

FAMILY HISTORY

In Search of a Swiss Role

by Allan John Parker

The following informative article documents the success story (and perseverance) of a Western Australian descendant of Swiss Italians in tracing his family history.

During my early adult years I was aware that, despite my English surname, the maternal side of my family had in its background the surnames of McMahan and Maggetti (of Irish and Swiss-Italian origins respectively). In a nation like Australia, possessing such a very strong British flavour, both appellations were somewhat quaint, and at other times, good conversation pieces.

It was not until my interest in family history surfaced that I realised what a challenge descendants of non-British families in Australia faced, particularly when few third generation, Australian-born people have studied more than a few months of any European language at school. Even fewer had taken the exercise seriously at all. For myself, I had had twenty years exposure to ecclesiastical Latin, and had made an extensive study of Latin over three years at high school. I could still hazily conjugate verbs and, at a pinch, just work out to which of the four declensions Latin nouns belonged.

And so I set out on the journey of researching the topic of my Maggetti forebears. My mother knew only snippets about her mother's Maggetti background. However, mum had visited the home of her grandfather, Alberto Maggetti, in the Whipstick near Eaglehawk, a few miles from Bendigo, Victoria, in 1936, prior to her marriage.

Fortunately mum had been able to meet the living members of the first generation of Maggettis born in Australia, (Alberto himself having died in 1913). Using her trusty Kodak Brownie box camera she had taken some great photos of the existing family at 'Maggetti's Wine Hall'. Today they are prized possessions in the family album. The Wine Hall had served as a drinking hole and social centre for the miners of Wallace's Reef and Miller's Flat, especially those of Italian and Swiss-Italian background. Sadly, the timber building was demolished in 1948 and only a little rubble and the local historical society's identification pole mark the spot today.

Once in touch with cousin Kevin Magetti in Melbourne, I found that he had known the Wine Hall well as a child. His grandfather, Charles Albert and Aunt Angelina had run the Hall after their father and mother had died. Another aunt, Cecilia Anne, had migrated to Western Australia with a sister, Rosina Margurita, who was my mother's mother. No one really knows why, but Charles Albert's son, Charles Argus Magetti, changed the spelling of their surname by dropping one 'g' about 1920. Kevin Magetti was able to put me onto Joseph Gentilli's 1988 UWA publication *The Settlement of Swiss Ticino Immigrants in Australia*. I understand that Gentilli may have Ticino origins himself. The Ticinesi were the Swiss-Italian people from the Canton of Ticino – it being the only part of Switzerland using Italian as its primary language. The Maggetti's village of origin, Brione sopra Minusio, near Locarno, overlooked the beautiful Lake Maggiore area of southern Switzerland bordering on northern Italy. I found that the Ticinesi migrants from the south west had actually walked across Europe to Liverpool, UK, to embark. Alberto Maggetti's group voyaged on board the *Mindon* to Melbourne, landing in July 1856. This I confirmed by obtaining copies of the Passenger Lists when I next visited the Melbourne Public Records Office.

Many Maggettis from the north east of Ticino had migrated to America. Recently I have found some thirty Maggettis listed in the US White pages – mostly in California. At the closest they might be distant relations to my Australian Maggettis. Other US Maggettis are highly unlikely to be related at all, having migrated to the US from the Abruzzi region of south-eastern Italy.

Interestingly, Gentilli also gives many other references to consult to answer the question of the Ticino migration around the world. His explanation of factors like the below-replacement levels of the Ticinesi men, many of whom did not marry once in Australia, helped me understand the small size of the modern-day Magetti/Maggetti families. Another useful feature of Gentilli's work is the cross-referencing of the Ticinesi men with the women they married in Australia. Their strong Catholic beliefs made the single Irish women in the Colony philosophically very compatible, and therefore likely prospects – and so it was with

Alberto, who married Mary Ann Hanrahan at St Kilian's Catholic Church in Bendigo, in 1864.

