

**MIGRATION, WORK AND COMMUNITY: ITALIAN SPEAKERS
IN THE WALHALLA GOLD MINING DISTRICT 1865-1915**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies migration, work and community among Italian speakers in the Walhalla (situated in Victoria, Australia) gold mining district between 1865 and 1915, and analyzes the outcomes for those who either lived here for a time (as ‘sojourners’ in conventional historical parlance) or settled permanently in the district. It proposes to look way from the ‘big picture’ historical approach to Italian settlement in Australia, with its focus upon the large migrant communities in the capital cities, and instead examines the finer texture of small places and particular lives. The thesis offers a reconstructed history of Walhalla’s Italian community that challenges the prevailing emphasis of the district’s Anglo-centric history by using seemingly small and ‘insignificant’ events in order to develop broader themes which test and re-define ‘big picture’ history. In doing so, the thesis seeks to push the boundaries of understanding about what early Italians may have made of their lives, in terms of the experiences of specific individuals and family groups.

Firstly, the thesis questions the adequacy of contemporary understanding of what it means ‘to migrate’, and its use in historical analysis. It employs the Walhalla study in order to re-assess and re-apply the term ‘migration’ so as to provide a broader and better understanding of its meaning to Italians in a nineteenth century context. Has the word ‘migration’ changed over time, or has its use oversimplified and formularized a complex and diverse process in time, place and belonging? Is there a useful place for re-applying the term in a more constructive and inclusive way?

Secondly, the thesis re-examines and reconsiders the concepts of ‘migrant’, ‘sojourner’ and ‘work/migrant cluster’ and their application in our historiography. In particular, it focuses on the role of sojourners and their place within the migration process. A distinction between ‘migrant’ and ‘sojourner’ can only be drawn artificially and with hindsight and the use of these expressions in conventional historiography is unhelpful. Their application is problematic as strategies put into place prior to emigration could shift after arrival and the decision to settle permanently could be an imperceptible process made on an individual basis over time.

Thirdly, the thesis evaluates Charles Price’s well-accepted theory that migrant settlements often developed in certain Australian districts because pioneer migrants were involved in the same type of work which, in turn, led to the ‘accidental’ development of migrant communities. Should Price’s theory be re-formulated to address the possibility that early migrant settlements may have been more complex than previously understood, and that there were many facets contributing to the evolution of a migrant community not exclusively attributable to one occupational group?

Fourthly, the thesis reviews and examines the concept of ‘community’, its construction and what it may have meant to an early settler society and Italians within it. It explores the possibility that our national history may have been more inclusive, fluid and open-ended than previously understood and that to completely separate, or isolate, different national or ethnic groups may be an incorrect modelling of early Victorian settlements. The thesis questions whether a broader theory should be applied to challenge the idea of a

dominant British versus a non-British position towards the construction of 'community'. By re-constructing an Italian community, the thesis teases out the dynamics at work within the Italian migrant settlement and its interaction and dialogue with Walhalla's wider society.

My thesis emphasizes the relevance of micro-studies of this nature and its findings need to be extended by studies of other minority groups in other small places. Their accumulated implications should influence the broader historical understanding of the national and international patterns of Italian immigrant settlement in Australia and other New World countries.

DECLARATION

This is to certify that

- (i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,
- (ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
- (iii) this thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DECLARATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
PLATES	ix
ABBREVIATIONS	xi
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	23
<u>PART ONE – MIGRATION</u>	
Preface: Work clusters, sojourners and family operations	45
3. NEW BEGINNINGS AND EARLY ROOTS	49
4. FAMILY OPERATIONS: THE MONIGATTI CLAN	63
5. MEN ON THE MOVE: PIETRO BOMBARDIERI	85
6. NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: THE PIANTA CLAN	101
<u>PART TWO –WORK</u>	
Preface: Individualism and the move towards consolidation	118
7. THE ENTREPRENEUR: MICHELANGIOLO STUB MONTEAGRESTI	122
8. MAN OF MANY PARTS: VITTORIO CAMPAGNOLO	147

PART THREE – COMMUNITY

Preface: The dynamics of an Italian speaking community, its exchange and dialogue with the wider society. 166

9. COMMUNITY LIFE 169

10. COMMUNITY LEADER: DOMENICO MORATTI JUNIOR 191

11. WOMEN AND COMMUNITY 213

12. CONCLUSION 235

BIBLIOGRAPHY 242

APPENDICES 255

1. Names Index of Italian Speakers in the Walhalla District 1865-1915.
2. Walhalla Gold Mining Co. & Long Tunnel Gold Mining Co. – Italian Contractors & Employees 1865-1910.
3. Italian Shareholders in Walhalla gold mines – 1865-1900.
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