

The Italian Contribution to North-East Victoria

by His Excellency the Honourable Sir James Gobbo, A.C. Governor of Victoria

The Italian Historical Society Journal takes great pleasure in publishing the George Mackay Pioneer Oration given in the Wangaratta Town Hall on Thursday, 23 October 1997 by the founder of our Society, Sir James Gobbo.

President of the Wangaratta Historical Society, the Honourable Bill Baxter, the Honourable Janette Powell, both MLCs for the north-eastern Province, the Honourable Ken Jasper, Member for Murray Valley, distinguished Council members, other distinguished guests including Fathers Jones and Ware, and ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure and a great honour to be asked to give this oration. Perhaps I should begin by describing in a little more detail some of those links that make me particularly interested in the history of Italians in Victoria.

I had a somewhat strange upbringing in two countries. My parents came here in 1928 and I was born in 1931. My father had a very hard time of it in the Depression as there was no work in his craft of terrazzo making. Life was so hard in Melbourne that my father decided to move to Kerang, about 230 kilometres north north-west of Melbourne. Eventually, because of my father's on-going ill-health, in 1934 we all returned to Italy. I was brought up there until I was 7; we came back to Australia in 1938 because my father and mother were determined to return to this great country to prove that they could succeed. Which they did.

When my parents came back in 1938, my father could not pursue his trade as a terrazzo-maker and contractor, so he purchased a restaurant opposite the Victoria Market, which had the very strange name of the St. Kilda Grill Room. What on earth the St. Kilda Grill Room was doing in North Melbourne, opposite the Victoria Market, we never quite understood. But we didn't change the name to Café Roma or something equivalent because we did not want to frighten away Australian clients. So for years it remained the St. Kilda Grill Room. I thought it must have been some lonely St. Kilda football club supporter who had originally named it, but I later found out that St. Kilda was an island in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland; no doubt Mr. George Mackay would approve of my early links with Scotland through the St. Kilda Grill Room.

Of course the relevance of this to my present visit to country Victoria was that, being opposite the Victoria Market, all the growers from far and wide came into the restaurant right through the succeeding 10 years that we lived there. Many of the patrons were from Werribee, where there were irrigated market gardens, but some were also from this part of the world: in fact, quite a number came from Shepparton and Cobram as well as from the other side of Melbourne and Narre Warren.

So, as a small boy growing up in my father's restaurant and helping to serve at the tables, I came to know many of the customers who were market gardeners and even on occasions I would spend short holidays with them. When an Italian grower had a wedding we were always invited. And you know what Italian weddings are like; everybody gets invited. It is a mortal insult just to ask Mr and Mrs, you have got to ask Mr and Mrs and family and that means right down to the smallest kids. The guest list could include up to six or seven hundred people. Anyway, we were included and I must say as a small child I found it fascinating – that is how I came in contact with Italian growers and people on the land.

My father, however, always said to me *'Impara l'arte e mettila da parte'* – to try and translate that into English is not easy but literally it might mean 'learn a skill and fill the till'. It was very good advice. My advice to people who worry about getting a university degree, which Italians call a *laurea*, is to say that the art or the skill is more important than the degree. If you are very good at your trade in this country, you have a great future. Merely having a degree does not provide employment, but having a real skill, real qualifications, being really good at your job, whatever that job is, is going to advance the person in dignity and in prosperity. That was, therefore, the best advice my father ever gave me. Whatever I did I had the desire, which was encouraged in me, to do it well. Anyway I digress too much on background and I move on to my topic which is the 'Italian Contribution to North-East Victoria'.

The earliest presence of Italians in this area was brought about by the discovery of gold at Jamieson in 1854. One of the very earliest indications of Italians arriving in the area was at a place called Politti's Creek. Politti was one of the early miners. Some of the other early names of those who came here as gold miners, who are still well known around Wangaratta, were the Ribecchis, the Comensolis and the Lardis.