Returning to my main focus, it was now 1992 and 136 years had gone by since the emigration of Alberto, so contact with any Maggetti family in Alberto's homeland had been long lost. No living relative in our family knew any person, nor was cognisant of any authority to contact in Switzerland, to authenticate our heritage.

Working my way through Victorian records I was able to find Births, Deaths and Marriages for all the members of the Australian-born Maggetti family in Victoria, and I was able to meet cousin Kevin's close and extended family, all with the single 'g' spelling of their surname. Interestingly, in October 1997 I found a Maggetti in the New South Wales White Pages but have not as yet had an answer to my letter. One of the frustrations we genealogists have to take in our stride!

The spelling of these Maggettis' surname suggested that they were descendants of some of the other Maggettis who had migrated to the Victorian goldfields in the same Goldrush era, but who may not have been directly related to the Magettis we knew today in Victoria. Interestingly, some of the original Swiss migrants returned to Switzerland to live out their lives.

Shifting my focus to Western Australia, I found the few relevant Births, Deaths and Marriages, plus a copy of Albert Maggetti's Naturalisation Certificate in 1894. I was grateful that some Australian State repositories have copies of early documentation from other States. The International Genealogical Index gave me a historic list of Maggettis in Switzerland itself, but not knowing who was who, and knowing only the names of Alberto's parents, I had little to hang my genealogical hat on.

Nothing seemed to happen for some time.

I felt that I was stymied, even after hours of poring over maps, and ploughing through Gentilli's book many times. I noticed in the text some details about the city of Bellinzona, and its role as the central registry for the Ticino region. Each Canton would provide, for a fee of \$A30, a three-generation family lineage called a Familienschien (family certificate), and so I applied, in English, for a copy. Many months went by, and I grew despondent about the likelihood of getting a reply. In talking with an Italian friend of the family, she

advised me that Swiss officials may not be above reproach, and could have pocketed my funds! So, with greater determination I wrote back again, explaining my need once more, and asking if there was a higher authority to which I would have to refer the matter!

Four weeks later I received my copy of my Familienschien, entitled *Registro della Popolazione del Comune di Brione*. It unfolded to a double A3-sized document with names, ages, religions, district, dates, 'Births, Deaths and Marriages' and relationships. There was also a useful column of 'osservazioni' on each person about whom some personal details had been known. And it covered 224 years of family lineage! My Maggettis were recorded from 1777 to 1901, many of whom I could not identify. But there,, right before my eyes, was Alberto Maggetti, son of Pietro and Guglielma Pedroia. He had been the eldest of nine children. On this document the Italian was so fundamental and self explanatory that I could read most of it the first time without a dictionary.

But, as wonderful as it was – what now? I had to make contact with someone in Switzerland! And so it was off to the State Library to consult the Swiss White Pages. In and around the little town of Brione sopra Minusio in Canton Ticino, not far from Bellinzona, I found a number of Maggettis listed, and laboriously took down addresses. Phone numbers were of no use for I spoke only about ten words of Italian and some of those would have caused me to have been hung up on! And so I approached my Italian family friends again to translate my draft letter into Italian. Then I sent off eleven letters, using what my family calls my 'scatter gun' approach – hit enough people in the area with a letter and invariably one will reply with some knowledge to help me along. At best they will know they are related because they had also been researching into the family themselves, hoping that one day an overseas cousin would contact them to complete the link. It had worked with my research into the Parkers of Lancashire, although it had taken persistence, and some fifty letters, to achieve the desired result.

