

Italians

This paper is in two parts: Don Dignan traces the history of vicissitudes and successes of Italian immigration and settlement; Jan Dickinson presents the scene of the Italians in Queensland today including their contributions to the economic and cultural life of Queensland.

Historical Perspectives

Despite a long history of Italian immigration to Queensland, the Italian-born component of the State's population remains relatively small. It is, furthermore, in steady decline as the virtual end of emigration from Italy and the deaths of older Italo-Queenslanders increasingly take their toll. The 1996 census recorded 16 297 Queenslanders born in Italy and a further 31 573 with at least one parent born there.

In the 150-year perspective of this chapter, it must be emphasised that anti-Italianism was a characteristic mainly of the 80 years from the 1890s to the 1970s. It reached its paroxysm in the panic-stricken months after the fall of Singapore in February 1942, receded steadily in the 1950s, more rapidly in the 1960s, and largely disappeared in the 1970s. When the expedition of 106 Tuscans on the barque *Indus* arrived in Queensland in 1877, the Italian immigrants drew favourably interested articles from the newspapers in Rockhampton and Maryborough, but the Brisbane papers ignored them.

Before the arrival in 1891 on the *Jumna* of the celebrated 335 'Piedmontese' indentured to cut sugarcane, the census of that year revealed only 438 Italian-born residents in the colony. Nonetheless, the role played by these few hundred settlers was out of proportion to their small numbers. Without their presence and their continuous advocacy of a chain migration there would have been no Italian dimension to the Queensland sugar industry. With ample employment opportunities available at that time in the two Americas, in France and in Germany, very remote Queensland was not a destination to which Italian emigrants would have been attracted, had it not been for the vigorous pulling efforts of the tiny

community of their compatriots who were already there. If it is generally true that Italian emigration was always more of a chain phenomenon than one of unconnected pioneering individuals, this is certainly true of the Queensland case.

In a curious coincidence, self-governing Queensland and the liberated Italian nation State were born in the same month and in the same year, June 1859. Scarcely had the former Sardinian consulate in Sydney been transformed into the legation of the Kingdom of Italy when its Consul and then Vice-Consul proposed to the new Brisbane Government that Queensland's need for farmers appropriate to its climate could best be met from a skilled Italian peasantry. This industrious class was now confronted with increasing population pressures on limited agrarian resources. Both delegations received an encouraging reception from the Governor, Sir George Bowen, whose wife was Lady Diamantina Roma, daughter of Count Candiano di Roma, President of the Senate of the Ionian Islands. This good lady, very active in promoting charitable enterprises, left her maiden names on a western Queensland town (Roma) and on a tributary of the Murray-Darling system (Diamantina).

The Catholic Primate of Queensland, Bishop James Quinn, proposed to introduce 3000 immigrants from the Como district in Lombardy. Quinn had already proved his considerable competence in the recruitment of immigrants.

Failing to win public interest in organised group immigration from Italy, Quinn made an extensive tour throughout Europe from 1870 to 1872 during which he recruited a number of professional immigrants with skills that he believed were in short supply in the young colony. Due directly to his efforts, two dozen or so Italian immigrants arrived in Brisbane in 1871 and 1872. One of them, Chiaffredo Venerano Fraire, a secondary-educated son of a small Piedmontese landowner, was to become the promoter of the 1891 *Jumna* expedition that began the subsequent chain migration of nominated Italian immigrants into the North Queensland sugar industry.

In some ways the most noteworthy or notorious of the 1871–72 arrivals were 16 Italian priests to whom Quinn had resorted during his European tour because of his difficulty in recruiting Anglophone clerics. Five of these Italian priests, however, endured the pioneering hardships long enough to become valued permanent Queenslanders. Pietro Capra, a Milanese graduate in theology, was posted immediately after his arrival in Quinn's party on the *Silver Eagle*, to the remote south-western frontier. He later moved in 1882 to the less isolated town of Roma, where he remained until his death in 1907. Costantino Rossolini went immediately from the *Storm King* in March 1871 to the Gayndah parish where his work mainly centred on the rough copper mining township of Mount Perry. A Bolognese-born canon lawyer, Dr Giovanni Cani, weathered not only the rude colonial life but the attitudes of his Irish colleagues to become the first Bishop of the new diocese of Rockhampton in 1882.

Two of the Italian priests made substantial contributions to the developing society. Benedetto Scortechini soon earned the respect of his parishioners whose pioneering experiences he shared. As he travelled throughout this vast expanse of virgin bush he also collected and classified valuable botanical specimens.

Giralmo Davadi was posted to the tin mining settlement of Stanthorpe, where he remained for 23 years. Out of concern for the future of the district as the tin deposits approached exhaustion, he used the Land Order he had taken up to demonstrate the suitability of the Granite Belt for the cultivation of grapes, stone fruit and apples. In this sense he was the pioneer of the staple industries of this district.

To these five Italian clerical recruits should be added Giuseppe Canali, a trained engineer and architect. Although he left as an enduring monument to his first vocation, the imposing portal to All Hallows Convent, Canali had emigrated to train in Brisbane for the priesthood. Apart from assigning him to assist Andrea Giovanni Stombuco in designing and constructing All Hallows, Quinn sent Canali to teach at a seminary that the energetic bishop had established in South Brisbane. Canali was able later to minister to the parish of Fortitude Valley where he resided among the tiny Italian community attached to the charming St Patrick's Church in Morgan Street, one of Stombuco's creations.

Whatever Quinn's shortcomings in interpersonal relations, Queensland's first bishop was determined to bring some elements of European civilisation to the rude frontier colony. It was perhaps inevitable that, because of the paucity of moneyed clients in Brisbane, he soon lost to Sydney the sculptor Achille Simonetti, the painter Giulio Aneviti and former Sistine Professor of Music, Domenico Carmusci. Simonetti returned to Brisbane from Sydney in 1885 after Quinn's death to create the memorial statue of his first distinguished patron, which adorns St Stephen's Cathedral.