Ribecchi was the master of ceremonies at the opening of the Cassilis Hall in Wangaratta in 1889. Another early family was the Comensolis, and I am delighted that tonight a direct descendant is present here to propose one of the toasts. Bartolo Comensoli came here in 1890, if not earlier. He was a vine grower from near Brescia in Lombardy. First he worked in the gold mines at Chiltern and then settled in this area.

Beechworth was also very important in those early days of gold and the earliest Italian family that we know of who settled there was the De Piazzas who came from the Ticino in the far north of Italy. Battista De Piazza came to Victoria in 1863. His great contribution was that he planted a large number of chestnut trees. In Italy, as we know, chestnut trees are highly valued; they are not only very beautiful but above all you can eat the chestnuts or *castagne* which, with red wine on a cold winter's night, is really a marvellous treat. There are still beautiful chestnut trees in Beechworth today.



Battista De Piazza with his second child, Battista, c1890. From The History and Family Tree of Catherine and Battista De Piazza 1870-1980 by Patricia De Piazza, Mudgegon, 1980.

De Piazza was also instrumental in setting up the Myrtleford Butter Factory Co-operative Company in 1903. De Piazza married Catherine O'Brien and the marriage produced 14 children. It was common for early Italian male settlers to marry Irish women as there were very few single Italian females in the colony. They are both buried in the Myrtleford Cemetery.

A similar marriage was that of Carlo Lardi to Mary Tully in 1862. They had 12 children. Here again Lardi began in goldmining but moved to fruitgrowing, also supplying shoring timber to mining companies. One of his daughters, Adele, was a scholarship student at the Star of the Sea Convent in Gardenvale and eventually became a nun and teacher at the school. Mother Sebastian, as she was known, was Principal of that School from 1928 to 1946. In 1946 Mother Sebastian was appointed Mother General of the Presentation Sisters, an office she held for twelve years. In 1958 she was elected by the various States as Mother President of the newly formed Society of Australian Presentation Congregations. Mother Sebastian was 81 years of age at the time of her appointment as President but age did not deter her from travelling regularly to every State in Australia where there were Presentation Sisters.

Mother Sebastian Lardi was renowned for her holiness, her wisdom and her strength, and was revered. She died on 15th October 1979 aged 102 years. Her memory is perpetuated in the name of the school hall – Sebastian Hall.

One of the earliest Italian settlers in the Bright area was Antonio Masciorini who came to Australia in 1859. He first worked on the Gabo Island Lighthouse and later as a miner in Bendigo. In 1867 he purchased a drapery store in Wandiligong which a photograph shows with the name A. Masheoreny. It is heartening to find that a large store conducted by his descendants in Bright is shown in a 1987 photograph with the sign A. Masciorini, est. 1867. The store is still flourishing and is conducted by John Masciorini, a direct descendant of Antonio Masciorini.

Some of the early miners soon left the goldfields and pursued other occupations in North-East Victorian areas such as Echuca. One such miner was Ambrogio Rapochioli, sometimes Rapacioli. There are still descendants in the Echuca district, the family having produced University academics, tradespeople and war servicemen over the years.

Echuca also benefitted from the skills of a Lombard barge builder called Buzza who built barges to carry timber from his sawmill at Echuca. One barge, the Emily Jane, launched in 1875, was said to be able to carry 170 tons of timber.