My letter to Switzerland also worked! Back came a letter from Claudio Maggetti in the village of Brione sopra Minusio, which by now I had found out meant 'Brione (the town's actual name) above (on the hilly slopes) the town of Minusio',

situated on the shores of Lake Maggiore. The postcards Claudio enclosed confirmed that the area is beautiful beyond belief. I was over the moon, for here was my answer at last. I quickly tore open the envelope only to find that my 'maybe' cousin had answered in fluent Italian! He neither spoke nor wrote English. Even though my French was limited and my German non-existent, I had somehow reasoned that had Claude known one of these other languages, it would have offered me some sort of hope. Changing gears in my mind back into Latin, I battled through enough of the Italian to work out that Claudio did not know much about his heritage, but that he did have a *nonna* (grandmother) who might know something. He would go and see her specially to ask. I would have to wait for another letter from him. The suspense was killing me! Failing that, he would consult with other Maggettis in the district, some of whom he knew. At least I had captured someone who was not just going to ignore or dismiss me altogether.

To date our correspondence has been minimal but Claude tells me that one of his elderly friends is currently writing a history of Brione sopra Minusio, and Claude intends to give him all my materials to help the research. Perhaps the writer will have some information to help me make a direct connection. As I write this I still await a copy of the book, whose launch was initially planned for Christmas 1997.

One bonus will be from Victoria, with an impending publication – the Eaglehawk Pioneer Register in two volumes, put out by local historians and writers O'Donoghue and Hanson, tracing the lives of 2100 migrants and settlers in the Eaglehawk, Victoria area between 1852 and 1880. In itself it is a huge undertaking, and will be a great tribute to these early settlers in our land. It will be with great pride that I will be able to read of the lives of my Maggetti predecessors.

So, when your European research goes in fits and starts, expect it, for it is perfectly normal. Perhaps, I could tell you about the very limited success I have had with researching into my father's maternal Westhoven forebears in Germany, but I have recently found fifty-two of them in Germany's White Pages on the Internet.

In case you're wondering, some letters have already been sent to Germany.

The publications mentioned in A. J. Parker's article are available in the 'Family History' Section of the Italian Historical Society's Reserved Library.

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Alfred Lucas: where did he come from?

by Damien John Hynes

A good example of knowing extensive details of the life of an ancestor in Australia, but not being able to locate the place of origin in Italy.

Alfred Lucas and three later generations were miners in the area around Omeo, Victoria and elsewhere.

The official records begin in 1860 with his marriage at Bruthen to an English immigrant, Elizabeth Thayer. At that time Lucas was a stockman on Gelantipy Station, in north-east Gippsland, a very remote place then, and today still sparsely populated. Elizabeth was a domestic on this station. On the marriage certificate, Lucas's profession is stated as marksman. The first two of nine children were born on Gelantipy. Six survived infancy and three did not. Two of these deaths are referred to in the book *Lonely Graves of the Gippsland Goldfields*, 1994, ISBN 0 646 17805 9.

Some time after his marriage, Lucas returned to his former profession, that of a miner, and typically so, a number of moves happened in the area but with Omeo mostly being the central town where the family mined and lived.

Following the death of his wife in winter of 1877 at (Upper) Swifts Creek, Lucas married again at Omeo in 1882 the widow Sarah Hibbs. There was but one child of this union named Rosabella who died of tuberculosis aged 14 years in a hotel in Prahran. I have traced down all lines of the family both of the first and the second marriages and their descendants which unravel nothing more as to his Italian origin.

In all the certificates he is always shown as Alfred Lucas but on one certificate he is given as Alf Lucasa. In all of them he gives Livorno or Leghorn as his place of origin, but for one certifi-

cate he gives Lucca. He is not the informant on the family records and I had thought this would be because of his illiteracy at least in English. On his second marriage certificate he does sign his own name. Then in 1884, following the introduction of legislation in 1883, he passed a test for an engine driver and I understand there was both a written and a practical test.

At the time of his first marriage he provided his age as 24 years but on the second marriage he gives his birth date as 25 December 1833, which makes him 27 years old when he first married. I have his death certificate, a copy of his Will and the obituary from the Omeo paper. Alfred died in 1897 at Brookville and was buried in the Omeo cemetery. At the time of his death he was managing the Chalet Hotel. James Fletts' book *Pubs and Shanties of the Goldfields* states that the licence was in Mrs Lucas's name for Lucas had not been naturalised. However, the hotel may have been Sarah's for she was left property from the estate of her first husband.