In 1874 Quinn had attracted to Brisbane the self-taught Florentine architect, Andrea Stombuco. Stombuco's creations include St Joseph's Christian Brothers College in Gregory Terrace, the tasteful St Andrew's Anglican Church in South Brisbane, All Hallows Sisters of Mercy Convent in Petrie Bight, St Joseph's Christian Brothers College in Nudgee and the architecturally innovative St Patrick's Church in Morgan Street, Fortitude Valley.

One talented musician who remained in Queensland and founded three generations of further contributors to the musical life of the capital was the Paduan violinist, Antonio Benvenuti, who arrived in 1871. Establishing himself as a violin teacher in Brisbane, he performed in the evenings as leader of the orchestra in the Stombuco-designed Theatre Royal. After his two sons became adult musicians, he formed a family band that was usually chosen to play at viceregal and other official functions.

It is no mere accident that a large number of the earliest immigrants to Queensland came from the Valtellina around Sondrio and Tirano. Many Sicilians in later periods were drawn from a cluster of the same villages around Catania. Most of the earliest Italian-speaking immigrants to Australia were Swiss Italians seeking rapid fortunes in the Victorian goldfields of the 1850s.

In the wake of Swiss Italian trail blazers came the Valtellinesi. In 1869 25-year-old Giacomo Tenni set out from Tirano for Queensland leaving his 21-year-old wife, Giacomina, to bear his first son, Martino, who became the grandfather of Martin Tenni, a State parliamentarian and cabinet minister in the 1980s. Martino joined his father in 1889, and both of them worked on the Cairns–Kuranda railway, helping create a series of spectacular tunnels up to the Atherton Tableland

in one of the more notable engineering feats of the late nineteenth century. Their wages helped Giacomo and Martino take up a selection under the *Land Act 1884*, on which the veteran Valtellinese lived to the advanced age of 90. By that time Martino's son, Giacomo, had grown up to enable the Tenni family to transform a freeholded selection into a profitable sugar farm.

Italian emigrants to Queensland in the 1870s travelled on German ships from Hamburg because immigration from Italy was a projection of the colony's recruitment in Germany. In the first half of the 1870s agents-general in London reported to Brisbane that their efforts to recruit immigrants were encountering not only uncooperative attitudes from British officials and outright resistance from English landlords but obstruction also in Germany. They then turned their recruiting efforts to northern Italy.

Consequently small groups of northern Italians made their own way to Hamburg to board vessels, such as the *Humboldt* (8, including 7 Gagliardis joining the 2 who came with Quinn in 1872); the *Lamersbagen* with 3 Regazzolis; the *Reichstag* (28 adults); the *Lamersbagen* (32); the *Humboldt* (9); the *Robert Lees* (4); and the *Charles Dickens* (10).

The most influential immigrant on the *Reichstag* was Count Giovanni-Battista Pullè, a scion of a Flemish noble family. Described as a surveyor on his naturalisation certificate in 1878, he worked briefly for the Lands Department at the princely salary of £100 per annum before spawning a remarkable series of businesses, the most striking of which, perhaps, was Queensland's first brandy distillery at Fairfield.

Most important of all, however, was Pullè's role as the founding editor in Sydney of the first substantial weekly Italian language newspapers: *L'Italo-Australiano* and *L'Oceania*. Through editorials and encouraging interviews with the small group of Italians who had proved successful as cane-cutters and sugar farmers, this patriot vigorously promoted the renewal of Italian immigration to Queensland.

It has been largely overlooked that the first influential proposal to establish Italians in the sugar industry was made by the Catholic Conservative frontbencher John Macrossan in 1872.

The substitute for the labour provided by the Kanakas was to be found in the thousands of Italian agriculturalists emigrating to other

countries where they were now doing the work formerly done by African slaves. Macrossan did not wish to be misunderstood, however. The Italians were not to remain quasi-slaves. They were an honest, industrious, patient race of people. Through a system of tenancy they would rapidly advance from the ranks of labourers, to that of share farmers, to the status of effective small farmers supplying a new institution of central mills. He presented a prefiguration of the history of Italians in the Queensland sugar industry.

Chiaffredo Venerano Fraire, an obscure but prosperous Townsville merchant, came into prominence by his involvement in the role of Italian immigrants in the Queensland sugar industry.

Soon after Fraire landed off the *Silver Eagle* in Brisbane in May 1872, unemployment exhausted the small funds he had brought with him; but he was rescued from poverty by a city draper who took him on as an apprentice and taught him the trade. After establishing a store in a tent on the Palmer goldfields, in 1873 he moved to Townsville to work for James Burns, a Scot who had established a drapery there. The secretary of that firm was Robert Philp, from which humble origins arose the oceanic Burns-Philp company. It was this business association of Fraire and Philp, who had become a member of parliament, that was decisive in what followed.

On Philp's recommendation, the Griffith-McIlwraith coalition government gave legislative framework to the agreement which Fraire had made with a number of sugar planters, that he would recruit indented labourers in northern Italy to replace the Kanakas. The recruits would be sought only from Leghorn (Livorno) northward. Among Italians, these were a different class of people altogether. From the very outset then, future Italian immigrants were encouraged by the host society to complicate their inter-ethnic problems by their own regional prejudices. After giving open evidence of a very constructive kind to the 1925 Ferry Commission on the increase of aliens in North Queensland, Carlo Della Vecchia, the most successful of the *Jumna* pioneers both in the sugar and other industries, felt compelled to seek a private confidential interview with the commission's secretary. Like all northern Italians, he had no time for the southerners, Sicilians, Calabrians etc.

A small minority of the *Jumna's* pioneering passengers did manage to gain a toehold in

the sugar industry. In the first two decades of the twentieth century they then promoted a very thin chain of followers, which expanded to a measurable size in the 1920s.

After arrival on the sugarcane plantations the Italians immediately proved to be much less docile than they had been pictured or than the planters had hoped them to be. The majority of planters, with their profit margins slashed by the competition of subsidised German beet sugar in the markets of the southern colonies, expected that Italian labourers would cost them no more than had the Kanakas. Ironically, the *Jumna* Italians did not experience any cane-cutting, the primary task for which they had been recruited. They arrived on the Queensland plantations in the slack season of 1891–92, during which some planters declined to pay the full weekly wages stipulated in the contracts because of work that could not be done on rainy days during the typical summer wet. Barely a month after their arrival, a number of Italians began to leave the plantations. These departures then became an almost total exodus in mid-February 1892.

