

World War II, Migrants and Memories – 1935 to 1950

1935 TO 1950 – AN OVERVIEW

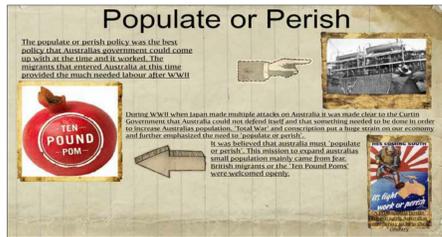
The Depression years resulted in little immigration. There was massive unemployment, poverty and hardship. In 1938 the government decided to accept 15,000 Jewish refugees from Nazism over three years; only 7,500 reached Australia before war broke out.

After being formed in 1925 to push for full citizenship rights for Aborigines, as well as land compensation for dispossession, the Aborigines Progressive Association held the first 'day of mourning' on 26 January 1938; the 150th anniversary of the landing of the First Fleet.



First Aboriginal day of mourning, 26 January 1938, Sydney. Source: MAN Magazine, March 1938, p.85.

Australia's sense of vulnerability during World War II led to calls for Australia to 'populate or perish', although 'White Australia' remained the cornerstone of immigration policy until 1959, when the Immigration Reform Group was founded. They argued that discrimination on the grounds of race not only damaged Australia's reputation internationally, but was also morally wrong.



Populate or perish poster. Compiled by Mary Bubrzczyk.

Telephone services

Melbourne's first telephone exchange opened in 1880. The first telephone directory published was a single page containing just twenty-three names. Thirty-six years later, Wallan and Wallan East were connected to the telephone. Calls were made through the Wallan East exchange.

The post office got its telephone in the late 1930s, although telephones were not common in Upper Plenty homes until the late 1950s.

Some months ago the Postal Department sanctioned the erection of telephone communication, but owing to the Depression, the matter has been held in abeyance. The Post Office [Upper Plenty] is not connected to the telephone ...

Advertiser (Hurstbridge), 28 October 1932.

The Glenvale school

The Glenvale Primary School (No. 727) opened around 1865. It closed temporarily between 1934 and 1936 after the headmaster, Major Sydney Crawford, was charged with overly disciplining a pupil, Ronald Miller. Widely reported, including in *The Argus*, the case was dismissed due to conflicting evidence. Major Crawford resigned, the Miller parents withdrew their children, leaving insufficient pupil numbers for the school to remain open. By 1936, numbers of children in the district requiring primary school rebounded and the school reopened. The school permanently closed in 1944. (Thanks to Val Andrew, née Miller, for information on this period.)



The Glenvale State School No. 727 outing to Melbourne Zoo, 1943. Back row: Valda Miller (13), Helen Bates (13). Front row: Duncan Duns, Gordon Cardwell, Robbie Downie, Ford Bowman, Ruth Bowman, Norma Wheelpton (12).

WORLD WAR II

In 1939, at the beginning of World War II, all unmarried men aged 21 were called up for three months' militia training. These men could only serve in Australia or its territories. Conscription was effectively introduced in mid-1942.



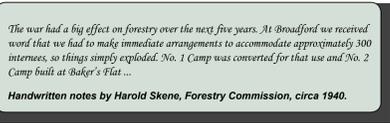
ID card issued to all residents at the beginning of WWII.



Harry Patton, circa 1940.

Internment

At the outbreak of World War II, foreign nationals of 'enemy' countries, such as Italy and Germany, were again sent to internment camps. The Australian Government did not differentiate between Nazi sympathisers and those who opposed fascism, leading to tensions in some camps. In Victoria, Archbishop Mannix was able to convince the Australian Government that the Italians were of more benefit to the country if left on their farms; therefore, very few were interned here.



Handwritten notes by Harold Skene, Forestry Commission, circa 1940.

Life for the internees at the camps was fairly relaxed. Locals remember them attending dances at the Upper Plenty hall. The internees worked in the forests cutting wood, for which they received some payment. Much of the housing was in tents. However, Peter Fox, a well-known Collins Street photographer and German Jew, refused to cut wood or live in a tent. He had private wealth and paid for his own hut to be built. He later managed the accounts at Camp No. 4.

Broadford No. 1 Camp is now a Heritage-listed location.



Hand-drawn aerial plan of Broadford No. 1 Camp. By Karl Friedrich Muffler, 1944.



Drawing, Forestry Camp No. 2, Broadford. By Karl Friedrich Muffler, 1944.

