



AS TIME GOES BY.....



For many years I would see a clock that sat on the shelf in the garage that was the domain of my father. Over the years it would receive a freshening up; sometimes appearing silver or during the 70s, that ever popular mission brown colour. As a youngster it was just an old clock that wasn't good enough to make it to inside the house, but relegated to a type of second class citizenship, and thus it was kept in the garage. I have a recollection that maybe while my grandfather was alive (my father's father who lived with us) it actually sat on his bedside table, so the clock did enjoy time in the 'big house' before the garage became its home. Either way, it wasn't until I began to take an interest in the heritage of my father and was talking to him about what he or his father brought with them when they each came to Australia that I asked the question, 'Where did that clock come from?' and that is when my father told me the story of how a clock that once belonged inside a German military truck ended up in a garage in Australia. My father can be a bit of a joker and known to pull a few fuffies, so was I to believe his rendition?

Well according to my father the story goes like this...he was about 12 years old and the war was nearing its end, the Germans were in retreat heading back to Germany with the Americans about half a mile behind. There were tanks, trucks, cars, motorbikes and the like full of German soldiers on the main highway that literally ran from the South to the North in Italy. My father's little town in Italy was about 2kms off the main highway and one lone German truck full of German soldiers stopped behind their house. From the window of their home my father, Grandfather and uncle watched

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2007 MHP MEETINGS

The MHP Committee meets the first Thursday of the month (February-December) at 5.30 pm, Meeting Room 1, Level 10 Wollongong City Council Administration Building, Burelli Street, Wollongong. Members and other interested people or groups are always welcome. The remaining meetings scheduled for 2007 are as follows:

1 November (AGM)

6 December

(Venue for meetings provided through the Wollongong City Council Multicultural Services)

MHP COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman

Franca Facci

Treasurer

Mendo Trajcevski

Secretary

Fidelia Pontarolo

Committee:

Gregor Cullen

Rina Montgomery

Olga Romano

Giulia Bonacina

Ludwik Ihnat

Peter Bestman

Don't forget to visit the MHP website www.mhpillawarra.com

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Thursday, 1 November 2007
5.30pm**

**Level 9 Conference Room
Wollongong City Council
Administration Building
Burelli Street Wollongong**

**Guest Speaker:
Meredith Walker**

(See enclosed flyer for further details)

ALL WELCOME

(As Time Goes By... Continued)

as the German soldiers jumped from the truck, changed out of their uniforms into civilian clothing, dropped everything and ran into countryside. Before they ran off a German soldier torched the truck where it was left to burn. After the fire ran its course, my grandfather and uncle went to the truck and salvaged a clock from the dashboard. According to my father the truck also contained burnt money, Italian notes, but unfortunately none of that was salvageable. For a little while my father and his family went further into the countryside to live with family friends, away from the retreating German army and the advancing American army – basically out of harms way. But I digress, back to the clock.

My father watched his father make a stand for the clock out of tin, because being housed in a dashboard it was not designed to stand upright on its own. The clock then sat on a credenza in the kitchen of their house in Italy. My father would tell time from this clock right up until 1952 when he left his home in Italy to come to Australia. In 1959 the clock too ended up in Australia when my grandfather emigrated and came to live with us.

The clock does have German trademark names written on its clock face. I have Googled the names and can confirm that one name is for a German automotive firm and the other is a German clock/watch manufacturer. Both still in existence today. Ironically, today the German clock manufacturer has an Italian distributor and representative in Milan. I also saw one clock, looking very much like this one of my father's, for sale on E-bay. Our clock would have to be at least over 60 years old. There are a couple of bits missing, but it keeps perfect time – a testament to German engineering.

I have photographed the clock and have filled out an object description form (a version of an object description form can be downloaded from the MHP website). I am going to make sure that the rest of the family knows the significance of the clock and how it came to become part of our heritage. I might also send a photograph to the Australian War Memorial and ask if anyone there can help me out with some information on the origins of the clock. They have helped me out before when I wanted to confirm that in a photograph of one of my great uncles he was in fact wearing the uniform of the French Foreign Legion. But that is another story too.....

Photograph and article courtesy of a member of the Migration Heritage Project (name and address supplied).

MEET THE MHP COMMITTEE

In the final instalment of 'Meet the Committee' it could be said that we have kept the best for last. The following three committee members are ladies who collectively have a wealth of knowledge of the migrant experience. From a 5 year old child coming to join her

father in Australia, to a child born to migrant parents before World War 2 and a young mother and wife coming to an unfamiliar land. I call them the 'MHP's living treasures' and we are indeed privileged that they are members of our committee.

Olga Romano – Committee



Olga Romano's father had arrived in Australia from Italy in 1927 and found himself working on a tobacco farm in Myrtleford for a number of years. He was a single man at the time. He married, by proxy, and his wife joined him in Australia in 1936. Olga Romano was born in Wangaratta Victoria as that was the location of the nearest hospital to Myrtleford.