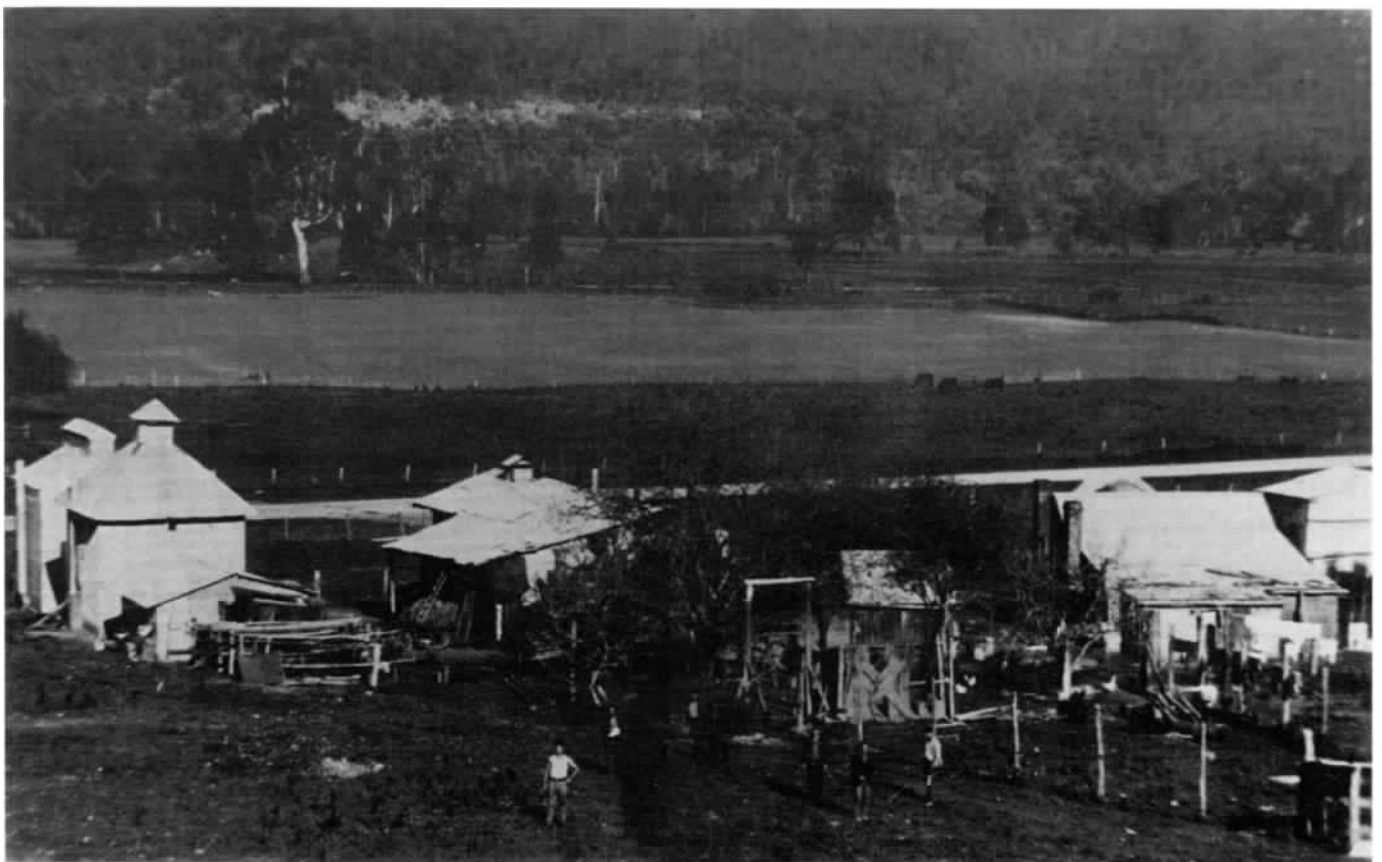
In another part of North-East Victoria, namely Rutherglen, a significant contribution was made, the benefit of which endures to this day. Romeo Bragato, who came to Victoria from Conegliano in the Veneto region, was a qualified viticulturalist. He was appointed the Victorian Government's viticulturalist in 1880 and became especially interested in the North-East of Victoria. The records show that he gave great support to the Brown Brothers whose vineyard was one of the first vineyards at Rutherglen at that time. He set up the Government Viticultural College at Rutherglen in 1896, which still survives and was one of the earliest colleges of its kind. It changed its name to the Victorian Research Centre and more recently was renamed the Institute for Integrated Agricultural Development – it is about seven miles south of Rutherglen on the Chiltern Road. At the turn of the century, it had some 50 students there learning viticulture.

Bragato made a very important contribution by

encouraging the settlers in the area to become interested in vine-growing and by assisting vine-growers in regeneration of vineyards devastated by the phylloxera plague of the 1870s. Some of the replacement vines came from California.