What happened to most of the 335 *Jumna* immigrants is not clear. Through examining naturalisation records and other sources two investigators have concluded that at least 40 managed to retain or subsequently to regain a toehold of one kind or other in the sugar industry. A striking example was the Della-Vecchia family. Carlo had come out with his father and mother, Basilio and Maria, at the age of 14. The family had taken up land on the Macknade plantation three months after landing and began farming there. After seven years with the Macknade plantation and two years with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR), they sold out and created a farm from standing scrub in the Mulgrave area. Other Italians later settled around them. They encouraged relatives to come from Italy and helped them get established. By 1925, there were 52 of them, including family members born in Australia, all doing well. The Queensland and Federal Governments in the early 1950s sent three successful naturalised cane farmers, Lalli, Lando, and Pavetto to recruit more Italian cane-cutters for the post-1945 expansion of the sugar industry and despatched them on the *Flaminia*, the *Aurelia*, the *Toscanelli* and the *Toscano*.

By the end of 1906, the White Australia Policy was inaugurated. The most racist exponents of

a homogeneous Australia, white and British, asked whether Italian immigrants were genuinely 'white-skinned'.

It was one thing for the new Federal Government to legislate for the termination of Kanaka labour at the end of 1906 and another for the sugar industry and the Queensland Government to furnish enough white labour for the cutting season in the cooler months of 1907. During the transitional year of 1906 the federal bounty had enabled a partial use of white labourers with mixed success. The Australians employed were often unreliable and unsuited to the work. Once again attention was directed towards another trial of organised Italian immigration. Facing an imminent sugar labour crisis for the 1907 season, Premier Kidston sent the experienced Felice Regazzoli to negotiate in Rome. At the two mills CSR had purchased in the Herbert River district, Macknade and Victoria, Italians had outperformed transient Australian labourers from the south. The Mossman mill in the Port Douglas district reported a similar experience in 1906 with its small nucleus of Italian cutters. Its management consequently petitioned the federal Prime Minister for permission to seek 50 indentured immigrants from Italy. Characteristic of the new Australian nationalism Alfred Deakin acceded to the request. Queensland was then informed that proposals to introduce Continental European immigrants would be approved by the Federal Government only after proof had been furnished that suitable Australian labour was not available.

Early in March 1907, to general astonishment in Australia, the Italian Government rejected the request of the Regazzoli mission. The Italian Government declared that Queensland was proposing to condemn Italian immigrants to a servile status little different from that of the liberated Kanakas.

For a brief period adjacent to the 1933 census Queensland had the largest number of Italian-born residents in Australia: 8343 in a total State population of 947 534; a paltry 0.88 per cent. The Ingham district had only 2586 in a total population of 10 179 (25.4 per cent), though there were some larger, more local concentrations. In 1946 less than 15 per cent of the cane-cutters in the State were of Italian origin. In 1946 without distinguishing between Italian-born and Australian-born, the Queensland Vice-President of the Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) claimed that of

Queensland's 7659 growers, 1467 were Italian (19.15 per cent).

From 1933 to 1935 the outbreaks of Weil's Disease, a serious and often fatal disease contracted from the urine of rats entering the cuts and abrasions that inevitably occurred in harvesting sugarcane, were fortuitously concentrated in the Ingham and Innisfail areas. Serious disputes between the cutters and farmers over the firing of the cane fields before harvesting, which subsequently did become the approved method of dealing with the rat problems, led to a series of wildcat strikes collectively known as the Weil's Disease strikes. Although they had the unfortunate consequence in ethnic terms of causing rifts between Italian farmers and cane-cutters, they did have a positive side in demonstrating to Anglo-Australian unionists that Italian workers were capable of class solidarity.

The epidemic and the consequent strikes brought into very public prominence the newly appointed Queensland Director-General of Health and Medical Services, Sir Raphael Cilento. Of third-generation Italian origin, he had proudly recovered an ability to speak Italian. Cilento's capacity to communicate with the Italian cutters in the Italian language and the readiness of his access to leaders of the Italian community were important factors in settling the industrial confrontation over the appropriate measures to deal with Weil's Disease.

Some of Sir Ralph's enemies tried to have him interned but did not succeed. Nonetheless, an internment process began in which at least two Australian-born citizens of Italian origin without any of Cilento's stature, together with a great many naturalised Italian-born citizens, were interned for 'guilt by association'. Sir Raphael had certainly set himself up since 1937 as a vulnerable target for his enemies. In 1936 Dr Angelo Vattuone formed a Brisbane branch of the Dante Alighieri Society in which all the important executive positions except the presidency were to be held by self-declared Fascists. To avoid creating an unfavourable public impression, the presidency was offered to Sir Raphael Cilento, and Archbishop James Duhig was asked to be the patron. Sir Raphael was astute enough, when war broke out with Germany in September 1939, not to wait upon Italy's possible involvement in the conflict, but to suspend the operation of the Dante Society for the duration of the war.

When the internment officers after 15 June 1940 thoroughly examined the Italian communities, they found no evidence of a feared fifth column, no acts of sabotage either real or planned and no overt or covert disloyalty of Italian settlers to their adopted homeland. There were none to find. Italo-Australians were unhappily caught between a rock and a hard place. Many protested against the denial of a right to love their natural motherland, whatever her errors in foreign policy, while still loving their adopted motherland. When the internment process got underway, it clearly became more of a political response to placate public sentiment than a genuine security concern. Senior military officers did not know what they should do when Dario Burla, former secretary of the Italian Consulate in Brisbane in the late 1920s, and before his emigration a lieutenant in the Italian army in the 1914-18 war, enlisted in the 31st battalion of the Australian Military Forces in March 1939. Veterans of previous wars frequently sought and sometimes gained membership of branches of the RSL.

Count Piero Lalli gained genuine respect in the years to come as an agent of the Federal Immigration Department sent to Italy in 1954 to recruit a large number of new cane-cutters to service the post-war expansion of the sugar industry. As early as the period of steady releases of internees from mid-1943 there were clear signs that the worst times for Italian settlers in Queensland had passed.