It appears that Lucas had little association in east and north Gippsland with other Italian speakers. There are many entries for him in mining registers which commenced or survive from around 1867 and these are with anglo-saxon names making up the parties. There is a small number of Italians in these registers or in other records who settled in north Gippsland prior to the turn of the century. One of them was one Charles Paleari, better known in the early days of his arrival in Australia as 'Italian Charlie'. He died at Nariel, south of Corryong, in 1902 and was the storekeeper. He was from Lombardy and was in Australia from circa 1852. Paleari, like Lucas, never naturalised.

Lucas is featured in several newspaper accounts. The *Omeo Standard* centenary edition, 17 January 1935 describes 'Italian Lucas' as a pioneer miner coming to Omeo in 1854. Two earlier articles, the oldest in the *Omeo Telegraph* of 30 March 1888 relates a story of the lost Tomahawk gold reef and members of a party who went to search for it albeit unsuccessfully. Lucas was one of the party, along with Charles Paleari, an American Indian named Blevin and a man named Burgess.

As to Lucas's parents his father's name is stated as also being Alfred Lucas whose occupation was vigneron and his mother as Rosa Maysena, probably incorrectly spelled. I have not been able to

locate any record of Lucas's arrival in shipping records of Victoria, either from the United Kingdom or other European ports. Similar enquiries in New South Wales and South Australia public records did not produce results.

It was suggested to me that Lucas could be a Jewish name. His first wedding was celebrated in the Church of England and I believe also the second. He is buried in Catholic ground. Other enquiries via the records of the Latter Day Church did not give me any useful information as to Lucas's origin or family in Italy.

At this point I am almost deadlocked as to what might be done to settle the remaining question of origin. A letter written in English to the Collegio Araldico in Rome two years ago brought no response. Any suggestions or readers' response would be welcome.

My address is 47 Arthur Street, Eltham, Vic., 3095, Tel. (03) 9439 6187 (evenings).

Family history enquiries:

Giuseppe Ingegneri, aka Engegneri, Ingigneri and, after 1880, Incigneri.

Giuseppe was born in Riposto, Catania, Sicily in 1838. On his marriage certificate his father was named as Francesco Ingegneri (master mariner) and his mother as Santa Guarrera. It is believed he was a cabin boy who jumped ship (name unknown) when it arrived in Melbourne in 1856. In Melbourne he was a fisherman living first at Queenscliff and, after he married in 1866, at Hastings. He never became naturalised and died in 1896 leaving his second wife, Annie, and eight of their ten children. His house in Hastings was used for some years as the centre of Catholic life with the first Mass in the parish and a number of marriages being celebrated there. Apparently, after the Second World War, a relative in Sicily made contact with one of Giuseppe's daughters and some correspondence followed. Unfortunately, a few hours after her death a zealous relative burned all her personal papers and consequently contact with the family in Sicily were lost.

Mrs Angela Incigneri would be delighted to hear from anyone who knew the family in Hastings or who has any information about the marriages or Masses which were celebrated there. She would also like to contact anyone who comes from Riposto and would like to find some photos of

Riposto which she could borrow to copy for her family history. Angela can be contacted at 23 Gareth Drive, East Burwood, Vic., 3151 or Tel. (03) 9802 5289, Fax. (03) 9886 1459, E-mail bjincig@ccr.org.au.

Bernardo Costa and **Louisa Marsana** aka Marsano, Marsarno, Marsarns, Marsarin.

They were married in 1864 in the Beechworth area, Victoria. Bernardo died in 1915 and Louisa died in 1897 in Wodonga.