I would like to share with you a link with Californian vines. When I returned to the Veneto in my youth, I noticed that the local wine which was always served, was a very strong, very thick red called Crinto. Crinto I thought sounded a little strange and when I asked was this Crinto a grape variety, nobody could tell me. I was talking to a experienced viticulturist recently and he told me that Crinto was in fact an American grape called Clinton which was brought in from California in the 1880s to replace the phylloxera – damaged vines. The Veneti apparently could not say Clinton, so this much loved local wine is still called Crinto.

Two other areas which were of significance in the story of Italian settlement were Shepparton and Cobram. They became more important in the twentieth century because of the major irrigation programmes. Both Shepparton and Cobram have very high Italian populations. Those areas were made famous because of the cultivation of



Tobacco kilns and farm of Fulvio Valmorbida in the Owens Valley, in 1920s.

fruit, but above all of tomatoes. I know that the market gardeners brought large amounts of their crops down to Melbourne. Many Italian homes in Melbourne bought cases of tomatoes to make the 'conserva' sauce which was then decanted into beer bottles with crown seals. In our home in Carlton we also used to decant wine into beer bottles from barrels of wine. We never had much trouble with the wine but the sauce bottles sometimes exploded and when a sauce bottle exploded it made a terrible mess in the cellar or cupboard.

Tatura figures prominently in Italian settlement as many post-war settlers grew tomatoes and fruit there and some were dairy farmers. One such settler was Rocco Villani who first came to Australia in the 1920s from his village of San Marco in Lamis in the province of Foggia. He returned to Italy but came to Australia again in 1939. This time he settled in Tatura where he made steady progress, so much so that in 1947 he was joined by his mother and five younger siblings. The family's achievements and progress are well described in the book *Making it in Australia* by L. Hawthorne.

Let me move on to probably the most significant area of settlement, namely the Ovens Valley area and the tobacco farms there. Now it is a moot point as to who were the first of the Italian farmers in the Ovens Valley, about 1924-25. Fulvio Valmorbida and his wife Agnese, who were both from near Vicenza, came out in 1925 and settled in the Ovens Valley where they grew tobacco. They lived there for about five years, became Australian citizens and then went back to Italy. The Valmorbidas came back to Victoria after the Second World War and eventually set up a flourishing business principally importing olive oil and food products from Italy. The business was headed by Carlo Valmorbida, who became the acknowledged leader of the large Italian community of Victoria. Carlo Valmorbida was one of the main moving forces in the development of the Assisi Centre (hostel and nursing home) in Melbourne and is still its Honorary President.

Alongside the Valmorbida family in

the mid 1920s were the Delboscos. Guido Delbosco, who came from Rovereto in Trento, married a Casarotto from Vicenza and they had two sons and two daughters. One of those daughters is now Dulcie Kennedy and I had a conversation with her only a few days ago. Dulcie is married to John Kennedy who coached Hawthorn and North Melbourne and is the Chairman of the AFL. Dulcie has a marvellous memory of the history of this area and was able to give me very reliable information about the early days.

Another early family was the Cavedon family. Remigio Cavedon came to Victoria in 1927. He started off being a share-farmer for an Australian tobacco farmer and then eventually purchased his own property of some 43 acres at Eurobin. Another property at Eurobin is now the beautiful and successful Emu and Deer Farm and restaurant complex conducted by a branch of the Cavedon family. Amongst those early tobacco farmers in the 1920s was Giuseppe Piazza who

messadri in qualsiasi circostanza il bosco, anzichè questi dovranno tagliare e condurre a proprie spese fino ai forni tutta la legna occorrente per cuocere il tabacco tutto completo.

6.) Cavalli e stesseri appiccolitici occorranza messadri in qualsiasi circostanza per la lavorazione della terra, il proprietario dovrà esporre tutto ciò a disposizione di essi.

7.) Il raccolto cioè il prodotto, il proprietario e i messadri si convengono così: Il 40% quaranta per 100 del prodotto intero verrà incassato dal proprietario sig. Cavedon. Il 60% sessanta per 100 del prodotto intero verrà incassato dai suddetti messadri.

