership. The procedure was for the name of a prospective member to be put on the noticeboard for one month, and if there were no objections from members, the applicant was able to join.

The clubrooms were open every day, providing members and friends with a place to meet, have a drink, and play cards, bowls or billiards. The visitors' book at this time shows many people of non-Italian origin visited the club. There were two full-time barmen who, in addition to serving drinks, sold supplies of imported Italian food and wine. Meals were available too, and some single men ate most of their meals there.

Dances and social evenings were a regular feature of club activities, and were well attended. In 1932 the 50th Jubilee was celebrated with a musical evening followed by supper and dancing. A party was also held for the children of members. Other popular events were the annual picnic, held at Hutt Park, and the Christmas party, attended by the whole family. Fred Ferretti recalls how as a child he enjoyed these events because the children were all given lollies and balloons.

The club also provided assistance and support members. Help was given to recent immigrants to New Zealand and men in need of a job would frequently find work with another club member. When there was a funeral, the club paid for taxis for the mourners because so few people had cars.

These activities came to a halt in the 1940s, after Italy entered the Second World War. The



A children's party to celebrate the club's 50th jubilee in 1932. (Private collection)

club went into recess over the war years, when there was strong public feeling about Italians, particularly when being seen to enjoy themselves while Kiwi soldiers were fighting in North Africa.

The club started up again after the war. A leading figure in the reopening was Joe Milano, a fish worker and restaurateur who had previously been President. The members of the first committee after the war were Darby De Menech, Frank Ferretti, Primo Menara and Alfredo Mitri.

To build the club funds, members were asked to pay £15 to rejoin, with the subscription being £5 a year after that. The club's activities were similar to those before the war. However the clubrooms were open only from Friday to Sunday evening. It was still a major meeting place for the Italian community. A migrant of the 1950s recalls he went there often to talk to other people because Italian was spoken, and he hadn't yet learnt good English. The full-time barman and custodian continued to sell the food and wine imported from Italy by the club. The stocks included vermouth, wine, pasta, tinned fish such as herring, anchovies, sardines and tuna, as well as large quantities of olive oil and cheese.

During the 1950s dances at the club were held fortnightly on a Saturday, with a band from Lower Hutt being the regular performers. Drinking was not permitted while dancing, so at 8.30pm a slide was lowered on the bar for the duration of the dance.

The club had been in existence virtually without incident for 75 years when one event suddenly brought its name to everyone's lips and even today mention of the club sparks memories. In September 1957 the club's custodian, Angelo Odorico, was murdered. Late one evening, when all the members had gone home, Angelo La Mattina remained and asked Odorico if he could take the club's cash float for a loan he needed. Odorico declined. When La Mattina then asked to purchase something, Odorico bent down to get it and La Mattina hit him over the head with a jar of olives. La Mattina stole the day's takings, £97. Odorico was later found dead. The murder investigation included interviews of those members who had been the last to see the custodian alive. The Wellington newspapers were full of the story. The stolen money was found in a drain at the house La Mattina was staying at. For the police the case was notable because it was the first time fingerprinting was used as evidence. The trial grabbed headlines

for days. There were claims that the killing was an affair of the heart, that the two men vied for the attentions of the same woman. This was not correct. La Mattina was sentenced to death but had a stroke of luck. The Labour Government of Walter Nash abolished the death penalty and La Mattina was sentenced to life in prison. He became notorious as a frequent escapee from prison and there were suspicions that he was harboured by Italians. He was deported to Italy in 1974, apparently to serve yet another jail term there.

The killing had even greater repercussions for the club. The police who investigated the murder had done a stocktake of the club's bar immediately afterwards. A few months later, the club was raided by police investigating breaches of the licensing laws. Bert Monastra, who was on the door that day, initially refused to let them in but when the police threatened to break the door down with an axe, he opened the door. The club's stocks of liquor were confiscated. The police took two hours to take the liquor away, using six jeeps as transport.

Eventually the liquor was returned. The club's legal representative argued in court that the alcohol was the individual property of members, so the committee set about dividing up the alcohol among individual members. Parcels were made up containing about £5 worth of liquor which were then given to members who were asked to pay £5 for them.

Membership had been high in the 1950s, reaching a peak of 242 in 1956. It fell below 200 in the late 1950s, and by 1960 there were only 102 members. There was modest growth in numbers during the 1960s, but membership never approached the heights of the previous decade.