Twelve months after Olga was born the family moved from Myrtleford to Steeltown (Cringila). But these were tough times and there was very little work available for men in Wollongong, so Olga's father went to Queensland to work cutting sugar cane, leaving behind his family in Steeltown, until they were able to join him in Texas, Queensland where he and his wife once again worked on a tobacco farm. It was hard work and difficult times for a young, migrant family; living in sheds with Hessian bags used for walls. Olga can recall the difficult times migrants endured during World War 2 and witnessed men and sometimes whole families being interned as enemy aliens. Olga's father wasn't imprisoned, but he was directed to serve in the Civil Aliens Corps in Clermont Queensland. Olga still has the papers he was served. His absence left Olga's mother and another lady to work the tobacco farm on their own. After the war was over, the family came back to Wollongong, but Olga's father missed working the land so they moved back to Texas. Eventually in 1951, the whole family, which now included Olga's sister, settled in Wollongong. This was the same year the Tin Plate Mill was being built so Olga's father worked there. Olga attended St Patrick's Catholic School in Port Kembla until she started work at Isaacs.

Isaacs was situated in Wollongong and was a factory that sewed men's trousers. Because Olga could also speak Italian she was often used as an interpreter, as well as teaching the new ladies how to use the machinery. It was also where Olga learnt to speak 'proper' Italian as up until that time she spoke the dialect of her father and mother's native Vicenza. Her translating duties were not restricted to the Italian women, she also found herself interpreting for other nationalities even though she didn't speak the language. She was however able to understand, perhaps it was the universal language of shared experience. Olga was able to watch her parent's struggles and successes. She also saw a difference in the migrant experience for those who came to Australia before World War 2. *"They had no work, no place to live, by the time the migrants came after the war, they were given a roof over their heads at the hostel and even food; we didn't have that"*.

Olga joined the MHP as she is interested in heritage and has been active in preserving her family documents and photographs *"because for me it is something that I want to hold onto. It means a lot to me, because it's history"*. Because of Olga's interest in migrant history she became involved in the MHP. *"I am really interested in what the MHP are doing"*.

Giulia Bonacina – Committee



Giulia Bonacina, born in Italy, eventually came to settle in Wollongong but not before having spent some years as a migrant in Argentina. Her husband, the late Efrem Bonacina, had gone to Argentina looking for work and Giulia and her children eventually joined him there and stayed for about 4 years. The family then returned to Italy for another 9 years until they made their way to Australia in 1961. The Bonacina family was sent to Bonegilla, where Giulia and the children stayed for 45 days. During this time Efrem was sent to Myrtleford to work on a tobacco farm but later returned to Bonegilla

for medical reasons. The family were then put on a train to Sydney but once again Giulia and the children were separated from Efrem. Giulia and the children (1 daughter and 2 sons, another son was later to be born in Wollongong) were sent to Skyville Migrant Hostel near Windsor and Efrem was sent to Unanderra Hostel and later Fairy Meadow Migrant Hostel. As soon as Efrem accepted work at BHP the family were reunited and stayed together at Fairy Meadow Hostel for 11 months in 1961-1962. They had been apart for 11 months. It was at Skyville Hostel that Giulia had her first opportunity to be a translator.

Giulia has been a tireless worker amongst the Italian migrant community and the Wollongong community. She began her work in this area as part of the Good Neighbour Council where she welcomed, and was able to help, new residents of all nationalities, including those from Great Britain. Giulia also continued her work as a translator in both the Italian and Spanish languages in the Children's Court in Wollongong.

Giulia was also on the founding committee of the Co.As.It in the Wollongong area. Co.As.It., an Italian Social Welfare Organisation, helped newly arrived Italians find housing, made up food and clothing parcels for those in need and provided a sense of community for the Italian residents in Wollongong. When funding for a Co.As.It office in Wollongong was no longer available, Giulia, her husband and many other members of the local Italian community, raised funds to found It.So.Wel., a local Italian Social Welfare organisation, so they could continue their work amongst the local Italian community. It was through their efforts, and many generous contributions from the community, that the house in Stewart Street Wollongong was purchased for the It.So.Wel. Their work is well-known in the Italian community and through their efforts and with the support of the Italian community they assisted both locally and overseas raising funds to sponsor students to go to Italy to study, sending money to disaster areas in Italy as well as raising funds to assist the bushfire victims in Australia, the Kidney Foundation and the list goes on. Now retired from It.So.Wel, Giulia continues her charity work focusing on the Cancer Council and Leukemia for Kids.

Giulia believes that it is important to leave the legacy of migrant history for future generations so that they may know of their journey from their homeland to where they are today, *"because I like to leave the future generations knowledge of how our life was as migrants. I believe everyone has an experience to teach the newcomers"*.

