

ETHNOS

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Circa December, 1951. The Verwey family board a plane in Amsterdam, Holland, on their way to Sydney.

IMMIGRANT CONTRIBUTION TO AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

A quarter of all Australians are of non-English speaking background - yet their economic, social and cultural contribution to Australian life is only just being recorded by historians.

The Ethnic Affairs Commission, through its Oral Histories Project has undertaken to collect material of historical significance about Australians of ethnic backgrounds. Its Pilot Project, "Thirty Years After", launched last year, is now complete. The Project concentrated on the written and oral histories of people who came to Australia in and around 1951.

This month, Ethnos outlines progress made so far by community groups and the Commission on the Oral Histories Project.

It also details future plans - both from the communities and the Commission - about the task of collecting material about immigrants and their contribution to Australia. Photographs in this issue are from the "Thirty Years After" collection.

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"THIRTY YEARS AFTER"

The Pilot Oral Histories Project of the Ethnic Affairs Commission of N.S.W. focussed on the recollections of people who arrived in Australia in or around 1951.

"My first impression as I came into Sydney was 'green'. Coming from where there is no green, I could see grass everywhere. I said 'I could have a cow and a sheep here.' This country is rich! I went to work on the railways at Chullora!"

"...we travelled along the Great Australian Bight. It was this grey, sad, drizzly day and you could see nothing but some sort of land. I knew there was no one there (in Australia) who I knew from my past. It was frightening... Then...the wharfies came on the ship. They couldn't unload us because there was a strike and they spoke a language which seemed extraordinary English to us."

"...when we came here there was no garlic and no oil. If you drank wine you were a plonk and if you ate garlic you were an outcast... One time we wanted some olive oil so I found out that the chemist sold the oil. I said: 'Oh well, we're in a queer country with queer people. If you get it at the chemist, we'll go to the chemist.'"

From over 60 respondents, 22 have now had their recollections recorded in full. They represent different nationalities and ethnic groups - Austrian, Bulgarian, Cypriot, Dutch, German, Greek, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Maltese, Polish, Russian and Yugoslav.

There is a fairly even spread: refugees and immigrant workers, artists, intellectuals and businessmen, Jews, Roman Catholics, Protestants, a Muslim and members of various Orthodox Churches.

The recorded recollections provide vivid stories of:

- * What life was like in the countries of origin
- * Why people emigrated to Australia
- * Their reception in the Australia of the 1950s
- * And changes they saw over the past thirty years.

The recollections are accompanied by photographs, diaries, letters, scrapbooks, government publications and other memorabilia. These include:

- * The internment diaries of architect, Mr Harry Seidler.
- * Dutch-born Mrs van der Zwaag's diary of her trip to Australia.
- * Dr Edith Kramer's written memoirs of her survival in German concentration camps.
- * From Hungarian-born Mr Jenő Masszauer - letters to and from Hungary; Australian government immigration pamphlets; newsletters from the ship and from Bathurst Camp.
- * Mrs Natalie Shornikov's written memoirs of her arrival in Australia.
- * Photographs of life in pre-World War II Hungary, Germany, Poland, Yugoslavia, Austria, Bulgaria and refugee camps in Germany after the war.
- * Bathurst camp in Australia, housing and work in Australia.

As with all material collected directly by the Oral Histories Project, the "Thirty Years After" tapes, transcripts, photographs and other documents will be deposited in the Mitchell Library for use by researchers studying the migrant influence on Australian history. The material is also being used in displays, publications and radio broadcasts.



Mr Jenó Masszauer, a participant in the "Thirty Years After" Pilot Project shows his photograph album to the Project's Co-ordinator, Janis Wilton.

LIFE AND WORK ON THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS SCHEME

The Oral Histories Project of the Ethnic Affairs Commission is now recording recollections of life on the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

It seeks memoirs of life and work on the Snowy from people of immigrant backgrounds. Details are required on:

- When and why people went to the Snowy.
- The sort of work they did.
- How it compared with work experiences and qualifications gained before coming to Australia.
- Accommodation at the Snowy.
- Reception by locals of new arrivals.
- And where people went once the Scheme was completed.