At the 1937 conference of the Queensland Country Party a deputation from the Amiens Soldier Settlement had complained that only 60 of the original 500 soldier settlers in the Stanthorpe district had survived. That was not because of any lack of competence in fruit and vegetable farming but because the original valuations for loans had been too high as were also the interest rates. The Labor State Government then permitted Italians migrating from the sugar districts to gain possession of the farms abandoned by the defaulting soldier settlers on terms much more favourable for the interlopers. A very painful reminder of these failed soldier settlements still stands out in the World War I battlefield names given to them: Bullecourt, Pozières, Passchendaele, Bapaume, Messines and Amiens.

In the tobacco growing districts of Texas-Yelarbon-Inglewood, the successful Italian farmers could not be accused of profiting from

the failure of Anglo-Australians. In the mid-1920s, on the initiative of the Italian Consul Count di San Marzano, who had some familiarity with tobacco growing, a group of Italians was brought to the region from North Queensland. After great initial difficulties they earned the distinction of pioneering the new industry there. There was no takeover from failed predecessors. The majority of the newcomers worked as sharefarmers for Anglo-Australian landowners.

Archbishop James Duhig had strongly backed the resettlement of Italians in both the fruit growing and tobacco growing regions of south-western Queensland. He vigorously defended the rights of all Italians already settled in the State. The common complaint of the period that Italians were congregating in ghettos persuaded him that a useful corrective might be to disperse them more thinly across the State.

Unfortunately, the reverse proved to be true. No hatred of Italian settlers was more intense than that meted out in the late 1930s and early 1940s to the first group of some 350 successful Italian fruit farmers in the Stanthorpe area, about 5 per cent of the total population.

Then, paradoxically, as the numbers of Italian-born and the percentiles of the total district population rose to reach their peak of 844 and 9.91 per cent at the census of 1961, the degree of ethnic tolerance gradually rose. Subsequently the increase in absolute and proportionate numbers of Italian-born settlers there, to the statistical peaks in 1954 of 2952 and 25.9 per cent, made Ingham not divisively pluralistic but almost a prefiguration of later contemporary biculturalism and bilingualism.

In the Weil's Disease crisis of 1934 the real hero later remembered by the Ingham Italians was the Anglo-Australian local practitioner Dr Gordon Morrissey. It was he who first diagnosed the disease and recommended and campaigned with the cutters for the pre-harvest firing of the fields.

The experience of immigrant host countries has been that the fashionable threshold of tolerance may be governed less by the numbers of immigrants on the ground than by overriding economic conditions. The settlers who lived the heroic half-century of the Italian experience in Queensland endured a socioeconomic climate arising from the depression of the 1890s, the devastating drought of 1900–04, the tight circumstances of the 1920s and the Great

Depression of the 1930s. With the post-World War II sugar industry booming, with Australia experiencing 30 years of the long-dreamed-of near full employment, well might the ships bearing the recruits of 1955–56 be given a welcome so very different from that of the *Jumna* pioneers in 1891 or to those arriving on ill-received boats in the 1920s and 1930s.

Many unskilled Anglo-Australian workers who had fought Italian immigrants over shares of cane-cutting in the 1930s were now happy to leave to immigrants the more strenuous and less pleasant labours. Even many of the Italian recruits of the 1950s stayed for only one or two cutting seasons when they found that there were more agreeable tasks in the cities. This was particularly the case when most of them also discovered that the historic pathway from cutter to farmer had virtually been closed off by the enormous increase in the value of the farms. This now mattered very little. Many new opportunities were opening up in Australia, whose future had been transformed by the war. An era had ended, even long before harvesting machines were to make the cane knife largely an historical relic, a symbol of the hard road that the early generations of Italo-Queenslanders had had to travel.

Not that the road towards social and economic equality with the dominant ethnic group did not remain a tough one still to travel. To exchange cane-cutting for work as a builder's labourer or a self-employed house painter in Brisbane's post-1950 building boom in some ways was a good swap but often involving more dangers than many past risks. Yet it was borne with good spirit. The nature of the Italian community in Queensland also changed radically after 1950. No longer was it the largest Italian community in Australia because Queensland shared little of the development of manufacturing industries that drew such large numbers of immigrants fleeing from a war-shattered Italian economy and society to Melbourne and Sydney, or to Adelaide. Nevertheless, Brisbane did become home to the majority of Queenslanders of Italian origin: the native-born number rising from 779 in 1947 to its peak of 8432 in 1976. At that point, the number of Italians leaving Italy was surpassed by the number returning.

The 10 443 Italian-born Queenslanders outside Brisbane in 1976 were not a great deal more numerous than the 8111 in 1933 nor the 7762

in 1947. Most of 35-fold increase in Brisbane's tiny pre-war Italian community was its small share of the large waves of post-1950 Italian immigrants to Australia. Among those who migrated from North Queensland to the capital were families who had prospered well enough from the extremely hard lives of cane farmers despite, during the 1930s, their being driven close to desperation not only by Anglo-Australian hostility but also by cane beetles and other pests that had ravaged the industry. These families were now driven by the newer social goal of immigrants in New World host countries: the upward social mobility of their children that could be attained only by easier access to better secondary education and to the one tertiary institution in the State.

In terms of progress towards genuine ethnic equality Queensland's Italians by the end of the 1950s still had a long way to travel. It would be fair to say that the contempt in which the majority of Australians had held them for half a century after 1890 steadily gave way in that decade to an ethnic tolerance. A decade later, at the end of the 1960s, there remained few social barriers for the fully assimilated Italo-Queenslanders that were not equally shared by Anglo-Australians who had not come from elite families or matriculated from elitist schools. For a community in which *italianità* is being steadily atrophied by the end of new immigration from Italy, what the theoretical official recognition of the right to a bicultural and bilingual Australian identity will actually mean for those Queenslanders with Italian names remains to be recorded by future historians.