8.) Su commissione del N° 2 la spesa del quaranta per 100 tocca al proprietario, e il sessanta per 100 tocca ai messadri.

Letto e firmato e in conferma di due testimoni

Il proprietario: Emilio Cavedon

I messadri: A. Casarotto
Carlo Casarotto
Matilde Fortunato

I testimoni: Giuseppe Neri
Severino Bette

Section of the contract stipulated between Remigio Cavedon and three Italian migrant workers for share farming of tobacco in Eurobin in 1931.

settled in Eurobin. His son Dino Piazza became a councillor and the head valuer of the Tobacco Production Board. And in another group of tobacco growers, this time from Calabria, was the Sciutto family who came from near Catanzaro.

In that pre-war period the settlers that were the best represented, in terms of numbers, were those from Trento, from the Veneto, especially Treviso and Vicenza, Ascoli Piceno, and of course from Calabria. After the Second World War the immigrants came from a much broader selection of Italian regions.

A very detailed and scholarly unpublished doctoral thesis by Dr Daphne Phillips, written in 1968, entitled 'Italians and Australians in the Ovens Valley Area' contains a valuable survey and analysis of the role of Italian migrants in that valley.

One of the principal migrant families in the post-war period was the Pizzini family. Its story and the rigours of tobacco growing are well described in *Memories of Oxley 1862-1994* by Graham Jones. At one stage Arnaldo Pizzini had two hundred and fifty acres of tobacco farm land in the King Valley. Now most of that has been converted to vines and the Pizzini brothers are growing Nebbiolo, Sangiovese and Barbera grapes and producing much Italian variety wine.

When I was a barrister some three decades ago, I had an unpopular brief and I have some hesitation in mentioning it in this company. The State Rivers and Water Supply Commission was building the Buffalo Dam and, later, the King Dam; it acquired some tobacco farms including a tobacco farm owned, if I remember correctly, by one Michellini. The State Rivers, with unfortunate timing, acquired this property at the height of a boom in tobacco. There was a tremendous argument about the price because people were paying very high prices in the 1960s for land in those valleys. I had the task as a barrister for the State Rivers in coming along and trying to defend the rather inadequate offers of compensation that my client was making for this land. Preparation for the case involved me in being flown to the area in a single-engine plane from Moorabbin on a foggy morning. We flew into the Yarra Valley and the fog grew thicker and thicker so that we had to turn back. There was little room to turn and we almost crashed into the trees on the side of the valley as we did so. We

cleared the trees by a few feet. I wonder what would have happened to my young widow and five small children had we crashed! As a sequel the pilot, who was very experienced but also worked as a dentist, was killed in an air crash a few years later.

The life of tobacco farmers was an extraordinarily hard one, especially in the pre-war period, when there were terrible problems with blue mould. Until they discovered that benzol could overcome the blue mould disease, it was not uncommon to lose a whole crop through blue mould. There was an enormous amount of work involved in tobacco-farming, not just the planting and growing of the crops but also the drying process. The early kilns were wood-fired, not the oil kilns or gas-fired ones of today. Those wood-fired kilns required the farmers to sit up all night feeding them with wood lest the temperature fall. They were hard years, but particularly for the women who had to work in the fields, hoeing the tobacco plants. The plants themselves had to be grown to seedling stage somewhere else where they were likely to grow in a more healthy condition.

Dr Phillips' survey of Italian growers in the Ovens Valley shows that by 1961 71% of the tobacco growers were Italian-born and nearly three-quarters of the tobacco industry was in the hands of Italian growers.