Karl Friedrich Muffler was a qualified pastry chef and confectioner, born 1900, who migrated to Australia from Germany in 1930. On 4 September 1939, Muffler was placed into police custody as an enemy alien. He was transferred to Tatura internment camp and later to Broadford Forestry Commission Camp No. 1. He was finally released in 1945 and eventually became a naturalised Australian citizen, having no family left in Germany.



Envelope addressed to Karl Muffler, 1944. Courtesy: Museum Victoria.



Italian prisoners of war from the Libya campaign on their way to a country internment camp. The picture shows an Italian soldier wearing a battered sun hat chalked over with Italian inscriptions, among which is 'Three ideals - God, Fatherland and Family'. Courtesy: Museum of Victoria.

Joe Zabinski

Joe Zabinski was an internee at Camp No. 4 during World War II. He later bought 300 acres adjacent to the forest, extending down the mountain to Clarke's Road. Joe was a mechanic who worked with the army at Puckapunyal for many years and, later, with the Laffan brothers in Wallan. He built an inground pool lined with beer bottles and many of the loggers and workers would call in for a swim, chat or a beer on hot days. His carport was lined with beer bottles, and he built two Aboriginal statues of concrete and chicken wire at his property entrance. Later, a syndicate of doctors turned some of the property into a camp for underprivileged children and at one time a nudist group ran the Northside Health Camp on the site. More recently the YABAMAC Scout Camp occupied part of the property, the remainder being subdivided into residential blocks. (Permission: Ron Pickett, *Ghosts, Gold and a White Elephant*.)



Entrance to YABAMAC, the old Zabinski property, February 2009.

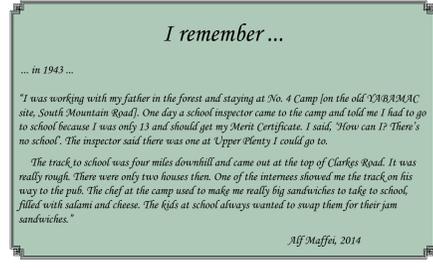
Alf Maffei

Alf's father emigrated to Australia from Italy in 1922. During World War II he worked as a wood carter for the Forestry Commission at Mt Disappointment. As he was a naturalised Australian citizen he was not required to reside at an internment camp. He was, however, highly utilised

as an interpreter in the camps. His much younger brother, Adolfo, was captured in Libya while fighting for Mussolini and was subsequently transported to Australia as a prisoner of war. Alf remembers that Adolfo was treated very well at the potato farm in Koo Wee Rup, where he was allocated to work.

Prisoners of war wore Australian Army uniforms dyed red. To address manpower shortages, POWs were, under the rural labour scheme of 1943, supplied to farmers for a payment of one pound per week, of which the prisoner received fifteen shillings. Post war, Adolfo was deported to Italy; however, he returned to Australia in 1946, married and raised a family.

Alf and his wife, Julie, purchased land in Upper Plenty in 1971. After Julie's death in 2013, Alf sold the property and moved to Wallan.



Alf Maffei, 2014

POST WAR

The camps on Mt Disappointment later housed displaced people from Poland and Hungary, and other countries where Russia had taken control. These people could stay in the camps for around two years and, as with the internees, made a very real contribution to the development of local multiculturalism.

Post World War II ushered in a period of sustained economic prosperity and rapid social change. Boom times had arrived and skilled labour was scarce, prices were rising and shortages disappearing. Thousands of displaced persons from war-torn Europe started arriving in 1947 and worked began on the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, using large numbers of migrants. European migrants also made their way to Upper Plenty both before and after the war.

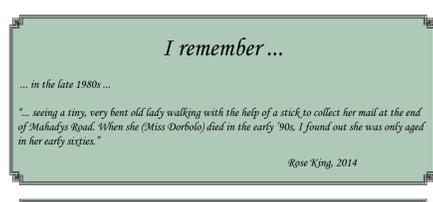
The Dorbolo family

Gisella Dorbolo arrived in Australia from Italy in 1932 with her children, Dionasio and Velma. Gisella's husband, Luigi, had arrived a few months earlier to find work. The family may have been placed in an internment camp at the outbreak of World War II; however, as some records have been destroyed there is no record of this having occurred.

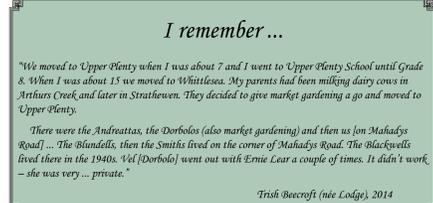
The family were naturalised and purchased land in Upper Plenty in 1949, starting a market garden. They seem to have been very insular, not even mixing with their Italian neighbours. Luigi died in 1975 and Gisella in 1986.