Don Dignan

Italians in Queensland Today

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the image of Italians in Queensland is relatively young, vital, stylish, and part of one of the dominant elements of our contemporary culture. They look to Italy as a modern and dynamic trading partner of Australia, as the source of their cultural heritage, and in many cases, as their homeland, for there are today many Italians — not of the generations of immigration — who live and work in Australia for reasons of commercial, academic and cultural exchange. Those born here are either the children or grand-children of the immigrants, and in the main, they too are familiar with Italy in its modern reality, and journey back and forth between the two countries.

They, along with many fellow Queenslanders, wear Italian clothes and shoes and jewellery and accessories, and consume Italian food and wine and coffee and chocolates and opera and cars and motorcycles and films and meet in Italian bars and restaurants and attend Italian language classes in large numbers. They aspire to own or rent houses in Tuscany and go on food tours and art tours and attend the many Italian cooking classes held in Queensland cities. They live in a society in which imported Italian goods of every type — from lighting to furniture to machinery and component parts, to marine technology — dominate the homes, offices and workplaces, and they are visible and represented in every profession and commercial, cultural and academic endeavour. More than any other, we feel the impact of Italian culture in our daily lives. It is now fashionable to be Italian, either in reality or in origin or by persuasion and inclination. It was not always so.

This novel situation has its roots largely in the period of immigration immediately following World War II. The story of how we got from there to here — of the economic and cultural contribution of the Italian immigrants whose descendants now live this narrative — is the story of the second half of the twentieth century.¹

I would like to draw a contemporary image of what being *Italian* means in Queensland in 2001, by looking at people and their lives, for history is not about things but about people.

There can be little doubt of the dominance of the Italian cultural influence on contemporary Australian society. We know that a culture is maturing when it begins to be mythologised in its literature, and a mark of how profoundly Italian is embedded in Queensland culture is the warm reception given to the novels of Brisbane writer Venero Armanno. At forty, Venero is the darling of not only the literary set in Brisbane, but also of his readers, as they eagerly follow him in his various journeys of discovery, of being Italian and growing up in Brisbane. Since the 1970s in particular, there have been several fine books about the migrant experience, by those who lived it and they form an important part of our history. Venero, however, is not Italian but Australian; and it is his imaginative realisation that carries his passionate experience of being of Italian heritage, to Queenslanders of all ethnic backgrounds.

The Brisbane arts venue, The Powerhouse, opened its inaugural season in 2000 with a new

play by Lyndon Terracini, *The Mercenary*, based upon the experiences of one of the Venetian immigrants among the group duped into settlement in 'New Italy' in northern New South Wales in 1881. It was received by the broadest possible audience and reviewed as a part of Australian history.

Demographics

In reality, Italians in Queensland are not young but a rapidly ageing population, diminishing as death and return-migration reduce the numbers. In 1966 there were just over 20 000 Italians in Queensland, mainly concentrated in the North, working in the canefields. With the demise of manual cane-cutting in the 1970s, the numbers declined dramatically. By the 1980s, Queensland had only 7 per cent of Australia's Italians, mostly around Brisbane. In 1996 the Italy-born group was the largest of all migrant groups in Australia, numbering 238 216, with only 17 138 of those in Queensland, and those now distributed more evenly across the State, with 47.8 per cent in Brisbane. The immigration generation is composed of many more men than women and is ageing rapidly, but 47 870 Queenslanders are their children.² The general tone of observers in the 1980s was one of pessimism with regard to the maintenance of Italian culture in Australia.³ What they could not foresee was this great surge of *italianità* across the whole Australian community, fuelled by interaction between the two countries and driven by the second and third generations.

The original immigrants are being replaced by their children, grandchildren, and by young Italians of recent arrival — not immigrants of the original strain, but adventurers seeking new horizons and scope for their talents. The census of 1981 shows that 78 per cent of the Italian-born, having no formal post-school educational qualifications, were restricted in employment to physical labour.⁴ Today's younger Italians and Italo-Australians, have by contrast, a higher level of education than their forebears and are to be found in all of the professions, in politics, the universities, in all areas of business and commerce.

Giovanni Porta is an exemplar of young, second-generation Italians in Australia. After several years as a corporate lawyer for a large company, he founded his own company, Porta Lawyers, in 2000. He is deputy-president of the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Qld),

an active member of the Dante Alighieri Society, a member of the Italian Historical Society, and gives a great deal of time to activities promoting Italian culture. He is one of five children of Angela and Paolo Porta who both emigrated from Molfetta in the 1930s. Paolo was interned as an 'enemy alien' in 1940 and spent two years road-building in the Northern Territory. He and Angela built up a sugarcane farm at Edmonton near Cairns in North Queensland, which grew from 70 acres to over 600 acres.

The descendants of Francesco De Pasquale, one of the founders of Nanda Pasta, are the children of his three sons, Ralph, Victor and Vince. They have chosen careers in film, the theatre, advertising and commerce, and typify the wide diversity of the children of the immigrants within the Queensland community.

It is these second- and third-generation Italians who have participated in the transition from a society of immigration to one of diversity where 'Italian' is trendy. Joe Virzì and his family-run 'La Dolce Vita', in Park Road, Milton, are by now an institution. Dean Merlo is the name in Brisbane when it comes to coffee, supplying an almost infinite number of cafés and bars and restaurants. His father, Gino Merlo, ran Brisbane's most famous Italian restaurant, the 'Milano' in Queen Street, in the days when it was one of a small group of Italian eateries. Now it is scarcely possible to count the number of Italian food outlets.

Some of the finest restaurants in Queensland, known throughout Australia, are Tony Percuoco's 'Fellini's' at Surfer's Paradise; 'Romeo's', started by Romeo Riga in Brisbane; 'Gianni's', with one of the most outstanding cellars in the country, run by Bolognese Gianni Greghini; and Phillip Johnson's award-winning 'Ècco', flagship of the new Australian cuisine which owes its roots to the fusion-cuisine of Italians and the more recent Asian immigrants. Pizza is now the mainstay of nearly every Australian, with Silvio Bevaqua's pizza chain one of the biggest in the State.

