Fruits of our labour The history of Griffith's Italian community

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MIGRATION HERITAGE CENTRE
NEW SOUTH WALES

Griffith City Council
progress with pride

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The Migration Heritage Centre at the Powerhouse Museum is a New South Wales Government initiative supported by the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW.

www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au

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Front cover: Pitting and drying apricots on the Pastega farm in the 1930s. Reproduced courtesy Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

Back cover: Miranda's packing shed at 57 Jondaryan Avenue in 1936. Reproduced courtesy Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

Foreword

The NSW Migration Heritage Centre is pleased to be a project partner with the Griffith Italian Museum and Griffith City Council in *Fruits Of Our Labour: The History Of Griffith's Italian Community*.

The NSW Migration Heritage Centre advances the NSW Government's State Plan in building harmonious communities and helping them conserve and interpret their cultural heritage. The Centre identifies, records, preserves and interprets the heritage of migration to Australia and settlement in New South Wales from 1788 to the present - in particular, collections, places and associated memories. The Centre gives new perspectives on Australian history, ensures a more representative heritage is preserved for future generations, validates former migrants' experiences and challenges myths and prejudices. It has an office at the Powerhouse Museum and is funded by the New South Wales Government and supported by the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW.

Today, four out of ten people in New South Wales are either migrants or the children of migrants. As former migrants age, it is vital their stories and cultures are recorded.

The Centre works in partnership with community, government, educational and cultural organisations, including New South Wales' cultural institutions, to optimise and share skills and resources. It draws on the Powerhouse Museum's Regional Services program for curatorial and collection management expertise to support its work with communities.

Fruits Of Our Labour was published as part of the first stage of a community heritage study highlighting how Italian migration has formed a diverse community in the Griffith district with a shared identity and sense of place. A second stage of the study will assist the Griffith Italian Museum in providing outreach to local families helping them document their collections in the context of the history. The study will also assist the Griffith Italian Museum in developing future community exhibitions and it will also support the Griffith City Council's initiatives in promoting the Italian history of Griffith and its living cultures through heritage interpretation and cultural tourism. A third stage of the project partnership, supported by the Heritage Office in the Department of Planning (NSW), will see the installation of a migration heritage trail which will be showcased in an online exhibition hosted on the Centre's website.

The Centre thanks the people of Griffith for assisting Griffith Italian Museum and Griffith City Council staff and historian Jennifer Cornwall to produce *Fruits Of Our Labour*. I also thank the Mayor of Griffith, Councillor Dino Zappacosta, and Councillor and Migration Heritage Centre Panel of Advisors Member John Dal Broi, for working with the Centre to record and promote Griffith's migration heritage.

This book is a history of enduring significance for the people of Griffith and all students of Australian history and a milestone in a continuing community and government partnership to record and celebrate Griffith's Italian heritage.

John Petersen
Manager
NSW Migration Heritage Centre

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Introduction

Since the 1980s migration history has developed as a major subject area. This coincided with the political and institutional development of multiculturalism as a 'dominant national ethic' that superseded assimilationist policies in endorsing diversity rather than singularity as the fabric of nationalism. As one of the largest migrant groups in Australia, the Italians have been the focus of many of the historical studies of Australian immigration and immigrant groups. Much of this historical work has focussed on the post-1945 period as the 'origin' of our diverse immigrant population and multiculturalism.

Recent critiques of immigration historiography have commented on the failure of historians to integrate migrant groups in their histories of the nation, except in somewhat circumscribed ways. This is partly because 'migrants' are treated conceptually as discrete groups with a particular relationship to the host Anglo-Celtic population. The telling of their story has tended to focus on the process of migrant 'Australianisation' or 'how they fitted in'. Few have seen the contact as a two way process of 'cultural entanglement'. Indeed, as historians Baldassar and Pesman have recently pointed out in their history of Veneto migration to Australia, use of the term 'italiano all'estero' in preference to 'emigrati italiani' is 'a recognition of, and an attempt to, foster the distinctive cultures which have not only survived but thrived outside Italy'.

While the policy of multiculturalism strongly influenced the entry of migration history into museum public programs, the standard set of interpretative approaches to migrant history exhibitions that emerged have remained largely unchanged – even though multiculturalism has changed its modulations over twenty years. The more popular of these are the 'rebirth' narrative (a favoured interpretation of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electricity Scheme) and the 'enrichment' narrative. A number of cliched metaphors have also developed to carry the storyline for these two narratives, the most popular perhaps being 'the journey' (with its over-use of the suitcase), followed closely by 'hard work and success'. Another conceptual tendency has been to 'periodise' migration, limiting its examination to the post-war period. Yet another is the strong sense of passivity and insularity imbued in the treatment of migrant history. The interpretation of the migration experience has suffered as a result, being repeatedly documented in these circumscribed ways which limits the scope for broader examination.

This history, which has been prepared for the Griffith Italian Museum, seeks to move beyond the generic treatment of the experiences of Italian Australians, resisting the past tendency to both generalise and quarantine these in the narrower and well-worn trope of the 'migrant experience'. It attempts to locate the story of Italian settlement within the broader history of the area itself. In rejecting narrow, revisionist narratives, it is hoped that a more refined picture emerges, one that demonstrates a diversity of experiences and perspectives and reveals a number of narrative strands which challenge the myths and celebratory stories which in many cases have had the effect of 'assimilating' the community's history into a more comfortable version of the past.

There is one important qualification. As the earliest and largest Italian group in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, and possessing a keen sense of their 'pioneer' status, the Veneti experience has been extensively documented, while those of the Calabresi, Siciliani and others have received less attention. This is reflected in this history. No doubt their stories will receive more attention in the future as the Griffith Italian Museum continues to develop its collection and exhibition program.

chapter 1

Benessere: in search of a better life

In 1913 Francesco Bicego left northern New South Wales where he had been working on the construction of the railway line and headed for the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA). Bicego had decided to see for himself the opportunities other Italians had spoken of in the work camp. The MIA was still little more than a frontier settlement of work camps building weirs, canals, channels and other infrastructure for this new irrigation area. Bicego stayed a while, working as a labourer before moving on to the Burrinjuck Dam site in 1915. From there he went to Broken Hill to join the growing number of Veneti working in the mines. By the time he returned to the MIA in 1926 and took up a farm, a small Italian settlement of some eight five people had developed.[1]

Bicego had arrived in Australia in 1912 from a village near the town of Verona in the Veneto region. Like his fellow Italians, he had come to Australia in search of *benessere* (prosperity).[2] Since the 1880s migration had become 'an inherited and accepted way of life' for the *contadini* of a small number of towns and villages in some Italian regions.[3] Poverty and lack of opportunity characterised rural Italy prior to the land reforms of the 1950s. When there was not enough work to support the extended family unit some of the men would migrate across the Alps to France, Germany and Switzerland for seasonal work, returning home a few months later when it ran out. Some travelled further afield to North or South America where they stayed for longer periods. Others left Italy permanently, either taking their family with them or sending for them at a later date. Yet another group only intended to be away for a few years but ended up settling permanently. Although South and North America were the preferred destinations, some came to Australia. They moved around the country working as itinerant labourers in mines, timber-fellng and navvies in remote work camps on dam, road and rail construction. These Italian immigrants of the pre-war years were highly motivated adventurers who struck out with no formal assistance, settled in Australia and used their initiative to establish farms and businesses.

Angelo Pastega (on the right in foreground) with other Italian labourers working on the construction of the northern New South Wales railway line in the early 1910s. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

Prior to the Second World War, most Italians in Australia came from the Veneto region, the *Mezzogiorno del Nord* (south of the north).[4] This 'long tradition and experience of migration' meant that they were 'well equipped to cope, survive and prosper in their new land'. They developed 'networks of people and information that spanned the world and accustomed them to movement, to hearing new languages and learning new ways'.[5] As news of work opportunities circulated through their networks, concentrations of Italians from the same villages and towns developed across regional Australia in places such as Broken Hill, the cane fields of northern Queensland and, from the mid-1910s, the MIA. From these, permanent settlements grew as *paesani* followed them via chain migration.

Located in south-western New South Wales where the Murrumbidgee River meets the great riverine plain, the MIA is made up of two main irrigation areas, Mirrool and Yanco. These are located about sixty kilometres apart and serviced by the towns of Griffith and Leeton respectively. With its decentralised pattern of settlement, horticultural farms are concentrated in settlements on the outskirts of the towns. In Mirrool, the villages of Hanwood, Yoogali, Yenda, Bilbul, Beelbangera and Lake Wyangan are located between three to ten kilometres outside Griffith. Water is supplied to the irrigation areas from water flowing down from the Burrinjuck Dam on the Murrumbidgee to the Berembed Weir via a main canal and distributed to farms by a network of supply channels.

The scheme was conceived in the late nineteenth century, a time when the adoption of a more 'scientific' approach to agriculture saw irrigated closer settlement schemes championed in south eastern Australia as a means of achieving higher yields by intensive farming.[6] Based on the agrarian ideal of a yeomanry class of small farmers and appealing to romantic notions of rural life, closer settlement schemes drew most of its settlers from urban areas and, to a lesser extent, British migrants.

Canal construction, Griffith area, c1919. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

The MIA was established in 1906 with the passage of legislation enabling the construction of the Burrinjuck Dam. From 1912 the first settlers began taking up blocks as pastoral holdings were resumed and subdivided into farm holdings. There were three different types of holdings under the scheme: one hectare blocks for vegetable crops ('home garden' allotments) located on the periphery of Griffith and the village settlements, horticultural farms consisting of four to twelve hectare blocks and large area farms ranging in size from 60 hectares upwards. The size of the holdings was determined by reference to what was considered necessary to support an average family. Leasehold grants of Crown land formed the basis of the land tenure system. The Home Maintenance Area rule restricted holdings to one per family, intended as a guard against the domination of large farms ('landlordism') by preventing leaseholders

enlarging their holdings.[7] The MIA was controlled and administered by a territorial authority, the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission (Irrigation Commission), with wide ranging powers which included the approval of land grants and the supply of electricity and water.

The early years of this highly experimental irrigation scheme were plagued with problems. Less than half of the eighty-nine holdings released had been taken up by mid-1913, with only nineteen of these occupied.[8] Insufficient knowledge about irrigation farming and suitable crops was compounded further by a lack of planning and inadequate support for the settlers. There were also no established towns in the area. Construction of the new town of Griffith was yet to commence.[9] The villages of Beelbangera, Bilbul and Yoogali did not develop until the area became more populated in the 1920s. The largest settlement was at Hanwood, known then as Bagtown, the main work camp set up by the Public Works Department. This shanty town consisted of tents, makeshift humpies and a few shops made of scrap tin. Its population was employed mainly in building irrigation infrastructure such as canal and channel construction. A smaller work camp existed at Yenda which developed into a village as the number of settlers grew.

A small number of Italians from the province of Treviso in the Veneto region settled in the MIA during the First World War, mostly via the mines of Broken Hill. In an attempt to recruit settlers, senior officers from the Irrigation Commission had been sent to Broken Hill to promote the scheme.[10] The exodus of young men who enlisted with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 put an end to any prospect of attracting large numbers of settlers.

It was no surprise that the MIA scheme held such little appeal. Settlers had to begin from scratch, clearing the land and, in the case of horticultural holdings, plant fruit trees which took at least five years to become productive. But for these Veneti the MIA offered the opportunity of land ownership and economic independence, an impossible prospect in Italian peasant society. A more immediate factor for the Broken Hill miners was the unreliability of work because of declining demand due to the war. Many were also beginning to suffer poor health.

Most of the early Italian settlers were experienced farmers or artisans, possessing a versatility and adaptability which characterised peasant culture and enabled them to successfully establish horticultural farms. The dominant agricultural unit in the Veneto region was the privately-owned farm of between two to five hectares in size (divided into even smaller holdings following the population growth of the late nineteenth century). Farming included the production of maize, wheat, grapes and other fruit, silk and pigs. The other two main groups were the tenant-farmers and the mezzadri (share-farmers).[11] Some families owned, rented and sharecropped at the same time to earn a sufficient living as well as some of the male members working as labourers on other farms[12]

The first of the Italian miners to take up a horticultural farm in the Griffith area was Luigi Bonomi. He had arrived in Australia from Velo Veronese near the town of Verona in the province of Treviso in 1905 with his wife Fiorina and baby Cesare. Bonomi had worked in the mines at Rutherglen and Charlton in Victoria and on the Burrinjuck Dam in the MIA before moving on to Broken Hill. In August 1915 Bonomi was granted a horticultural farm in the Mirrool Irrigation Area (Mirrool), sending for his wife and children who had stayed behind in Broken Hill. His twelve year old son Cesare did not go to school that year so that he could help his father clear the land and plant fruit trees. [13]

Fellow p*aesani* Cirillo Baltieri, Luigi Guglielmini, Marco Castagna and his wife and baby left Broken Hill shortly after to join Bonomi, taking up a horticultural farm in partnership.[14] This form of land tenure, with *paesani* or family members pooling their resources where savings did not permit outright purchase in order to gain a foothold in the 'agricultural ladder', was to be a feature of early Italian settlement.[15]

Another Veronese, Guerino Baltieri, arrived just over a year later from Broken Hill in December 1916, accompanied by his wife, Giuditta and their three young children. Baltieri worked at a local nursery while saving enough money to take up a farm in Mirrool, which he did in 1919.[16]

A small group of Italians from the Communita Pedemontana del Grappa group of towns and villages in the Alpine foothills of the province of Treviso in Veneto also left Broken Hill to settle in the Griffith area. The first of these was Giovanni Ceccato from the village of Cavaso del Tomba. He was granted a horticultural farm in Mirrool in 1917, although continuing to work as a labourer on channel construction and other projects for the Irrigation Commission in order to earn income to meet his farm repayments. His younger brother, Antonio, arrived that same year. [17]

Three *paesani* from Possagno in the province of Treviso also left Broken Hill for Griffith in these years. Giuseppe Cunial was the first to do so in 1916, working as a farm labourer at Hanwood. Angelo Manera followed the next year, taking up a farm in partnership with his friend Girolamo Vardanega in February 1917.[18]

There were other Veneti who left Broken Hill in the late 1910s to work as labourers in the MIA where there was no shortage of employment on irrigation construction. Because they did not take up farms, however, they left no official records and little is known of them.

Word of the opportunities in the MIA was not confined to Broken Hill. Many Italians had learned of it while working on the Burrinjuck Dam and other work camps across the state. One of them was Assuero Collauti from the village of Segnaco in the province of Udine located in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. He acquired a farm in Hanwood in partnership with fellow paesani Giacomo Del Fabbro in 1915.[19]

Many of the Italians who had settled in Griffith returned home in 1917 to serve in the Italian army as part of the Allied forces in the First World War, either repatriated or returning voluntarily. They returned after the war, often with family members, accepting a government-assisted package back to Griffith. Luigi Guglielmini, for instance, arrived back with his wife and sixteen year old son.[20] Collauti returned in 1921 with a new wife, Del Fabbro's daughter Enrichetta, and her two brothers.[21] Other Veneti returning to Australia after the war joined *paesani* in Griffith. Angelo Pastega, for example, who had been working in the mines at Broken Hill when he was repatriated, arrived in Griffith in March 1920, living on the farm of his friend Angelo Manera.[22]

From the early 1920s *paesani* from the home villages and towns of the provinces of Treviso and Vincenza began arriving in the Griffith area. The existing economic pressures in Veneto, further exacerbated by the devastation caused by the First World War, left many with no option other than to migrate. With the decline in opportunities in central Europe and South America and the introduction of strict quotas for southern European migrants by the United States in 1921, Australia became a more attractive destination.[23] Letters sent home which spoke enthusiastically of the opportunities in the MIA were in turn passed around the village, inducing others to migrate. [24]

Italian men lined up to board a troop ship at Darling Harbour in Sydney in May 1918 for repatriation to Italy to fight in the First World War. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

Veneti also continued to arrive from Broken Hill. High unemployment in the early 1920s, combined with the emergence of the Fascist political regime, had increased hostility towards Italians in Broken Hill and other mining areas such as Kalgoorlie, Lithgow and Port Pirie.[25] In order to diffuse the situation the Italian-Consul gave assurances to the Federal government that it would direct migrants to agricultural areas. This was how Domenico Calabria from the small town of Plati in Reggio Calabria, came to settle in the Griffith area in 1922. His brothers Giuseppe (Joe) and Pasquale followed shortly after.[26]

In 1925 the Federal government introduced the requirement that southern Europeans ('aliens') be sponsored or possess £40 on their arrival (landing fee) as a condition of entry to Australia.[27] Governments of these countries were also requested not to issue passports to those persons unable to meet these requirements. As a result, the production of an *atto di richiamo* (sponsorship form) was necessary before departing Italy.[28] But this had little impact. Rather, the sponsorship system perpetuated existing patterns of chain migration as it required the presence of a friend or relative in Australia.[29]

Many young Italians arrived in Griffith on spec with nothing more than the name and address of a fellow *paesano*, in most cases also their sponsor. As a boy in the early 1920s Cesare Bonomi can recall six young Italian men appearing unexpectedly at the family farm one night. They set up camp on the farm and his father, Luigi Bonomi, helped them find work. Others followed. It was a similar story at the Ceccato farm. Unbeknown to Giovanni Ceccato, young men from his town of Cavaso del Tomba had noted down his address from letters they had sent home and nominated him as their sponsor.[30]

One of the young men was twenty two year old Antonio (Tony) Bugno who arrived in Sydney from Possagno in 1921 with no English other than a piece of paper on which was written the words 'Griffith' and the name of his sponsor, 'Pastega'.[31] After managing to find his way to Griffith, he fortuitously encountered a friend from home, Girolamo Vardanega, who took him to the Pastega's farm.[32] Twenty two year old Santo Salvestro from Cavaso del Tomba who joined his brothers, Luigi and Antonio, was another.

Arriving in 1924, he worked as a bricklayer before taking up his own farm at Hanwood in 1927. This in turn also became a boarding house for arriving *paesani*.