Through information like this, and more, the Oral Histories Project will document aspects of the daily life and work on the Snowy.

The Project is also interested in collecting or copying paragraphs from memoirs, letters, diaries and other memorabilia which illustrate these experiences.

The material will be deposited at Mitchell Library as part of the resources available for historians who wish to research the role played by immigrants in building and changing post-war Australia. It will also be used by the Oral Histories Project and its Co-ordinator in displays, broadcasts and publications.

ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AND THEIR ORAL HISTORIES

If you or members of your ethnic community want to record your own histories, the Oral Histories Project of the Ethnic Affairs Commission is offering the following assistance:-

- * A booklet entitled Balancing the Books: Oral History for the Community will be available shortly from the Commission. This booklet sets down the techniques and assistance available for groups collecting their own oral histories,
- * Help in deciding on topics to record and in compiling guideline sets of questions,
- * Translations of some questionnaires and other aids into languages other than English. (The "Thirty Years After" questionnaire is already available in Greek, Italian and Russian).
- * Workshops to inspire interest in and familiarity with the type of material which can be collected and the ways in which it can be collected.
- * Representation on the Oral Histories Advisory Committee which meets once every three months to exchange information and ideas about the progress and problems related to respective oral histories projects.
- * The loan of recording and transcribing equipment.
- * A limited number of good quality cassette tapes for recording.
- * Transcriptions of recorded recollections provided that the recording is in English.
- * Copies of transcripts for the communities and for the individuals involved.
- * Assistance in putting together displays, radio programmes and publications, based on the material collected.

The Mitchell Library is offering to:

- * provide a safe and permanent deposit for the original material. (nb: the Library reserves the right to make final decisions about whether the material is best deposited in the Mitchell Library or in another venue like the Ethnic Affairs Archives at the University of N.S.W.)

You can also publicise your work through this newsletter.

MITCHELL LIBRARY AND THE ORAL HISTORIES PROJECT

The Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales contains an extensive collection of documents (books, manuscripts, pictures, maps, etc.) about the history of the Australian community. The activities of ethnic individuals and groups are an intrinsic part of that history. It is therefore very appropriate that the Mitchell Library is associated with the Ethnic Affairs Commission in its Oral Histories Project.

Discussions between the Library and the Commission at the commencement of the Project, defined the Library's role as being:

- To house the master (preservation) copies of the Project's oral history tapes.
- To house transcripts of the Project's tapes, when available.
- To evaluate ethnic archival material resulting from the Project and to be the repository for items selected for preservation.

The Library is responsible for negotiating the conditions under which items are given to it; for inspecting and culling collections; for arranging, describing and storing material; and for providing reference service, according to its usual practices.

The Library welcomes enquiries from individuals and organisations wishing to donate material.

Direct enquiries to the Field Librarian, Mrs Betty Goodger on (02) 221-1388 ext. 229 or by mail at the State Library of New South Wales, Macquarie Street, Sydney, N.S.W. 2000.

RUSSIANS IN AUSTRALIA



Circa: 1933. Students from a Russian "ethnic" school in Yugoslavia. It was a day school recognized by the Yugoslav education system under the patronage of King Alexander of Yugoslavia.

Mrs Natalie Shornikov was born in Russia but grew up and worked in Yugoslavia. She is one of the many whose families fled from Russia following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the communist takeover. In 1951 she again left communism behind when she emigrated from Yugoslavia and came to Australia. Her recollections were recorded for the "Thirty Years After" Project. At one stage she lamented:

"...there's not much known about the Russian community because people are afraid of the word 'Russian'. But I would be very happy if you could spend a bit of time on us because we did quite a lot for ourselves without anybody helping ... the newspaper and all the clubs and churches and schools and retirement villages."

Mr Kisliakov, a member of the Russian community, has responded to the plea.