The children of Italians in Queensland are well represented in politics at all levels (January 2001): the Hon. Teresa Gambaro, MP for Petrie; the Hon. Con Sciacca, MP for Bowman; the Hon. Santo Santoro, MLA Clayfield; and Cr Michael Caltabiano of the Brisbane City Council. They are also heavily represented in the

professions, with pharmacy and law serving as just a couple of examples.

There is also an Italian lawyers' association. Prominent Italian names in law include Judge Angelo Vasta, barrister Lorenzo Boccabella, solicitors Nick and Sergio Masinello, and Ray Rinaudo and his father, Joe, of Rinaudo and Co. Solicitors.

Barrister Frank Lanza serves as an interesting example of more recently arrived Italians. Driven by a desire for adventure, he applied for immigration to Canada, South Africa and Australia after completing a degree in Nuclear Engineering at Rome University in 1968. Having chosen Australia, he fell in love with Sydney and applied for citizenship as soon as the required three years was up. Frank found a job immediately, operating airborne geophysical equipment with a mining exploration company. He was sent to the Northern Territory where he was involved in the discovery of the Ranger uranium deposit (the world's largest). In 1973 he joined the company's research and development section and for five years worked throughout the world.

Back in Australia in 1983, he fractured his spine in a fall from an aircraft during refuelling. The resultant enforced leisure provoked a crisis of direction. The family decided to settle in Cairns, and Frank completed a law degree and set up practice as a Barrister-at-Law in 1990. In 1993 he was appointed Honorary Vice-Consul for Italy; he represents the Cairns branch of ICCI, the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; is a past-president of the Cairns Dante Alighieri Society; recently ran as mayoral candidate for the Cairns City Council; does work at the Cairns Community Legal Centre; runs his own restaurant; is a supporter of the Regional Art Gallery; and, in his spare time, built his own house!

For women it is a very different story from that of their mothers. In the 1960s there was hardly an Italian woman who worked outside the home unless it was a matter of dire necessity, and then usually only in factory employment. In 1981, 3 per cent of Italian-born women had never been to school at all, 35 per cent left before completing primary school, 78 per cent had no further education after the age of 16, and almost all had grave difficulty with English, particularly in written form.⁵ Today their daughters are present in every area of commercial, political and cultural

life, leading the dynamic image of Italians in the State.

Kate Maccheroni Collins is a journalist and adviser to the Hon. Mat Foley, Queensland Minister for Arts and Justice. She is prominent in the support and promotion of such things as Queensland's participation in the Venice Biennale, has sat on the board of ICCI, speaks good Italian which she learnt as an adult, and writes for food and travel publications, about all things Italian. Dina Bassi is an economist with Cassa Commerciale Australia and sits on the board of the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Rina Caruso was the first woman of Italian origin in Queensland to become a Justice of the Peace.⁶

Sarina Russo runs her own large company, The Russo Institute of Technology, which is one of the largest employment and training institutes in the State with schools of Business, Hospitality, Travel, Information Technology and English. The company owns its own premises in Brisbane's CBD and is affiliated with the universities in the delivery of cutting-edge education.

Rosanna Medda did her degree in commerce before taking over the running of a large Italian tile-importing business she founded with her father. Not only has she grown the business beyond their earlier dreams but also has reared three children, completed another degree in literature and has just completed her Honours thesis. Rosanna is fluent and articulate in Italian, English and her regional dialect. She is an Australian whose Italian heritage fuels her daily life in the broadest commercial and cultural sense.

In a recent book, *A Fair Go* — as in most other similar publications — migrants generally sum up by saying that they came here to enable their children to enjoy opportunities denied to them in the circumstances of their home country at that time.⁷ It is fair to say that their children have largely realised that dream, though the cost to the parents has been very high.

If it is true that *italianità* is pervasive in daily life in the Queensland — indeed Australia — of today, it is that the Italy the migrants left behind no longer exists. Its place has been taken by a sophisticated modern nation, the fifth economic power in the world, and the undisputed leader in all things pertaining to style. Italians are affluent, well educated, cosmopolitan, and above all, mobile. Already by 1988, it had become difficult to

distinguish a difference between the standard of living in the two countries.

Economic Contribution to Queensland

The economic contribution to Queensland of Italians and their descendants has been profound. The wine industry in Queensland owes much to the Puglisi family of Stanthorpe. Today Leeanne and Robyn Puglisi work with their father Angelo in the enterprise begun by the family patriarch, Salvatore Cardillo in 1930. The annual 'Opera in the vineyard', held at their Ballandean Estate Winery for the past eight years, presents another fine example of the way in which Italians have so often contributed to the economy while also promoting cultural development.

One of the industries wherein Italians have been most prominent is that of construction, where chain-migration and the opportunity for self-employment meant that Italians were three times more likely than the general Australian population to be working in this industry.

If there is one name in Queensland which has straddled the entire postwar period and all of the categories with which this article is concerned — from economic to social to cultural — that name is Pradella. One of the largest private companies in Queensland, it is now run by the three sons of the founder, Cesare Pradella — Silvio, David and Kim — all of whom speak Italian and have close links with Italy. The company is involved in construction, hotels and tourism, industrial and domestic property development, tube-making and steel racking — an enormous concern that covers a huge range of economic activity and contributes heavily to the economic wellbeing of the State.⁸

Immediately after the war in which he fought as a partisan, Cesare Pradella qualified as an engineer in his hometown Brescia. Described by everyone who knows him as a born leader, he arrived in Australia in 1950, like so many other migrants, with very little money and no English. He revolutionised the construction of project-housing in this State, being the first builder to introduce the principles of mass-production and the production-line to the building industry. In 1970 he was finishing a new house every seven and a half hours, a house a day! He was also the first to see the potential of the inner-city suburbs and apartment-dwelling, and the first to use techniques such as suspended terracotta slab flooring.

Another name prominent in this field is that of Delio Iezzi. He immigrated to Australia at 24 years of age. Delio comes from Abruzzo and for him, any difficulties of immigration were overshadowed by the real tragedy of his young wife being struck down by a brain tumour after only nine years of marriage. He was left to rear two young sons alone in a strange country with no family and little language.

