



EVERY STORY COUNTS



EVERY STORY COUNTS

# EVERY STORY COUNTS

RECORDING MIGRATION HERITAGE  
A WOLLONGONG CASE STUDY

ILLAWARRA MIGRATION HERITAGE PROJECT INC

Written by Meredith Walker  
Edited by John Peterson

ILLAWARRA MIGRATION HERITAGE PROJECT



# CAMERONIA

Recording migration heritage, and in particular, people's memories of migration and settlement provides first-hand perspectives on Australian history. Meredith Walker's thematic framework provides a new and innovative approach to recording the migration experience. It gives voice to memories which would not be heard or shared and ones which are rarely documented formally. They are however, part of the kaleidoscope of stories that bring us together as a nation.

Steelmaking begins at Port Kembla **1931**

Rina Filippi Arrives in Australia from Italy with her mother and brother

Wall Street crash **1929**

Joseph Stalin takes control of Soviet Union

No.1 Blast Furnace goes into production **1928**

Giacomo Filippi (Rina's Father) Arrives in Australia from Italy **1926**

Mussolini takes power in Italy **1922**

Land acquired at Port Kembla for Steelworks **1921**

Australian Fertilizers Ltd commences operations at Port Kembla



First published in 2015  
Illawarra Migration Heritage Project Inc  
PO Box 1589 South Coast Mail Centre Wollongong  
NSW 2521 Australia  
www.mhpillawarra.com

**EVERY STORY COUNTS**  
Recording Migration Heritage - A Wollongong Case Study is a project of the Illawarra Migration Heritage Project Inc supported by the NSW Migration Heritage Centre, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

The NSW Migration Heritage Centre is a New South Wales Government initiative supported by the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural New South Wales.  
www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au

Researched by the Illawarra Migration Heritage Project Inc and Meredith Walker. The book is based on research conducted between 2003 and 2005 and subsequently revised in 2010 and 2014

Written by Meredith Walker  
Edited by John Petersen  
Realised and published by Illawarra Migration Heritage Project Inc.  
Cover art and design by Gregor Cullen  
ISBN 978-0-646-92416-8  
©2015 Illawarra Migration Heritage Project Inc Wollongong.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electrical, mechanical or otherwise, without first seeking the permission of the copyright owners and the publishers.

Every effort has been made to locate owners of copyright for the images in the book. Inquiries should be made to the Illawarra Migration Heritage Project Inc.

Printed in Australia by Westonprint Kiama, NSW. 2533

## CONTENTS

- 4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- 5 WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR AND HOW CAN IT BE USED?  
FOREWORD
- 6 ABOUT THE ILLAWARRA MIGRATION HERITAGE PROJECT

### INTRODUCTION

- 7 WHAT IS MIGRATION HERITAGE?
- 9 TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED
- 10 OVERVIEW OF POST-SECOND WORLD WAR MIGRATION  
AND WOLLONGONG

## PART ONE

### THEMES OF MIGRATION HERITAGE

- 12 1.1 LIFE IN THE HOMELAND
- 14 1.2 THE DECISION TO EMIGRATE AND THE CHOICE OF AUSTRALIA
- 18 1.3 JOURNEY TO AUSTRALIA AND WOLLONGONG
- 20 1.4 MIGRANT ACCOMMODATION
- 26 1.5 WORK
- 30 1.6 WORSHIP
- 34 1.7 CREATING COMMUNITIES
- 38 1.8 RESOURCES FOR MIGRANTS
- 42 1.9 HOME AND FAMILY
- 46 1.10 ADJUSTING AND IDENTITY
- 52 1.11 CELEBRATION AND REFLECTION

## PART TWO

### TELLING YOUR STORIES

- 56 2.1 RECORDS
- 57 2.2 PERSONAL STORIES
- 58 2.3 PHOTOGRAPHS - CAPTIONS AND RESEARCH
- 60 2.4 SKETCHES
- 61 2.5 FAMILY HISTORY
- 62 2.6 FAMILY TREES, CHAIN MIGRATION TREES AND TIMELINES
- 64 2.7 GROUP DISCUSSIONS
- 64 2.8 WEBSITES
- 65 2.9 OBJECTS, PLACES AND TRADITIONS
- 70 2.10 SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

# WORK

**THEME: WOLLONGONG AS A PLACE FOR WORK; ITS MAJOR EMPLOYERS; STRIKES, CONDITIONS, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND DISCRIMINATION; FINDING A VOICE; EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN; CREATING NEW BUSINESSES; DECLINE IN THE STEEL INDUSTRY (RESTRUCTURING, UNEMPLOYMENT IN 1980S).**

Migrants coming to the Illawarra in the 19th century worked in timber-getting, dairying, agriculture and coal mining.