Mr Kisliakov has begun documenting the experiences and histories of Russian organisations and members of the community. Already he has:-

- * translated the "Thirty Years After" questionnaire into Russian;
- * contacted a number of members of the community - some are willing to have their recollections recorded; one man has begun writing down his memoirs;
- * begun documenting and writing up the history of the Russian Club's Art Gallery;
- * recorded the recollections of a couple of colleagues who worked on the Snowy Mountains Scheme with him;
- * begun writing down his own recollections of coming to Australia and life here.

If you are a member of the Russian community and have memories or other documents and photographs which tell about the history of Russians who came to Australia, contact Mr Kisliakov on 547 1837.

PRE-WORLD WAR II GREEKS IN AUSTRALIA

- A report from Sophia Klazoglou

Inspired by the "Thirty Years After" Pilot Project of the Ethnic Affairs Commission and prompted by individual founding members of the Greek Australian Professional Association, a sub-committee was set up to initiate an Oral Histories Project of Greeks who arrived in Australia in the pre-World War II period.

Preference has been given to preserving and recording as many of the valuable experiences and recollections of the early Greeks as possible. It is the histories of these early Greeks that are at risk of being lost.

This year, 10 interviews have been conducted. More and more Greeks are showing interest - the list of persons to be interviewed is growing.

Strong consideration has been given to putting the collected material together in the form of a publication. There are also plans to film some of the interviews.

No specific theme has been adopted. Despite this, the general approach, evident in conducting of initial interviews, will allow for different and appropriate themes to be developed. The Commission's "Thirty Years After" questionnaire has been used as a guide - new questions have been added where appropriate, eg, regarding ethnic schools.

On questions like "What were your first impressions when you arrived in Australia?" responses rarely matched the expectations of new arrivals. An example of one response - from Mr George Payzis, a one-time shoe-designer and now Poet and Theatrical Producer, who arrived in

Sydney in December, 1910 at the age of 17:

"Ah! my first impressions, I cried bitterly (he laughs) I don't know why, I didn't find things as I expected. Mind you ... I didn't come, they brought me here. I don't know why they brought me here. We had service at home day and night and when I came here I had to serve other people in the cafe (shop) of the man who married my sister..."

Another example - this of a Greek woman who arrived in Sydney with her husband in May, 1935.

"The day I arrived an (Australian) employee of my husband gave me a bouquet with a mauve ribbon tied around it... I did not take this well... as you know in Greece mauve colour is for the dead... I told my niece ... to throw it out..."

The Association is grateful for the assistance the Commission has provided in terms of recording equipment, cassettes, photocopying and transcribing. It is especially indebted to the personal and unfailing assistance of Janis Wilton.

People who wish to assist in the project or need further information may contact: *Convenor of the Sub-Committee, Sophia Klazoglou, by writing to P.O. Box 296, Newtown, or by phoning 266 8729 (work).*

HUNGARIANS IN AUSTRALIA

On 20 May, 1982, the Hungarian-language paper Magyar Élet published a bi-lingual announcement calling on individual members of the Hungarian community to preserve their history by collecting and saving historical documents and personal reminiscences.

"If you think that you don't have such material, you may be quite wrong. History is a social process and all of us have a part in it. You may be in possession of photographs, diaries, letters, scrapbooks or other memorabilia which illustrate the experiences of Hungarians who have come to Australia. You may have memories of childhood, of the old country, of events connected with migration and settling which could be spoken into a tape and become valuable material to some future historian. Don't let these items perish! Safeguard them for the future. You too are a part of history."

Members of the Hungarian community who would like to have their recollections recorded or who have other material which documents the history of Hungarians in Australia can contact Mr John Sarvay on 419 8913.



Circa 1913: Mrs Masszauer (nee Shramko) with her father and brother in a park near their home town of Godollo, outside Budapest. Mrs Masszauer migrated to Australia in 1950.

"FOREIGNERS" IN THE AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES DURING WORLD WAR II

Dr Stephen Lovas was born in Hungary. He came to Australia in 1939. With the outbreak of World War II, Dr Lovas was like many of his migrant colleagues. He wanted to help with the war effort. But, many of them were still citizens of countries at war with Australia and were classed as "enemy aliens". When they were finally accepted into the army, it was not into fighting units sent overseas but into the Employment Companies where they shunted trains, loaded trucks and carried supplies.