Most of these young Italian men, predominantly small farmers and agricultural labourers, were employed on the farms of civilian and soldier settlers and irrigation construction. The larger farms such as Beaumont's, Spry's and Barber's at Hanwood were large employers of Italian labourers.[33] They lived in makeshift camps on the farms of their *paesani* or employer.[34] Jack McWilliam, who established a winery in Hanwood in 1916, was a large employer of Italians. Tin shacks were erected on his farm to provide accommodation for Italian farm labourers. Egidio (Jim) Gatto, for example, who worked for the Holroyds packing grapes and other fruit when he arrived in Griffith in the mid-1920s, camped on the McWilliam property.[35]

Construction of the Mirrool Creek regulators, 1921. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

For about one half of the Veneti in Mirrool during this first settlement period, farm ownership was achieved initially by entering into partnerships with *paesani* or other family members until individual ownership was possible. Like the assistance given with accommodation and finding work, this reflected the strength of family and regional ties and the co-operative nature of Italian peasant culture.[36] A mere eight Veneti purchased the small one hectare residential blocks of one to five acres in size. Although this number fluctuated in the following decades, it seems that these small holdings never held much appeal to Veneti as a stepping stone to farm ownership. The purchase of a horticultural farm with savings remained the main avenue. Further, subleasing from soldier and civilian settlers was not common in these early years. Many continued to work as labourers after acquiring a farm to earn enough income to meet their repayments.[37] Santo Salvestro, for example, worked as a labourer on road construction in order to pay off his farm as well as send money home.[38] It was a tough existence, as he later recalled:

> I worked day and night. Just think, I had four horses and they died on average every three months. In five years I paid off all my debts while continuing to send money home to the family. This way my father was able to buy the house in which he lived.[39]

The temporary accommodation on Santo Salvestro's farm at Hanwood for recently-arrived *paesani* in 1929. Young men arriving in Griffith lived in primitive makeshift accommodation such as this on the farms of the more established Italians while working to save enough money to buy their own farm. The men in the foreground are Santo, Luigi and Antonio Salvestro. The woman is Santo's wife, Regina, who is holding their daughter Natalina. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

While most Italians arriving in the MIA did so with the intention of settling there permanently, some intended to return home. Brothers Antonio and Romano Ballestrin from the village of One-di-Fonte in the province of Treviso, for example, worked in the Griffith area for five years from the late 1920s in order to save enough money for a comfortable life back home. After a season of working as grape pickers, they grew vegetables on land leased from Bill McCann. Much to their disappointment they found that conditions had remained unchanged on their return, re-migrating to the MIA shortly after in 1935, together with their new wives.[40]

Although poverty was the primary reason for Italian migration, there were also non-economic forces at play.[41] For many, permanent migration meant breaking away from the constraints of the family unit and the rigidity of peasant society in Veneto which offered little opportunity for independence, let alone economic or social mobility. As Huber noted in her 1969 study of Italian settlement in the MIA:

> The code of behaviour was rigid, imposing such strongly enforced constraints, that there were almost no alternatives for the dissenting other than permanent migration. It was an egalitarian peasant society where each family was interested in maintaining or improving its economic status. There was little social or economic mobility.[42]

Banna Avenue, Griffith, in 1921. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

The rise of Fascism in 1922 – fiercely opposed in Veneto – also forced many to leave. Fiore Plos was in his early twenties when he fled his home town in Udine in 1925. As he recounted many years later:

> I had a friend. We go round here and there looking for girls in different towns on the pushbike. When I met him one Sunday I saw he had joined the Fascists. He had a black shirt. I said, take that dirty shirt off, I'm not coming around with you with that dirty black shirt. And he reported me. The next day they [the Blackshirts] came into the barber's shop with a revolver and the castor oil, 'you got to drink this oil here'…. When they get the oil, they don't get castor oil, they get machine oil…out of the sump. They kill you.[43] When my father saw them coming he follows them into the barber shop…He went down on his knees, poor man, to try for them not to give me the oil… So they took pity on an old man and said, 'all right, we will let him go this time, but next time he'll have to take it.' So when they went he said, 'stop your working and see if you can go somewhere out of Italy, otherwise they will come and kill you'. I talk with my friends. Romano Snaidero says he has got a friend in Australia. 'I'll come with you', he said. So then the other Snaidero heard that and he said, 'I'll come too'. So the next day we start to go around and make papers to come to Australia.[44]

The majority of farmers in the MIA during the 1920s were soldier settlers. Settlement of some 1,500 returned servicemen in the MIA began in 1919, a solution to the scheme's failure to attract settlers.[45] As a form of repatriation, the cost of the State-administered soldier settlement schemes was met largely by the Federal government. The settlers were provided with land in areas specifically set aside for soldier settlement in Mirrool and, to a lesser extent, Yanco which was still being established by the Irrigation Commission. They also received capital for establishment costs such as housing, buying stock, plant and orchard seedlings. Although applicants were required to have some farming knowledge or qualifications, in the enthusiasm to place them on the land this was not strictly enforced. By the end of 1924, ninety percent of soldier settlers had taken up their blocks in Mirrool.[46]

Farmers delivering their grape harvests to McWilliams winery at Hanwood around the late 1920s. Jack McWilliam opened the first winery at Hanwood in 1916. Italians were already making their own wine for domestic use. The first Italian to establish a winery was Vittorio De Bortoli who dedicated the farm he bought at Bilbul in 1928 to wine growing. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

The speed at which returned servicemen were placed on the land was followed by their equally rapid withdrawal. Images of bountiful orchards and lush pastures that had appeared in the publicity material belied a much starker reality. Serious problems had surfaced as early as 1923, stemming from inexperience in irrigation farming, a lack of knowledge of the types of suitable crops and growing methods, marginal returns due to the impact of increased production on prices and excessive use of irrigation water.[47] By then seventeen percent of the original soldier settler horticultural holdings in Mirrool had been relinquished. In Yanco the figure was much higher, at just under one quarter.[48] Once the subsistence payments stopped, interest on loans made to soldier settlers during the establishment period began to mount as farms failed to become productive. As crops failed and markets collapsed, the settlers were unable to service their debts.[49] Growing anger amongst soldier settlers came to a head in 1924 when around 500 marched on the Irrigation Commission offices demanding a re-evaluation and reduction of their debts owed to the government.[50] That same year W. J. Allen, a senior fruit expert with the New South Wales Department of Agriculture carried out an assessment of the orchards of soldier settlers in 1924 which he found to be generally unsatisfactory.[51]

One advantage of relinquishment was that it enabled the enlargement of holdings for those who remained through the amalgamation of neighbouring farms.[52] In 1926 legislation was passed which allowed for a reclassification of horticultural and large area farms. Most soldier and civilian settlers sought an assessment of the suitability of their land and increase in their home maintenance areas.[53] Where there was no prospect for enlargement, settlers either remained on their original holding or consented to surrender, although not always voluntarily.[54] Few Italians took advantage of these provisions, as most were unaware of them. But they were also less disposed to attribute blame to the government and Irrigation Commission for the problems which beset them than other settlers.[55]

Only a minority of original soldier settlers in Mirrool and Yanco survived more than ten years.[56] By the end of 1929 when the full impact of the Depression was being felt and which saw prices collapse and markets disappear, around two thirds had relinquished their holdings, either by sale, surrender or forfeiture (due to rent arrears, non-repayment of debts or non-compliance with the conditions of the grant such as inadequate improvement of the land and lack of sound management).[57] The 1930s offered some

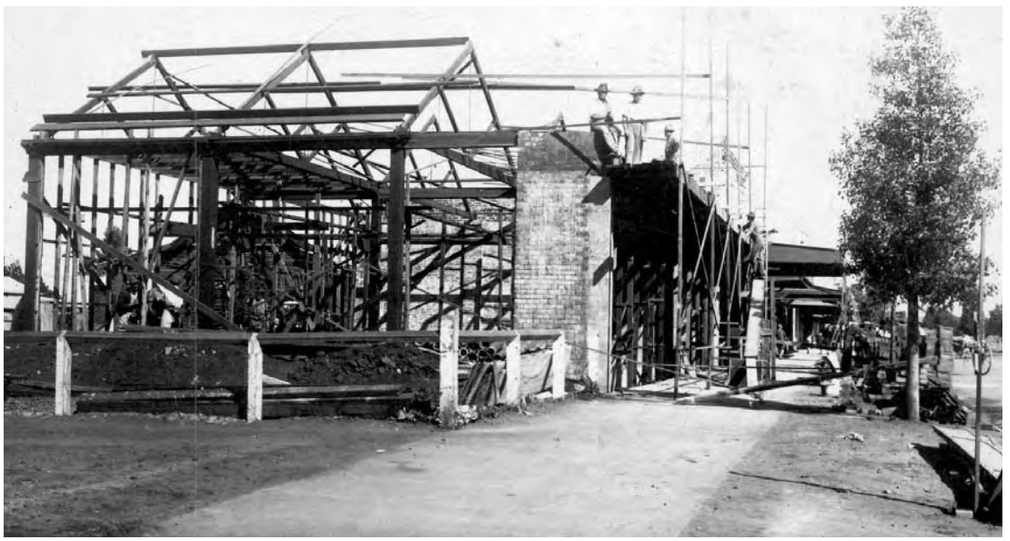
Mirrool soldier settlers marching to the offices of the Irrigation Commission along Banna Avenue on 6 February, 1924 to demand a re-evaluation and reduction of their debts. They are led by Stan Broome, president of the Griffith RSL Sub-branch. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

relief for those remaining. Far-reaching relief measures were provided for with the passage of the *Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area Occupiers' Relief Act No. 52, 1934.*[58]

In stark contrast, most of the Italians were establishing viable horticultural farms. The first five years or so of settlement was particularly tough for settlers who struggled while waiting for fruit trees to mature and become productive. Driven by the peasant ideal of land ownership and self-sufficiency and accustomed to hardship, the Italians worked co-operatively towards these common goals, pooling their resources and sharing equipment and machinery. While they had little previous experience in large-scale horticulture, they did possess an ability to adapt and innovate, making them better placed to survive. Much of their survival was due to the operation of the whole family as a working unit, which proved critical given the labour intensive nature of horticultural farming. Their ability to carve out a frugal and subsistence life and strong tradition of collectivism meant that they were able to weather times of economic depression more easily than non-Italian farmers. As experienced intensive farmers they also worked the land to its full capacity, even growing vegetables between fruit trees to generate additional income to keep them afloat in the hard times.[59] But they were not spared the devastating impact of the Depression years of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Anna Barichello Peruzzi, for example, remembers how her family were forced to live on food coupons as they were unable to sell their produce.[60]

By the end of 1929, sixty seven farms in the MIA were owned by Italians. Sixty-four of these were in Mirrool, about one-tenth of the total. Of these fifty-five were owned by Veneti.[61] The three Italian farms in Yanco were owned by Calabresi. Like the Veneti in Mirrool, the Calabresi would become the dominant Italian group in that area. During the 1930s other Italian groups settled in the MIA, such as the Friulani in Mirrool and the Pugliesi and Siciliani in Yanco.[62] Their settlement did not, however, trigger chain migration on the same scale. Most settled in the Griffith area from the cane fields of Innisfail and Ingham in northern Queensland.

The apparent success of the Italians, many of whom had purchased relinquished soldier settler holdings, made them an obvious target for vilification. In publicly venting its anger over the plight of soldier settlers, the RSL sought to identify the Italians as major players in their displacement. Because of the concentration of soldier settlers in designated areas, the arrival of Italians in their 'exclusive domain' was highly visible.



Antonio Ceccato with other bricklayers working on the construction of the second Griffith Producer's Co-operative building in the early 1920s. Antonio continued to work in the building trade while also operating a farm. He constructed many of the original buildings in Griffith. Gino Ceccato private collection

For most of the 1920s the local newspaper, the *Murrumbidgee Irrigator* (the *Irrigator*) carried periodic reports of the growing number of Italians and other southern European migrants in Australia. But it was not until 1927, when the failure of soldier settlement began to attract widespread attention, that the Italian presence emerged as an issue of local concern in press reports.[63] An article appearing in the *Irrigator* in June of that year depicted the so-called 'foreign invasion' as sinister and somewhat parasitic in nature. His 'game', according to the article, was to 'come in to communities where settlement had been effected by other people' with the assistance of 'a well defined organisation extending from Italy and having its agents everywhere in Australia where land can be won from original holders by the special means the foreign person adopts in successfully boring in and gradually squeezing out the Australian and Britisher'.[64] It was also claimed that the Italians were undercutting other farmers by operating outside the marketing organisations and schemes established in the MIA by selling directly to 'Italian and other foreign shopkeepers'.[65]

Occasional articles appeared in the *Irrigator* referring to Italian cultural practices, notably their apparent tendency to 'drink wine like we drink tea' and what was perceived by Australians to be the exploitative practice of women and children working on the farms. This, along with the primitive conditions they were prepared to live in, was attributed as the reasons for their success, rather than any sound farm management.[66]

Such crude and xenophobic characterisations largely went untested because of the minimal social contact between Australians and Italians. But it is unlikely the alarmist tone of many of these reports reflected community sentiment in the MIA which, if anything, was one of indifference.[67] Contact between Italian and non-Italian farmers took place on a daily or weekly basis in an ordinary or routinised context. The Italians were respected as horticulturalists. Further, as Pich has noted, 'Italians were commonly enough known by Australians employing them as industrious, reliable workers'. As such, any '"reputed" virtues or vices' were 'of secondary concern to the developing irrigation community'.[68]

Angelo Rossetto and friends building his new home at 1261 Erskine Road in 1926. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

Many Italians have recalled instances of generosity and the formation of friendships with Australian farmers. Neighbouring Italian and Australian farmers often helped each other. Giovanni Ceccato's neighbour, Jack McWilliam, for instance, gave him advice on vine growing methods.[69] Similarly, when James Chapman was planting his fruit trees and grape vines in 1916, Luigi Bonomi offered the loan of his implements.[70] A life long friendship developed between the Bugnos and 'bachelors' Tom Morley and Wilson Moses, who were regular dinner guests at their home in the 1930s, having developed a liking for Antonietta's cooking.[71]

Many soldier settlers employed Italians as labourers, who often also lived on their farms in makeshift dwellings. Mutual respect and understanding developed as a result of such proximity. Fiore Plos' employer, Mr Dobson, bought him an English/Italian dictionary when he started working for him in 1923 so that they could communicate and attempted to teach him English. As Fiore fondly recalled many years later:

> He starts to teach me one word a day. No more, he says, one word a day. So in the morning, 'what did I tell you yesterday?' 'Chooks' I say. He say, 'good'. Next day, 'what did I tell you yesterday?'. 'Axe, you tell me to chop wood with the axe.' We went like this for a good while. I learnt fast. After six months I can talk real. I never learn any more after that.

One day he got a very sick horse. He send me to town in Griffith to buy a bottle of linseed oil on a pushbike to give to the horse. He was a bit of a singer and when he come up in the shed he come there singing 'the raw linseed oil' to the tune of 'A life on the ocean wave'. He said, can you remember?'. I said, 'oh yes boss'. Anyway, I got in the Co-op there and I said 'a bottle of the raw linseed oil'. I got it all right and when I come home and he say 'how you do it', I said, 'I remember your song'.[72]

His wife, Mrs Dobson also played an important part in his education:

> Mrs Dobson was a very nice lady too. One day I asked the boss one word. It wasn't a nice word and he told me not to ask him that any more. And she heard him. When you want to know any word, she said, tell me when the boss not looking. I will tell you exactly what it is. I like it very much that way because how can you know the words – you say the wrong thing.[73]

Fiore was an extremely hard worker, often working seven days a week or in the evenings without extra pay. 'If there was work to be done', he recalled, 'doesn't matter if it's Sunday or Saturday or night or day, it's got to be done. Just the same pay, eight bob a day'. There were also more light-hearted moments, such as the time that Fiore, a barber by trade, shaved Dobson's face with a razor sharp blade with his head turned away as he conducted a conversation with Mrs Dobson as she washed the dishes:

> Once I put the razor to the face I turn towards Mrs Dobson and talk to her while I'm shaving him. He couldn't move. I noticed he was scared and shaking. When I have the razor in my hand it just flies. No trouble for me. That was my job. When I'm finished the boss said, well, you won't touch me any more. I told you, I said, I was a barber and I can shave you without looking.[74]

As Fiore pointed out, 'Dobson had no money himself. They were hard days'. He also had no farming experience. Like the Italians, the Dobsons were a young couple trying to establish themselves.

Many Italian men were also helped by their employer with family reunions and accommodation. When Antonio Bugno brought his wife and child out from Italy in 1922 his employer, H. Such, allowed him to live in a makeshift dwelling on the farm, building him a home on the site shortly after.[75] Similarly, in 1926 the Dodsons lent Fiore Plos money to send to Italy for the passage of his fiancé to Australia and paid for his wedding reception. Fiore's fiancé even got married in Mrs Dobson's wedding dress when hers failed to arrive. Fiore remained working for the Dobsons for eight years. During this long association Fiore and his wife befriended many Australians in the area. Fiore left the employment of the Dobsons in 1932 when he bought a farm in Hanwood.[76]

But the extent of integration should not be overstated. Racist taunts and other displays of interaction were widespread in the Griffith area. For the most part, Italians were excluded from town life and tended to socialise only with each other. As one Italian recalled of the 1930s:

> [W]e were terrified of going into town, especially anywhere near a pub. The place was full of Australians, mainly returned soldiers, and they'd always pick a fight. They'd call us 'bloody dagoes' or 'spags' and say we smelled of garlic and onions. We only went into town when we had to… We stuck together like one big family.[77]

Maria Manera also recalls the racism they suffered in the interwar years: 'Italians were abused and insulted by Australians and it was very bad to bear because we harmed nobody, just worked and looked after our families'.[78]

Much of the anti-Italian sentiment was fostered by the local RSL sub-branches. At a meeting of the Griffith RSL in July 1927, for example, a motion was proposed calling on the Irrigation Commission to review its policy of allowing Italians to take up former soldier settler farms. It was defeated by forty one to thirty nine votes. As several members pointed out in the heated debate that followed, such a proposition was hypocritical given the willingness of many of those present to employ Italians as labourers on their farms because they were hard working – and to sell their farms to them.[79] Those who came out in defence of Italians, however, risked being labelled 'white dagoes' by certain sections of the community.[80]

Even had the Irrigation Commission been willing to oblige, it was mindful of the terms of the *Treaty of Commerce and Navigation* between Great Britain and the Kingdom of Italy which over-rode the provisions under various land laws restricting ownership by aliens.[81] Its application in New South Wales meant that the requirement of twelve months residency and naturalisation as a pre-condition for land ownership under section 241 of the *Crown Lands Consolidation Act 1913* did not apply to Italians. Unaware of this exemption, most Italians nevertheless became naturalised. As the Irrigation Commission noted in its 1931 annual report, the effect of the treaty was that Italians had 'full rights to acquire title to land in Australia, just as Australians would have in Italy'. As a result, it did not differentiate between British-Australian and Italian applicants in the early years of settlement.[82] The treaty did not, however, limit the Irrigation Commission's absolute discretion in approving applications for leasing, sub-leasing, purchases, transfers or assignments of land.

Anna Bof, Luigi Suine and Alasco Ceccato at the drying ovens during apricot season in 1930. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

As historians Baldassar and Pesman have noted:

> As in the mines and on the cane fields of North Queensland, the growing concentration of Italians in the Griffith area, together with the transfer of an increasing number of farms into their hands, fed Australian xenophobia…These attitudes were particularly fostered by the Returned Soldiers League (RSL). The RSL expressed anger over the Italian success in the MIA, which they represented as having been achieved at the expense of the failed Australian ex-servicemen settlers.[83]

But the two were causally unrelated.[84] The popular view that Italian settlement occurred largely on the back of soldier settlement failure is simply incorrect. By the end of 1929, farms acquired from soldier settlers made up thirty-six percent of all Italian holdings in Mirrool. The majority of farms, sixty-four percent, were acquired by Italians either directly from the Irrigation Commission (either uncleared Crown land or irrigated land still unplanted) or from civilian settlers.[85] Rather, the leasehold land tenure system in the MIA was the central factor in their ability to take up farms as it did not require any major capital outlay.[86] The exit of soldier settlers merely created additional opportunities for the Italians.[87] Their presence, however, challenged the very racial underpinnings on which closer settlement was premised – that is, the retention of the British character of the Australian population. But both the immigration schemes established to attract British settlers and secure a period of preference for MIA produce, namely canned and dried fruits, had similarly failed.[88]

Despite their overall success, the Italian settlers also experienced the full range of life's difficulties. Whether because of mental illness, social isolation or simply bad luck, not all Italian settlers prospered. Assuero Collauti and Giacomo Del Fabbro had been forced to sell their farm at Hanwood shortly after they had taken it up in partnership in 1915 following the failure of their first two crops of tomatoes and potatoes due to bad advice. Fortunately for Collauti, the Adelaide businessman, Len Wincey, bought them out and kept him on to manage it.[89] Similarly, Giuseppe Calabaria lost his horticultural farm at Bilbul in the 1930s.[90]

Beniamino De Bortoli, a carpenter from Asolo who arrived Australia in 1927 with his friend Giovanni Carraro, succumbed to alcoholism. De Bortoli ceased contact with his family two and a half years after he had left. One of his seven children, Olivio De Bortoli, travelled to Australia to look for him many years later, finding him in Griffith in 1953, a homeless alcoholic. Olivio remained in Griffith working for two years before taking his father home to Asolo.[91]

The Colautti family picking pears on Len Wincey's farm at Hanwood in the summer of 1928. Len Wincey is in the foreground. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

Similarly, Valerio Ricetti, known locally as 'the hermit', suffered from mental illness. He worked as a miner in Broken Hill with Francesco Bicego and other *paesani*. Rather than following them to Griffith, he headed for South Australia and worked in various jobs. His wanderings led him to Griffith in 1925 where, unbeknown to him, his *paesani* had settled. Ricetti set up home in a cave on Scenic Hill on the outskirts of town where he lived undiscovered for several years, growing his own fruit and vegetables and occasionally working as a farm labourer in exchange for food.[92]

There were also cases of exceptional success. Vittorio De Bortoli arrived in Griffith from Castelcucco in the province of Treviso in 1924, working as a farm labourer before moving to one of the McWilliam family vineyards. He acquired his own land in 1927 and established a winery, becoming one of Australia's leading and largest producers.[93]

By 1933 the Italian population in the Griffith area had increased to 747, representing close to nine percent of the total population of the Griffith area.[94] Although the number arriving in Australia declined significantly during the first half of the 1930s due to the Depression and the introduction of restrictions on southern European immigration, Italian settlement in the Griffith area continued to grow during these years. This was largely due to family reunification and the migration of Italians from the cane fields of northern Queensland, many of whom had worked in the Griffith area during the picking season before deciding to settle there.[95] Frank Battaglia was one of them. He settled in Ingham, in North Queensland, after migrating to Australia in 1927 from the village of Patrizzi in Calabria, working as a cane cutter and travelling down to Griffith during the fruit picking season before moving there permanently in 1939.[96]

Tony Dal Broi with his son Angelo and new Chevrolet truck loaded with trays in preparation for the prune season on his farm at Hanwood in 1937. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

In 1940 , 230 horticultural farms were in Italian ownership. The concentration was greatest around the settlements of Yenda, Hanwood and Yoogali in Mirrool where Italians – mostly Veneti – owned 205 of the 645 horticultural farms.[97] Italian farmers filled the 'void' created by the failure of soldier and civilian settlers. Indeed, without Italian settlement the MIA scheme may well have failed.[98] As soldier and civilian settlers were walking off their land in large numbers, the Italians were taking their place.[99] They were also willing to buy farms that had become run down or were derelict as well as take up land classified as unsuitable for horticultural production under irrigation methods in the 1920s and 1930s (anomalous land). Affordability of the land was a major factor in these instances.[100]

Their important contribution was publicly recognised by the Irrigation Commission in its 1931 annual report:

> A feature of the development of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas of recent years has been the influx of a large number of Italians. It is estimated that there are between 600 and 700 Italian workers, many of them with wives and families, at present in residence on the Irrigation Areas. At the Public Schools a sprinkling of young Italians is already in evidence. Of these the great majority of Italians is on the Griffith end of settlement, where approximately 100 of them have taken up farms. Many of these blocks which, being of a heavy difficult nature to work, were transferred by their holders, or were classed as unsuitable for agriculture in the recent classification.
>
> As settlers these men have proved very hard workers, and it can be said without doubt that their methods on the heavy soils are giving satisfactory results.