The heavy burdens of tobacco growing and other intensive agriculture created many pressures. They imposed social pressure on those men who came as unaccompanied migrants. Last century, generally speaking, they married Irish women but this century they more often went back to Italy to seek a bride. Sometimes they got a wife by proxy (*procura*). I had the pleasure recently of launching probably the only book written in Australia about proxy brides. It describes how these marriages took place in this formal way because parents on the other side of the world would not let their daughters go unless they were already married before they left home. The marriage actually took place in the Church of the bride in Italy with someone – a proxy – standing in for the bridegroom who was, of course, somewhere in Australia. The marriage was not a guarantee that things would work out; there were examples of the boat arriving and the bride refusing to leave the cabin to disembark. Sometimes the man cheated a little and sent a picture of himself that was some twenty years

old. One farmer spoke of being *imbrogliato*, that is, taken in. Some cases which went awry created considerable problems for the priests. Moreover, there were only a limited number who could speak English. Eventually the Church decreed that there were to be no more proxy marriages because of all the problems. I think the last such marriage took place in 1969.

At the book launch in Melbourne I met a number of these proxy brides. They said their marriages worked out because they did not start off with any over-romantic ideas. One said, one did not come because one was marrying a film star, one came because this was something worthwhile. It also offered a start in the New World. Such marriages were often on a sound footing and usually worked out.

In farming, there was a problem for the children too. The demanding life of intensive agriculture created some problems in the upbringing of children. At times, demands were made on the whole family, with everyone having to pitch in. Italian migrants had come with the aim of seeing that their children secured the kind of education which they did not have. So the boys in particular were encouraged to go to, and stay at, school. But if the family were farmers and were busy and prosperous, the boys usually gave up school to work on the farm. As a consequence many young Italians or children of Italians did not pursue their education.

But there were often positive outcomes; for example, as the children grew up, they intermarried, resulting in a mixture of cultures. There is a very interesting book called *Growing Up Italian in Australia* which has a series of stories about growing up Italian. One of them is by Gianfranca Damaschi who describes how her father, who was Italian, and her mother, an Australian, tried very hard to make sure that the Italian linkages were not lost. She gives a splendid description of Christmas dinners in her home. In a way, it is very similar to my own case because I married an Australian not of Italian origin and every year our Christmas dinner was a peculiar mixture of Italian and Australian. We would start with some seafood which is very Australian – oysters, prawns and so on, and then we would have tortellini in brodo, every Christmas without fail. Even if the temperature was 40 degrees we would have hot soup with tortellini in it, then turkey with about six veg-

etables, followed by plum pudding, and then we would revert to the Italian things such as panettone dipped in spumante.

Another aspect to be considered in the life of Italian families here was the role of religion. The Catholic church played an important role for these migrants. There was a tendency in Italy for some Italian men to regard going to church as almost a social event. They would dress up, go to church and sit outside and talk to other men while the women were inside praying. The attitude was that, if one was anti-clerical in Italy, one had to be seen to be anti-clerical. Some of this survived here in Australia in a small way. Interestingly enough, that attitude of anti-clericalism and suspicion of priests was disarmed because Australian priests were very much more open and very much more engaging. Indeed a number of the Australian priests spoke Italian, as we know one of our priests present tonight does, because Australian priests used to go to Italy to complete their training. That was a very big plus although it did present a problem. Archbishop Mannix had a rule, during the War, that there could only be a sermon in Italian if there was also a sermon in English. So, when you went to the Italian mass, you got a sermon in both English and Italian. This was very trying.

The Second World War played a very important part in the settlement of Italian migrants here. When Italy entered the War against the Allies in June 1940, of course there was an Italian community in the country here and in the city of Melbourne. It was very hard for them because, overnight, they became the enemy; in fact a small number of them were interned, although I have to say that in Victoria there was a measure of common-sense. In Queensland, however, all the sugar-cane growers and others were interned, many of them being brought down here and kept in internment camps for most of the War. There is a story about internment of Italians in rural areas told to me by Dr. Jim Cairns, a former Federal Minister. Cairns was a member of the Victorian Special Branch Police Force in 1940 when Italy entered the War. He said that he received orders to go to Werribee with a number of trucks to round up all Italian market gardeners. He said, 'We went into the paddocks and just pulled them in off the fields as they stood in their gumboots and put them on the trucks; they were all taken to Tatura. It was a

disaster for the womenfolk, for the women could not drive trucks, and so could not get the produce to the market'. He said, 'I have to tell you that fortunately the authorities saw sense. After two weeks there were almost no vegetables in the Victoria Market and we released all the growers from internment'.

