

MEMORIES MAKE HISTORY
How Research Has Been Conducted For An Exhibition

by Fiona McFarlane

[Fiona spent three weeks at the Society as part of her final placement for her Diploma of Museum Studies. We congratulate Fiona for the excellent results she has achieved in her diploma and thank her for her very valuable contribution to the project.]

I feel most privileged to have assisted three organisations whose partnership in mounting an exhibition is historic for Australian museum practice.

The Museum of Victoria, the Italian Historical Society and The Jewish Museum of Australia are collaborating to bring together their expertise, collections and resources that will form an exhibition (opening at the Museum of Victoria in August 1992) which examines the history of ethnic immigration to Carlton. Particular focus will be given to the two communities which made the most notable demographic impact in the area from the 1860's to the 1960's - the Jews and Italians.

I first became aware of the project six months ago. At the time I was surprised that Carlton ever had a Jewish population, indeed, one so significant that the suburb was known in the

1930's as "Little Jerusalem". Naively I had always believed Carlton to be "Little Italy". Apart from my knowledge that Italians and working-class Australians were in Carlton I had never really questioned who might have lived or worked in the streets such as Lygon, Rathdowne, and Drummond.

Yet, in my time assisting the museums I have discovered that since the 1840's Carlton has been home to Irish, Chinese, Lebanese, Indians, Greeks, Jews and Italians. That is just to name a few! Just take time to examine the faces and names inked on the back of pre 1950 class photographs from the schools such as Lee St. State and Princes Hill that will be exhibited. These illustrate a fascinating and colourful multicultural past.

My five-week involvement with the project began at the formative stages of the exhibition.



Christmas 1959 at St. George's Kindergarten with Ann Campbell as the Virgin Mary

I have catalogued information and objects collected over the past year by the Italian Historical Society and The Jewish Museum. I have also had the special privilege of interviewing Italians, Jews and Lebanese who have historic ties with Carlton. Some of these people have lent or donated their photographs for reproduction, and diaries, memoirs and personal objects for research and display.

The last object I brought back from an interview was a pair of socks that had been kept as mementos by the Jewish family who ran the Ideal Knitting Mills where the socks were manufactured. In the 1930's this mill stood in Lygon Street where the Road Traffic Authority is today.

I now have a clearer understanding of the events, issues, organisations and personalities of these communities and their profound impact on Carlton. The Jewish and Italian cultures are no doubt different. Yet strangers in a new land



Caterina Sinisgalli with friends Caterina Russo, Rosina Tursi, Raffaella Torzillo and daughter Maria in front of her house at 22 Dorrit Street, Carlton in 1940.

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The Lygon Street Traders was published in the early 1950s by The Carlton Traders' Promotion Committee of which Prospero Papaleo was the Treasurer.

share remarkably similar experiences. I have found it most interesting in my readings and at interviews with members of the two cultures that experiences most profound for the newly arrived are often the same. Some arrived here on the same ship. Many would have passed each other in the street or at the Exhibition Gardens. The first day at school and finding first employment are subjects most often referred to in the memoirs I have read. Sadness at leaving the homeland, excitement about the prospects and possibilities of a new country, trepidation and fear of the unknown are emotions that were shared by both communities. These will be sensed in this exhibition.

It has been a thrill meeting the personalities behind the photographs and memoirs I have studied. Hearing them share intimate details of their past, their perceptions, observations and philosophies has been a special experience. For the first time in my life I met someone who could describe from first hand experience the terror of Nazi brutality. This was the reason for Rabbi Rudski's emigration here. I have met Joe Lo Schiavo who kindly brought his family photographs to the Eolian Hall in Lygon Street - a building which was originally central to Jewish cultural life as the Kadimah and which became the Eolian Islands community club in the late

1960's. Joe arrived here in 1930 from Stromboli, an island so small and hilly that no soccer ground could be built. Luigi Di Santo has spoken of how he had the idea to import espresso machines to Melbourne. He brought out Melbourne's first Cimbali machine in 1953. Today his importing business still operates from its same address in Amess Street, Carlton. It began as a rented front room of an Italian family home. Gina Triaca has given information about how she taught English to newly arrived women at St. George's Hall. John Gangitano painted vivid pictures of how Lygon Street looked in the 1950's and recalled his experiences as a Real Estate agent here.

Needless to say, assisting with this exhibition has been for me a most fulfilling and enjoyable experience. I have absorbed new information and met wonderful people. I have also begun to look at Carlton through new eyes and, as a fourth generation Scot, am now keen to pursue more information about my own ancestors' experiences of immigration. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the three Curators responsible for this exhibition. Dr. Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien at the Italian Historical Society, Dr. Helen Light at the Jewish Museum of Australia and Miss Anna Malgorzewicz at the Museum of Victoria have all been so welcoming and supportive. I have learnt and been inspired by them all and wish them great success with this fascinating and worthwhile exhibition.



Maria Rebellato with great-grandson Eros Anceschi in the Carlton Gardens in 1956 c.



St. George's First Communion. Carlton, 1936.