While the people that arrived following the Second World War had a wide variety of skills and experience, many were not able to find work similar to the areas of employment they had prior to migrating because of lack of English, the lack of recognition of their qualifications, or because suitable jobs were not available.

The steelworks became the place of employment for the overwhelming number of people who came to live in Wollongong as Displaced Persons or assisted migrants. It was the most common place of employment for men.

Australian Iron and Steel (BHP) made agreements with the unions who were concerned about the lowering of wages, skills and conditions, due to the two-year 'indenture system' whereby Displaced Persons were required to work for two years in the employment found for them. However, migrant men were over-represented in the unpleasant sections of the works, such as the coke ovens, the open hearth, or the blast furnace, at least until the 1970s. In 1971, 11,500 (58 percent) of the workforce at the steelworks were migrants, and by 1973 two-thirds of the migrant apprentices and 45 percent of the migrant trainees were the children of steelworks employees.

The Water Board was the first employer to arrange for Displaced Persons to be employed in Wollongong and placed newspaper advertisements in Greek. Because Displaced Persons were obliged to work under Federal Government direction for two years, the Water Board realised that they provided an opportunity for a steady workforce, while other workers might quit for other opportunities.

Men with training in engineering and mining were recruited from Britain and other European countries, such as Italy and Germany. Australian Iron and Steel (BHP) sought and received many job applications from miners in England and Wales.

In the 1960s the list of skills required in Australia was broad. Trevor Fletcher got a job as a hairdresser in Crown Street within hours of arrival in 1968 as a 'ten pound Pom'. At times when work was limited, some men also took the opportunity to do sessional work away from home eg. cane-cutting.

In a quickly growing urban area, opportunities for self-employment were recognised, especially providing for the needs of compatriots, such as shops and business and building.

For women, especially for those who did not speak English, opportunities for work were limited. In the 1950s, with government assistance, Wollongong became a centre for clothing manufacture, providing employment for many women. Many migrant women also

## QUESTIONS

### WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE?

What was your first job in Australia?

What was your experience of finding later jobs?

How has your type of work changed in Australia?

What was your experience of workplaces?

Did you experience workplace discrimination?

## EVIDENCE OF THEME

1.5 WORK

Documents associated with work, such as rosters, newsletters, social clubs and union records.

The workplaces; objects associated with work – machines, clothes – such as aprons and other protective clothing, tools of trade, objects produced.

Friends from workplace. Work skills; networks of friends; other work related experiences – unions or clubs.



found employment with Metal Manufacturers Ltd in the coated-wire products division.

Migrants, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds, established a reputation for hard work. For some people, the sacrifice of leaving their homeland

was too great not to succeed. Only a more secure financial status, and a better life for their children, warranted the sacrifice of migration. Many migrants worked extra hard to make a go of it with overtime prized by all employees.

above: Shunter at Australian Iron & Steel, [BHP] Port Kembla.  
Photo courtesy Orfeo Pontarolo

# CREATING COMMUNITIES

**THEME: ABOUT FORMING COMMUNITIES; PROVIDING PLACES TO SOCIALISE, TO MAINTAIN AND FOSTER FRIENDSHIP AND MEET PEOPLE; SERVING PEOPLE FROM SIMILAR CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS; PROVIDING ESSENTIAL AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SERVICES.**

In post-Second World War Wollongong, new organisations flourished in migrant communities. The diversity of languages and backgrounds provided the impetus for religious and social organisations which continued language and traditions.

By the 1960s, Wollongong had many organisations related to the countries of origin of its migrants; in time some of these were later linked with similar organisations elsewhere. The impetus for these organisations was to provide a communal social space and activities for migrant communities. A secondary aim was to provide a place for meeting other Australians.

