

family history

poschiavini in australia, a cd compiled by hans fumberger

Reviewed by
ALAN POLETTI

FOR ANY FAMILY HISTORIAN WHOSE ANTECEDENTS MAY HAVE COME FROM THE ITALIAN-SPEAKING PART OF THE CANTON OF GRAUBÜNDEN IN SWITZERLAND (*CANTONE GRIGIONI*), EXAMINATION OF THIS CD IS A 'MUST'. THIS PART OF THE CANTON, CONSISTING OF THE PRESENT DAY *COMUNI* OF POSCHIAVO AND BRUSIO LIES TO THE SOUTH OF THE BERNINA PASS. UNTIL 1797, IT AND THE DISTRICT OF VALTELLINA IMMEDIATELY TO ITS SOUTH, WERE RULED BY THE GERMAN-SPEAKING *GRIGIONI*. AT THAT TIME, VALTELLINA, A PART OF THE PROVINCE OF SONDRIO, JOINED THE TRANSALPINE REPUBLIC, BUT THE *POSCHIAVINI* VOTED TO REMAIN AS PART OF GRAUBÜNDEN CANTON. BY 1860, AFTER 50 YEARS OF AUSTRIAN RULE, THE SHORT-LIVED TRANSALPINE REPUBLIC WAS PART OF THE KINGDOM OF ITALY. PEOPLE WITH A COMMON CULTURE AND LANGUAGE HAD ALREADY BEEN SEPARATED FOR SEVENTY YEARS BY AN ARTIFICIAL BORDER ONLY THREE KILOMETRES NORTH OF THE TOWN OF TIRANO IN VALTELLINA. HOWEVER, FAMILY TIES AND A SENSE OF BEING PART OF A COMMON COMMUNITY ENSURED JOINT VENTURES AND CONTINUED INTERACTIONS ACROSS THIS BORDER. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE PAPER *IL GRIGIONE ITALIANO*, PUBLISHED IN POSCHIAVO ON 11 JANUARY 1860, WE HAVE:

Yesterday another contingent of 25 emigrants crossed the Bernina Pass heading for Australia. There were 4 from Poschiavo, 13 from Brusio and 8 from Valtellina. There was even a young woman engaged to be married. She was tired of battling the storms of love and had resolved to defy the stormy seas to join her fiancé.

The young woman was Maria Mazzolatti from Villa di Tirano. She married Andrea Pianta from Brusio two weeks after she arrived in Melbourne on board the *Red Jacket* on 27 April 1860. He had arrived two years before.

Hans Fumberger was born and educated in Australia and now lives in Zurich. His grandfather, Christian was on the *Shalimar* when it arrived at Melbourne in 1861. Christian was from Ausserferrera in the Schams Valley (also in Graubünden canton), but to the north of Chiavenna in the province of Sondrio. The material which Hans has assembled on this CD provides a huge extension of the data compiled by Joseph Gentilli and contained in the latter's pioneering work *Swiss Poschiavini in Australia* (Geowest 25, UWA, 1989).

The thoroughness of Hans' work sets the standard by which all similar enterprises will be judged. In essence, he has examined all of the relevant records available in Switzerland and has then compared them to the information in records available in Australia.

It is unusual for Registers of Passports to survive for more than a few decades. Fortunately, Hans found that the passports issued by the *comune* of Poschiavo for the years 1853 to 1914 are still available. His spreadsheet 'Lista d'passaporti' [Lista dei passaporti] lists them all. Unfortunately, Registers of Passports issued in Brusio after its separation from Poschiavo in 1851 have been lost.

Another source which Hans has exploited, and which supplements the passport list, is that obtained from the Graubünden canton *Amtsblatt* (Gazette). A would-be emigrant had to announce his impending departure so that anyone to whom he was indebted could get their claim in before he got away. These 'Grida d'emigrazione' are especially useful for descendants of people from Brusio. Over 500 are listed in Hans' spreadsheet.

Following the identification of an emigrant, the relevant vital records (births, deaths and marriages) in both Australia and Switzerland were then examined by Hans and the information compiled and added to his main table entitled 'Emigrants'. He has examined all the relevant Australian naturalization files and this information is also included in the spreadsheet 'Nats'.

Where possible, he has tracked down the Civil Registry records of the migrants in Australia. These are in the spreadsheet 'BDM'. Marriages of the migrants in Poschiavo and Brusio are in the file 'Marriages'. For anyone who needs to reconcile baptismal names in church records (which are often in Latin) with the Civil records, he has provided a table of equivalences. Some are hardly obvious: Luigi = Aloisius, Giuseppe = Josephus, Giacinto = Hyacinthus, etc. In separate folders, Hans has provided thumbnail sketches of each migrant and extensive family trees. The CD also contains information on the much smaller number of migrants from the Schams Valley.

It has been an immense labour. For family historians it is a gold mine. For social historians, after much analysis it could be even more valuable and useful. We owe Hans a great debt. He has kindly donated the CD to the Italian Historical Society. You can make an appointment to view the CD, by calling the IHS on (03) 9349 9019.