According to Mr G J Evatt, a commissioner between 1921 and 1944, the Irrigation Commission welcomed Italian settlement:

> In my time we always, except of course during the World War II period, welcomed Italian settlers…The earlier Italian settlers were the main advocates of settlement by their friends and relatives and thus their number grew…There was no need to induce the Italians to settle on the MIA as those already here did the propaganda work…As resident commissioner I welcomed the chance of getting settlers from anywhere in addition to the discharged servicemen… Italian settlers got no special concessions… I always welcomed them and would willingly have had more as they were regarded usually as excellent farmers…[101]

Keen to recover or minimise its losses, the Rural Bank (which took over the role of financing farm enterprises from the Irrigation Commission and government departments in 1934) was similarly disposed because of their proven record of success in the MIA.[102] Importantly, Italians acquiring former soldier settler farms inherited the outstanding debts of the original holder as part of the purchase. When Angelo Dal Broi acquired a farm in Hanwood in November 1934 in partnership with his uncle, Sebastiano Favero, most of the purchase price of £1,550 consisted of an outstanding debt owed by the former soldier settler owner to the Rural Bank. The only planting of any worth on the two hectare farm was a small area of prunes. The rest of the plantings, which included stone fruits, grapes, citrus fruits and fodder crops had to be grubbed out. They still proceeded with the purchase on the understanding that the outstanding debt would be reviewed, paying the previous owner £350 and borrowing the rest from the Rural Bank.[103] When criticised for granting finance to Italians while declining to lend to some prospective British-Australian applicants, the Rural Bank simply responded that decisions were based purely on commercial considerations.[104] In the end, Italian settlement in the MIA had proved fortuitous for both the Irrigation Commission and the bank.

Endnotes

1 B. Kelly, *From Wilderness to Eden – A History of the City of Griffith, Its Region and People*, Griffith City Council, 1988, pp166-167; T. Cecilia, *Un Giardino nel Deserto. Storia della communità italiana della Riverina: New South Wales, Australia*, Centro Studi Emigrazione, Rome, 1993, p70.

2 Southern Europeans were not subject to the White Australia policy and there was no restriction on their immigration to Australia. As with the legislation of the colonies prior to federation, the Commonwealth *Immigration* Act of 1901 was aimed at controlling the entry of Asians.

3 Loretta Baldassar and Ros Pesman, *From Paesani to Global Italians: Veneto Migrants in Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, 2005, p23.

4 With the economic collapse of the rural sector and decline of the traditional silk and wool industries resulting from the Napoleonic Wars of this once wealthy region, it became characterised by poverty, backwardness and political conservatism. see R. Pascoe, *The Seasons of Treviso*, Grollo Australia, Northland, 1995.

5 Baldassar, *op cit*, p25.

6 The idea of irrigation schemes based on whole districts was not a new one. Rather, the high costs involved had meant that most of the privately-funded irrigation schemes of this nature had failed. An important exception here were the schemes developed by the Chaffey Brothers in the late 1880s for fruit growing along the Murray River at Mildura in Victoria and Renmark in South Australia. These became the model governments sought to emulate. But in most cases it was not until greater government involvement that such schemes succeeded.

7 R Huber, *From Pasta to Pavlova: A Comparative Study of Italian Settlers in Sydney and Griffith*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1977, pp7, 56; G Pich, 'Italian land settlement in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1975, pp 29-31.

8 As at June 1913, forty-three of the eighty-nine farms available had been taken up with an additional ten applications pending. *Irrigation Record*, 2 June 1913, cited in Kelly, *op cit*, p239.

9 The Chicago architect Walter Burley Griffin, who designed the town, was not commissioned by the State government until late 1913. The town was completed in 1916. Kelly, *op cit*, p239.

10 Huber, *op cit*, p56; Kelly, *op cit*, pp 165, 168.

11 Huber, *op cit*, pp15-16.

12 Huber, *op cit*, pp 20-23.

13 Like many Italians who came to Australia at this time, Bonomi was a veteran *giramondo*. He had first left Italy at the age of eighteen, working in South America for five years before returning home. As his family's agricultural holding was unable to sustain them all he left again shortly after, this time to Germany. On the next occasion he was persuaded by a paesano to emigrate to Australia. *Griffith and District Pioneers: A Biographical Register*, Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society, Griffith, series 1, 1990, p49; Cecilia, *op cit*, p36.

14 Griffith and District Pioneers, series one, *op cit*, p49; transcript of interview, Cesare Bonomi, LSC, Griffith City Library, cited in Kelly, *op cit*, p168.

15 Pich, *op cit*, pp44,48.

16 Griffith and District pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, pp29-30.

17 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, pp85, 88, 89.

18 Griffith and District Pioneers, series1, *op cit*, pp125, 266;. Kelly, *op cit*, p173.

19 WRC Farm Records, cited in Kelly, *op cit*, p167; Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, pp104-105.

20 Transcript of interview, Cesare Bonomi, Local studies collection, Griffith City Library, cited in Kelly, *op cit*, p168.

21 *Area News*, 10 April 1981.

22 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 2, *op cit*, p340.
23 Baldassar, *op cit*, p44-45.
24 C A Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1963, p180.
25 *NSWPD*, 4 November 1925, p2116; 9 February 1927, p1049.
26 Further, Consuls and Consular agents were instructed not to issue nomination papers to Italians living in regional industrial areas in order to restrict chain migration until employment conditions improved. *NSWP*D, 15 November 1927, pp257-258; 25 November 1927, p687; Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3 part 1, *op cit*, pp119-120, 121, 122, 123.
27 The measure was aimed at preventing the entry of those without sufficient means to support themselves.
28 The Federal government had already introduced annual quotas for southern European migrants. In the case of Italians, this was set at around 5,000 per annum, the number considered able to be absorbed into the Australian economy. These measures had little effect as numbers fell way below the quota limits. As Price has noted, the decision by southern Europeans to migrate was 'primary influenced by their own desires and financial capacities or by those of their relatives'. Price, *op cit*, pp88, 91, 95,100.
29 Baldassar, *op cit*, p34.
30 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, p90; Peter Kabaila, *Griffith Heritage*, Pirion Publishing, Canberra, ACT, 2005, pp 59-60, 61.
31 *Griffith and District Pioneers: a biographical register*, Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society, series 3, part 1**,** 1993, p99.
32 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, pp99-100.
33 Kelly, *op cit*, p174.
34 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 2, *op cit*, p5; Cecilia, *op cit*, pp47-48.
35 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, pp303, 304.
36 Pich, *op cit*, p65.
37 Pich, *op cit*, pp48, pp51-54
38 Kelly, *op cit*, p177; Cecilia, *op cit*, p70.
39 Cecilia, *op cit*, p71.
40 Tony married Rosalia Dametto and Romano married Agnese Minato. The two couples lived in a makeshift house on a farm at Bilbul owned by their friends, leasing some land in the area on which they grew vegetables. In time they had saved enough to acquire a horticultural farm at Bilbul in partnership. Romano purchased a farm in Griffith two years later. *Area News*, 26 May 1995, p11.
41 Price, *op cit*, pp84-85; Baldassar, *op cit*, pp45-46.
42 Huber, *op cit*, p25.
43 The force-feeding of 'castor oil' to opponents of Fascism was one of the distinctive techniques of these paramilitary groups
44 transcript of interview of Fiore Plos, March 1978, Local studies collection, Griffith City Library.
45 The rapid expansion of irrigation farming in Goulburn and Murray Valleys was similarly dependent on soldier settlement. Repatriation became the emphasis of these schemes rather than the economic viability of farming enterprises.
46 In Yanco the equivalent number was eighty-three percent. Of the 1,146 returned servicemen granted irrigation farms, 826 settled in Mirrool, with eighty percent establishing horticulture farms. The rest took up land in the Yanco Irrigation Area, where just over half of the blocks were devoted to horticulture. Pich, *op cit*, pp22-23.
47 On the matter of underdrainage and over-watering, see A. V. Lyons, *Area News*, 22 October 1923.
48 That is, seventeen percent in Mirrool and twenty four percent in Yanco. Pich, *op cit*, p28.

49 These problems were not confined to the MIA. Soldier settlement schemes all over Australia had run into difficulty by the mid-1920s, leading to the establishment of an inquiry by the Federal government in 1927. The main reasons for the failure of soldier settlement schemes identified by the *Pike Report* of 1929 were lack of capital, the marginal land, inadequate size of the land holdings and the unsuitability of settlers to farming. *Pike Report*, p23, cited in Pich, *op cit*, p21.
50 *Irrigator*, 1 February 1924; *Area News*, 7 February 1924.
51 J. W. Allen, *Report on inspection of farms held by returned soldiers*, 1924, cited in Pich, *op cit*, pp41-42.
52 Horticultural holdings in Mirrool and Yanco were between four and twelve hectares. In Mirrool half of the horticultural farms were only four hectares in size, compared to Yanco where seventy two per cent of the holdings were between eight and twelve hectares. Pich, *op cit*, p29.
53 T Langford-Smith, 'Landforms, land settlement and irrigation on the Murrumbidgee', PhD thesis, ANU, Canberra, 1958, pp195-198.
54 Pich, *op cit*, pp29-31, p34.
55 Pich, *op cit*, p111.
56 Pich, *op cit*, p37.
57 Sixty four percent were relinquished in Mirrool and sixty six percent in Yanco. Pich, *op cit*, pp28, 34-35, 37.
58 It granted all occupiers of irrigation farms exceeding one hectare a reduction of their current indebtedness to the Crown or Commission by one-third and the rate of interest on the amount fixed at four percent per annum. Rentals on leased holdings of similar size were reduced by one-third as well as numerous other concessions for repayment of arrears and indebtedness over a long-term period.
59 By the 1930s certain criteria was also applied by the Irrigation Commission in considering an application for a transfer of land to Italians, such as their experience in horticultural farming, demonstrated either by previous ownership or employment as a labourer. Pich, *op cit*, pp153-154.
60 Cecilia, *op cit*, p75.
61 WRC farm statistics, Kelly, *op cit*, p174; Pich, *op cit*, pp45, 99-100.
62 Pich, *op cit*, p108; Kelly, *op cit*, pp115-156.
63 Pich, *op cit*, pp91-93.
64 *Irrigator*, 24 June, 1927.
65 *Irrigator*, 29 June 1928; *Area News*, 21 August 1928; Pich, *op cit*, pp85-86.
66 eg *Irrigator*, 12 July 1927.
67 Pich, *op cit*, p95.
68 Pich, *op cit*, p96.
69 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 2, *op cit*, p90. McWilliam established the first winery in Hanwood in 1916.
70 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 2, *op cit*, p97.
71 Griffith Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p101.
72 transcript of interview of Fiore Plos, March 1978, Local studies collection, Griffith City Library.
73 *ibid.*
74 *ibid.*
75 Griffith Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p100.
76 Transcript of interview with Fiore Plos, 28 March 1978, Local studies collection, Griffith City Library.
77 Huber, *op cit*, pp97-98.
78 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, p267.
79 *Irrigator*, 26 July 1927; 29 July 1927.
80 This term was still in use in the Griffith area in 1954. Price, *op cit*, pp214-215.
81 Signed in 1883, the treaty extended reciprocal rights to the citizens of each country, guaranteeing freedom of movement and ownership of property to the nationals of

each country in the other.

82 The Treaty was nullified in 1940 when Italy entered the Second World War as an ally of Germany. Thereafter Italians became subject to the provisions applying to 'aliens' which required naturalisation within three years of the transfer of land to them. Pich, *op cit*, pp78-79.

83 Baldassar, *op cit*, pp71-72.

84 Of the sixty four horticultural holdings taken up by Italians in Mirrool during the 1920s, just over a third were former soldier settler blocks, the rest being Crown land yet to be established; none of the three holdings acquired by Italians in Yanco during the decade had been relinquished by soldier settlers. Less than one third of holdings purchased by Italians in Mirrool during the 1930s were former soldier settler farms, while in Yanco four of the twenty three blocks had been relinquished by soldier settlers. Pich, *op cit*, p33.

85 Land purchased from the Irrigation Commission constituted twenty-five percent of Italian holdings. Pich, *op cit*, pp46-48.

86 Huber, *op cit*, pp7-8.

87 Pich, *op cit*, p7.

88 *WC & IC Annual Report*, 1924, 1925, cited in Pich, *op cit*, p87.

89 Although he was called up by the Italian army in 1917, he returned to the farm at war's end with his new wife, Enrichetta, remaining there as manager until 1959. Griffith and District Pioneers, series one, *op cit*, p105.

90 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p123.

91 Tony De Bolfo, *In Search of Kings: What Became of the Passengers of the 'Re d'Italia'*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 2002, pp203-204.

92 Ricetti eventually returned to Italy in 1952 where he died shortly after. Kelly, *op cit*, p178-179.

93 Baldassar, *op cit*, p71.

94 The total population of the Wade Shire in 1933 was 8,506. Huber, *op cit*, p57; Census, ABS, 1933. According to the Census of that year, the total Italian population in the Wade Shire was 615.

95 In 1929 the Scullin Labor Federal government halved the quotas for southern European immigration in response to fears that they would compete with Australians for jobs. In the following year it abandoned the quota system altogether, prohibiting the entry of all southern Europeans other than dependent relatives of those already settled in Australia or those possessing considerable financial resources. This policy remained in place until 1936. By the time the Depression had arrived, however, Italian immigration was already in decline as a result of the restrictions imposed by the Fascist government of Italy in 1927 which prevented the emigration of all Italians other than dependent relatives as a means of retaining its young men for conscription in the army. By 1930 it was forced to relax them due to high unemployment. Price, *op cit*, pp86, 89, 91, 92, 93.

96 *The Area News*, 14 June 1995, p10.

97 Pich, *op cit*, p3, Kelly, *op cit*, p174.

98 Pich, *op cit*, p48.

99 Kelly, *op cit*, p174.

100 This was due to impeded drainage or waterlogging, heavy soil or inadequate size. In Mirrool, about one in every six Italians occupied such land, while one in every eight did so in Yanco. Pich, *op cit*, pp143-144, 233-235.

101 Personal communication with Pich 1971-1972, in Pich, *op cit*, p6.

102 Price, *op cit*, footnote 25, p212.

103 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, pp214-215.

104 *Area News*, 27 March 1936; 5 March 1937; 29 June 1937.

chapter 2
Vino, Donne e Canto
(Wine, Women and Song)

In January 1922 Luigia (Gina) Cossaltar, the fidanzate (fiancé) of Angelo Pastega, arrived in Griffith from her home town in Possagno. She was accompanied by her friend, Pasqua Rostirolla, who was engaged to Antonio Ceccato. The young women were chaperoned by Giustina Cunial who was joining her husband, Giuseppe Cunial. They would join the handful of other Italian women living in the Griffith area.

The pattern of settlement for women was that wives, children and fiancès were sent for once the men had become established and repaid their own fares. Some single men returned to Italy to be married, returning with their new wife. When the necessary funds for the passage could not be found couples were married by proxy, whereby a representative of the groom, usually his brother, would attend the ceremony in his place.[1]

The period of family separation could be very long. Paolina Manera and her two daughters did not join Angelo until 1923, six years after he had left Italy.[2] As the patrilineal extended family formed the organisational basis of peasant farming in Veneto, women and their children lived with their in-laws during the period of separation. The women (*vedove bianche* or white widows) often had to support themselves and their children, either sharecropping, raising silkworms, spinning for local textile factories, sewing or working as domestic servants.[3] Although setting out for their new life and home in Australia was highly anticipated, it was also tinged with much sadness as they said goodbye to their families, not knowing when they might see them again.

This photo of Paolina Raccanello with her children and in-laws was taken on 3 September 1939, shortly before their departure for Australia to join her husband Giuseppe. She remained in Crespano del Grappa, Treviso, living with her in-laws during the many years of her separation from her husband. Bruno Raccanello private collection

While no strangers to poverty and hardship, few women were prepared for the primitive living conditions they were to endure – far worse than what they had left. Invariably their new home consisted of a shanty tin hut on a friend or employer's farm with a dirt floor, no running water and unbearable heat in the summer, not to mention the dust and flies. Antonietta Bugno's impression of Griffith as *la finne del mondo* (the end of the earth) on her arrival in 1922 was a sentiment shared by most women.