Several recreation and social clubs started from friendships formed in the migrant hostels, including the South Coast Social and Fraternity Club (established at Fairy Meadow in 1952), the Ukrainian Club (formed in 1951), the Dutch-Australian Society in the Illawarra (formed in 1952), and the Berkeley Club (formed in the 1960s).

There were sufficient numbers of people with common language and background to form communities that were almost self-contained. People who had little need for English could meet most of their needs through their community organisations and shops, through Little Malta's, Little Italy's etc. For example, by the 1960s, Fairy Meadow shops had a distinctive Italian flavour.

The different ethnic groups worked together, taking on a political role to comment on issues such as poor wages and discrimination. As well as developing organisations based on language and homeland, migrants also took part in broader public life, including union appointments and local government.

The Federal, State and Local Governments were concerned to ensure that non-English speaking people did not develop enclaves. But it was inevitable that migrants arriving in the mid-20th century settled first in the low-cost areas close to the steelworks and in the newly developing areas of suburbs, throughout Wollongong.

Over time, the character of organisations changed, as the needs changed. For large communities, the activities and services expanded; but for smaller communities, the membership, and range of activities reduced, as the younger generations had less need for them and migration from the home countries ceased. The ageing of post-war migrants has led to an increased need for aged-care and medical services.

The clubs and organisations founded by migrants generated an enormous variety of activities, adapting their traditions to the local calendar.

Of all the community sporting traditions brought to the Illawarra, football (soccer) was the most popular and enduring. Already the most popular football code, due to migration from England, Scotland and Wales in the 19th century, post-war migration from Europe ensured that football (soccer) continued to flourish in the Illawarra. Many of the clubs were (and



above: Celebration of Chilean National Day. Fairy Meadow Hostel, 18 September 1971. Last family Collection

## QUESTIONS

### WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE?

What are the issues that have faced migrants from your homeland in Wollongong?

What organisations have been created and what is their history?

How have traditions been continued and adapted in Wollongong?

What leisure interests and places are popular for recreation in your community?

## EVIDENCE OF THEME

Organisations and their premises, and former premises.

Meeting places in Wollongong of people from the same district and homeland.

Records of organisations; club trophies, cultural activities dances, music, new traditions.

remain) strongly associated with ethnic identity, despite name changes. Football (soccer) provided a familiar activity and identify for many European migrants. Among non-English speaking migrants bocce was a popular game with competitions between compatriots in other cities and towns.

The Dutch community needed an organisation for ex-service men and women. After having fought alongside the Allies, they were shocked to be denied membership of the Returned Servicemen's League in New South Wales. So, in 1956 Mr. van Arkel in Wollongong founded the Nederlandse Oud Strijders for remembrance and social purposes.

The Wollongong migrant communities maintained links with their homelands, especially in times of crisis or other difficulties; for example, the Macedonian community in the Illawarra raised funds to aid people affected by a major earthquake in their homeland in 1963.

Many people are members of clubs and organisations, and have contributed as members, officers, or employees and volunteers. Some people have or have had many hats in their communities. The creation of the Illawarra Migration Heritage Project is one in a long line of community organisations that recognise the multicultural nature of Wollongong's population.

right: Illawarra Mercury feature article from October 1974. Article reproduced with permission of the Wollongong City Library and Illawarra Historical Society.

### THE BENEFITS OF CLUBS

AGA Club Germania. In October 1974 construction started on a new clubhouse for the Australian-German-Austrian Club Germania, in Berkeley. On Friday 25 October, the Illawarra Mercury had a full-page feature about the club, including a piece by Dr H Turk, Consul-General of the Federal Republic of Germany, about the importance of clubs for migrant groups and the broader community.



*Australian history is a history of migration and immigrants. After World War II, migrants from Europe and Britain joined Australians in their efforts to develop this continent.*

*Migrant groups in Australia far away from their homeland; need clubs and societies for settling down in their new environment and mixing with new friends.*

*The rich cultural heritage brought by migrants to Australia is a welcome contribution to these club societies. ....*

*The club is well known for its many activities and has become very successful in preparing its clubhouse, one of the foremost goals of migrant centres and communities.*

*I congratulate and welcome this magnificent achievement and thank Wollongong people who have contributed so open-mindedly.*

*In a short time the A.G.A. clubhouse will become the centre of the friendship and understanding between old and new Australians.*

# HOME AND FAMILY

**THEME: NEW FAMILY LIFE IN WOLLONGONG; KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS; ACQUIRING FAMILIAR FOODS; CREATING A NEW HOME; ADAPTING FAMILY TRADITIONS AND PRACTICES; AND GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN VALUES, ATTITUDES AND IDENTITY.**

In Wollongong, migrants encountered a myriad of new experiences: finding a place to live, getting work, getting to know the place, and learning the language and customs.