He worked as a builder's labourer and then sub-contractor before founding his own company, Iezzi Constructions, in 1960. In 1964 he managed to obtain his first big contract, which was for 100 houses to be built in Mount Isa, having no idea where Mount Isa might be! Today, Iezzi Construction is one of the largest builders of housing in the State. Asked about his greatest achievement, Delio states quite emphatically that his greatest joy and his greatest pride come from his two sons, Freddiano, an architect, and Ercole, an engineer. Both speak good Italian and nurture links with their father's life and with Italy.

Italy is Australia's second-largest European trading partner after the United Kingdom. In the financial year 1989–90, Queensland exports to Italy valued \$176 million, which within a decade, by 1998–99 had risen to \$404 million. By contrast, in 1989–90 we imported from Italy to the tune of \$98 million, and in 1998–99 this had reached \$223.4 million. By far the largest area is in specific machinery and manufactured component parts. Food and wine account for \$12 million. Our exports, therefore, are worth twice our imports, and this is a healthy position, except for the fact that it is very heavily dependent upon primary industries. There has been, however, a push in the past year or two to export science and technology and the 'know-how' of English-language teaching. There is also an increasing desire to woo Italian investment in Queensland.

This matter of investment and joint-venture capital has had a boost in recent times with greater recognition by our State governments of the value of Italy as a trading partner on the eve of a united Europe. This has led to the establishment in Queensland of large Italian companies such as the dairy giant, Parmalat, and the huge engineering company, Ansaldo. Not all Australians recognise the positive nature of this exchange, which Australian governments acknowledge as essential to our ability to compete in a world market and to diversify our economic base.

The economic impact of Italian companies on the Queensland economy today is reflected in the names of those companies that have chosen to sponsor the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Queensland (ICCI). Parmalat, Ansaldo Signal, John Cant Ferrari, *Business Queensland*, Qantas and the Pradella Group are all large, Queensland-based companies — Qantas was founded in Queensland — which have as a common link their commercial activities both within the State and abroad.

Working in conjunction with the Italian Consulate and the Queensland Government, ICCI promotes trade and commercial exchange between Italy and Queensland, assists in the negotiating of joint-venture proposals, and functions as a forum for fostering the interests of Queensland-based companies across the full spectrum of commercial activities. Founded in 1990 by a group of Italian businessmen, ICCI initiatives include a student exchange program for graduates of university schools of business.

Consulate

The very concept of being an Australian citizen is concomitant with the story of immigration, for until passage of the *Citizenship and Immigration Act 1949*, we were all still British subjects.

The first Italian Vice-Consulate opened in 1951, but by the late 1950s it was upgraded to a full Consulate; and in the 1960s, it was shifted to New Farm, the site of most Italian settlement in Brisbane, where it remained for 20 years. The Italian Consulate is situated in AMP Place, an elegant and ample headquarters from which the many functions of the Italian Government in its continuing close rapport with its citizens and dependents in Australia, continue to operate.

The story of Italians in Queensland (as in Australia generally) is often the story of association. The many Italian associations have provided the umbrella needed to protect their members from an often hostile and uncomprehending external society, which while acknowledging that the migrants were needed, at first certainly did not celebrate their differences.

The development of the multifarious Italian associations is symbolic of the reality of the early postwar immigrants, who were not so much 'Italian', as Calabrian, or Sicilian, or Piedmontese or Abruzzese or Friulian or Sardinian. These are

the regions from which the vast majority of the immigrants came, and the first associations were social clubs for people from a particular region, who could find understanding and companionship in an otherwise foreign and unsympathetic external environment.

The story of the associations is in part the story of the regions, and this is an important key to understanding Italians in Australia. A Com.It.Es publication of 1999 listed more than 90 Italian clubs and organisations throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory including Brisbane, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Cairns, Stanthorpe, Townsville, Mount Isa and Darwin.⁹ All migrant groups formed associations or clubs for mutual support and understanding, but none as much as the Italians.

One of the early and most important Italian figures, Dr Francesco Castellano was, however, instrumental in the formation of Italian bodies that spoke to the wider Australian community. These were organisations such as The Dante Alighieri Society and the Giuseppe Verdi Choir, bodies that not only transcended regional boundaries but also drew other Australians into intercourse with Italians and their culture.¹⁰

Cultural Impact

One of the greatest Italian contributions to today's Queensland is to our cultural life. The Pradella company has a policy of generous support for the State's cultural and social life. Along with others in the Italian community, such as John Parrella and Luigi Casagrande, Pradella was instrumental in raising and donating funds for the endowment of a Chair of Italian at Griffith University. This eventuated as a Chair of European Studies, which today is held by an Italianist, political scientist Professor David Moss, who was one of the contributors to the recently published Routledge *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture*, edited by Prof. Gino Moliterno of the Australian National University. Professor Gary Ianziti holds the Chair of European Studies at Queensland University of Technology, meaning that both European chairs in Queensland are held by Italianists.

Dr Piero Giorgi from Bologna teaches anatomy and the history of medicine at the University of Queensland. He enjoys life in the Sunshine State. Both of his overseas-born children have elected to live here as well. He loves being part of the chain

of migration that has dynamically moulded human communities throughout history. Piero holds dual citizenship and regularly commutes between the universities of Bologna and Queensland. He is deeply involved in all aspects of the interaction between Italian and other cultures, and among his myriad cultural commitments, edits the international journal *ConVivio: journal of ideas in Italian studies*, which he and I co-founded in 1995.

The Italian language is taught in 74 Queensland schools. The Brisbane Dante Language School is recognised as one of the foremost language schools in Australia. During the 13 years in which it was directed by Dr Carlo Zincone, with Enzo Belligoi as President, it grew to where it now enrolls around 270 students every semester, an increasing proportion of whom are the sons and daughters or grandchildren of migrants. Many of these students spoke either English or the regional dialect in the home, and now have a great desire to learn or to improve their competency in standard Italian.