Dionasio was described by neighbours as being 'unusual'. He disappeared after the war, aged in his twenties, and was never heard from again. There is speculation that he may have changed his name, but there is no evidence that he returned to Italy. His sister, Velma, although known to have at least one brief relationship with a local boy, lived as a spinster at the family farm until her death in 1993.

Luigi, Gisella and Velma all died intestate. The Public Trustee is holding the proceeds of the sale of the family farm until there is a claim from family descendants.



Rose King, 2014



Trish Becroft (née Lodge), 2014



Lodge family home, circa 1949. Courtesy: Trish Becroft.



Trish Becroft (née Lodge), 2014

The Andreatta family

Andrea Andreatta arrived in Australia in 1922 as a 14-year-old boy sponsored by a family friend. He was the first in his family to migrate and later brought his three brothers over to Australia. Between 1922 and 1943 he worked in Tasmania in coal mines, in South Australia in mines and in Queensland doing seasonal cane-cutting.

In 1943 he moved to Melbourne and married Ilse. In 1946 they purchased the 355 acres on Lords/Mahadys Roads, which had earlier belonged to George and Georgina Robertson. Their daughter, Margherita, was aged two when they arrived in Upper Plenty and there were subsequently two more children, Cesarina and Andrea.



Mr and Mrs Andreatta in 1946, the year they moved to Upper Plenty.



Mrs Andreatta with Margherita, 1946. Arrival in Upper Plenty.

In the beginning the family cut and supplied firewood to a biscuit factory and a steel foundry five days per week. Weekends were spent dragging logs to the saw bench to be cut for delivery the following week. In the Dodge truck – the family's only means of transport. After some years Andy had an accident and lost three fingers. This coincided with a loss of demand for firewood due to the increased usage of electricity and gas. It became very hard to make a living.

The family then moved into market gardening, growing potatoes and tomatoes, which they supplied to Victoria Market. However, water shortages and poor-quality bore water made this another difficult enterprise. Margherita and her mother milked cows before and after school and eventually Andy decided that dairying would be a good business to try. This did not prove successful either and prevented the family from building the new home they had saved for. Ilse was devastated and wanted to sell the property because making a living



Left to right: Iso, Margherita and Mr Andreatta in front of the family's only means of transport – the Dodge truck. Circa 1956.



Margherita and Cesarina Andreatta with friends. Mt Disappointment fire tower is in the background.

To make ends meet the family raised pigs – feeding them on the skim milk from the cows – as well as day-old chicks and selling any available eggs. Despite being very sick in 1955–56, Ilse worked hard on the farm. Her mother took her to the Women's Hospital, resulting in immediate surgery for cancer. Margherita looked after the family for two months while her mother underwent treatment.

Around 1962, Andy had another accident where he lost most of his remaining right hand. Margherita had to drive him to find help; with no drivers' licence she did the best she could. Nancy Lawrence at the Upper Plenty Post Office drove Andy to the police station and from there he was transported to hospital.

Margherita left school in 1958, at the legal leaving age of 14, to work on the farm. At 19 she became engaged to Charlie, who worked in the Mt Disappointment forest. Charlie bought Margherita a car, which made it possible for her and Cesarina to drive to Epping for work in a factory, but they still returned home at night to work on the farm.

Margherita and Charlie saved up a deposit and, in 1964, Margherita, Cesarina, Andrea [junior] and their mother left to live in the new house in Melbourne. Margherita and Charlie married about two months later. It was a difficult time for Ilse because separation and divorce were still uncommon. Tragically, Charlie was killed in a vehicle accident caused by a drunk driver just 16 months after he and Margherita married.

Mr Andreatta sold the Upper Plenty property in 1966 to three brothers. It was later occupied by the Bontempelli family and subsequently subdivided into the properties today owned by the Ogilvie, Kanderovskis, Hullin and Potter families. Margherita met Giacomo, her husband of 46 years, whom she married in 1968. They live in Eltham and have two daughters and three grandchildren. Cesarina married Ken and they have two daughters. Andrea married Teresa and they also have two daughters.

Ilse died in 1969 at the age of 50 and Andy in 1991, aged 83.

The Johnson and Day families

Bernard and Florence Johnson were originally from Tasmania. They purchased 286 acres on Clarke's Road from the Mahady family in the early 1900s. Their daughter, Florence (Florrie), married Fred Day and their son, Mick, married Irene (Rene) Huxley. Mick and Rene lived and worked on the Upper Plenty property with Bernard and Florence, who had purchased a house in Reservoir for Florrie and Fred. The Upper Plenty property was left to Florrie after Bernard and Florence's deaths. Mick and Irene could remain on the property until Mick's death; however, they moved to Whittlesea in the 1970s when Mick's health began to fail. Florrie ('Ma') decided to sell the property after Fred's death and subsequently sold to her grandson, John Day, and his wife, Cathy, in the early 1990s.