In 1981 Dr Lovas decided to record his recollections and those of his colleagues. He has done archival research, written his own memoirs, recorded the experiences of a couple of people and compiled a list of others who served in the Employment Companies and who are available for interviewing.

As Dr Lovas has noted: "17 different nationalities were involved in the Employment Companies. This was an early mixing, indeed of people from so many different backgrounds".

Dr Lovas is seeking assistance in completing the project. If the right person comes along, he will provide much of his material and assist rather than direct.

If you served in the Employment Companies during World War II or if you are willing to assist Dr Lovas in this project, please contact:

Dr Stephen Lovas 909 2008
or Janis Wilton 692 3547

WHY ORAL HISTORY?

- A report by Dr. Stephen Lovas

Justification is usually thought necessary for writing an autobiography or the biographies of other people. My opinion had always been that these should be written by and about outstanding individuals whose actions, ideas and discoveries were novel, creative or challenging.

I never assumed that life stories of average people could be of any interest to me, especially the stories of my fellow immigrants. I have heard so many of them, so many times. Whenever I have been in the company of friends or participated in ethnic gatherings, conversation has sooner or later turned to story-telling.

There were stories of monstrous, heroic, tragic or humorous incidents - important to the story-tellers. But, as I was on the receiving end, after a while those stories became monotonous.

But reading the recent escape stories of Vietnamese refugees, I could see these struggles from a different angle. I changed my mind and found that, although these stories seemed very similar to those which we earlier immigrants had experienced, they had immense value. They showed how immigrants tackle new problems, sometimes with resignation, at other times with ingenuity and skill.

I then remembered that we were often bewildered by the reactions of the native born population in certain situations and I thought that stories about the ways in which different migrants cope with their problems could reflect the culture and values of their respective countries of origin. Such personal stories could help the native born population understand why the newcomers (now over 20%) act the way they do.

I believe that collecting these oral histories and other writings will serve to contribute to:

- a) the general understanding of newcomers in Australia;
- b) a better understanding of the actions and attitudes of those people (and their descendants) who have come from other lands. Most of these people have come with habits and mores quite different to those of the present native-born (originally Anglo-Celtic) population of this land;
- c) a greater tolerance by the native population of the later immigrant arrivals. After all, together they form the multicultural society of Australia.

LIMINA: A SICILIAN VILLAGE AND AUSTRALIA



Circa 1930. Santina Rizzo's maternal great grandparents, Carmunu Stigliola (Restifo) and his wife, Nunziata Mircina (Lapi). *

- * The photographer was a friend from the nearby village of Graniti and he came down every year to photograph the festa. He stayed with Carmunu and Nunziata and, as thanks, took photos of them. This particular portrait was taken in the family fields. The couple had taken their best clothes out with them. Carmunu's shirt was made from material handwoven by his wife; his suit had been made some time before for a niece's wedding; and the shoes were probably the only ones he owned. Nunziata was in her wedding outfit - a green silk skirt which she had woven herself - and she had dropped the handkerchief which she usually wore on her head, to drape across her shoulders. This looked more sportiva, more fashionable. The necklace of ceramic and gold beads threaded on wire was a wedding gift. But, all this finery was not enough for the photographer. He produced a tie and handkerchief to improve Carmunu's appearance; he also supplied the paper waratah and daisies. He then hung the linen backdrop under a nearby pear-tree, positioned his subjects and took the photograph.

Santina Rizzo's family comes from the village of Limina in Sicily. Santina became interested in her parents' backgrounds, their immigration to Australia, their life here and their continuing close contacts with other people from the village. She has begun recording recollections of life in Limina and in Australia, and she has uncovered photographs and other memorabilia. The history of a village in Sicily and in Australia is being revealed.

Santina will be presenting a first account of her work at the Frederick May Foundation's "Second Australian Conference on Italian Culture and Italy Today." One day (Friday, 6 August) of the conference is devoted to Italian emigration and immigration. For information about the conference phone 692 2875.

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