

Papers Received

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Italian Australian in the New Millennium

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My contention is that to identify the Italian-Australians in the new millennium it is important to analyze their predecessors. It is vital to understand the mentality of the Italian immigrants and why they migrated, plus the difference between the 'first', 'second' and 'third' wave. I propose to concentrate on the 'second wave' and briefly touch on the other two. I believe that the 'second wave' of Italian immigrants that entered Australia post World War 2, was socially engineered and had enormous repercussions. The impact of such an influx of culturally diverse and Non English Speaking people over a brief period is extensive. I propose that these Italian immigrants through their rich cultures have changed and affected Australian's community and economy, particularly agriculture and Australian's cuisine. In addition, they contributed to the labour market at first predominantly as blue-collar workers, in factories, infrastructure, irrigation, construction and farming. Later they became prominent in industries such as engineering, construction, fashion and hospitality. Whilst Italian immigrants affected many industries both directly and indirectly, I aim to limit my discussion to the second wave and show the correlation with the agricultural industry, especially the fruit and vegetable one. In Victoria, this industry is estimated at 55 million export dollars, per year. (*Herald Sun* 27/12/99) I claim that some of the seeds for these vegetables originally entered Australia with the 'second wave' and sometimes as contraband.

Furthermore, I contend that the large influx of rural, agricultural Italian people affected not only the broader Australian community, but, also, the established Italo-Australian, 'first wave' community. The newly arrived Italian immigrants generally continued to practice their rural, regional, popular cultures, therefore, redefining what is Italian in Australia and causing some ambiguity within the Italian community. This paper focuses on Victoria where 42% of Italian immigrants have settled.

My methodology has been to review the type of Italian permitted to enter Australia especially the second wave. Part of this paper has come about because of my conversations with people in the Italian community. These conversations brought forth issues on immigration

and the Italian community, such as, Australia's selection policy with Italian immigrants; the program of resettlement – assimilation; how realistic was it? were Italian foods available when post war Italian migrants arrived? Finally, what impact did the large influx of Italian immigrants have on the host community? I looked at some documents on the Contraband Act and its history. The origin of my paper was on the contribution by the second wave Italians towards the agricultural industry. However, as I progressed I felt that I needed to ask who were the 'first wave' and their contribution. To satisfy this inquiry I did a brief research on 'first wave' Italian migrants through the study of secondary material and more conversations. This brief research generated more questions on the perceptions of what it was to be Italian. I would like to thank all those Italians who gave up their time to converse with me and the staff at Customs House Victoria for their help.