

SPUNTI E RICERCHE

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150 Years of Italians in Queensland



Edited by: Catherine Dewhirst;
Claire Kennedy; and Francesco Ricatti

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150 Years of Italians in Queensland

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Front Cover Illustration: Silverio Dalla Vecchia and family using a trolley on the rail network through the cane fields at Mourilyan, north Queensland, circa 1920. Photo courtesy of Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien from Rose Gorr with the kind permission of Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien.

SPUNTI E RICERCHE

Volume 24 – 2009 (published 2011)

Abstracts 5

ARTICLES

Catherine Dewhirst Claire Kennedy Francesco Ricatti	150 Years of Italians in Queensland: An Introduction	8
Karen Agutter	The Italians in Queensland during World War I	22
Jonathan Richards	“End the Canefields Terror!”: True Italian Crime in North Queensland, 1932–1940	42
David Brown	“Gathered around the Sign of the <i>Littorio</i> ”: The Italo-Abyssinia Conflict and Its Impact on Italian Fascism in Queensland, 1935–1939	55
Ilma Martinuzzi O’Brien	Italians in Ingham and Innisfail in World War II: Selective and Not Mass Internment?	75
Francesco Ricatti	<i>Speranza e Sacrificio</i> : Memories, Oral Histories and Myths about Migration	91
Stefano Girola	The Italian Catholic Federation in Queensland: Serving the Changing Needs of Italian Migrants	114
Catherine Dewhirst	Historical Turns in the Historiography of Italians in Queensland	133
	Contributors	154



Some of the popular destinations for Italian migrants. The sugar-cane fields stretch along the coastal plains from Mossman in the north of Queensland to northern New South Wales.

Abstracts

Karen Agutter

The Italians in Queensland during World War I

The Italian declaration of war on the side of Britain and her allies in May 1915 brought to an end months of uncertainty for Italian immigrants around the world. For Italians in Queensland, however, their role within the war effort would remain confused and confronting. Using information obtained from the 1916 Alien Registration forms, this article establishes the size and nature of the Italian immigrant community in Queensland. It addresses how Italian men of military age were caught between the Italian Consul's demands to repatriate them to Italy to fight and the Australian government's need of their labour for the critical sugar harvest. The role of labour movements in this debate is also considered. Finally, a brief history is given of the Italians who, following the harvest, were repatriated on the infamous troopship *SS Medic* and were quarantined in Sydney with Spanish Influenza.

David Brown

“Gathered around the Sign of the *Littorio*”: The Italo-Abyssinia Conflict and Its Impact on Italian Fascism in Queensland, 1935–1939

This article examines the progression of fascist support amongst the Italian communities of Queensland in the 1930s with a specific focus on the celebrations concerning Italy's victory in the Abyssinian War. This event saw the largest celebrations in support of the Italian fascist government by Queensland Italians and enabled the state's fascist organisations to mobilise the support of the Italian population in a way they had previously been unable to achieve. What does this demonstrate about the nature of fascist support in Queensland and the forces that shaped the interaction between Italians and the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* in this state? This article uses the specific focus on the reaction to the Abyssinian War amongst the state's Italians to illuminate those particular factors that could encourage widespread support for fascism and, thus, a more complex understanding of the Italian population's relationship with the Queensland fascist associations.

Catherine Dewhirst

Historical Turns in the Historiography of Italians in Queensland

This article analyses the historiographical record of Italians in Queensland over 150 years, incorporating developments in Western historical thought. It takes a particular criticism about ethnic histories, as they have developed from Australia's multicultural context, to explore Italian migration experiences in Queensland. This historiography reveals the dominance of Australia's need to project cultural homogeneity. While historians have been slow in writing more culturally-inclusive histories, new approaches are emerging, challenging outmoded nationalistic guises. However, the historiography of Queensland's Italians provides an important reminder about awareness of the influences of the wider political landscape and dominant ideological framework on the writing of history.

Stefano Girola

The Italian Catholic Federation in Queensland: Serving the Changing Needs of Italian Migrants

This article discusses the history of the establishment of the local branches of an Italian lay Catholic association, the *Federazione Cattolica Italiana* (FCI), in Queensland in the 1980s. This history grew out of the increasing involvement of lay people in the life of the Catholic Church, promoted by Vatican Council II, and the foundation of the FCI in Melbourne in 1960 by the Scalabrinian fathers. A discussion of the reasons why many Italians were interested in participating in the FCI's activities in Queensland shows the need for more involvement in the life of the Church locally, from which Italian migrants often felt alienated. This discussion also locates the social context of Brisbane's Italians of the 1980s as influencing the FCI's outreach towards Italian youth. Finally, this analysis suggests that attitudes towards 'New Australians', which developed in the 1950s, have persisted even well after multiculturalism became a policy officially accepted by both the Catholic Church and the state in Australia.

Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien

Italians in Ingham and Innisfail in World War II: Selective and Not Mass internment?

During World War II, a quarter of all the Italians interned in Australia came from the two towns of Ingham and Innisfail in North Queensland. About half of all internments of Italian-born persons in Australia came from Queensland. Although the Italian-born populations of Victoria and Queensland were approximately the

same size, Queensland interned roughly 15 times as many people of Italian origin as did Victoria. In this article I will consider some of the factors behind these disproportionate internments in Queensland and explore their impacts on the communities involved.