The standard Australian dwelling – the detached house on its own block – provided the opportunity for a garden. Many houses and gardens developed a distinctive southern European character, with large vegetable gardens, fruit trees and vines.

In home life, traditional practices were continued or adapted, especially those related to growing fruit and vegetables, cooking and meals. Creating a home with a familiar atmosphere was a high priority with possessions brought to Australia further supplemented with other traditional objects sent by family, or acquired on visits home.

Many people experienced homesickness and isolation. Keeping in touch with family and friends in Australia often involved travelling to other regions and cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle and Griffith.

Family celebrations, such as weddings, developed aspects of more than one culture, or two ceremonies – one in Australia and the other in the homeland. For their new friends – other migrants or Australian-born – these events provided a way of understanding each other. With more men migrating from some countries than women, there were many 'mixed marriages' in Wollongong. People who arrived in Australia as children, or the Australian-born children of migrants, often had to negotiate two sets of values – the family expectations and those of school and friends.

The family components of religious celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, were adapted to suit the climate, and the opportunities (and sometimes the restrictions, such as shop closures) offered by Australian public holidays.

Returning to the homeland provided a new perspective on the differences between Australia and the homeland and as a result some people stayed and others returned to Australia. Some never wanted to confront the emotions of loss, sadness, regret and anger and changed landscape of their homelands. Sometimes the customs and traditions were more strongly continued in Australia than the homeland.

## QUESTIONS

### WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Have family members joined you in Wollongong, for example, through chain migration or family reunion?

What is your family's experience of creating a home in Wollongong? Where did you choose to live?

What are your family's traditions in Wollongong – for example, in relation to food, family celebrations and recreation?

What traditions have you brought with you to Australia and how have they evolved in Wollongong?

What objects do you have at home that remind you of your family's life before migration to Australia?

## EVIDENCE OF THEME

Houses and flats, alterations, renovations and interiors decoration; use of backyards – gardens and sheds; cooking; music, singing and art.

Family celebrations and traditions; neighbourhood traditions.

Communications with family and friends overseas – letters, tapes, videos, DVDs, CDs; visits to the homeland, and visits from family and friends who live overseas.

### CREATING A NEW FAMILY TRADITION

In 20th century Italy, the *passeggiata* (walking and talking in the piazza or main street) is a custom of urban life. On Sundays, people dress in their best clothes to see and be seen, to strut, to chat and to be part of the community.

In Australia, the nearest equivalents were window-shopping in the city, before or after a show, shopping in the main street on Saturday morning, or walking along the beach. In 1920s-30s Port Kembla, families walked along the breakwater, especially on Sundays.

By the mid-1950s, a version of the *passeggiata* was observed along Parramatta Road, in the Leichhardt and Stanmore areas, in Sydney, as those who worked all week made purchases before midday closing. This was an area with a high concentration of Italian-owned businesses and Italian migrants. However, there was no piazza or *passeggiata* in Wollongong, so families developed new customs.

The Facci family, who migrated to Australia in 1960, developed a Sunday recreational routine of driving to a nearby lookout, either Sublime Point, Mt Keira or Bulli, and indulging in an ice cream (either Hearts or Cornettos!). They always took the camera and binoculars. The camera was taken along so updated photos could be taken and sent back to family in Italy, showing them how much the children had grown and how well they were doing in the beautiful city (hence the panoramic background). The rest of the afternoon was often spent visiting friends.



above: The Facci family at Sublime Point Lookout, 1967. Bruno, Anna, Franca and Roberto. Photo courtesy Franca Facci

right: Fred Romano at the barbeque with two of the chestnut roasters. Photo courtesy Fred and Olga Romano



## PART ONE

THE THEMES OF MIGRATION

1.11 CELEBRATION  
AND REFLECTION

### LOST IN TRANSLATION - REFLECTING ON MIGRATION

In 1996, the Macedonian Literary Association, Grigor Prlichev, published *An Anthology Of Macedonian Poetry In Australia*. Many poems reflect on the experience of migration and the poet's relationship with their homeland. The poets include Olga Nikolovska (nee Mackovska), who migrated to Wollongong with her parents and brother in 1972, when she was 17 years old.