I think that happened here with tobacco farmers, for tobacco was regarded as an essential crop for the war effort. But their children were affected because they got a hard time of it at school. Those with Italian names were called 'dagoes' and at one country school where there were a number of Italians the Nun used to let the Italian boys out a quarter of an hour early so that they could get home without being set upon by the others. But all this soon passed.

At that time the North-East was important because there were big POW camps here. There were the Murchison and Tatura camps and, of course, closer to here was the camp at Whorouly. There had been a large number of Italian military personnel captured in the Desert Campaign in Libya; they were supposed to be kept in India but this was becoming very difficult so the British Government asked the Australian

Government if Australia could accommodate some 20,000 of them if Britain paid for the cost of doing so. The Australian Government agreed and built a number of camps around Australia. The original intention was to just keep them in the camps but after they had been there for a while it became clear that they ought to use the prisoners who were very bored and keen to do something. So they were billeted out to work on farms, conducted by non-Italians. Sometimes they even lived on the farms if there was no camp close by. All this was very valuable for the local Australians because many of the men were serving in the War and there was an acute shortage of farm labourers. Generally speaking the officers did not work on the farms.

Whorouly POW camp was about 211 acres in size but it has now gone entirely. After the War it was bought by a man called De Grazia who then sold it to one Pozzi. I do not know whether Pozzi still owns the site but all signs of the camp have disappeared, even though at one stage there were about 2000 POWs and 500 personnel and guards there. When it was disclosed in the local papers that there was going to be a camp built, locals were very up-in-arms about it, saying that they would all have to be armed because the camp



Italian POW Officers at Myrtleford in 1943. From l. to r., standing: Vitellazzi, Solmi, Cerri, Rigon, Ventura and Cipri; seated: Michetti, Lazzarotto, Busetto, Tirania, Alessandra.

would be full of dangerous people who might break out and come on to their farms. When the scheme was underway and POWs were being taken out to farms, locals said they did not want their children to be exposed to them. The Italians were so missing their own families that the thing they wanted most of all was to greet the children. Very soon fears disappeared and friendships began to build up. On one occasion when a wedding reception was taking place and prisoners of war were being taken past, they persuaded the driver to stop. They called out, in Italian, *Vogliamo vedere la sposa - We want to see the bride*. The bride, Angelina Marasco, came forward and waved to all the POWs in the trucks. It was just a small incident illustrating how much they valued that sort of interaction with the community. I knew some of these POWs because one of them married my mother's sister after the War. My uncle said that one of the most common songs sung by them, in a mixture of Italian and English, was 'Don't Fence Me In'.

Just this morning, as a matter of fact, thanks to the resourcefulness of my Aide, Damien Farrell, I spoke to a former Italian POW who was in the Murchison Camp. His name is Renato De Pardo and he lives in Melbourne. In 1942 he was a Lieutenant in the Italian Army in the Murchison Camp. Though Officers did not have to work he insisted that he wanted to work on a farm. He learnt a little English, and was allocated to work at the property of a man called Trevor Gadd at Guys Forest near Corryong. They became good friends. When the War ended Renato di Pardo had to go back to Italy, as was the case with all the POWs, but Trevor Gadd sponsored him to come back in 1952 with his wife and two children. Renato eventually settled in Melbourne and became a tax accountant. He is now 80 years of age and when I spoke to him on the telephone this morning told me some stories which I will share with you.

He said that when he came back in 1952 he went into the Walhalla pub and the first person he saw at the bar was the Commandant of the POW Camp, Colonel Chisholm. Chisholm was delighted to see him and they had a beer together. Then he saw the local policeman; he had been a sergeant who was one of the guards at the camp. Di Pardo, who wanted to be able to drive a car, asked, 'Can I secure a licence?' The sergeant, who knew that during the War De Pardo had

been allowed to drive a truck, said, 'Come around to the police station at 4 o'clock'. Di Pardo said, 'But I have not got a car to do a test', and the policeman said, 'No need, just bring 10 bob'. I think that tells you something about the openness and the trust and wonderful feeling that had been built up at that time.

