FACT SHEET

ITALIAN MIGRATION 1850-1900

'I could not sleep that night, nor for many nights after in that tent. I had never come across such a thing. I was cold and the worst of it was the hunger, the number of fleas and lice that crawled all over me, and the mice at my neck and ears all night long.' *From the diary of Beniamino Casarotti, who worked as a woodcutter in Victoria in 1888.* From *Per l'Australia: the story of Italian migration* (MUP, 2006).

Introduction

Italy has had an association with Australia since the sixteenth century when Italians sailed with Spanish and Portuguese explorers. In 1676, Father Vittorio Riccio wrote to Rome from Manila requesting permission to establish a Roman Catholic mission in Australia. By the time he received approval, Riccio had died and with him hopes of establishing an Italian outpost. Antonio Ponto and Italian-American James Mario Matra were with Captain James Cook when he arrived in Botany Bay in 1770. Matra went on to play a role in the establishment of Sydney, whose suburb of Matraville takes his name. Convict Giuseppe Tuzo was one of a number of Italians who arrived with the First Fleet in 1788. These early arrivals were followed by missionaries and then by seasonal workers and a small number of professional men and women.

Patterns of migration

Italian migrants began arriving in Australia in the mid-1800s. They were motivated by the need for work, the search for new opportunities, and the deprivations caused by war, poverty, crop failure and natural disaster.

The majority of migrants came from rural communities, where seasonal work was a way of life. As such, they possessed a wealth of practical knowledge and many were also skilled tradesmen. Between 1876 and 1900 around 300,000 people were leaving Italy annually to seek work in South America, France, the United States and Australia. They came with the intention of staying a few years and returning home.

By the 1850s, there were already around 3,500 Italians and Swiss Italians in Victoria and New South Wales. More immigrants followed in the wake of the discovery of gold in Western Australia and copper in Queensland. In 1854, a protest by miners against bad conditions on the Victorian goldfields led to armed clashes with government troops. Miner Raffaello Carboni's eyewitness account of the Eureka Stockade and the court case that followed documents the events that contributed to the establishment of representative government in Australia.

The building boom created by the gold rushes brought Italian timbercutters and labourers, who cleared the land and built towns and cities. In their wake came Italian artists, builders and tradespeople. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were around 5,700 Italian-born in Australia.

The settlement process

The predominant pattern of settlement was chain migration: a male relative would arrive first, establish himself and then sponsor the passage of wife, children, siblings and *paesani* (people from the same region).

The majority of pioneers settled in rural Australia. The earliest significant community was established in the 1850s around the Victorian goldmining town of Daylesford. In

the decades that followed, settlements sprang up across the country. Among the largest were New Italy in northern New South Wales and the Western Australian mining towns of Kalgoorlie and Boulder. Irrigation systems, many of them built by migrant engineers such as Ettore Checchi and Carlo Catani, led to the emergence of migrant-owned market gardens and orchards all over the country.

In the 1870s, Archbishop James Quinn invited artists and artisans to come from Italy to work in Brisbane. Others were drawn to the country by the international exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne in 1879 and 1880 respectively. Many, including artist Anthony Dattilo-Rubbo decided to stay and establish businesses and private schools.

In 1891, migrants from Lombardy, Piedmont and the Veneto were recruited to work in the Queensland canefields where they soon became industry leaders. Eolian islanders opened fruit shops in the eastern states. Many new arrivals brought the trades for which their region was famous: fishing, music, figurine making, terrazzo paving and tailoring. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, people from Puglia and Sicily established fishing communities in Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales. Musicians from Basilicata arrived in Sydney and Melbourne where they quickly gained a foothold.

Italian eateries opened in Australia in metropolitan and regional centres in the mid-1800s. Viticulturists Romeo Bragato and Giovanni Battista Federli played a pivotal role in the development of the Australian wine industry and helped found viticultural colleges in Victoria and New South Wales.

As Italian communities grew in wealth and influence they became involved in the sponsorship of tours by Italian opera and theatre companies. A growing number of these visiting performers and conductors stayed on and helped establish the opera, classical music and ballet in Australia. Among the most noted are Count Ercole Filippini, who contributed to the foundation of opera companies in South and Western Australia, and composer and teacher Alberto Zelman, whose son Alberto Junior founded the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in 1906.

Italian migration 1850-1900 in the Italian Historical Society Collection
You will find a range of publications, photographs, correspondence and other documents relating to migration during this period in the following collections:

- ➢ Candela Collection
- ➢ Del Monaco Collection
- ➢ Document Collection
- ➢ Fashion Collection
- ➢ Food Collection
- ➢ Library
- ➢ Newspaper Collection
- ➢ Opera Collection
- ➢ Oral History Collection
- ➢ Photographic Collection

See also the following Italian Historical Society Fact Sheets:

- ➢ Contribution of Women
- ➢ Italian migration 1900-1945
- ➢ Italian migration 1945-1970
- ➢ Italians in Carlton

- Map: Australia
- Map: Italy
- Proxy Brides
- Statistics on Italians in Australia
- The Arts
- Trades and Professions

Further reading
The resources listed below can be accessed, by appointment, at the Italian Historical Society.

Publications
Bureau of Immigration and Population Research 1993, *Migration Oz: an investigative resource kit*, Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, Canberra.

Aldersea, J & Hood, B 2003, *Walhalla, valley of gold: a story of its people, places and its gold mines*, Walhalla Publishing, Trafalgar, Victoria.

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Harrigan, R 2006, *They were expeditioners: the chronicles of northern Italian farmers-pioneer settlers of New Italy with documentation of the Marquis de Ray's four expeditions to New Ireland between 1879 and 1881*, Rosemary Harrigan, Werribee, Victoria.

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State Library of Victoria 2004, *Pictures catalogue*, SLV, Melbourne, http://sinpic.slv.vic.gov.au/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First

Audio-visual
Hard work and hope: Australia's Italians 1989*,* video recording, Italian Historical Society—COASIT and Equality Press, Carlton Victoria.

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