*Rich???* was written in 1988, shortly after Olga, her husband and children moved into their newly-constructed house, in the foothills of the escarpment. For Olga, *Rich???* represents another time, both in Macedonia and Australia, but some of its subtlety, sounds and symbolism have been lost in translation.

### MIGRATION FILM FESTIVAL

The Centre of Multicultural Studies in the University of Wollongong was established in 1977 and continued until early 1997, when the University restructured its research centres. The Centre focussed on research and teaching, but that wasn't all it did. In 1980, it held a Migration Film Festival screening films from 1940s to 1970s over two days.

The common themes of the films were the misunderstandings and conflicts that arise from different cultural understandings and behaviours, and the difficulties of adjusting to new places – all of them approaching their subject with humour.

### WOLLONGONG WELSH CHOIR

The Welsh are renowned for their singing. Miners who came to the Illawarra in the late 19th century to early 20th century sang underground and continued singing in pubs and clubs, football matches and chapel.

The Welsh Choir started in 1992 as part of the Wollongong Australian-Welsh Friendship Club; first under a conductor, then under the musical direction of Judith Overton who first had the idea of forming the Choir. The members sang for the pleasure of singing and to promote Welsh culture in the Illawarra. They practised once a week and in the first years sang on Saturday afternoons at nursing homes, to gain experience in public performance.

In 2006, the Wollongong Welsh Choir has forty singers, male and female, one-third of whom are Welsh-born. The choir performs in both English and Welsh; but knowledge of the Welsh language is not essential, anyone who enjoys choral singing is welcome. The Choir's repertoire includes traditional Welsh hymns, folk songs, and popular songs from musicals.

The Choir sings at the annual commemoration of the Mount Kembla Mine disaster (1902) in Windy Gully; and every May they hold a festival of singing (*Gymanfa Ganu*) at the Wesley Uniting Church.

On the Welsh national day, St David's Day, on 1 March 2006, the Choir celebrated at the Illawarra Master Builders Club. Anyone with Welsh connections was invited to 'enjoy a dinner, a sing-along and a chat with people celebrating the existence of Wales'.

### RICH???

*I have a house with four floors  
as if one couldn't hold me  
some ten big chambers  
and white banisters  
a porch with shiny tiles  
a kitchen full of machines  
buttons everywhere.  
High ceilings  
you can barely paint and even  
fountains  
some plated in silver  
some in gold.*

*You must close the doors with  
care.  
As I said  
I'm full of riches ...*

*Yet I am missing something  
I don't have a messy barn  
with burnt walls on one side  
in the barn:  
a donkey pack-saddle, a  
shovel*

*two spades and further on*

*a pickaxe to trench-plough a  
vineyard  
straw scattered all over  
only here and there a chook  
and left in front of the  
cauldron  
a hen with little chicks and  
firewood  
opposite the cauldron a well  
with grey water  
which you draw with a  
battered bucket.*

*From below  
you can hear uncle Pando  
shout  
arguing about the boundary  
of the furrow.  
No, I am not mistaken  
I don't miss anything  
only the seal of the name of  
Macedonia.*

*Olga Nikolovska 1988*



above: Publicity poster for the Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong. Designed by Redback Graphix 1980 Micheal Callaghan

left: Illawarra Mercury article, Welsh Choir at a celebration of multiculturalism at Westfield Shoppingtown, Warrarong, Christmas 1994. Image courtesy John Jones

## PART TWO TELLING YOUR STORIES

There are many ways to record, investigate and appreciate Wollongong's migration heritage.

### Here's a list of things you can do.

1. Keep and create records
2. Write captions for photos
3. Make sketches from memory
4. Record personal stories of migration
5. Research family history of migration
6. Compile family trees, chain migration trees and timelines
7. Group discussions about migration experiences
8. Use websites
9. Research and record objects, traditions and places
10. Assess the significance of objects and places

Each activity is described in the following sections with examples from the migration heritage of people in Wollongong.