Although physical hardship was a common experience of the wives of all settlers in the MIA, Italian women had the added burden of existing in a world *al rovescio* (upside down) – an alien landscape and culture where not speaking the language made even basic tasks like communicating with doctors and shopkeepers difficult. These women also had to contend with a number of other challenges. Having come from small closely-knit communities where farms were close to each other, they now found themselves isolated with little human contact.[4] Loneliness and homesickness were not the only emotional burdens:

> The need to help children to adjust to the presence of unknown or only vaguely remembered fathers were some of the difficulties faced by married women. For long separated fidanzate and proxy brides there was also the problem of beginning a marriage in an alien world to men from whom they had been separated or barley knew or perhaps had never met.[5]

Like most women, Gina Cossaltar laboured alongside her husband, Angelo Pastega, on horticultural farms following her arrival.[6] Where husbands continued to work in other jobs after acquiring a farm, the wives assumed much of the responsibility of its management in addition to her domestic duties. When the Croces took up a farm at Hanwood in 1936 and Simeone remained at McWilliams Winery where he worked as a cooper (barrel maker), Rachele worked the farm.[7] In addition to farm work, the women were also responsible for cooking, cleaning the house and caring for the children. On those farms where single men boarded the women would earn some extra income by cooking their meals.[8]
The women were central to the subsistence lifestyle, making everything at home, from

Giovanni and Elisabetta Ceccato with their children making spaghetti on their farm in the 1920s. Peter Ceccato private collection

soap, bread, wine and salami.[9] As Baldassar and Pesman have observed:

> In accepting migration and the attendant hardships, in labouring side-by-side with their husbands on farms or cleaning, cooking and washing for boarders or working in factories and the service industries, usually while simultaneously running the household and caring for children, the women were making their active contribution to the benessere of the family unit.[10]

The Ceccato family moving prunes onto wooden drying trays on their farm at Yoogali with the help of the O'Brien family, c1940. Gino Ceccato private collection

Taking a break. Note the sulphur box on the left. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

The children also had to work. Cesare Bonomi can recall working with his father on the family farm during the 1920s before and after school and for another employer for wages at weekends. The Bonomis had eight children, all of whom worked on the farm planting and harvesting peas, beans and other crops.[11] Similarly, Petronio (Peter), a young boy in the late 1920s and one of ten children, can recall that he and his nine brothers and sisters 'all had chores to do each day':

> After school the older ones helped out on the farm and the younger ones had to chop wood, feed the chooks and bed the barn with straw for horses, cows and pigs. We also dried fruit off the trays and picked up prunes from the ground. And there was chipping grass and delivering milk to six neighbours.[12]

But delivering milk 'had its bonus'. As he recalls, 'the Justice, Gilliard, West, Martin, Wright and McWilliams families were all good, friendly, understanding people who realised that Mum could not possibly have the time with so many children and other things to do, to bake cakes or scones and their empty billy cans they gave in return always contained lollies or cakes'.[13] There was also time for play among themselves and with the children from the neighbouring farms.

One childhood memory which has remained with Peter Ceccato was when, at the age of eight and having 'graduated to be the milkman', he met Charles Kingsford Smith in the course of his run who visited Griffith in August 1931 as part of a barnstorming tour:

> Stan Gilliard, who managed Mobil in those days, supplied the fuel and accommodation for his weekend stay. It was Saturday morning when I arrived at the Gilliards with these six billy cans and Smithy was out the front, dressed in his flying suit waiting for Mr Gilliard to take him to the aerodrome. Smithy called out to Mrs Gilliard that her milkman had arrived and to take her camera out. He said he wanted a photo taken with her milkman…So the photo was taken. He asked me my name then said I could have a free ride on the plane. The next day Dad was taking us all up to the aerodrome and I had a free ride, sitting beside Smithy as 'co-pilot'. He became my idol and I cried when, in later years, he disappeared. [14]

Fruit picking on the Pastega's farm, probably in the 1930s. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

Peter left school at the age of fourteen in 1935 to work on the family's three horticultural farms with his older brothers and father.
Despite the many hardships most women considered migration beneficial. In particular, leaving meant liberation from the dictates of the extended family (and the church). The hierarchical and closed structure of the village and home meant that relations were often strained by a lack of privacy, gossip and arguments, particularly between the women.[15]

Some women experienced the additional hardship of losing their husbands, left to manage the farm on their own. When Guerino Baltieri died from pneumonia in 1923, his twenty eight year old wife was left to fend for herself.[16] With no family to rely on or social security services in place at the time, she kept the farm going by cooking for Italians in return for work. It was not easy, as her daughter, Mary, recalled many years later:

> Clothes were scarce. We mostly wore clothes that were given to us. At one time I only had one dress which I used to wash in the morning, put it on wet, and by the time I walked the three miles to school it was dry. At this time my brothers would be sent naked to wait in the bedroom while our mother washed their clothes so they could put them back on.

> At one stage we didn't have anything in the house to eat that night. We were busy on the apricots and as we lived six miles from town didn't have time to go to town. Our mother saw our cat coming up the road with something in its mouth. It was a small rabbit so she took it from the cat and that was our meal for that night! The same thing happened the next day and on the third day the cat came home with the mother rabbit.[17]

Tragedy also struck the Cunial family when Giuseppe died in December 1928 at the age of forty six from 'black lung' (silicosis) due to his years working in the mines at Iron Knob and Broken Hill, leaving his wife Giustina and seven children.[18] Returning home to Italy was not an option for these women.

The Manera women. (l to r): Angelo, Zoe, Ines, Angelina, Maria and Paolina. Paolina Manera acted as the mid-wife for other Italian women during the 1920s. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

By 1933 a greater gender balance was developing within the largely Veneti community, with the female population comprising close to forty percent.[19] Their presence greatly enhanced the strong Veneti sense of *campanilismo*. Italians primarily identified with the village or small region in which they were born (*paese*) whose 'traditions, practices and experiences' were different. This formed 'the core of his *companilismo*'.[20] Identity as an Italian citizen is 'a relatively recent incarnation'[21]:

> In the second half of the nineteenth century Italy was unified at the level of the political class but the emigrants did not come from that post-Risorgimento legal and political entity now known as Italy. Rather they came from the paesi, provinces and regions of the Italies with their distinctive dialects, traditions, land systems, work patterns, class and gender relations. Very few migrants had strong national identities. Their ties were to family, kin and neighbours.[22]

As such, social and cultural interaction beyond the family was 'ringed by those of the *paesani*'.[23] In the absence of family, *paesani* formed the basis of a cohesive and supportive network. The presence of those who 'spoke their dialect, and shared their customs, values and cultural traditions' eased the 'harshness and alienation of the lives of the migrants'.[24] The concentration of Veneti from different villages and towns, however, worked to 'weld diverse groups into a unified regional group settlement'. As a result, village and district ties diminished in the context of intermarriage and social relationships. But such strong regional identification acted to the exclusion of those from southern Italy, notably the Calabresi and enhanced the Veneti's sense of superiority and antagonism towards them.[25]

The farms of the more established families such as the Ceccatos and Maneras became the centres of social life where Italians gathered on the weekend to dance, sing, play bocce, eat and drink wine and grappa together.[26] Italians produced their own wine and

grappa, running illicit stills on their farms.[27] An accordion player was always present, accompanied by other musicians. A number of Italian men were accomplished musicians such as Assuero Colautti who played the violin, mandolin and Spanish guitar.[28]

As in Italy the community gathered to celebrate weddings and religious milestones such as baptism. The wedding of Norina Peruzzi in the 1920s, recalled by her mother Anna Barichello Peruzzi, was typical of the role of family and friends both in the preparation of food and the celebration that followed:

> Signora Paolina, an excellent cook for weddings and festive occasions, prepared it but all the family and friends were involved in the arrangements. We invited the uncles and aunts, all the relations and the children big and small. Everyone came. All the chickens were killed; some were roasted while others were boiled to make risotto. Everyone was happy to take part in the wedding and the celebrations. There was so much togetherness and love and songs and accordion music.[29]

Social gathering on the farm of Antonio Ceccato at Hanwood on New Years Day in 1927. Note the wine barrel on the right. Gino Ceccato private collection.

Some events such as wedding receptions were catered for by Giustina Cunial, whose home on a farm in Yoogali had a large room. Giovanni (Fillipetto) Bellicanta from the small town of Cavaso del Tomba where he worked in the catering business, also prepared food for many of the large Italian functions.[30]

These social gatherings served as opportunities for young men and women to meet. Giovanni (Fillipetto) Bellicanta met his future wife, Maria (Teresa) Agostino, this way and they were married in 1933.[31] Food was always a focal point of socialising. Some gatherings were organised around particular traditions and customs such as the *filo* and *far il porcel* – the killing of the pig – from which salsicce, salami, muset, osso-collo, pancetta and cotechino were made.[32] One important community event was salami making. Rural Italians fared much better than their urban counterparts when it came to producing their traditional foods as they were able to grow *radicchio rosso*, *fagiolo* and olives, bake their own bread, make olive oil, cheese and salami and wine and distil grappa.

Gathering on Angelo Manera's farm to celebrate the christening of his daughter, Angelina, in 1924. Gino Ceccato private collection

Sunday outing on Angelo Rossetto's first truck in 1929. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

Several of the more established Italian men assumed a leadership role within their community. Not only did they provide a model of independence for younger Italians, but also performed an important organisational and welfare function within the community through support, guidance, employment and, in some cases, financial assistance. One of them was Antonio (Tony) Bugno who had taught himself English. Bugno served as the unofficial interpreter for the Italian community in their everyday dealings, whether visiting the doctor or solicitor, communicating with the bank or Irrigation Commission or completing forms for land transfers, proxy marriages and naturalisation. This role extended to providing business and financial advice, even acting as guarantor and lending money on occasions. Bugno was particularly concerned about single Italian men whose loneliness and isolation often led to excessive drinking and depression, sometimes even suicide. When someone wanted or needed to return to Italy, he would organise a *colletta* (collection) to raise the necessary funds.[33]

Group of Italians at Taylors Beach, Darlington Point in 1932. It was a popular picnic spot, where Italian families would gather on Sundays. (l to r): Giovanni De Valentin, Peter Cadorin, Gerardo Serafin, Tony Dal Broi, Giusepina De Valentin, Mrs Bandiera, Angelo Dal Broi and Giulia and Lina De Valentin. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

By the latter part of the 1930s the Italian population was reaching 1,000, increasing during the summer season with the influx of cane cutters from Innisfail and Ingham in North Queensland who worked as fruit pickers. 'Scraps of soft Italian' could be heard in the streets of Griffith.[34] The RSL's anti-Italian crusade had not diminished.[35] There were increasing references in the local newspaper to the 'Italian question' during the 1930s.[36] But Italians now felt confident enough to defend themselves. In a letter to the *Area News* in July 1934 Antonio Bugno publicly challenged a series of editorials and articles denigrating Italians in the MIA:

> It would have been more honourable to have said that Italians, by acquiring orchard properties, are improving the area (Mirrool) enormously. If you had noticed the condition of the properties taken up by Italians, you would have refrained from condemning these industrious people…for bringing back into production farms that had gone to rack and ruin.[37]

By the late 1930s such overt and menacing anti-Italian sentiments were confined to extreme sections of the RSL and media and did not reflect those of most soldier settlers.[38]

Ori Pastega posing on his father Angelo's grape crusher in about 1924. Like many Italian farmers, Angelo made his own wine. Prohibition in the MIA was only just being lifted at this time. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

Now firmly established in the MIA, the Veneti community began establishing its own institutions.[39] In 1936 three farmers and part-time musicians, Pompeo Vardanega, Pietro Pavese and Antonio Dal Broi formed the Yoogali Amusement Company (YAC). In the following year the company built a hall on Hebden Street at Yoogali to serve as a venue for large community functions. Constructed by local builder Antonio Ceccato, it was called Coronation Hall to mark the coronation of King George VI in 1937, the year it was completed. The hall's kitchen had a large wood burning stove and oven.[40]

Bob Vardanega and Aldo and Tony Dal Broi in about 1929, the first Italian band formed. They played at weddings and other large social events. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

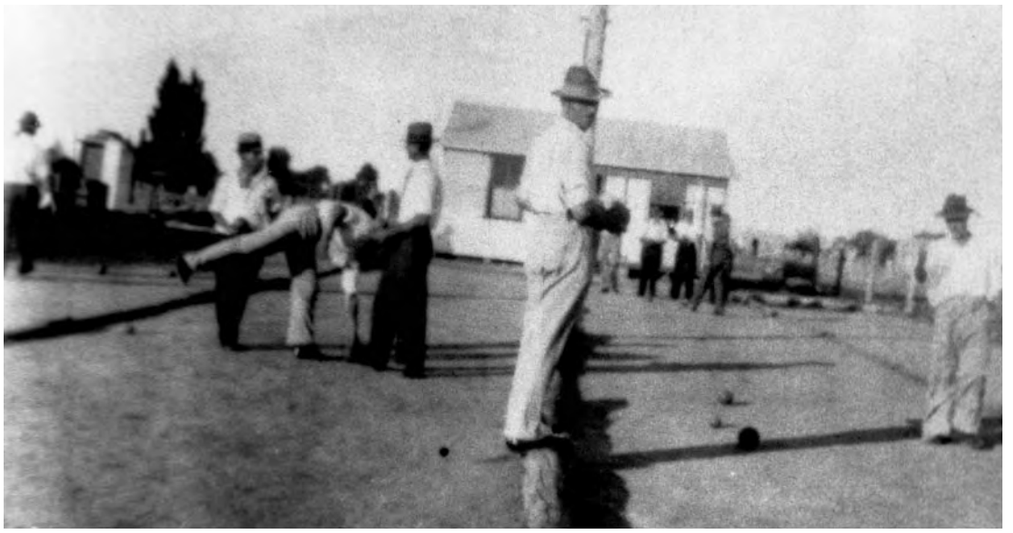
Most of the Veneti Italian wedding receptions were held in the hall which could accommodate some 200 people. The Saturday morning ceremony would be followed by lunch at Coronation Hall.[41] The newly-weds would then be visited at their new home in the afternoon where drinks and anti-pasto was served. Guests would re-assemble at the Coronation Hall in the evening for dinner. After the speeches the tables would be removed and dancing began.[42] The music, which always included a piano-accordion, guitar and violin, was performed by musicians from the Italian community.[43] The tables were returned at about 11pm and supper was served – large plates of cakes, crostoli and roasted chicken pieces. Dancing then resumed, along with the singing of old Italian songs, until the early hours of the morning. Celebrations continued the next day, starting with lunch, stretching into the afternoon.[44]

Saturday night dances were held regularly at Coronation Hall. There was occasional trouble, mostly caused by intoxicated young men. Non-Australian girls who turned up unescorted and flirted with the Italian boys also caused some disquiet. But otherwise these were no different to any of the other Saturday night dances held in halls throughout the Griffith area.[45]

A social club called the Italo-Australian Club was also started by the YAC in 1937. It was only the second social club to be formed in the Griffith area.[46]A two-roomed fibro and corrugated iron structure was erected to serve as the clubhouse on the block of land adjoining Coronation Hall. Bocce courts were built at the front of the club. Although privately owned by the YAC it was managed as a community club with an elected committee. The membership fee was five shillings a year. The club was a modest affair, more closely resembling an *osteria* – the social centre for males in Veneti villages. The men would meet at the club for a drink and conversation and play cards and bocce. As the club was unlicensed (unregistered), alcohol was sold using the 'locker system'. This was used by unlicensed clubs in New South Wales as a means of

circumventing the liquor laws.[47] At the Italo-Australian Club members purchased tokens which cost the price of a bottle of beer, which were redeemed at the bar. The beer was then supposedly placed in the member's locker. There were 300 of these, located behind the bar.[48] Sunday afternoon was the busiest time at the club when the women and children would also attend. The women would serve the food they had prepared and chat while the children amused themselves and the men played bocce.

Coronation Hall and the premises of the Italo-Australian Club shortly after completion in 1937. The bocce court is visible at the front of the club. They became the hub of the Italian community in the Griffith district prior to the Second World War. Gino Ceccato private collection



Playing bocce at the Italo-Australia Club in 1937. The fibro club rooms can be seen in the background. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

Tokens used by members of the Italo-Australian Club to purchase beer as part of the 'locker system', devised as a means of unregistered (unlicensed) clubs serving alcohol instead of members having to bring their own without breaching the liquor laws. Gino Ceccato private collection

Some younger Italians also socialised outside the family and community, attending the local picture theatres and dances. The occasional racist taunts they encountered by local louts who 'hung around the dance halls' were not enough to deter them. Gino Ceccato, a young man in the late 1930s and keen dancer, regularly attended dances and balls at the *Palais de dance* on Yambil Street and other local halls in the Griffith area from the time he was old enough to do so.[49]

Interior of the general store owned by Frank and Caterina Miranda and Peter and Madalena Mogliotti in May 1939 which catered for the local Italian community. Frank Miranda, Madalena and Peter Mogliotti are standing behind the counter. The store was located on Kooyoo Street, opposite the Griffith Hotel. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

Italian small business were also beginning to appear in the 1930s. In 1939 a general store catering for the local Italian community opened in Griffith. Located on Kooyoo Street opposite the Griffith Hotel, it was owned by two couples, Frank and Caterina Miranda and Peter and Madalena Mogliotti. The store sold a range of imported goods such as olive oil, pasta and other Italian food and domestic items otherwise unavailable in Griffith.[50] It was where all Italians did their food shopping.[51] A mixed business store was opened two years later in Banna Avenue in the building of the former Mirrool café by Frank Battaglia and Tom Apolloni.[52]

With the customs and traditions of Italians so intertwined with the Catholic Church, in the mid-1930s the Italian community had also turned its attention to the building of its own church. By the late 1920s the large Catholic community in the Griffith area was well catered for. It had been declared a parish in 1920 and Father Robert O'Dea arrived shortly after. The Sacred Heart Church in Griffith was completed in 1928. But the considerable social and cultural differences between the practices of Italian and Irish Catholics were not understood by the Australian Catholic Church. In northern Italy, for example, where the Catholic Church permeated every aspect of life, the local priest was more powerful and visible in the community. Further, in Australia the *festa* did not form part of important religious events such as baptism, first holy communion and confirmation. Even the church itself was different, less adorned with iconography and imagery than those in Italy. [53]

Spearheading the push for the church were Paul Zanotto and Tony Bugno who sought a donation of £10 per family.[54] After raising £400, a deputation was made to Monsignor Panico, the then Papal Nuncio and Apolistic Delegate to Australia in Sydney (Consul for the Vatican). The highly regarded Aeolian priest Father Bongiorno was subsequently sent as a curate to the Griffith parish by the Catholic Church.[55] Moves by the Italian community to build their own church began in earnest. In the meantime, Italian services were held in the Coronation Hall. The church was designed by Antonio Ceccato, modelled on the architecture of a church in his village of Cavaso del Tomba in Treviso. He also built it, with the assistance of others in the community. [56] Our Lady of Pompeii at Yoogali opened on on 28 April 1940. It was an another important milestone for the Italian community.[57]

The official opening and blessing of Our Lady of Pompeii at Yoogali on 28 April 1940. Designed by Antonio Ceccato, it was modelled on a church in his village of Cavaso del Tomba in Treviso. Gino Ceccato private collection

Broader recognition of the Italian community and the need to cater for them had also emerged by the late 1930s. By 1937 notices in Italian had appeared at the entrance and exit of the packing stores in the railway yards indicating the way in (*entrata*) and out (*uscita*) in order to facilitate the orderly movement of traffic.[58] Some local businesses even sought to capitalise on the growing Italian market. George Hazel's general store on Banna Avenue in Griffith, for example, sold olive oil, along with 'i migliori prodotti Italiani', advertising in the New South Wales Italian newspaper, *Il Giornale Italiano*. Similarly, Griffith tailor, John Prest, advertised in the same paper, describing himself as 'rivolgetevi alla rinomata sartoria' (renowned tailor)[59] Italians were also beginning to appear behind the counter of Australian-owned local businesses. Sisters Mabel and Jean Rossetto were employed as waitresses by Bill and Majorie Maher at their popular café in 1939. Dressed in their English-style light blue uniform and white apron and cap, they served customers as well as cooked and cleaned.[60]

From 1937 there were several attempts to foster greater integration. In that year the NSW Department of Education sought to establish an English night school for Italians. According to its figures, less than ten percent of Italians in Mirrool spoke English and even fewer could read the language.[62] The program failed, however, due to a lack of interest.[63] The *Area News* also started a regular feature written in the Italian language, *Sommario Di Cronaca* in Italiano, in March 1938. It only lasted some six months due to an apparent lack of interest by local Italians in reading newspapers.[64] By contrast, the hour-long program broadcast by local Griffith radio station 2RG in Italian on Sundays at 5pm introduced at the same time – an Australian first – was extremely popular. Known as the 'Italian hour', the announcer of 'la voce del Murrumbidgee' was Corrado de Mayda. The program played a variety of music, including opera, 'Neapolitan love songs' and well-known contemporary Italian singers such as Tito Schipa, along with advertisements and community announcements. Australians were encouraged to buy an Italian grammar book and tune in to learn the language.[65] It ceased with the outbreak of the Second World War and was not revived until the early 1950s in the form of the Continental Music Club.