Rene Johnson on her 90th birthday.

The original 286 acres was subdivided and part-sold to Fred Day's brother, Herbie, possibly as early as 1920. He and his wife, Sarah, built a home, which has long since burnt down. The area sold to Herbie and Sarah is now owned by the Carlins, Gaven Day and John Hobbs. Some forty-four acres were sold to the Williams family in 1970 and later sold to Rita and Keith Miller. The remaining property, now owned by John and Cathy Day, is five acres.

At one time there were three generations living on the property: Bernard and Florrie, Mick and Rene, and Mick and Rene's son, Kenny, and his wife, Shirley (née Becroft). Described by one family member as 'a row of bungalows', the most notable of these buildings was the one constructed of flattened tar drums and saplings with a dirt floor, built by Rene and Mick Johnson during the Depression of the 1930s. The walls were lined with hessian and covered with wallpaper.

Jack Lord

Mr Jack Lord was a well-known identity in the Upper Plenty district. As well as being involved in logging around Mt Disappointment from 1948 to '50, he built the road that now bears his name – Lords Road. During the making of this road, Jack and his brother lived in a hut in the forest, making the most of daylight hours for working and only going home on weekends. Older residents of Upper Plenty remember being visited by Jack during this period. There is now no trace of the hut, although prior to the 2009 bushfires his name could be found printed on a concrete pipe that was left at the site.

In May 1948, Jack purchased the Whittlesea sawmill, which continues to be owned and operated as a family business.

The photographs below show Jack logging in the Mt Disappointment area.



I remember ...

"Mick Johnson and his wife, Rene, and family Peter and Ken, were willing and able workers for the Mechanics' Institute in their many years of living here, also the school working bees. Mick was a VicRail employee for the greater part of his life. Irene was well known for her great cooking skill using an old colonial oven and her willingness to assist anybody in trouble. A good friend to all."

Mavis Patton, 2004

Wedding day, Mavis and Harry Patton, 1947.

At the beach, circa 1953. Left to right: JJ Mahady, Father Boland (his mother was an Irish Laffan), Dennis and Maureen Laffan, Sara Ann Mahady and Mary Laffan (née Mahady).

"... in the 1950s ..."

"... old Mr Muldowney on Clarke's Road. He lived next door to us in an old tank, just like a farm. We used to be really scared of him. He had an old Ford truck. When he got old I heard that his solicitors bought him a house in Broadmeadows but he wouldn't live in it. He went and lived in the shed at the bottom of the garden instead."

Stephen Patton
Upper Plenty, 2004

"... in the 1960s ..."

"... Mr Brown, who lived at the end of Clarke's Road. He would always help us on the farm and make sure we were all right. He came over the hill every day."

Margherita Bottos, 2014

Wedding of Mary Mahady and Owen Laffan, St Patrick's Church, Kilmore, 1939. Left to right: Bernie Laffan, Lea Laffan, Aileen Mahady, Owen and Mary Laffan, John Joseph Mahady, Eileen Smith, Betty Franks, gentleman unknown.

Wandering Sports Day, New Year's Day, 1938. Ernie was allowed to take his father's car. Left to right: Ernie Lear, Nancy Lawrence, Mavis Lear. Photograph courtesy: Mavis Patton.

Picnic party at Mt Disappointment, circa 1950. Left to right: Sara Ann Mahady, Eileen Smith, Maureen Laffan, Mary Laffan, Dennis Laffan, John Joseph (JJ) Mahady.

"... in the 1930s ..."

"Jack Mahady (JJ) was the owner of the first motor car in Upper Plenty. He had a fondness for the drink and high speeds. His frequent motor vehicle accidents earned him the name 'Aeroplane Jack'. He engaged his nephew, Jack Jr, to drive for him despite his wife, Sara Ann's, opposition."

Mavis Patton, 2004

Owen Laffan pictured at Rye Beach in 1939 with the 1928 Packard and carvair in which he and Mary (Mahady) honeymooned. The couple had to wait eight years to marry because, as was customary, Owen worked on his father's farm for no wages.

Nancy Osmond and Ernie Lear, circa 1938. Photograph courtesy: Mavis Patton.

From left to right: Gerald Lodge, Nancy Lawrence, Mrs Lodge (rear), Joan Lawrence, Mrs Blackwell holding baby Rita. Circa 1950. Courtesy: Trish Becroft.