Before concluding this paper, I would like to refer to some topics which I believe merit a reference. The Savoy Club at Myrtleford is important, and not just because I am visiting it tomorrow! It was one of the very first clubs of its kind in Victoria. It began in 1955 in a place then called the Continental House, a property purchased in 1951 by Dominic de Fazio. Continental House was built by Mr. and Mrs. de Fazio with their own funds but was always intended to be a club. In 1956 a committee was formed and Luigi Roso, who came to Myrtleford in 1933 from the Vale di Pasubio near Vicenza, became the first President. The property was sold by the de Fazio family to the Club in 1978. The Club now has excellent facilities, 526 full members and substantial assets. It is a very important centre not just for people of Italian origin but for the community generally.

Another important Italian group in the North-East of Victoria is the Myrtleford Trentino Folk Group which is present tonight. The Group was the first of its kind in Australia. It presents the folk dances and culture of the valleys of the Trentino in Northern Italy. The Group is splendidly attired and is almost entirely composed of young persons who are second generation Australians from the Trentino.

There is another topic which warrants one or more separate papers, namely, the Italian presence in Bonegilla, which was a few miles from Wodonga. This is the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Bonegilla Camp. There were many Italians who came through Bonegilla but they were not by any means the most numerous ethnic group. There was a major riot there in 1951 and we have many accounts as to what caused the riot. It is agreed that it was largely due to unemployment. Migrants who had been there for some two or three months and were unemployed, rioted. Such were their expectations of this country. But I read a quite different account recently of the reasons for the riot given by one Donnini. Some of you may know Donnini's restaurant in Melbourne in Carlton.

Donnini claims that his father, who was in the camp at that time, said that the authorities made pasta available but that they appointed three Russian 'cooks' to cook the pasta. These cooks were inexpert and spread a kilo of sugar on top of the pasta. This, it was said, triggered the riot which he describes as the Great Pasta Riot!

All that I have described tonight shows what a special and valuable contribution has been made to North-East Victoria by its Italian settlers and their children. It represents an important heritage. It is a story that must be preserved and I congratulate the Wangaratta Historical Society for its initiative in arranging tonight's function. It has been very rewarding for me. I hope that all of you, whether you are of Italian origin or not, never throw away records and memorabilia of the history of this area. It is very important to keep family papers and those old photographs which are your links with the past. Your children may seem totally disinterested at the moment but you will be surprised sometimes how they or even your grandchildren will suddenly show enormous curiosity. So make sure that material is preserved and the best way to do this is to leave it to a suitable organisation like your own Wangaratta Historical Society. In the case of material about Italian migrants, you may wish to give it to a specialist organisation which is owned and supported by the Italian community. I refer to the CO.AS.IT Italian Historical Society which now has 10,000 photographs of early Italian settlers and many thousands of documents in its collection. It is one of the bodies of which I am most proud as I helped found it in 1980. Hopefully the Italian Historical Society and the Wangaratta Historical Society will be able to work in partnership to collect and use and exhibit some local Italian material.

What emerges from what I have told you is a history of achievement in, and contribution to, a great land by people who managed to keep their ties and their culture and yet became good Australians. By and large they were received with tolerance and goodwill in this generous land. At the moment I am sorry to say that in another part of Australia a certain person is preaching intolerance and ignorance, and whose message runs counter to the experience of the people of this area. May I say that we Italian migrants enjoyed the benefits of a British tradition of fair play and tolerance when we came to this country. Let us make sure that we do not

deny it to those coming now. We must not give them any less than we received. If we do not do that we will fall short. It will cause us great harm and we will fail at the point where we are strongest, namely, in our courage, in our diversity, in our generosity and our freedom.

May I finally express my thanks to all those who assisted me in the preparation of this paper, especially Laura Mecca of the Italian Historical Society. I also drew very heavily on the rich reefs in Charles D'Aprano's book, *From Goldrush to Federation, Italian Pioneers in Victoria 1850-1900*.

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