The premises of local Griffith radio station 2RG in 1938, the year it began broadcasting an hour-long program in the Italian language. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

The greatest degree of integration was perhaps amongst children who attended the same schools. Children from neighbouring farms also played together. During the 1930s the Bugno children, Jim and Mario, and Danny Such, the son of their father's employer, were inseparable.[66] But Italian children were subjected to racism. Maria Manera can recall being stoned walking home from Yoogali School in the 1920s.[67] Peter Ceccato also remembers being called a 'wog' and 'spag' as a young boy in the 1930s, particularly in the school yard.[68] Further, there was little formal interaction between these children outside school.[69] By the time these children reached adulthood, however, they had lived in Australia all or most of their lives. It was this first generation of Australian-Italians who would play a major role in forging integration in the years ahead.

Children at Yoogali School in the 1930s. Close to half the pupils have Italian surnames. back (l to r): Reuben Lucca, Bill Foster, Roy Lucca, possibly Aldo Centofanti, Barney Webb, Owen Devitt, possibly Gino Centofanti. front (l to r): Ines Manera, Mary Barbaro, Jean Starr, Joan Hartman, possibly Daisy Curry, Joan O'Brien, Lena Manera, Gwen Sanders. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

Endnotes

1 Pietro (Peter) Andreatta and Angelina Zanandrea, for example, were married by proxy in 1933. Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p15.
2 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, p267.
3 Baldassar, *op cit*, pp31-32.
4 Huber, *op cit*, p27.
5 Baldassar, *op cit*, p103.
6 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 2, *op cit*, p342.
7 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p187.
8 eg Paolina Manera, Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, p267.
9 *The Area News*, 5 June 1998, p11.
10 Baldassar, *op cit*, p105.
11 Cecilia, *op cit*, p54.
12 *Area News*, 5 July 1996, p11.
13 i*bid.*
14 i*bid.*
15 Huber, *op cit*, p23.
16 Griffith and District Pioneers, *op cit*, pp29-30; Cecilia, *op cit*, pp29-30.
17 Cecilia, *op cit*, pp30-31; Griffith and District Pioneers, *op cit*, pp30-31.
18 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, p125.
19 This is based on population figures for the Wade Shire Council. Census, ABS, 1933.
20 Huber, *op cit*, p29.
21 Baldassar, *op cit*, pp14-15.
22 As a consequence, in many ways Italian migrants were '"italianised" through their migrant experience because of their identification as Italians from that nation by Australians. Baldassar, *op cit*, pp21, 14-15.
23 Baldassar, *op cit*, p106.
24 Baldassar, *op cit*, p 97.
25 Price, *op cit*, pp230-232, 254.
26 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p104-105; Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, p267.
27 eg *Irrigator*, 12 July 1927.
28 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, p105.
29 Cecilia, *op cit*, p76.
30 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p41.
31 *ibid*.
32 Baldassar, *op cit*, pp110-112.
33 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, pp102, 104, 105; Kelly, *op cit*, p176.
34 *SMH*, 1 April 1937.
35 In 1937 the RSL went as far as seeking the passage of legislation to restrict and ultimately reverse Italian land ownership. Pich, *op cit*, p166.
36 See for example, *Area News*, 10 December 1937; 14 January 1938; 25 January 1938; *Smiths Weekly*, 27 February 1937, p1.
37 *Area News*, 30 July 1934. See also *Area News*, 28 June 1934; 5 July 1934; 2 July 1934; 2 August 1934; 9 August 1934 for the war of words which ensued.
38 Price, *op cit*, p 214.
39 This is an estimation only. A further 123 Veneti arrived after 1933 and before the Second World War, along with an unspecified number of Italians settling via the canefields of northern Queensland. Huber, *op cit*, p57; Kelly, *op cit*, p174.
40 Gino Ceccato, *The Coronation Hall, Yoogali 1937-1991*, c2002, p3; Kelly, *op cit*, p. 222.
41 Saturday morning was the only available time available for those wanting a full nuptial wedding.

42 Ceccato, *op cit*, pp3-4.
43 The names of these musicians who played at social events held at the Coronation Hall were Battista Valentini (button accordion), Tony 'della armonica' (button accordion), Severino Aliprandi (violin), Aldo Visentin (violin), Tony Dal Broi (guitar), Peter Pavese (violin), Pompeo (Bob) Vardanega (clarinet and guitar), Joe Bicego (piano accordion), Tony Piasente (piano accordion), John Licosi (guitar and drums), Mario Baron (piano accordion), Mick Romeo, (drums). Ceccato, *op cit*, p4.
44 Ceccato, *op cit*, p4.
45 Ceccato, *op cit*, pp5-8; Huber, *op cit*, p99; Kelly, *op cit*, p222.
46 The Jondaryan Club opened in June 1928. Fashioning itself as a gentlemens'club, membership was limited to '100 prominent Australian property owners and professional men within a thirty mile radius of Griffith' and included graziers, local business people and stock and station agents. Needless to say membership was not open to Italians and other 'foreigners'. Fifty years of fellowship (Jondaryan Club), 1976, in Kelly, *op cit*, pp 216-217.
47 Prior to 1946 the number of club licenses (registrations) in New South Wales was restricted to eight-five. The locker system was devised as a means of unlicensed clubs selling alcohol instead of members having to bring their own. It worked such that when the club purchased alcohol it was considered to be doing so on behalf of members. Accordingly, the purchase of alcohol by a member was considered to constitute reimbursement of the club, rather than its sale or supply by the club which was prohibited.
48 Ceccato, *op cit*, 3, pp4-5; Kelly, *op cit*, p222.
49 Ceccato, *op cit*, pp5-7
50 *Area News*, 5 June 1996, p23.
51 Personal communication with Gino Ceccato, 1 July 2007.
52 *Area News*, 14 June 1995, p10.
53 Baldassar, *op cit*, p115-116.
54 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p104.
55 *ibid*.
56 Kabaila, op cit, p54.
57 Our Lady of Pompeii was the patron of Italians in foreign lands.
58 *Smiths Weekly*, 27 February 1937, p1; *SMH*, 1 April 1937.
59 *Il Giornale Italiano*, 16 May 1934, p8.
60 Kabaila, *op cit*.
62 *Area News*, 22 June 1937.
63 Although this was attributed in large part to a lack of tradition in formal education among Italian peasant culture, no doubt the prospect of attending classes at the end of a long day working on the farm held little appeal.
64 *Area News*, 11 March 1938 to 2 September 1938.
65 *Area News*, 4 March 1938.
66 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, pp102-103.
67 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 1, *op cit*, p267.
68 Personal communication with Peter (Pietro) Ceccato, 23 February 2006.
69 Al Grassby, 'Griffith and the origins of Australian multiculturalism', *Multicultural Papers*, no. 46, Clearing House on Migration Issues, Richmond, Victoria, September 1985, p3.

chapter 3

Second World War

When Italy entered the war as an ally of Germany on 10 June 1940 life for the Griffith Italians changed. The *National Security Regulations* which came into force in July 1940 created two categories of Italians - 'enemy aliens' and 'naturalised persons of enemy origin'. Enemy aliens - estimated to be about one fifth of the 2,300 adult Italians in the MIA - were required to register and issued with ID cards. They also had to report to an alien registration office each week.[1] Transfers of land to them were forbidden.[2]

Other restrictions imposed included the confiscation of all firearms and the prohibition of the use of petrol and motor vehicles without the permission of alien registration officers (local police) – all essential for farm management. Use of the Italian language in public places was also banned.[3]

Between 1940 and 1942 many Italian men were interned. Naturalisation was no protection as its effect was suspended during the war. The widespread feeling among Italians that the selection of individuals for internment by the local police was often because of a strong identification with their community and culture prior to the war appeared to have some basis.[4] Antonio (Tony) Bugno, for example, a vocal defender of his community in the past, was interned in 1940.[5] Similarly, Assuero Collauti, who had been a farmer in the Griffith area since 1915, was interned on the basis that he regularly received Italian newspapers, was a member of the Italian Tourism Club and had a son who was serving in the Italian army as a conscript.[6] Even Valerio Ricetti (the 'hermit') was interned.

Mates Roy Pastega and Bill Mackay in the early 1940s. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

While applauding such measures, the RSL did not think they went far enough, actively lobbying the government for more severe restrictions. With the sanction of the Commonwealth Department of the Army, RSL branches formed into local Volunteer Defence Corps units. Those in Griffith and Leeton advised MIA citizens of the ever present danger of local subversion. They even went as far as posting armed volunteers on small bridges over irrigation channels near Griffith as a guard against the apparent threat of Italian sabotage. The RSL also sought the dismissal of Italians from employment in canneries and pulping factories.[8]

As Peter Ceccato recalls:

> There was animosity and racism against Italians before World War Two and it reached its peak during and just after the war, when it was almost impossible for anyone of Italian extract or descent to go to the pictures, dances or enter a hotel for a beer without being attacked by some hooligans. Admittedly they were a small minority but they seemed to have been allowed to carry on with this vulgarity without much restraint by others.[15]

Some members of the Griffith community and councillors of the Wade Shire Council (many of whom were RSL members) generally supported the RSL stance. When 'enemy aliens' from Queensland were granted permission to travel from Queensland for the harvesting season in 1942, for example, a public meeting was called to discuss safeguarding the security of the community.[9] Greater control of the movement of Italians and the operation of their farms was also called for.[10] But much of the anti-Italian sentiment was tempered by the importance of the MIA in food production.[11] Italians were producing some ninety percent of vegetables in the Mirrool area and labour was in short supply.[12]

Internment meant that wives were left to manage the farms on their own, made even more difficult by the severe labour shortages. The practice ceased following the intervention of several influential Australians in the MIA who persuaded the Federal authorities that most Italians posed no threat and would best serve the country's interests by continuing to farm.[7]

The closing of the Italo-Australian Club in 1940, the need for written permission for aliens to travel outside their neighbourhoods together with the air of hostility which permeated Griffith limited avenues for socialising.[13] Italian men returned to gathering on farms to socialise as they had done in earlier years. Although these sly-grog operations were illegal , they were tolerated by the police as it kept the men away from the pubs in town. As Gino Ceccato has recalled:

> Beer was very scarce during the war, but [Italian owned] boarding houses in Hanwood, Yoogali, Bilbul and Yenda were somehow able to get supplies. Some of them, being on farms or farmlets near the villages, had built bocce courts and this was where the older Italian generation went for their entertainment…It was a wonder that these places were allowed to operate without much trouble from the law. There were rumours that the police were more lenient on these places as it kept many Italian men away from the hotels and so avoided possible confrontations[14]

Playing bocce on Berto and Marianna Bernardi's farm at Hanwood in the early 1940s. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

Despite the anti-Italian sentiment, young Italian men were as keen as their Australian counterparts to enlist. Mario Bugno enlisted in the AIF in 1940, the same year his father was interned.[16] Ori Pastega joined the RAAF in 1941, as did his brother Roy.[17] Twenty four year old Alasco Ceccato and his brother Bruno who was two years his junior, both enlisted in the Australian army in 1940.[18] Their brother Petronio (Peter) was exempted so that he could remain working on the family farms growing fruit and vegetables. Similarly, his cousin, Gino Ceccato was called up, only to be exempted to work on the family farm. With the advent of the Pacific War, food production in the MIA became central to the war effort, supplying vegetables and dried fruits to the Allied forces. In the latter years, the importance of food production outweighed the need for soldiers. Although no farms were entirely planted over to vegetables, they were grown anywhere a patch of land could be found, sometimes even between fruit trees.[19] As Peter Ceccato recalled, those on the homefront had to work extremely hard:

> Labour was very short with so many entering the services. Cane cutters whom we relied on at harvest had stopped coming to the area. My youngest brother [Adolfo] left school to help on the farm. We worked from daylight to sunset on the farm and spent many nights packing fruit. Daylight saving was brought in and we never got to the pictures or a dance before it was half over. Dad had a car but because of petrol rationing it was only used in emergencies. We pushed a bike everywhere we went, even to a ball in Binya.[20]

It was much easier for younger Italian-Australians who had grown up in Griffith. For young Gino Ceccato, life continued as it always had. He still went to the movies and attended dances – made even more popular by the presence of girls from the Australian Womens' Land Army who were billeted in Mirrool House and hostels in Yenda, Hanwood, Beelbangera and Tharbogang.[21]

In an attempt to demonstrate the Italian community's commitment to the war effort, an Italian War Loan Committee was established in Griffith with the permission of the Federal government. The committee's role was to ensure that local banks recorded the amount contributed by individual Italians, which was then publicised nationwide.[22] Its request for the amount of subscriptions received to be published in the local press, however, was refused.[23]

When Prime Minister Ben Chifley announced to the nation that the war was over on 15 August 1945 the Griffith community united in joy and celebration. As Gino Ceccato recalls of that day:

> People everywhere went wild with joy, sirens sounded, train whistles blew and car horns tooted everywhere. The Penfolds Winery whistle which always sounded at 8am, 12 noon, 1pm and 5pm and could be heard all over town, blew for about half an hour continuously…People everywhere left their work and gathered in the town. There was dancing in the street and the hotels were full of people. It was the first time I had seen men and women drinking at the bar together.[24]

Gino was also there when the town ushered in the new year. The night started with a dance at the *Palais de Dance* in 1945 which, because of Sunday closing, did not start until midnight:

> The town on that evening was alive; the street was full of people in the mood for celebrating. Everybody wanted to see the old year out and to celebrate the New Year in with the knowledge and relief that the burden of war with six long years of suffering and hardships were over. There were many parties held throughout the town that night.[25]

The postwar years would see the resumption of Italian settlement on an even larger scale than before. This was to be accompanied by concerted efforts at achieving greater integration. The sheer number and importance of Italians to the MIA farming economy would mean that their marginalisation was simply untenable.

Endnotes

1 *Area News*, 6 August 1940; *Irrigator*, 6 February 1942.
2 In the mid-1940s the Commission declined approval of the transfer of a lease from Eric Browning to Antonio Carbone on the grounds that the transferee was 'of enemy origin'. The decision was appealed against and went all the way to the High court who held that the Commission had not exceeded its powers in refusing the transfer as it had not been made on the basis of race. *Irrigator*, 29 April 1947, *Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission (New South Wales)* and *Browning*, 1947, 74 CLR 492.
3 Pich, *op cit*, pp241-242.
4 *Area News*, 26 June 1942; Pich, *op cit*, p244.
5 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p105.
6 Assuero's son went missing while fighting on the Russian front. Griffith and District Pioneers, series one, *op cit*, p105.
7 Pich, *op cit*, 244-245.
8 Pich, *op cit*, pp245-247.
9 *Area News*, 20 January 1942; *Irrigator*, 23 January 1942.
10 During the Second World War, the NSW government also developed policies to curtail or eliminate Italian settlement in irrigation areas, although these were never implemented. See Pich, *op cit*, pp255-256.
11 For an overview of the central role of the MIA in food production during the Second World War see Pich, *op cit*, pp252-254.
12 Pich, *op cit*, pp249-251.
13 *Area News*, 11 October 1940; Pich, *op cit*, p243.
14 Ceccato, *op cit*, p5. According to Gino Ceccato, these sly-grog operations on the outskirts of town continued after the war, obtaining beer supplies from Western Australia via long haulage operators. Personal communication with Gino Ceccato, 1 July 2007.
15 *Area News*, 5 July 1996, p12.
16 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p105.
17 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 2, *op cit*, p346.
18 Nominal roll, www.awm.gov.au
19 Huber, *op cit*, p58.
20 *Area News*, 5 July 1996, p12.
21 Ceccato, *op cit*, p7.
22 An initiative of the Sydney War Loans Committee, the formation of such committees was an attempt to counter the suspicion and hostility directed towards Italian and German communities during the war. Griffith and District Pioneers, series three, part one, *op cit*, p210, 216.
23 Pich, *op cit*, p254.
24 Ceccato, *op cit*, p8.
25 Ceccato, *op cit*, p6.

chapter 4

Building a community

The years immediately following the end of the Second World War saw a rapid increase in Italian settlement in the MIA. In 1947 there were 1,889 Italians living in the Griffith area. Three quarters of them were Veneti, concentrated in the Mirrool area.[1] Close to half of the Italian population could be described as Italian-Australians, having lived most or all of their lives in Australia.[2]

By the end of the Second World War the economic situation in Italy had become even more desperate for its rural population, with food scarce and millions unable to find work. Between 1947 and 1951 alone some 2,296 Italians settled in the Griffith area via chain migration.[3] By 1949, 251 of the 383 horticultural farms in Mirrool were Italian-owned. In Yanco, which had remained a predominantly civilian settlement, only 29 of the 224 horticultural farms were in Italian hands. This figure grew significantly over the following twenty years.[4]

Tony Colla and Pietro Ziliotto with the Andreatta's on 12 December 1949, their first day in Griffith. When Tony and Pietro arrived in Melbourne on the *Surriento* from the village of Castelcucco in Treviso they were two of ten others who piled into the Salvestro Brothers' Chevrolet with their trunks for the trip to Griffith. The living quarters, a former chicken shed on Tony Andreatta's farm, is in the background. Tony Colla private collection

Tony Colla and Pietro Ziliotto working on Tony Andreatta's farm a few days after arriving in December 1949. Tony Colla private collection

Italian settlement was now officially sanctioned under the Federal government's migration scheme aimed at driving economic development and boosting the country's population. The signing of the bilateral Assisted Migration Agreement in 1951 meant that sponsorship was no longer required and assisted passage was available. But most continued to arrive in the Griffith area under the sponsorship system. The pattern of migration from a small number of villages and townships in the Veneto provinces of Treviso and Vicenza remained unchanged. Far fewer migrants came from Vicenza, however, while greater numbers settled from Treviso where the impacts of the Second World War had been severe.[5] Brothers Tony and Romano Ballestrin who had settled in Griffith in the 1930s, for example, sponsored a number of their nephews and nieces who were looking to escape war torn Treviso.[6] The trend of Piemontesi and Siciliani settling in the MIA from the sugar cane fields of Northern Queensland also continued in these years.[7]

A greater proportion of Italian migrants settling in the Griffith area were from southern regions. Most southerners came from Calabria and the Abruzzi region. The Calabresi were mostly from the village of Plati, possessing small farming backgrounds growing olives, citrus fruits and wine grapes. Abruzzi was also a poor agricultural province in central Italy located east of Rome. Another notable difference was the number of single women arriving – mostly as *fidanzate* (proxy brides) and the much shorter period of separation between men and their wives and family.[8]

By 1954 the Italian population, that is, those born in Italy or having Italian parents, numbered 4,185. The Veneti still made up the overwhelming majority at fifty eight percent, although the Calabresi now accounted for twenty two per cent of the Italian population in the MIA.[9]

Like those before them, the postwar Italian migrants worked as unskilled labourers and in trades they brought with them. Among the Veneti were terrazzo workers, blacksmiths and barbers. Those arriving via chain migration were assisted by their *paesani* in finding accommodation and work. Many took up market gardening. The importance of the MIA in supplying food to the Allied forces in the Pacific during the Second World War had led to the increased importance of vegetable growing in the area in the postwar period. As Australian farmers ceased to be involved in vegetable farming after the war, it became 'an exclusively Italian occupation':

> The new wave of Italian settlers in the second half of the 1940s was eager to take advantage of the opportunity offered. Vegetable growing required little capital and needed labour – intensive methods that suited family units. Italians, who were willing to work hard under poor conditions, saw this as a chance to save money to buy or put a deposit on a farm.[10]

Italian migrants arriving at Port Melbourne on the ship *Surriento* on 17 June 1951. Third from the left in the back row is Rita Pisan who married Gino Ceccato in 1955. Gino Ceccato private collection

Some leased a few hectares of land to grow vegetables. Sharecropping on rice farms was common, whereby the owner paid for the machinery, water, electricity and other expenses and the Italians provided the labour, receiving a third of the net income for the vegetable crops. Others grew vegetables while also working in another job, with the extra money going towards saving for the purchase of a farm.[11] Requiring little capital, this labour intensive enterprise was suited to the family work unit of Italian peasant culture.