Children:

Annie Alberta b. 1866 Yackandandah;
Rosa Maria b. 1868, d. 1869 Yackandandah;
Angela Ellen b. 1869 Yackandandah, Vic.;
Louisa b. 1872 Yackandandah;
Laura b. 1874 Yackandandah.;
Maria Vittoria b. 1876 Yackandandah;
Gertrude, b. 1879 Kiewa, Vic.;
Florence, b. 1881 Tallandoon, Vic., d. 1882
Wodonga;
Bernard Victor b. 1882 Wodonga, Vic.;

[A boy, at last!]

Edgardo Raffaele Arpante aka Arpentini. Born in 1860, Naples. Son of Marquis de Castellano and Michelina, from Bologna. Arrived in Sydney 1881 on the 'Italian majestic warship' Europa. Married in 1886, died in 1926. Descendant researching the family history: Frank Wiseman, 64 Clery Crt., Clayton, Vic., 3169. Tel. (03) 9544 5506.

Stefano Belli, Swiss-Italian born in 1856 in Vogorno, district of Locarno, Canton Ticino. Arrived in Victoria in 1876 on board the ship Loch Katrine. Married Cammillia Georgi, aged 17, in 1877 at St. Peter's Church in Daylesford, Victoria, profession miner. The place of residence given on the marriage certificate is Eastern Hill, near Daylesford. The name Belli was later changed to Bellin. One son, Stephen Bellin, was born in 1876 and died in August 1957. His direct descendant Laurie Raftery, 60 Lucerne Cres. Alphington, Vic., 3078. Tel. (03) 9499 4169 is interested to hear from anyone who may have information on Stefano Belli and on the village of Vogorno.

Giovanni Antonio Tognazzini, Swiss-Italian born in 1839 in Someo, district of Valle Maggia, Canton Ticino. He married Ellen Vaughan. Enquiry from Robert Marshall, 3 San Michelle St., Tugun, Qld., 4224. Tel. (07) 55342 165.

Giovanni Battista Sanguinetti. Born in Rapallo, Genova, in 1836. Came to Melbourne in 1857 on board the Morning Light from England. where he had resided and worked for a number of years as a tailor for his uncle Biagio. In 1860 he married in Melbourne Harriett Fisher, an English woman. In 1863 he opened a tailor shop at 182 Russell Street, Melbourne, then moved to 30 Little Collins Street East in 1866. From 1873 to 1888 his business was located at 125 Little Collins Street. In 1889 he opened with his son Alberto Sanguinetti another tailor shop in Little Charles Street, Abbotsford where he operated until his death in 1905. Enquiry from Richard Sanguinetti, 57 Malin Street, Kew, 3101, Tel. (03) 9819 1625 who is interested to trace the family history back in Italy.

Pasquale (Charlie) Lacava and **Barile/Barrile**.

Both were accomplished musicians. Lacava came out with his parents early this century, aged 14. He played the flute in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and for the Capitol Theatre for a number of years.

Barile emigrated from Viggiano to Australia in the 1890s. He lived in the city and then in Carlton. Descendant Jenny McNeice, 1089 Burke Rd. East Hawthorn 3124, Tel. (03) 9813 0004 is interested to hear from anyone who may have come across these names in their family history research.

Giovanni Lironi was born in Lemna, Como, Lombardy. He was a stained glass maker and the family still holds his 'secret formula' for etching on glass. He came out to Australia from Scotland in the 1860s, where he was engaged to work at the windows of a new cathedral. His Scottish wife came out with him. In Melbourne he set up a glazier workshop in Flinders Lane. Two children were born in Melbourne. Enquiry from Peter Knights, 16 Shane Cres. Croydon, Vic., Tel. (03) 9870 5942.

Ester Martelli nee Savieri or Slavieri left Leghorn, Tuscany, for New Zealand in 1875 on board the Taranaki with three daughters and one son. Her husband Alessio did not travel with her and could have been in New Zealand already. She settled in Westland, South Island, New Zealand. Robert Glover, Tel. (03) 9789 5009 is interested to hear from anyone whose ancestors migrated to New Zealand in the 1880s.