

## **My PhD studies**

I began my PhD at Flinders University in 2016 and hope to submit it in August 2020. A PhD involves a concentrated period of study on one area which contributes new knowledge to a subject which in my case, is Italian migration studies in Australia. A person undertaking a PhD must use a theory and method and demonstrate a deep level of knowledge in the area of research.

## **Development of the community oral history project to PhD: 2006-2019**

My PhD has grown out of the community oral history project that I began in 2006 when I was interested in finding out more about the Italian market gardeners in the western suburbs of Adelaide. I was fortunate to have the assistance of people whose families had been involved in the business of market gardens, from manufacturers of half-case boxes to men and women who had built up their farms over many years. I discovered that a group of people who had come from the Veneto region in the late 1920s had started their market gardens in the area of Kidman Park and Flinders Park, west of the city of Adelaide. The 11 pioneer families lived within about two kilometres of each other.

## **Oral history interviews**

Gradually I began recording interviews with the sons and daughters of the pioneer market gardeners and found out a lot about how families ran their farms and what kinds of experiences they had in their small community. Three men, Johnny Marchioro, Frankie Ballestrin and Bruno Piovesan assisted me in delivering presentations to local history groups and we had a number of public events. I was fortunate that Eleonora Marchioro and Anna Mechis offered to interview some of the people for the project. There are four interviews recorded in dialect.

As I gradually interviewed people, I discovered that there were two generations of people in the group of descendants of the pioneer Veneto market gardeners. There are people who were children when they arrived in Australia – usually they came with their mothers to join their fathers after they had settled on the market gardens. There are also second generation members of families – they were born in Adelaide.

The 58 oral history interviews gathered for the project are available on this website. Ten interviews were recorded with children of the pioneer market gardeners who arrived in the 1930s with their mothers. Another 25 interviews were recorded with sons and daughters of pioneers. Eleonora Marchioro and Anna Mechis recorded interviews in Italian. There are interviews with descendants of people who came from other regions of Italy and also three members of Anglo Australian families who had market gardens in the same area. In addition, there are some interviews with people born in Australia who now live in the Veneto region in Italy.

### **Development of the website**

The City of Charles Sturt has supported the community oral history project and I received funding for the development of this website in 2014. As interviews are recorded and preserved by the State Library of South Australia, they are uploaded on the website and they have become an archive for the community here in Adelaide and for relatives in the Veneto region.

### **Work on my PhD from 2016**

I'm currently writing up the approach I am taking with my research for my thesis. In a PhD it is a requirement to select and explain what theory you use to research a particular question and use data to support the question.

My question is: “How can the 1.5 and second generation tell the history of their parents’ migration and settlement?” My purpose in choosing the role of the 1.5 and second-generation family members to examine Italian migration history in Australia between the wars is to provide first-hand evidence of the experience of migration within a small group of families who settled in Adelaide between the two world wars and adopted a common occupation in a small geographic area. The history of Italian migration in Australia after the Second World War has been more widely researched than the period before the war both in written texts and oral accounts. Almost all oral histories of Italian migrants collected by the National Library of Australia or by state institutions such as the State Library of South Australia represent the cohort who migrated from the late 1940s.

### **Questions framing the research**

The principal question that informs this thesis is how can the 1.5 generation and the second generation narrate the history of their parents’ migration and settlement? The intimate narrative of the pioneer generation who emigrated from the Veneto and built their early years of settlement in market gardens has not been documented in official histories. The role of their children as narrators could provide an intimate illustration of their family as migrants between the wars. In addition, five other questions inform the research. What role does oral history serve in providing evidence of family migration history? What memories are important in recounting family experience of migration and settlement? How was the experience of the “living peasant economy” (Holmes 1938, 23), of working and living on the land as *contadini*<sup>1</sup> in the Veneto region, transferred by the pioneer market gardeners to their children? What were the roles of women in the Veneto market gardener families? A further question is how can microhistory be employed in migration history to provide evidence of the circumstances of individuals and families who lived the experience as migrants?

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<sup>1</sup> *Contadini* is the Italian word that describes peasant farmers

Questions about migration and settlement shift between the individual citizen or family and Government policies and procedures and the social and economic conditions of two countries. The research questions in this study invite a new way of examining and interpreting the history of migration in Australia. The questions offer perspectives to examine the lives of individuals, including the voices and memories of 1.5 and second-generation family members in oral history interviews. It is significant that the research questions invite examination of the personal and intimate as a component of a history of migration derived from the oral histories. Richard extols the benefits of using oral history in the study of immigration in Australia which assists the historian to gain insight into individual and family lives in the study of emigration and settlement:

*Immigrants (just like other citizens) are living documents of their times: they are their own archive and they are often highly vocal in a literal sense. Consequently no consideration of twentieth-century Australian immigration history can afford to ignore the potential contained in the testimonies of the immigrants. The oral record is a crucial lode of evidence for every sort of immigration historian ...*

(Richards 2002 1-2)

The inclusion of microhistory in this study provides another means of investigating the individual in the context of migration and settlement and the complexity of circumstances that generate the physical and psychic movement from one country to another.

The 1.5 and second generation members of the Veneto market gardening families record their knowledge and in their accounts, move out of the present and recall the past, using the memories to create their sense of identity as children of migrants. They remember the enterprise of the family occupation, the community of *veneti* and the cultural

background that was part of their formation and which, for many, anchors them today. In the interviews, the narrators offer different forms of historical knowledge. They contribute to the history of migration in South Australia since the 1920s and the part played by the Veneto market gardener families.