With fluctuating prices and the potential for floods to ruin a crop, vegetable growing was a risky business. It was also extremely hard work. The following account from a Trevisan woman in her early thirties who had two children and lived in a run down house in the late 1960s provides an insight into the life of the Italian vegetable grower:

> My husband and I lease seven hectares of land nine kilometres away [from Griffith] and grow carrots and turnips. We pay $100 per hectare per year and $25-$35 for water. I go out each day with him and we do everything by ourselves…If we work all day we can each pick, wash and pack thirty-five 22 kilo bags of carrots and turnips. The trouble is that one day we may get $3 a bag, another day only $1. That is why we try not to use

> hired labour. It would eat up all our profits…We have a tractor and a vegetable-washing machine which we leave on the field. We lease a different block every two or three years. Until recently I took both children with me each day, fed them and put them to sleep in the truck. Now I only take the little one. The older one goes to school and my sister picks her up at three in the afternoon.[12]

Another Trevisan vegetable grower who leased eleven hectares some five kilometres from his home worked on his own while his wife looked after their five children who were all under the age of eight, hiring labour for harvesting. His day often started at 3am and finished as late as 9pm.[13]

The various stages of the wedding celebration at the Bisa farm for the marriage of their son Elio to Dorothy Lanyi in 1953. It started with the killing of the chickens. The wedding lunch was held on the verandah of the farm house. Lucy (Luciana) Taylor (nee Bisa) private collection

In the absence of any large-scale postwar soldier settlement scheme in the MIA after the Second World War, Italians were no longer perceived to be competing with Australians. But the progression of postwar Italian migrants to farm ownership was much slower. From the early 1950s farms were too expensive to purchase without capital or relatives to assist.[14] Legal obstacles also now existed. The nullification of the *Treaty of Commerce and Navigation* in 1940 meant that unnaturalised Italians no longer enjoyed the exemption from the land ownership provisions applying to aliens it had conferred.[15]

But this was far less onerous than the policy introduced by the Irrigation Commission in about 1948 requiring the owner of a farm to provide proof that there was no other (Australian) buyer before it could be sold to an Italian. Three statements also had to be provided by Italians from reputable citizens attesting to their ability as an irrigation farmer. This practice was clearly intended to discourage and obstruct Italian farm ownership. It represented a marked departure from the Irrigation Commission's attitude towards Italian ownership of previous years, a hang-over from State government policy during the Second World War. But with Italians often the only buyers in the market, it served no-one's interests. Indeed, even RSL members known for their anti-Italian stance wrote references for Italian buyers to assist soldier settlers in selling their

holdings. The removal of this provision was not achieved until the mid-1950s following the efforts of local solicitor, Paul Blumer.[16]

A young Italian couple crushing grapes on their farm around the early 1950s. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

A marked division between those more established Italians who had settled in the interwar years and the more recent settlers quickly emerged. At the top of the scale were the wealthy Veneti farmers. Italian vegetable growers were the lowest on the social and economic rung.[17] Further tension existed between different regional groups, notably the Veneti's disdain for southern Italians, particularly the Calabresi whom they considered socially inferior and clannish. Even within the Veneti community the religious/anti-cleric divided shaped relations.

These divisions manifest themselves most markedly in the formation of rival clubs which became the focus of social interaction within the Italian community.[18] In 1946 the Catholic Club was formed by a group of northern Italians with the backing of the Catholic bishop of Wagga. Non-catholics and Calabresi were strictly excluded from its membership. A small clubhouse was built at Yoogali behind the Our Lady of Pompeii Church and bocce courts constructed where the convent was later built.[19]

Within a week the Yoogali Club was formed. Membership to this club was open to all (males), regardless of political affiliation, religious beliefs or cultural background.[20] Indeed, although its founding members were predominantly Veneti, the club's first president and secretary were both Australian.[21] The club leased the former Italo-Australian club rooms, using Coronation Hall for its functions which included a ladies night dance.[22] As with the Catholic Club, beer was served using the locker system until a licence was obtained in 1951.[23]

Tony and Julia Colla posing next to their new car in 1955. Tony Colla private collection

In the early years, these clubs performed the same role as the village *osteria* or *trattoria*, where men gathered to talk, drink, play cards and bocce.[24] Like Australian clubs, women were excluded, except on Sundays when they attended with the children and prepared food while the men played bocce.[25] Italian farmers also drank at the local pub. In the early 1950s the Area Hotel in Banna Avenue was the favoured watering hole where they met on Saturday mornings for a few beers while they were in town and talked about the state of their crops, how much fruit they had sold to the canneries and so on.[26] But otherwise their social life was centred around the clubs and gatherings within their own community.

Private sly grog clubs operated on farms, usually boarding houses, were also popular meeting places in the postwar years when six o'clock and Sunday closing was in place and beer in short supply. Every village had one, such as Marianna's at Hanwood which was still operating in the late 1940s. Gino Ceccato can recall large gatherings at Marianna's on Sunday evenings, with music and dancing well into the night. Western Australian beer was served, trucked in by a long haulage transport company.[27]

Loading grapes on the truck with the help pf pickers on the Vardanega farm 1958. Mansueto Vardanega private collection

But by the 1950s registered clubs had become the hub of Italian social life. In 1956 the Yoogali Club moved to its new club rooms located a short distance up the road. The purpose-built premises included a dining area, auditorium and ballroom, making it the first in the MIA to offer all the facilities of the modern postwar club. The Catholic Club also moved to new club rooms the following year a few hundred yards away from the Yoogali Club.

But with its broader membership and stronger financial base, the Yoogali Club remained the more popular of the two. As a true sign of its progressiveness, women were able to join, albeit as associate members only, apparently the first club to do so in New South Wales. Poker machine revenue was a primary source of income, which translated into better facilities and the ability to stage large entertainment acts. Many 'top recording' Italian artists touring Australia performed at the Yoogali Club during the 1950s and 1960s (as well as other venues in Griffith), such as Nilla Pizzi, Luciano Taioli and Claudio Villa', to name a few, booked through the Australian agent for these acts, Johnny Gattuso.[28] By contrast, the Catholic club remained small and very much an Italian male enclave throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[29] By the late 1950s, however, relations between the two clubs had improved and the two played bocce against each other. The Catholic Club also began permitting non-Catholics to join, although only as associate members which meant that they were excluded from any participation in its management.[30]

Preparing food for a function at the Yoogali Club in about 1952. Giovanni (Fillipeto) Bellicanta, who is standing at the end of the table, managed the catering for functions at the Yoogali Club that year. He had been catering for large Italian functions in the Griffith area since the late 1920s. (l to r): Amelia Rostirolla, Nella Piva, Teresa Bellicanta, Vivi Toth (nee Bellicanta), Joe Toth. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

By then two more Italian social clubs had come into existence. The Hanwood Catholic Club was formed in 1956, a result of ongoing division between Veneti and Calabresi committee members at the Yoogali Club as to how it should be run.[31] Growing tension between the two groups culminated in the formation of this break-away club which operated from a house in Hanwood.[32] There were no restrictions on membership and, unlike the other Italian clubs, it never came to be associated with one particular Italian province or region. Some believed that this was due to the large number of Abruzzesi in Hanwood which 'diluted' the otherwise dominant Veneti and Calabresi membership and the conflict between the two.[33] Unencumbered by the traditional divisions, it came to be

regarded as the club where Italians from every region socialised together harmoniously.[34] By November 1964 it had built a modern clubhouse, although it too remained a male environment, except on the weekends.[35]

The less salubrious Coronation Club (which later changed its name to the Coro Club) also opened in 1956. It occupied the former and somewhat dilapidated Italo-Australian clubrooms vacated by the Yoogali Club.[36] The facilities of this exclusively Calabresi organisation consisted of little more than a bar and bocce courts. No food was served. Members settled for bread and salami bought from the nearby grocer. It was popular among Australian workmen and did a steady bar trade, although it struggled to attract members. [37] With four Italian social clubs operating in the Griffith area, by 1959 the Coronation (Coro) Club was facing the very real prospect of being wound up. In that same year the decision was made to move to West Griffith and launch a campaign to recruit more members. The strategy paid off and by 1964 it was financially secure. By then the Yoogali Club which, under its Calabresi-dominated committee had embarked on a major expansion program, had run into financial difficulties. Profits fell dramatically as members deserted it for the new Leagues Club and Ex-Servicemen's Club which had opened premises in a central location in town.[38]

Promotional poster for the performance of Peppino Di Capri at the Yoogali Club in the 1950s. Gino Ceccato private collection

There was no shortage of Italian entertainment in Griffith during the 1950s and 1960s. The Continental Music Club and Yoogali Club frequently booked Italian acts to perform in Griffith as part of their Australian tours. Gino Ceccato, who was responsible for booking them, can remember the performers arriving in Griffith in large black American-style cars. Gino Ceccato private collection.

Griffith's decentralised settlement pattern, with horticultural farms clustered around settlements on the outskirts of the town, meant visiting the local club was easier because of the shorter travel distance.[39] While the formation of clubs may have been perceived as an encouraging indicator of 'assimilation' and adoption of the 'Australian Way of Life', they played a central role in the retention of cultural traditions and practices by migrant groups, including old rivalries and divisions.

By contrast, Yoogali Soccer Club established in 1950 was a culturally diverse affair. As one of its founding members, Gerry Vio, recalled many years later in 1994, the club grew out of an impromptu soccer game:

> On a Sunday afternoon at the beginning of 1950 a group of new Australians happened to meet at the Marianna Guest House. Someone produced a soccer ball and all decided to have a game.
>
> This took place on an open paddock behind the present Hanwood Post Office. Approximately twenty people participated, all dressed in their Sunday best clothes! … The game lasted most of the afternoon and interestingly enough the number kept increasing as the word got around that a game of soccer was in progress. When the game ended everyone was so excited that it was decided we should get together again the next Sunday for another game with the possibility of forming a soccer club.[40]

A meeting of some twenty men followed at the farm of Peter Mogliotti in Yoogali who also conducted a boarding house there. The first official game of what became the Yoogali Soccer Club was played on 14 May 1950. The Italians were only one of several different cultural groups that participated in the inaugural game. As Peter Ceccato, the club's first secretary, recalls:

> Soon the word had got around that a club had been formed and that a game was to be played at the Yoogali Recreation Ground and that everybody interested in playing were welcome. On that day about thirty people of some six to seven different nationalities had gathered at the ground. Two sides were picked and a game was played.
>
> Although most had only recently arrived and could not speak English, it became apparent that there was a language barrier, but this was overcome by the form of arm waving and gestures and somehow everyone seemed to be able to communicate with one another.[41]

In its first game away from home the team the treasurer, Lou Salvestro, drove the team to Wagga in his truck. As Peter Ceccato recalls, 'there were eight different nationalities playing in our team, namely Australian, Italian, Dutch, British, Lithuanian, Scottish, Hungarian and Yugoslavian'.[42] Four years later a rival Hanwood Club had formed, officially registered at Wagga in 1960.[43] The Yoogali and Hanwood Soccer Clubs still exist today.

By the late 1950s a growing number of Italian small businesses were also beginning to appear in Griffith. In 1955 Tom Apolloni opened a supermarket, Griffith's first, which included a Continental deli which sold everything from olive oil and other imported food to Italian kitchenware and magazines.[44] That same year Frank Battaglia began building a small block of three shops at the top of Banna Avenue. His son, Antonio, who had owned a barber shop in Italy before the family joined Frank in 1948, set up a hairdressing business, the Battaglia Salon, in one of the shops. Frank later opened a liquor store in another.[45] Peter Calapari, a leader in the Calabresi community, also opened a shoe store in the block in the 1950s. This became a meeting place for Calabresi who would gather on the footpath outside.[46]

Tom's Supermarket on Banna Avenue around 1959 owned by Tom Apolloni. It was the first supermarket in Griffith. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

Several Italian-owned allied farming businesses had already been established in the 1940s and early 1950s. In 1949 Peter Andreatta opened a fig pulping plant in partnership with Lou Dodson. They sold the pulp to jam factories.[47] The Beltrame brothers, Peter and Charlie, started the Yoogali Service Station in 1946.[48] Several Veneti set up blacksmith shops, returning to their former trade. Tomaso (Tom) Bortolazzo from Crespano, Treviso, opened a blacksmith shop during the early 1940s which he ran until his death in 1963. Among the services he provided for the Italian community was the making of stills for the production of grappa.[49] Similarly, in 1951 Tony Colla took over the blacksmith shop in Griffith where he worked from its owner, Blue Hams. The business quickly became a family enterprise as his brothers, Luigi and Acide, joined him in Griffith. His father and youngest brother, Tarcisio, arrived in 1960. The Colla Brothers are still in business today, although the nature of their work has changed.[50]

By the early 1950s Griffith also had an Italian dentist, Dr Joe Sertori.[51] In 1960 Giuseppe Spagnolo, a tailor by trade, opened the Continental Dry Cleaners and Men's Wear in Banna Avenue.[52] Cesare Emporium, a furniture shop catering for Italian tastes opened in 1964 by Frank Pierotti and Cesare Orsuccin in partnership. Members of the Pierotti family had progressively migrated to Australia from Barga in Tuscany in the postwar years. In 1966 Frank's sister Anna and her husband Relo moved to Griffith from Melbourne to work in the shop.[53] The growing Italian presence in business and retail during the 1950s and 1960s introduced a distinctly Italian character to Banna Avenue, the main street of Griffith, which grew in the following decades as restaurants and cafes also appeared. The first pizzeria, the Belvedere, opened in the early 1960s. In the following decade an Italian restaurant, La Scala, was established by the Vico family. Both businesses remain today, along with many Italian cafes and restaurants which distinguishes Griffith from other regional towns.

The Italians worked towards the establishment of Catholic schools in the early postwar years. In 1949 a large function room was built behind Our Lady of Pompeii Church, which also served as the temporary classroom for St Mary's School until the completion of a permanent building in 1954.[54] In Hanwood, St Anthony's Church opened in 1948 – a surplus army chapel transported from Wagga and rebuilt by the parish under the supervision of builders Frank Andreazza and Jack Salvestrin – became the school house for St Josephs Catholic School during the week. Following the arrival of the

The Colla brothers working in the blacksmith shop in 1958. (l to r): Tony Colla, Louie Colla, Alcide Colla, Johnny Buoni.

Capucchin fathers in 1956 Yenda, Yoogali and Hanwood became one parish under Father Nicholas Simonazzi.[55]

The Italian presence was also becoming visible in the physical fabric of the Griffith area as new buildings featured a distinctly Italo-Australian vernacular. This was most prominently expressed in domestic architecture. Angelo Salvestro's house in Griffith, which he built in 1956 after retiring from farming, was typical of this, with its curved brickwork chimney and coloured tile panel on the front wall. The house was called 'Fontana' after a place in the village of Cavaso Del Tomba where he had been born.[56] The Colla family home in Kookora Street, Griffith, which was built in 1955, is another such example.

The 1960s and 1970s would be a period of further transformation and adaptation by the Italian community as successive generations made their own mark on the landscape. Changes in agricultural practices and the different aspirations of the younger and more affluent Italian-Australians would be major factors shaping this.

The 'far il porcel' (killing of the pig), 1965. Salsicce, salami, muset, osso-collo, pancetta and cotechino are the products of this Veneti tradition. Local studies collection, Griffith City Library

left: Tony and Julia Colla's first home on their farm in Griffith West, in August 1951. Tony Colla private collection

right: Tony and Julia Colla's new house at 101 Kookora Street, Griffith, in June 1955. It was one of several houses whose architecture was typical of a distinctly Italian-Australian design vernacular. Tony Colla private collection

Endnotes

1 Italian-owned farms numbered 163, of which 126 were owned by Veneti. The breakdown of ownership of the remainder by region was as follows: Calabresi - seventeen; Friulani – eight; Piemontesi - seven; Abruzzi - three; Siciliani - two.

2 C Price, 'Italian population at Griffith', Australian National University, unpublished, p12, cited in Huber, *op cit*, p57.

3 Pich, *op cit*, pp263-264.

4 Pich, *op cit*, p3.

5 Baldassar, *op cit*, pp53-54.

6 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p24.

7 Some former prisoners of war settled in Griffith after deciding to return to Australia. One of them was Michele Laricchia from Adelfia near Bari. Unsettled on his return to war-ravaged Italy and having come to like Australia, he borrowed the money for his passage. Huber, *op cit*, p57; Kelly, *op cit*, p178.

8 Baldassar, *op cit*, pp54-55.

9 Huber, *op cit*, pp57, 73.

10 Huber, *op cit*, p58.

11 Huber, *op cit*, pp 62, 73-74.

12 Huber, *op cit*, p67.

13 Huber, *ibid*.

14 Huber, op cit, p47.

15 The Treaty was nullified in 1940 when Italy entered the Second World War as an ally of Germany. Section 241 of the *Crown Lands Consolidation Act 1913* which applied to transfers of land required a period of residency and naturalisation within five years as a precondition of ownership. This provision was not repealed until 1964.

16 Pich, *op cit*, pp266-267; Kelly, *op cit*, p174.

17 Huber, *op cit*, p67.

18 Huber, *op cit*, p97; Kelly, *op cit*, pp221-222.

19 Huber, *op cit*, pp99, 107; Ceccato, *op cit*, p16; Kelly, *op cit*, p222.

20 Several of its founding members had also been involved in the management of the short-lived Italo-Australia Club back in the late 1930s. Huber, *op cit*, p99.

21 The club's first president was Adrian Paterson. The secretary was Dick Mortlock. Among the members of its inaugural committee was Gino Ceccato.

22 The owner, Pompeo (Bob) Vardanega, also one of the founding members, had been approached by the Catholic Club for the sale of the club rooms and Coronation Hall for use by it but the offer was declined. Kelly, *op cit*, p222.

23 The locker system was devised as a means of unregistered (unlicensed) clubs serving alcohol instead of members having to bring their own without breaching the liquor laws. It worked such that when the club purchased alcohol it was considered to be doing so on behalf of members. Accordingly, the purchase of alcohol by a member was considered to constitute reimbursement of the club, rather than its sale or supply by the club which was prohibited.

The alcohol was then supposedly placed in the member's locker for personal use only. Ceccato, *op cit*, p9; Kelly, *op cit*, p222.

24 Huber, *op cit*, p123.

25 Huber, *op cit*, p114.

26 Tony Colla, *My Family*, unpublished, 1993, p71.

27 Personal communication with John Dal Broi, 23 April 2007; Gino Ceccato, 1 July 2007.

28 Ceccato, *op cit*, p14.

29 By the late 1960s its membership numbered around 850, low by the club membership standards of the day. (70 of these were associate members). Huber, *op cit*, p108.

30 Huber, *op cit*, pp100, 107; Kelly, *op cit*, p222.

31 The establishment of the club was largely the product of a compromise brokered by Father F C Bell, curate at Griffith. One major source of disagreement was the push for expansion by the Calabresi. According to Veneti committee members, this was no more than a means of creating building contracts for themselves. Huber, *op cit*, p100; Kelly, *op cit*, pp222-223

32 Huber, *op cit*, p107.

33 Another reason put forward was that by then the Veneti and Calabresi had 'tired of the Yoogali frictions and were prepared to meet with more goodwill at Hanwood'. Huber, *op cit*, p13.

34 Huber, *op cit*, p114.

35 Huber, *op cit*, pp105, 109; Kelly, *op cit*, pp222-223.

36 Huber, *op cit*, pp 105, 109; Ceccato, *op cit*, pp16-17; Kelly, *op cit*, pp222-223. Due to changes in the law in 1971 which required all licensed clubs to become limited companies, it was forced to change its name as a club of the same name in the suburb of Burwood in Sydney had been the first to register it.