Franco Arcidiacono has made one of the greatest contributions to the Italian influence on the cultural life of Queensland through the teaching of the Italian language. Arriving in Australia from Caltabiano in Sicily aged five years, he later studied Italian at Brisbane State High School. In 1982 as a teacher at Stanthorpe State High School, Franco was responsible for introducing the teaching of Italian as a 'community language'. In 1992, after a year's further study in Italy, he oversaw the extension of Italian-teaching to 14 primary schools in the Stanthorpe area and later was part of the team that implemented it throughout Queensland. In 1995 he inaugurated an immersion-teaching program at Stanthorpe, which saw the students studying all subjects, including maths and science, in Italian translation. In 2000 that program was flowering, with three full-time teachers, and two Year 8 classes of about 40 students.

Franco Arcidiacono completed his Masters in Education at the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba in 1996, and in 1999 his outstanding achievements and contribution to education in the State of Queensland and to the diffusion of Italian language and culture were acknowledged with a 'National Excellence in Teaching' award, and a '*Diploma di benemerenzza*' with silver medal, from the *Sede Centrale*, the Rome Headquarters of the Dante Alighieri Society.

There are many scholarships, or *borse di studio*, offered to Australian students to further their studies in Italy. The Italian Consulate funds the Studitalia Prize which sends eight Year 12 students to Italy every year, for a month's immersion course. The Brisbane Dante Alighieri Society awards four similar scholarships, one to the most outstanding student of Griffith University's Italian department, and the others to applicants currently involved in research or work in the furtherance of Italian culture in Australia.

There is even a little of Queensland in Italy: Brisbane writer David Malouf, one of Australia's finest writers, lives part of the time in Tuscany, and his books are now available in translation in Italy. There is a Department of Australian Studies at the University of Lecce, headed by Maryborough-born Professor Bernard Hickey. He is an institution in Queensland. He has taught in Queensland, London, Rome and Venice and edits the journal *Terra Australis Italia* through Lecce University.

SBS radio and television is an important part of the Italian cultural contribution to the multi-ethnic composition of contemporary Queensland society. Begun in 1993, SBS radio transmits to Brisbane and the Gold Coast. The founders were the New South Wales parliamentarian Franca Arena and Al Grassby, along with other active members of the Italian community such as Franco Belgiorno-Nettis.

Radio 4EB is run by the by the Ethnic Broadcasting Association of Queensland. Founded in 1979 by Gaetano Rando, Griffith University's first lecturer in Italian, it continues to offer programs in Italian across a wide range of topics and interests.

In the past 50 years we in Australia have travelled from assimilation to integration to ethnic diversity to multiculturalism to where the Italian language is now enthusiastically learnt by students of all ethnic backgrounds as the language of a vital modern country, which is one of our main trading partners and the font of the Western culture that has formed us. Australia has gone from being a country of immigration to a country of great cultural diversity that sees itself as part of the wider world. Today most migrant groups promote their culture from within, but very few if any, have taken it to the wider Australian society in the way that the Italian community has done.

The Italians in Australia have been a major force in that journey, and their contributions to every aspect of life in Queensland have been remarkable and deserving of our gratitude. We are all uniquely privileged to have been in a small way from the very beginning, a part of the huge and historic upheaval of postwar immigration which became with time, and the advent of multiculturalism, the Australia of today. We are all part of the pattern of a country of cultural diversity, not always celebrated wholeheartedly, not always evenly and not always perfectly, but better than most, and with a real chance in this new century, of reaching for the stars.

Author's Note

The people whose names appear in this article stand only as symbols or exemplars for the many Italians and their descendants who enrich the life of Queensland today and who are deserving of recognition. I have tried not to write about people about whom there is already material published, to give the widest possible panorama of the Italian community. I want to thank all of them for the help and inspiration they have given me.

I grew up all over Australia with the children of migrants from Europe — Dutch, Lithuanian, Latvian, German, Polish, Estonian, Greek and Italian—Catholics, Protestants and Jews. We ate an odd mixture of cuisines garnered from all of them, and we listened to the miscellany of languages and music and stories and became part of them. I thought it was a normal Australian childhood; it was only as an adult that I understood that it was far from the experience of most Australian children. I realise that it was the formative experience of my life, and I am grateful.

Notes

1. There are several good studies collating figures from the 1996 census, in particular, Graeme Hugo's *Atlas of the Australian people — Queensland*. As well, the census of 2001 will include additional questions on ethnic background. I would like to draw attention, however, to the fine work done by Enzo Palmieri, in his chapter 'Italians in Queensland', in *Multicultural Queensland*, published in 1988. Enzo has given us a comprehensive overview of Italians in this State since settlement. Enzo Palmieri

immigrated to Australia from Milan in 1965. He is a geologist, now retired, and for some years taught Italian at the Institute of Modern Languages at the University of Queensland. Acknowledgement should also be made of the fine work done by Cesare Marletta during his term as Direttore Didattico, during which he researched and wrote widely on Italians in Queensland.

2. Hugo G. 1996, *Atlas of the Australian people — Queensland*, census, p. 88; and Shu et al. 1994, *Australia's population trends and prospects*.
3. Ware, H. 1988, 'Italians' in Jupp, J. (ed.), *The Australian People*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
4. op.cit.
5. op.cit.
6. The tremendous contribution made to Italians in Queensland by Cav. Uff. Carmelo Caruso and his family is well noted. See bibliography, Palmieri in *Multicultural Queensland* 1988, and C. Caruso's autobiography *Under another sky*, Brisbane, 1999.
7. McCarthy, W. 1999, *A Fair Go: Fifty inspiring Australians*, Focus Publishing, Sydney.
8. According to Monash University's AXA Australia Family Business research unit, family businesses in Australia account for 83 per cent of all companies and \$1.3 trillion in national wealth.
9. Committee for Italians overseas 1999, *Guida della comunità italiana del Queensland e 3 Northern Territory*, Brisbane.
10. I do not propose to write more about Dr Castellano here because much has already been written, and will still be written, about this extraordinary figure, who, nearly 30 years after his death, continues to cast his benevolent shadow across all things Italian in this State. See Enzo Palmieri's affectionate account of the life of Dr Castellano in *Multicultural Queensland* 1988.

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If there is one disappointing aspect to my research for this article, it is the dearth of studies, papers and books published on and by Italians in Queensland. My compliments to the project coordinator of this edition and to those others whose published works shed some light on Queensland's Italians.

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