Giulia joined the MHP to see that these important stories are not lost *"because if we don't start then no one else will do anything and that is why I joined the Migrant Heritage Project. Every migrant's experience is different and every migrant brings with them their own different experience and culture. Our culture plus*

other cultures can only make an even better culture and this is important and this should never be forgotten”.

Giulia Bonacina was awarded British Empire Medal in 1978 and was knighted with the Croce di Cavaliere (Italy) and is a fellow of the University of Wollongong. In 2000, she was awarded the Queens Sport Medal for her participation and leadership in Bocce, was an Olympic Torch Bearer, and in 2001 Giulia was awarded the Order of Australia Medal.

Rina Montgomery - Committee



Rina Montgomery was born in Italy but came to Wollongong as a young child in 1929 with her mother and brother to join her father who had arrived in Australia a few years earlier. The family lived initially in Corrimal, but shortly moved to Port Kembla and then finally settled in Steeltown (Cringila) in 1934. When Rina and her family lived in Wollongong there was very little in the way of assistance to migrants and many were left to cope on their own to manage with the language and customs.

Living in Steeltown Rina witnessed the growth of the steelworks, including the AIS merge with BHP, the beginning of Lysaghts steel production, No 2 Blast Furnace completed and the Commonwealth Rolling Mills commence production, as well as life changing events such as the Depression and World War 2. Rina has a great depth of first hand knowledge on the development of Wollongong, particularly in and around the industrial areas. Rina also witnessed first hand how single migrant men, as well as migrant families, coped as her family took in boarders. Rina is the MHP's 'living library'.

Rina is actively involved in the her local community assisting with meals on wheels for over 20 years and regularly helps out at the It.So.Wel. preparing meals for

the Italian Day Care patrons. Rina also volunteers at the St Vincent De Paul's shop. When she has some spare time you can catch Rina playing bowls at her local RSL.

Rina attended the meeting at the Town Hall which was the beginning of what is the Migration Heritage Project today. At the meeting Rina felt that a lot was being said about the migrants from post World War 2. *“I have been here since 1929 and the way we lived then was so difficult. We weren't accepted; we had no help with the language. We were lucky because Dad built us a house in Steeltown after living in rented accommodation in Corrimal and Warrawong, but other families lived in tents or built shacks. The migrants who came later lived in hostels, they had a bed and they had security with a roof over their heads and employment – we didn't have that. Other migrants arriving pre-World War 2 like the Greeks and the Chinese suffered the same things as us. To be able to write these things down so that they are not forgotten is very important to me”.* Rina's involvement with the MHP stems from the fact that it is an organisation that is dedicated to maintaining the history of the migrants in the Wollongong area of which she is very much part of.

ORAL HISTORY REFERENCE BOOKS

Wollongong City Council Cultural Services have purchased the following reference material that are available for loan to groups: *Talking Together: A Guide to Community Oral History Projects*; *Oral History Handbook (OHAA)*; *Oral History and Its Challenge(s) a Journal No 28 2006 (OHAA)*. Contact

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www.mhpillararra.com

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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| Joining Fee: | Individual | \$5.00 |
| | Pensioners | \$2.00 |
| Annual Fee: | Organisations | \$10.00 |
| | Individual | \$10.00 |
| | Pensioners | \$5.00 |
| | Organisations | \$10.00 |

Joining fees payable within fourteen days of receipt of advice of membership approval. Annual fees payable by 30 June of each year.

The Secretary
Migration Heritage Project Inc.
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We would love you to join but you don't have to be a member to participate.





sharing, saving, waiting & making do:

accommodation for migrants in post war wollongong 1940s-1970s

agm2007

an illustrated talk by Meredith Walker

in conjunction with the **Migration Heritage Project**

Annual General Meeting Thursday 1st November 2007 5pm.

Level 9 Conference room, Wollongong City Council

Administration Building, Burelli Street Wollongong.

RSVP by 29 October 2007 ph:0438 832 094 email: mhp@1earth.net

Meredith Walker is a heritage consultant and a conservation activist. She is a former president of Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and was actively involved in the development of the Australia ICOMOS Charter for places of cultural significance (The Burra Charter), the standard for good practice in heritage management in Australia, and widely used overseas. Meredith is co-author of *The Illustrated Burra Charter: Making Good Decisions for the Care of Important Places* (the lay persons guide to conservation) which has won several heritage awards. Meredith has been involved in several heritage projects in Wollongong including a community heritage project for Dapto, and research about the history and significance of the Illawarra Escarpment.

Meredith Walker will present this illustrated talk as guest speaker at the Migration Heritage Project Annual General Meeting.

The talk describes the accommodation available to migrants arriving in Wollongong from 1949 to 1970s, using real-life examples compiled in the current MHP project to discover places associated with migration in Wollongong. Each of the government and company hostels will be included and also the other options – flats, boarding houses, spare rooms, garages, caravans and tents.