37 Huber, *op cit*, p108.

38 Huber, *op cit*, pp100-101.

39 Huber, *op cit*, pp60, 127.

40 The Yoogali Soccer Club Reunion 1954- 1994, unpublished, quoted in Ceccato, *op cit*, p9.

41 *ibid*.

42 *ibid*

43 *Area News*, 26 August 2005, p24.

44 *The Area News*, 14 June 1995, p10. The business had started as a general store in 1941, in partnership with Frank Battaglia, to cater for the Italian population. Battaglia sold his share in the business in 1956.

45 *Area News*, 18 July 1997; Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, pp265-266; Kabaila, *op cit*, pp119-120. A Belgium architect temporarily resident in Griffith was commissioned to design the group of three shops. The European Art Deco designed building reminiscent of Belgian cafes, with its curved glass windows and the original tiled frontage and colour scheme of green and black is one of the more outstanding heritage buildings in Banna Avenue today. It is still owned by the family.
Antonio's son, Francesco, followed his father into the hairdressing salon. His daughter, Olga, runs the Dolce Dolce Café which is located in the block of shops.

46 Personal communication with John Dal Broi, 23 April 2007; Gino Ceccato, 1 July 2007.

47 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p16.

48 Kabaila, op cit, p128.

49 Kabaila, *op cit*, p13.

50 Kabaila, *op cit*, pp 89-91.

51 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p180.

52 Giuseppe and his sister Mary (now Trimboli) had left Plati in Reggio Calabria in 1949. Their nine siblings and parents progressively followed them to Australia during the 1950s. Having saved enough money working in various jobs in Sydney, Giuseppe moved to Griffith and opened the business. *Area News*, 5 June 1988, p10.

53 *Area News*, 5 June 1998, p5.

54 Kabaila, *op cit*, p54.

55 The church was rebuilt in 1972. Kelly, *op cit*, p230; Kabaila, *op cit*, pp 165-166.

56 Kabaila, *op cit*, pp 127-128.

chapter 5

Integration: a new *Campanilismo*

In 1952 the Federal Bureau of Agricultural Economics was commissioned by the Irrigation Research and Extension Committee (IREC) to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the MIA extension program.[1] A joint Federal/State body set up under the authority of the CSIRO and State Department of Agriculture, IREC's role was to identify and guide research and extension work on the irrigation areas and act as an advisory committee to government agencies serving agriculture.[2] Among the findings was that very few Italians participated in the extension program due to language difficulties, the exclusionary structure of Italian-Australian contact and a general suspicion of extension officers who also performed a regulatory role.[3]

As Grassby, then executive officer of IREC, recalled:

> The problem which emerged [from the survey] was that half of the farming population – that is, the Italian speaking half – were not part of the extension groups; were not part of the co-operative management; were not part of any organ of the local town; and of course because of language problems were not exposed to the flow of information in the written English form, either in the pamphlets or in the local English newspapers or in any of the material that had been produced by the service.[4]

Pasquale and Elisabetta Calabria picking peaches on their farm in 1946. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

The following year IREC sought the appointment of a bilingual extension officer by the New South Wales Department of Agriculture as a measure aimed at increasing the accessibility of the extension services to Italian farmers. In making its case, IREC pointed to the implications for the MIA of having a significant proportion of the farming population unaware of sound horticultural and irrigation practices. It also referred to the wider integration and greater cohesion of the Italian and non-Italian communities that such a move would foster:

> [T]he Italian farmer feels the lack of adequate advice, and his Australian neighbour must carry the burden of extension work and continue to face danger from next door because of mistakes in farm management that could be corrected by advice. The additional great work of integrating the two communities – English and Italian-speaking – to the benefit of the community as a whole would be advanced considerably by the appointment of such an officer.[5]

In 1954 Angelo Provera started work as the Italian liaison officer in the MIA. He was the first bilingual government liaison officer ever appointed in Australia outside the Department of Immigration and Foreign Affairs. Provera was instrumental in 'Italianising' extension services in the MIA. He assisted Department of Agriculture extension and administrative officers and IREC and prepared regular articles in the Italian language for the *Farmers' Newsletter* and Italian-language newspapers. Bilingual extension materials were also produced in English, Italian and Spanish by the Agricultural Extension Service and advisory groups set up. Provera developed a strong rapport with Italian farmers, particularly the Calabresi, who sought his advice long after he left the position.[6] These programs were later taken up by the Federal and State governments nationwide.[7]

Family friends Don Mackay, Gina Pastega, Len Mackay, Angelo Pastega, Mrs Mackay and Janice Mackay, c1940s. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

An important indicator of the success of the initiative was the attendance of Italians at extension group meetings, often making up to half the membership. Some even sought election as extension group representatives or as representatives on the controlling body, IREC.[8] Whereas in 1950 membership of the extension groups was dominated by English-speaking farmers, some ten years later the reverse was true. By 1960, for example, the Yenda Extension Group, was exclusively Italian. Similarly, Italians had also become involved in the management of the Griffith Producers' Co-operative who had also recognised the need to employ bilingual staff.

Giuseppe Raccanello with two labourers on top of truckload of grapes before departing for Melbourne in April 1954. As there was no market with local wineries at the time, farmers were selling their grapes to Italian migrants who used them to make their own wine. Bruno Raccanello private collection

But the project's findings had also pointed to the need to foster more cohesion within the wider community. It confirmed what Grassby and others already knew: although the Italians made up close to half the population, they were largely invisible in the economic and social life of Griffith.[9] According to Grassby, 'in the discussions to improve agricultural extension services it was recognised that the non-participation of Italian farmers in extension and farm improvement programs was part of the wider problem of their exclusion from every power structure in the community'.[10] The Department of Agriculture agreed. Grassby was to be their 'instrument of change'.[11] As Grassby recalls, he was approached to undertake liaison work with the Italian community because he spoke Spanish and 'it was quaintly felt' that as such he would also be able to speak Italian, making him 'the obvious candidate'.[12] It was the beginning of his long association with the Griffith Italian community and the championing of multiculturalism in Australia.

Grassby fully appreciated the challenge he faced in bringing the Italian community into the fold:

> It was not just a matter of passing on farm information; it was a matter of trying to capture their interest in the community generally. In the first instance I believed it was important that they joined together as a common language group because the people that came from various parts of Italy, from Veneto, from Piemonte, from Abruzzi, from Calabria, from Sicily, all had different backgrounds and were by no means a monolithic group. In fact the gaps between them were sometimes as great as the gaps between them and the Anglo Saxons.[13]

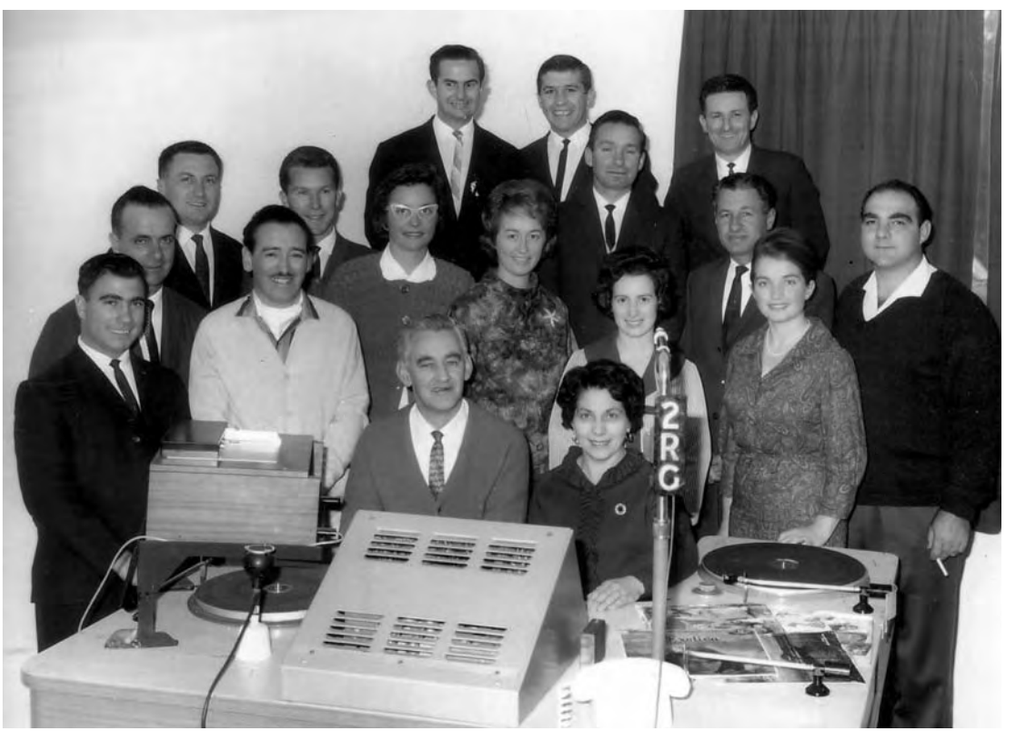
Grassby came up with the idea of a radio music club to be broadcast on the regional radio station 2RG in the Italian and Spanish language as the medium for promoting integration through inclusive cultural and community activities. A similar program, the

'Italian hour', broadcast on 2RG years earlier in 1938 had been extremely popular.[14] Grassby proceeded to recruit a group of six local Italian men, three of whom were Veneti. All of them had either been born in the Griffith area or settled in the interwar years.[15] The 'Continental Music Club' was chosen as the name because of the residual antagonism towards Italians as a result of the Second World War. The program's format was similarly intended to obfuscate its true nature. As Grassby explained:

> We had to think of something that would not raise the ire of the Anglo Saxons who were a very important and key part of the community, particularly in those early postwar days when the RSL had power and authority. So if you mentioned 'Italy' they got upset. If you mentioned 'Continental Music' they weren't so upset. If you mentioned music, of course nobody was upset. So what we did was we formed a Continental Music Club which was a euphemism for an organisation which was designed to carry out cultural activities.[16]

The program first went to air in 1951. It was broadcast at 9pm on Friday nights for one hour as well as half an hour on Sundays.[17] Although it provided important farming advice and general community information, it also promoted Italian and Spanish culture through music, from opera to Italian pop. [18] The programs were financed by subscriptions of one pound per year which entitled members to request their favourite song on the Friday night program. The club bought its records from the local record shop, Waltons Electrical and Radio Shop, who obtained them from a Melbourne-based Italian importer, Nino Borsari.[19]

A number of social and cultural activities were also organised, including dances, the screening of contemporary Italian movies and concerts starring touring Italian artists, often in conjunction with the Yoogali Club. As Gino Ceccato recalls, the club arranged everything, from finding the venue, advertising in the local paper and distributing promotional leaflets in shops, to making sure that 'there was a piano in tune' in addition to undertaking 'all the work on the night of the show'.[20]



Members of the Continental Music Club committee and program announcers, c1960s. The four people in the back row are (l to r): Stan Aliprandi, Frank Perosin, Tom Appoloni, Amerigo Bulzomi; second row (l to r): John Piazza, Simon Mackenzie, Elba Piazza (announcer), Gino Ceccato; third row (l to r): Joe Catanzariti, Emo Gatto (Behing Joe), Al Grassby, Marisa Bulzomi (announcer), Rosa Perosin (announcer), Leo Salvestrin. Sitting is (l to r): 2RG announcer Brian Stoneman, Maria Pascoli (announcer). Gino Ceccato private collection

Consistent with the club's aims of fostering integration, many of its social functions were 'deliberately geared to introduce the two halves of the Griffith community' – that is, the conservative Country Party element and the Italian and other migrant groups.[21] These evenings were attended by all sections of the Griffith community.[22] On the invitation list were people such as Walter Bishop, the president of the RSL and an original soldier settler, and George Denham, the chieftan of the Caledonian Society, along with other leading members in the local community known to have been hostile to Italians in the past. As Grassby recalls, care was taken to ensure that they were 'looked after' at these functions, with someone to translate always at hand. Gino Ceccato remembers the dances well:

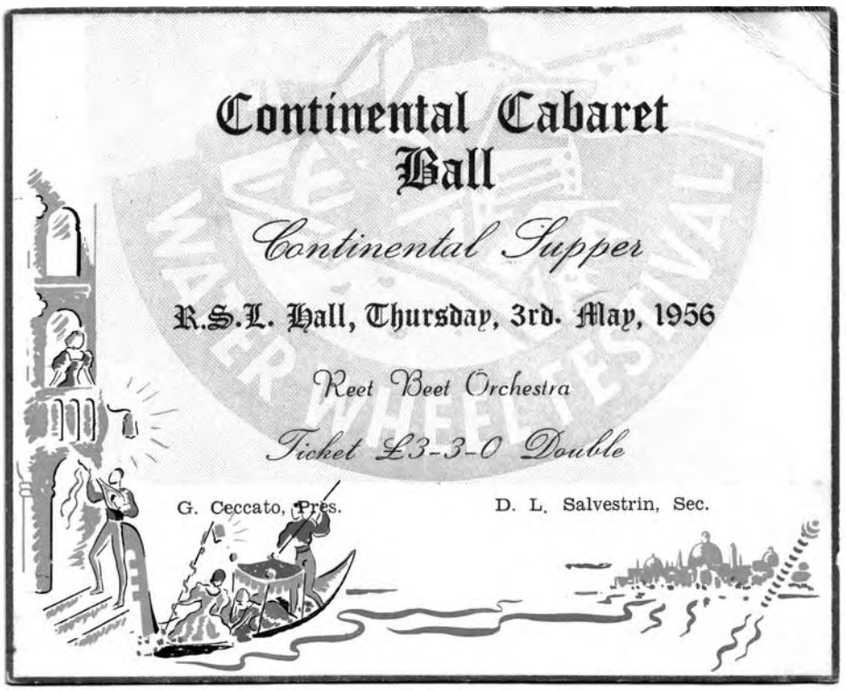
> The social dance evenings were very popular and always well attended in a beautifully decorated hall with Griffith's most popular band, the Reet Beet orchestra, supplying the dance music. The dance evenings were controlled by popular MC, Mr Al Grassby, who did all the announcing of the then very popular dances being the Waltz, Quick Step, Fox Trot, Jazz Waltz, Canadian Three Step and Pride of Erin. During the evening there were always the popular novelty dances, the Monte Carlo Waltz and the Spot Dance.[23]

But the primary purpose of these social gatherings was to make the non-Italians aware that they made up only 'half the community'. The strategy was a huge success in forging a recognition that 'there was this need to knit together'.[24] As Grassby recalls, some of the events were confronting for non-Italians in other ways:

> We also introduced the first Italian films. We sent to Italy for them. It had some funny repercussions because these were films of Rossellini and De Sica after World War Two and this was the new wave of Italian films showing poverty and war and prostitution, social realism. And so of course the [Australians] were absolutely horrified to think that there was any prostitution and any drugs or anything improper. There was a cultural gap there.[25]

Some Australians became active committee members and participants in four of the club's major functions. 'Miss Easter', a dance held on the evening of Easter Saturday and the Principessa del Continentale (Continental Music Club Queen) later in the year were both beauty contests. Among the judges for both of these events were local businesswomen of Griffith. One of these was well-known dressmaker, Myrtle Crockford. Judges of another event, the waltzing competition, included prominent locals, George and Linda Denham, owners of Denhams Soft Drink Cordials. Linda Denham was also a member of the Country Womens Association and the 2RG Sunshine Club. Gino Ceccato remembers that they always attended looking very smartly dressed in their Scottish Caledonian attire. George would bring along his bagpipes, entertaining the crowd during the course of the night with some Scottish music.[26] The Continental Music Club also ran activities in conjunction with the Country Womens Association for local branches of the Good Neighbour Council and New Settlers League.

Despite its somewhat eclectic nature, the Continental Music Club was 'a formula which worked particularly well'.[27] Similar programs were established in other regional areas of the state with high Italian populations, with clubs formed in Leeton, Broken Hill and Lismore, creating a statewide 'cultural network'.[28] It also became the model for the launching of multilingual radio in Sydney and Melbourne in 1975, a legacy of Al Grassby's period as the Federal minister for Immigration between 1972 and 1974.[29] The Continental Music Club was also active in the establishment of the Water Wheel Festival, along with other civic and community groups, whose purpose was to raise money for a town hall.[30] When the inaugural festival was held in May 1956, Lina Ballestrin, the reigning Continental Music Club Queen, was crowned its first queen. Lina's parents, Romano and Agnese, had lived in Griffith since the 1930s.[31] As perhaps



Ticket for the Continental Music Club Cabaret Ball held on 3 May 1956. Note that the venue is the RSL Hall. Its president, Gino Ceccato, was the first Italian to be accepted for membership at the Griffith Ex-Servicemens Club. Gino Ceccato private collection

another measure of the success of the Continental Music Club, one 'Australian' member suggested that the festival be opened by Gina Lollobrigida, while the preferred choice of Gino Ceccato, the president of the Club, was Marilyn Monroe.[32]

Continental Music Club float in the second Waterwheel Festival procession along Banna Avenue, Griffith, 1957. The reigning Continental Music Queen, Marisa Bulzomi can be seen on the top of the float. Gino Ceccato private collection

Grassby quickly won the admiration and respect of the Italian community, invited to their weddings and other celebrations and taken into their confidence.[33] It was this popularity that formed the basis of his successful political career which began in 1965 when, as the local State Labor candidate, he was elected the member for Murrumbidgee. Such was his personal following that, against all odds, he won the Federal Riverina seat in 1969 with a swing of 16.8 per cent due to the support of the otherwise Country Party voting Veneti.[34]

Water Wheel Festival Ball, 1956. L to R: Rita and Gino Ceccato, Rina and Angelo Minato, Josephine and Val Valentini at the inaugural Water Wheel Festival Ball in 1956. The festival was an annual civic event to raise funds for charity. Gino Ceccato private collection

By the mid-1950s a new *campanilismo* had been forged in the Griffith area. This in turn engendered a sense of belonging and confidence within the Italian community, leading to greater participation in public and civic life in the MIA.[35] Griffith was quick to claim that it was the 'best integrated community in Australia'.[36] Indeed, the important role that the Italians had played in the MIA, by then one of the richest farming regions in Australia, and the success of the integration initiatives was the subject of several studies in the 1950s and 1960s.[37]

The Griffith Ex-Servicemen's Club bowling team in the early 1960s. Note that the team is dominated by Italian players, most of whom settled in the Griffith area in the inter war years. Such a situation was inconceivable ten years earlier. (l to r): Joe Bandiera, Giulio Cappello, Peter Andreatta, Gus Bagatella, Arthur Hastings, Angelo Rossetto, Lou Garbin, Lou Signor, Milio Ziliotto. Griffith Genealogical and Historical Society

Endnotes

1 Conducted since 1940 by the New South Wales Department of Agriculture, it sought to place horticultural practices on a more scientific footing. Extension consisted mainly of the dissemination of information on new methods and techniques via the *Farmers' Newsletter* circulated regularly to growers from 1944, field work by extension officers and district extension groups which functioned on a neighbourhood basis (with five in Mirrool and three in Yanco).

2 The research projects covered irrigation, drainage and plant breeding programs, as well as extension programs which had a research component. Underground tile drainage which proved the saviour of the MIA, for instance, was initiated by IREC. A. J. Grassby, *Griffith of the Four Faces*, IREC, 1963, unpaginated; interview with Albert Grassby, November 1984, National Library of Australia, ORAL TRC 4900/18.

3 Pich, *op cit*, pp269-270, 272; Al Grassby, 'Griffith and the origins of Australian multiculturalism', *Multicultural Papers*, no. 46, Clearing House on Migration Issues, Richmond, Victoria, September 1985, p3.

4 Grassby, *op cit*, p.3.

5 'Case for Italian Liaison Officer', IREC, 5 May 1953, cited in Pich, *op cit*, p270.

6 Pich, *op cit*, pp272-273.

7 Grassby, *op cit*, p.5.

8 J Tully, 'Leadership and integration: integrating Italian farmers into an agricultural extension programme on the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area', *Australian J Soc Issue*, vol 1, no. 2, 1962, pp11-25.

9 Al Grassby, 'Griffith and the origins of Australian multiculturalism', *Multicultural Papers*, no. 46, Clearing House on Migration Issues, Richmond, Victoria, September 1985, p.2.