Francesco Ricatti

Speranza e Sacrificio: Memories, Oral Histories and Myths about Migration

The rhetoric of hope, sacrifice, success and contribution has frequently found fertile ground in contemporary discourse about Italian migration history. Such reassuring mythology paradoxically supports the negative perception and media representation of contemporary migrants who come to Italy. This article challenges such rhetoric from the core of one of its fundamental assumptions, by reconsidering the consolidated myth of ‘migration for a better life’ through migrants’ own memories and interpretations. The discussion is based on 15 dialogues with six men and nine women who migrated from Italy to Australia in the second post-war period, and settled in Queensland. The article suggests that a focus on the *intensity* of migrants’ lives, stories and memories can offer a fairer and more ethical understanding of Italian migrants’ histories, as well as of contemporary migratory phenomena.

Jonathan Richards

“End the Canefields Terror!”: True Italian Crime in North Queensland, 1932–1940

Criminal justice records reveal much about the lives and deaths of people in Queensland, and a small number allow us to gain useful insights into Italian communities in North Queensland. This paper uses police and court records to illustrate the racial stereotyping that followed a number of violent deaths in the Italian community of North Queensland during the 1930s. These crimes, still discussed in the community, remain unsolved. Previously published work on these murders is compared with hitherto unused primary sources, thus illustrating how media accounts have tended to distort popular perceptions of the events in question.

Contributors

Karen Agutter is a Visiting Research Scholar in the History Department of Flinders University, South Australia. Her research interests include World War I, Global Immigration History, and the Italian Diaspora. She is particularly interested in comparative immigrant identity and the Italian migrant's response to the call to arms in Australia, Canada, Argentina and Great Britain. Karen is currently researching the Italians and other aliens who served in the First AIF and completing her work on the Alien Registration and Naturalisation documents which has resulted in the construction of a database of records on over 8,000 individual Italian immigrants in Australia in the period pre-1920. **Email:** Karen.agutter@flinders.edu.au

David Brown completed his PhD on 'Fascism and the Italian Queensland Community 1910–1945' at the University of Queensland. His areas of interest specifically focus on the cultural life of Italians in Queensland in the period before 1945, including their clubs, associations and celebrations and the way in which the politics of Italian fascism affected this community interaction. He currently resides in Surrey, England where he teaches History at Farnborough Sixth Form College. **Email:** DBrown@Franboroughsfc.ac.uk

Catherine Dewhirst works as a Lecturer in History at the University of Southern Queensland, where she teaches World history since 1500, European history, historiography, and European women's history. Her research has been published in the *Journal of Australian Studies* and *Spunti e Ricerche*. She is currently writing a biography of Giovanni Pullè and early Italian community-building, and researching diaspora influences. **Email:** catherine.dewhirst@usq.edu.au

Stefano Girola obtained his BA from the University of Milan in 1994. He has published two books on Italian migrants and the Catholic Church in Australia and co-authored another three books. He was awarded a PhD in Studies in Religion from the University of Queensland on 'The policies and attitudes of the Catholic Church with regard to Australia's Indigenous peoples, 1885–1967' in 2007. He is an Honorary Fellow of the School of Theology at the Australian Catholic University where he lectures in Church history. **Email:** Stefano.Girola@acu.edu.au

Claire Kennedy is Cassamarca Senior Lecturer in Italian Studies at Griffith University, where she teaches Italian language and culture courses. Her principal research fields are language pedagogy and language learners' motivation, but a developing interest area for her is language change in migrant communities in Australia. **Email:** c.kennedy@griffith.edu.au

Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien is an Honorary Research Associate in the School of History and European Studies at La Trobe University. She is presently working towards completion of an ARC supported project on internments in Australia during World War II. She wrote a chapter on internments in the book *The Great Mistakes of Australian History* (2006). Previously she was Director of the Italian-Australian Records project at Victoria University. While Director of the Italian Historical Society CoAsIt, she was author of *Australia's Italians 1788–1988* (1988). She co-edited *Italian Pioneers in the Innisfail District* (2003) and *Under Suspicion: Citizenship and Internment in Australia During WWII* (2009). **Email:** I.O'Brien@latrobe.edu.au

Francesco Ricatti is Cassamarca Lecturer in Italian at the University of the Sunshine Coast. His principal fields of research are transnational migration, football and society, and emotions in Italian history. Regarding migration, he is particularly interested in re-orienting transnational migration and diaspora studies, as well as public discourse on migration, through a stronger and more empathetic focus on the bodies and emotions of migrants. He has recently published his first book, *Embodying migrants: Italians in Postwar Australia* (2011). **Email:** fricatti@usc.edu.au

Jonathan Richards lectures in Australian history at Griffith University. Two of his main research interests are North Queensland history and the criminal justice history of Queensland. His books include *The Secret War: A True History of Queensland's Native Police* (2008) and, with Mark Copland and Andrew Walker, *One Hour More Daylight: A Historical Overview of Aboriginal Dispossession in Southern and Southwest Queensland* (2006). **Email:** J.Richards@griffith.edu.au