A typical club afternoon where members met and played cards or bowls in the 1950s. (Private collection)

After some time at 270 Wakefield Street and in Kent Terrace, the club bought its first property at 230 Wakefield Street in 1961. The purchase was financed by debentures taken out by many members. Some lent particularly large sums of money, most notably a huge contribution from the Zandi family who lent £11,400 and one from Frank Ferretti who lent £6000. The club was located on the top floor, whilst the first and ground floors were rented out to businesses.

The club continued to be active in the 1960s and was still a popular meeting place for Italians with about 80 people attending on a Sunday. They spent their time playing cards and bowls. The card games were old Italian ones - scopa, sette bello, bestia, cinquilio, quartilio - played with a traditional Italian pack of cards, the suits being coins, cups, clubs and spades. The club wasn't licensed, so each member had a locker with his name on it in which he kept his preferred drink, be it wine, spirits or whatever. Each member had a key to their own locker with the custodian having a key to all lockers. The loser in a card game would shout the other players a drink from his private supply. Social games of bowls were played on Sundays, while on Wednesday nights there were bowling competitions. There was a cup the Club Garibaldi and the Yugoslav Club would compete for about twice a year, the competition being held on the premises of whichever club currently held the cup. There were also competitions within the club itself to find the club's bowling champion. These bowling competitions continued until the mid-1980s. The club also had representatives in interclub bowls and some players became known as excellent bowlers.

For years the major social event for other ethnic clubs had been their annual ball. The Club Garibaldi held its first ball in 1961 and continued to do so until the 1980s when balls went out of fashion and were regarded as too expensive to run. During the early 1970s the club's appeal as a social gathering point dwindled. Like other clubs, it was affected by the abolition of 6 o'clock closing, which gave people a greater choice of places to meet for a drink. The younger generation also liked to socialise in a variety of places and did not come to the club as often as their parents had. In the 1960s the club was open on both Saturdays and Sundays but, because of the changing times, the club gradually reduced its opening hours to Sundays only in the 1970s.

In 1982 the Club celebrated its 100th jubilee



A club ball in 1961. From left: Dominic Di Mattina, Vince Criscillo, Tony Paino, Vince Barnao, Betti Barnao, Stella Criscillo, Janie Di Mattina, x, Giuseppina Paino. (Private collection)

with a lavish Centennial Ball held at the Majestic Cabaret, attended by 500 people from the Italian community. The warmth generated by the great night only served to mask a painful fact: membership of the club was declining and the club's building was in a severe state of decay. Although the Club was financially healthy, its membership was down to 40. No one was prepared to make the financial commitment to refurbish the building, which was sold in the late years of 1980 for NZ\$ 800,000.

After a short period in temporary rooms, the club bought the former Cricketer's Arms Tavern complex on the corner of Vivian and Tory Streets. Renovations were carried out to the top floor of the property and the new club opened in March 1992.

Even before the new clubrooms were contemplated, members agreed something needed to be done to increase the club's membership. A special committee was set up to review the constitution which had last been updated by a member of the executive in the early 1960s. The new approved document provided for women of Italian extraction to become members and spouses of Italians to be

eligible for membership. For the first time women could serve on the executive committee and in 1994 there was a further milestone when members voted in the first woman office holder, Nina Cuccurello, taking over as secretary from Armando Gilmoni who stepped down after more than 20 years in the position.

The club has branched out into other activities of a cultural nature, such as the formation of children's tarantella groups and an Italian ladies' choir. The club has become the venue for a number of music nights and variety shows, from opera to comedy. In 1992 the club established two soccer teams and some young members formed the "Garibaldini" group to organise functions and get-togethers. Support was given for an oral history project to record and preserve the precious memories of some 30 older Italian migrants. In 1995 the club also moved to install a memorial on Somes Island to mark the years of internment on the island of Italians during the Second World War.

Whilst new ways are constantly sought to promote Italian language, culture and traditions, the history of the club's earlier members will be always remembered.

ALLA FINE DEL MONDO
To The Ends of The Earth
by Paul Elenio

A photographic and historical record of Italian migration and settlement in Wellington and the Hutt Valley.

Contents: 1. All in a Name; 2. Origins; 3. Fishermen (Eastbourne, Island Bay, Makara); 4. Market Gardens (Hutt Valley); 5. Business People; 6. Enemy Aliens (Internment of Italians on Somes Island during the Second World War); 7. Club Garibaldi.

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