10 *ibid*, p.4.

11 *ibid*, p4.

12 *ibid*, p3.

13 *ibid*, p4.

14 *Area News*, 4 March 1938.

15 The inaugural committee consisted of Gino Ceccato (president), Al Grassby (secretary), Tom Apolloni (treasurer), Emo Gatto and Leo Salvestrin.

16 Interview with Albert Grassby, November 1984, NLA, ORAL TRC 4900/18.

17 Ceccato, *op cit*, p12.

18 Ceccato, *op cit*, pp11-12; Grassby, *op cit*, p5.

19 Ceccato, *op cit*, p12.

20 Ceccato, op cit, p14.

21 Interview with Albert Grassby, November 1984, NLA, ORAL TRC 4900/18.

22 Ceccato, *op cit*, p13.

23 Ceccato, *op cit*, p12. Originally called the Crack-a-Jack Orchestra, it changed its name to the more American sounding Reet Beet Orchestra in the 1950s.

24 Interview with Albert Grassby, November 1984, NLA, ORAL TRC 4900/18.

25 *ibid*.

26 Ceccato, *op cit*, p13.

27 Grassby, *op cit*, p.5.

28 Interview with Albert Grassby, November 1984, NLA, ORAL TRC 4900/18.

29 Grassby, *op cit*, p.5.

30 The festival included other activities such as the Festival Queen competition and balls. It was the precursor to the Griffith Vintage Festival which replaced it in 1971, later renamed the Griffith Wine and Food Festival in 1989.

31 Ceccato, *op cit*, p14; Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, p24.

32 Ceccato, *op cit*, p14. With the cessation of Italian migration, the Continental Music Club fell into decline in the 1970s.

33 Huber, *op cit*, p121.

34 Huber, *op cit*, pp119-121.

35 Grassby, *op cit*, pp 5-6.

36 eg *Area News*, 31 August 1956; see also *SMH*, 25 May 1965; *SMH*, 29 July 1966. For a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the program, see Tully, *op cit*.

37 See bibliography.

chapter 6

Paése (homeland)

At a reunion dinner in Sydney in 1972, Al Grassby was asked to bring a bottle of channel water which, it was said, roused a nostalgic longing in former Griffith Italians residents. Such was the deep attachment and connection with Griffith among Italians who had settled there that channel water had assumed the symbolic qualities associated with a homeland.[1]

From the early 1960s Italian migration to Griffith (and Australia generally) slowed, particularly from the Veneto region. But Italian farm ownership continued to grow. By 1972 eighty percent of the horticultural farms in Mirrool and fifty percent in Yanco were owned by Italian-Australians. The Veneti in Mirrool and Calabresi in Yanco remained the dominant Italian groups. The Calabresi made up the second largest group in Mirrool, followed by the Siciliani and Abruzzesi.[2] Overall, the Veneti still made up the largest proportion of the Italian community.

Float built as part of the fundraising activities marking the fiftieth anniversary of Yenda Primary School, August 1970. Bruno Raccanello private collection

A greater number of second generation Italians had remained in farming compared to their Australian counterparts. Because of the land tenure rules which had prevented the expansion of individual holdings, Italians had often acquired farms for their sons who took them over when they turned twenty one or married. The practice served family relations well as sons acquired economic independence, irrespective of the usual rules of inheritance which privileged the eldest son. This was a major reason why young Italian men who might have otherwise pursued a trade or profession, remained on the land.[3]

The dynamics of Italian farming was, however, undergoing a process of change as the agricultural sector in Australia was being transformed by commercial practices and methods. These emphasised the nuclear rather than traditional Italian extended family pattern of farming. Family members would sometimes form companies to work their individual farms as one unit in order to increase productivity, acquire better machinery and improve the marketing of their produce. But such co-operative practices were, it seems, less common than in previous years.[4] Increased specialisation and mechanisation saw a further erosion of the family as the working unit. Women no longer had to work on the farms, which meant less involvement by wives in their day-to-day management and an even great delineation of their domestic role.[5]

From the late 1960s Italians had also begun moving into large area farming in the Benerembah-Tabbita irrigation districts and the new Coleambally Irrigation Area which adjoined the MIA.[6] Up until then large area farming had been the preserve of Australian civilian settlers. During the 1950s a mere four large area holdings were in Italian ownership.[7] The move into large area farming was a natural progression by a younger generation of farmers in their desire to diversify and take advantage of mechanisation and the new opportunities large area farming presented. To this extent it represented a continuity in, rather than departure from, Italian horticultural farming in the MIA.[8] But the take-up rate was slow. In 1973 only ninety-seven (ten percent) of the large area land in the MIA and adjoining irrigation areas was in Italian ownership.[9] By 1980 Italians owned thirteen percent of the large-scale farms, with the wealthier Veneti farmers accounting for some three-quarters of the Italian occupants of larger holdings.[10]

Bruna Raccanello with her children and friends on the farm, Easter Sunday c1960s. Bruno Raccanello private collection

A growing number of young Italians were also choosing to pursue non-farming careers. While nearly all of the Italians who settled in the Griffith area in the interwar years were engaged in, or associated in some way, with farming, by the early 1960s one quarter of the second generation of this group worked in a range of occupations, including the professions of accounting, pharmacy, medicine, law and teaching.[11] Their representation continued to increase over that decade. Phillip Andreatta took over the family farm at Lake Wyangan which his father, Peter, had owned since 1936, when he left school in the late 1960s. His brother, Dino, however, studied accountancy and moved to Sydney.[12] Similarly, Francesco (Frank) Sartor, the son of postwar Italian vegetable growers, won a Commonwealth Scholarship to Sydney University to study chemical engineering after graduating from Griffith High School.[13]

Although young Italians did go on to university or, more commonly for women, teachers college, the number completing school was still low by the end of the 1960s.[14] In 1969, for example, only eleven of the 104 final year high school students had Italian surnames.[15] In that year, Italians made up nearly half of the enrolments at the Griffith Technical College where girls typically did secretarial or dressmaking courses and the boys attended classes as part of their apprenticeship training, mostly in the areas of building and mechanics.[16]

Because they were bilingual, young Italian women had no difficulty finding jobs in local shops, banks, real estate agents, doctors' surgeries and the offices of lawyers and accountants. As such, few needed to leave Griffith for employment reasons. In any event, daughters were expected to remain in Griffith, living at home until they married.[17] Just as it was hoped that young men would remain in farming, it was generally expected that daughters would marry farmers. As in the wider community, young Italian women stopped working after they were married.[18]

The Italian clubs remained the hub of the community's social activity. By the 1970s the Coronation Hall had fallen into disrepair. Its owner, Bob Vardanega, sold the site to the Marando family in 1973. The old Italo-Australia clubrooms were demolished and a new building erected. In the late 1970s Coronation Hall was fully restored and operated as an antique shop for a time. It was acquired by the Indian community and converted to a Sikh Temple in 1991.[19]

As the Italian community aged, many of the cultural traditions changed as the new generation identified more broadly as both Italians and Australians and inter-marriage increased. In particular, Italian social gatherings and functions became more 'Australianised'. Now in his eighties, Gino Ceccato is just one of many older Italians who laments the passing of the Italianess of the gatherings and festivities:

> When the receptions moved to the clubs the atmosphere of the Italian style weddings changed. The clubs had strict rules, one being that no singing was allowed in the club premises…The old style Italian cooking also changed to a modern menu…[20]

Tony Colla (standing in foreground) looking on at Mark Guidolin during a bocce competition between Castelcucco-Cavaso-Riese and 'the rest of the world' at the Catholic Club in May 1976. Tony Colla private collection

With the passage of time the animosity between the northerners and southerners had diminished. But the murder of local resident and anti-drugs campaigner, Donald Mackay, on 15 July 1977 saw old divisions revived. The events surrounding Mackay's murder have been well documented. In short, as the Wood Royal Commission was to report in 1979, between 1974 and 1979 Italian migrants from the Calabrian village of Plati, also the headquarters of *L'Onorata Societa* or *N'Drangheta*, were involved in at least twenty marijuana plantations in the mainland states other than Victoria. Several of these were located in the Griffith area. From the early 1970s Robert Trimbole became a leading member of the Griffith cell of *N'Drangheta* – known as *La Famiglia*. Trimbole's parents had migrated to Australia from Plati, Calabria, in the 1920s, settling in the Griffith area where they took up farming. In the 1950s when he was in his early twenties, Trimbole had run a garage and panel beating shop in Griffith. His ongoing financial difficulties culminated in bankruptcy in 1968. In the years immediately following, however, he experienced an unexplainable change in fortunes, setting up two businesses in Griffith, the Texas Tavern Wine Bar and the Texan Butchery in 1972. The following year the family moved into a house in the then affluent McNabb Crescent in Griffith. Among his many business interests, as it was later revealed, was the sale and distribution of marijuana grown in Griffith on behalf of *La Famiglia*. But he was not the only one in town to have suddenly fallen on good times. A handful of local Calabrian farmers also began building palatial homes ('grass castles') and acquiring expensive cars and other luxury items.[21] This ostentatious display of wealth did not go unnoticed by the local community[22]

Their activities were an 'open secret' in Griffith.[23] Mackay was among the more outspoken in the Griffith community who began agitating for police action. This initially came to nothing, due largely to political inertia and the protection afforded the growers by local detectives, part of the much wider and systemic corruption within the New South Wales Police Service at this time. Acting on intelligence provided by Mackay, Sydney police raided an $80 million plantation at Coleambally in November 1975. Mackay's name had been revealed in the course of the criminal proceedings against those charged. When other raids followed in 1976 and 1977 Trimbole allegedly ordered Mackay's assassination.

The general slur on Griffith's Calabrian community who were cast in the role of *Mafiosi* was felt most by those who shared Trimbole's surname. Another casualty was Al Grassby, whose close association with a certain section of the Calabrian community was believed to have cost him his seat at the 1974 Federal election.[24]

One of the enduring legacy's of these events was that Griffith became erroneously 'enshrined in the national consciousness as the drug capital of the nation'.[25] Such is the sensitivity of this episode in Griffith's history that a reluctance to talk about it remains today.

Endnotes

1 *Sun Herald*, 4 June 1972, cited in Huber, op cit, p123.
2 Pich, *op cit*, pp195, 281.
3 Huber, *op cit*, pp7-8, 83.
4 Huber, *op cit*, pp78-80.
5 Huber, *op cit*, p87.
6 Water was supplied by the Gogeldrie Weir built on the Murrumbidgee River near Darlington Point which made use of the additional water from the Snowy Mountains Scheme.
7 One of the reasons attributed to this has been the distance of these farms from the town centre. Huber, *op cit*, pp72, 73, 74.
8 Pich, p320.
9 Pich, *op cit*, pp1, 309, 311.
10 Pich, *op cit*, p311.
11 Price, *op cit*, p194.
12 Griffith and District Pioneers, series 3, part 1, *op cit*, pp15, 16.
13 His father, Cesare, came from Treviso while his mother, Ida, was born in Padova, both in the Veneto region. They arrived in Griffith with their first four children after the war, operating a vegetable garden on leased land. They later bought a farm. A former Lord Mayor of Sydney, he is currently the State member for Rockdale and Minister for Planning in the NSW Iemma Labor Government. i*talydownunder.com.au/issuesix/sartor/html*
14 Huber, *op cit*, p89. While many Italians attended Catholic schools, most were the children of the Veneti and wealthier Italians. As these schools only went to year 10, however, they had to transfer to the high school or attend boarding school to complete years 11 and 12.
15 number of children with Italian ancestry may have been higher if inter-marriage is taken into account.
16 Huber, *op cit*, pp88-89.
17 Huber, *op cit*, p89.
18 Huber, *op cit*, p87.
19 Ceccato, *op cit*, p17.
20 One feature that has remained, however, is the accordion player. Ceccato, *op cit*, p16.
21 The term 'grass castles' was first coined by Mackay, a reference to the large homes built from the proceeds of marijuana sales.
22 Kelly, *op cit*, p265.
23 Kelly, *op cit*, p265.
24 *SMH*, Good Weekend, 21 December 1991, pp20-27; *SMH*, Saturday Review, 16 May 1987, p43; *SMH*, 19 August 1989, p71; Kelly, *op cit*, pp261-268; *Financial Review*, August 1986, pp6, 10; *Bulletin*, 11 April 1989, pp44-47.
25 Kelly, *op cit*, p268.

chapter 7
Italianità: the present and future

One of the striking features of Griffith today is the 'Italianess' of this regional town. The Griffith Italian population now spans at least five generations. [1] Some sixty percent of its population claim an Italian heritage. They are present in every aspect of professional and economic life, whether it be local government, retail, business, the professions or farming. Italian cafes and restaurants also line Banna Avenue.

Its enduring 'Italianess' distinguishes it from those urban areas of Australian cities which also attracted large concentrations of Italian migrants. In suburbs such as Leichhardt in Sydney and Carlton in Melbourne, for example, an aging migrant population and the trend for younger generations to move out of these areas has left a largely remnant presence in the form of cafes and restaurants catering for the popularity of Italian food.

While fiercely asserting their Griffith citizenship, the older Veneti also continue to define their identity by reference to their town or province of origin. This has been maintained and strengthened through return visits, made easier by modern communications and affordable air travel, as well as the formation of transnational and provincial associations. A Griffith branch of the National Alpini Association, an Italian equivalent of a returned servicemens' organisation, for example, was formed in the 1970s, one of only seven in Australia. Its members had served in the specialised Alpini Corps of the Italian army which were deployed in the wilderness conditions of the high mountains of the Alps and Appenines of northern Italy during both world wars.[2]

The close connection with the province of Treviso was similarly formalised in 1994 with the signing of the twinning agreement between Griffith and the six *communi* of the Communità Montana del Grappa – Borso, Crespano, Paderno, Possagno, Cavaso del Tomba and Pederobba. Appropriately, the mayor of Griffith at the time was John dal Broi, the son of emigrants from Cavaso.[3] Although other Italian groups such as the Siciliani and Calabresi have not established similar organisations or networks, they too retain a strong provincial identity.

The second and third generation 'baby boomer' Italians are the current custodians of *italianità* (Italian culture and identity) and the driving force behind its 'maintenance'. More educated and affluent than their parents and having lived all their life in Australia, theirs is a more inclusive identity, borne of a very different Australia. They identify 'more broadly along national lines – as Italian or Italo-Australian' and their social networks are formed in the same way.[4]

The younger generations are also less burdened by the dictates of the traditional divisions and rivalries. Not only might they be married to a non-Italian, they have enjoyed a more positive attitude towards Italians within the community.[5] As historians Baldassar and Pesman have observed:

In part due to Italy's increased affluence and consequently its more fashionable/positive image…and in part due to Australia's policy of multiculturalism, many second-generation Italians are today quite comfortable expressing their italianità consciously and conscientiously. Unlike their parents, the second generation have a positive heritage to claim; it has become rather fashionable for young people to be identified as Italian. While once Italian migrants were derided as dangerous swarthy types and labelled with the defamatory term 'wog', their Australian-born children are more likely to be envied for their olive complexions, dress style and knowledge of Italian cuisine. Second-generation Italians are still likely to be labelled as 'wogs', and even more likely to label themselves with this term. The word, however, has been given a new positive meaning.[6]

Members of the Committee of Festa Delle Alpi held at the Yoogali Club on 11 October 1975. A Griffith branch of the National Alpini Association was formed shortly after. Their distinctive hat was fashioned on those of the people from the Alps. The feather symbolises strength, audacity and wilderness. (l to r): Ermes Recco, Tony Colla, Nino Vardanega, Aldo Martinello, Natalina Murray (president of the Crippled Childrens society), Oreste Salvestro, Corrado Cozzi (Italian Ambassador), Marco Cardalana. Tony Colla private collection

The central role played by the Italians in the economic and cultural development of the Griffith area is a source of much local pride. Their contribution has been acknowledged in the form of a dedicated museum documenting their experiences. As the largest and most established non-British migrant group in Griffith, the Italians continue to shape and define the area.

While *italianità* seems secure in the MIA, the future of irrigation farming is less certain. Soil salinity, water conservation and climate change are among the many challenges facing all farmers in the region. A volatile wine industry and the growing threat of citrus imports are other major issues. Rural depopulation has similarly seen many younger Italian-Australians leave Griffith for the cities.

Griffith today is a culturally diverse and integrated community, more so than many urban areas in Australia. By the early 1960s the Griffith area boasted a population drawn from thirty-two different countries.[7] There are now more than double this number.[8] Among the prominent migrant groups to have settled are the Sikhs in the 1970s, the Turks, Fijians, Tongans, Hindus and Samoans in the 1980s and more recently the

Afghans and Pacific Islanders. With the demand for agricultural labour outweighing available workers as the Griffith region continues to expand, these groups are essential to meeting the labour needs of agricultural production. Like the Italians, they too will have their own unique stories of settlement.

Endnotes

1 It even has its own aged care services, Scalabrini Village in Yoogali, a hostel and nursing home which opened in 1988, established by the Italian community with the support and financial assistance of the Order of Scalabrini Missionaries.

2 The Alpini Corps was established in Italy in 1872, eventually becoming a division. Alpini soldiers played a major role in the First and Second World Wars. The National Alpini Association had been formed in northern Italy by a group of returned Alpini soldiers.

3 Cecilia, *op cit*, p11.

4 Baldassar, *op cit*, p168.

5 Baldassar, *op cit*, pp159, 160.

6 Indeed, the relatively recent phenomenon of 'wog pride' is the product of this generation who drew on their own experiences for film, television and live theatre. It is a measure of the transformation of Italians and other southern European groups within Australian society. Baldassar, *op cit*, p169.

7 A. J. Grassby, *Griffith of the Four Faces*, IREC, 1963, unpaginated.

8 Globa Consultancy, *Griffith City Council Social and Community Plan 2004-2007*, p37.

Appendix one

Total registered Italians, soldier settlers, civilians and ex-servicemen on horticultural, dairy and large area holdings in Mirrool, Yanco, Benerembah-Tabbita and Coleambally, 1924-1972 [1]

at year ended	Mirroll			Yanco			Benerembah-Tabbita	Coleambally
	horticulture	dairy	large area	horticulture	dairy	large area	large area	large area
1924	SS: 523 Italians: 12 Civilians: 179	102 - 36	4 - 16	SS: 128 Italians: 1 Civilians: 221	102 - 36	4 - 63	- - -	- - -
1929	SS: 343 Italians: 67 Civilians: 201	41 - 26	37 - 29	SS: 98 Italians: 4 Civilians: 204	41 - 26	33 - 71	- - -	- - -
1939	SS: 218 Italians: 205 Civilians: 222	1 - 6	56 - 82	SS: 55 Italians: 25 Civilians: 205	1 - 6	34 - 173	- - -	- - -
1949	SS: 138 Italians: 251 Civilians 245	- - -	40 2 100	SS: 26 Italians: 29 Civilians 198	- - -	22 1 204	- - -	- - -
1959	SS: 62 Italians: 446 Civilians 150	- - -	60 9 116	SS: 11 Italians: 72 Civilians 157	- - -	21 2 243	51 11 81	- - -
1972	SS: 6 Italians: 471 Civilians 100	- - -	47 53 151	SS: 2 Italians: 128 Civilians 121	- - -	4 13 252	22 44 91	42 16 259

Percentage of total horticultural holders

at the end of:	**1924**	**1929**	**1939**	**1949**	**1959**	**1972**
Soldier settlers	61.19	48.09	29.36	18.49	8.13	0.87
Italians	1.22	7.74	24.73	31.57	57.68	75.32
Civilians	37.59	44.17	45.91	49.94	34.19	23.81

*includes the small number of World War II ex-servicemen which settled in the MIA. The settlement of ex-servicemen after WWII was almost exclusively confined to large area holdings in the irrigation districts of Benerembah, Tabbita and Coleambally irrigation areas.[2]

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1 reproduced from Pich, *op cit*, p3.
2 *ibid*, pp4, 23.

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