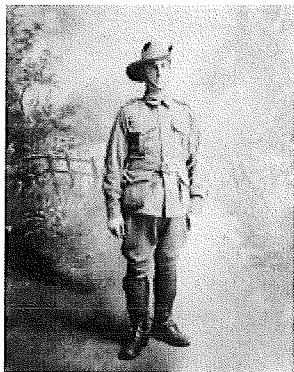
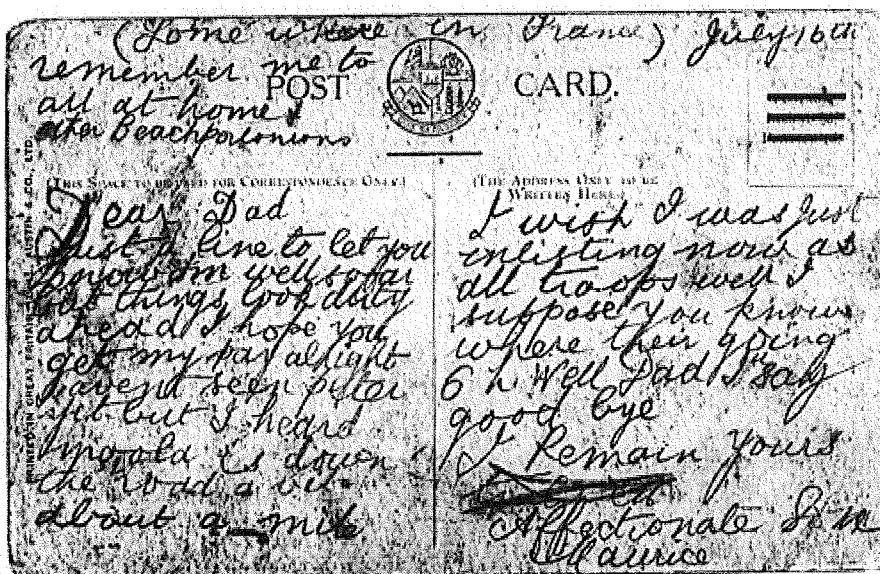


EARLY SICILIANS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

WORDS: CAV. PROFESSOR DESMOND O'CONNOR

In the latter part of the Nineteenth Century few Italians resided in South Australia. Between the two censuses of 1881 and 1891 the Italian presence grew from just 141 to 185. Apart from the small communities of Apulians from Molfetta that were beginning to develop at Port Pirie and Port Adelaide, other Italians were more commonly itinerant, sometimes stopping briefly in SA and then moving on to other Australian colonies or beyond in search of work.



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01 For the most part, the early Sicilian presence in SA can only be glimpsed through available archival documents. Giuseppe Pampinella, a sailor from Palermo, is recorded as being in Adelaide in 1868. Another sailor, Rosario Pipitone from "Sicily" (according to his naturalisation certificate), was in 1902 residing in Port Pirie. Brothers Giuseppe and Giovanni Pirera from Messina, described as Adelaide fruiterers in their naturalisation certificate of 1898, stayed just two more years, returning to Italy in 1900.

One Sicilian who did settle in South Australia in the nineteenth century and raised his family here became with his children and grandchildren a major contributor to the social and economic life of the State. Carlo (Charles) Corigliano (1853-1933) was a sailor who jumped ship in Albany WA in 1875. Briefly arrested by the local police for desertion, on his release he made his way to South Australia. In 1877 he settled in Beachport on the south-east coast, where, before the jetty was built, he was a boat operator employed to transfer the cargo to

shore from the ships at anchor. A great deal could be said about him: he helped build the lighthouse at Beachport; he was a member of the local government council for 22 years, for four of which he was chairman; he founded the Beachport Institute; in 1908 he was elected president of the Beachport United Labor Party; he took a keen interest in the advancement of the South-East, and was actively engaged in commercial fishing. Today one of the principal streets in Beachport is named Corigliano Street. He married a Ms Mary O'Connell and had 13 children, ten of whom survived. There is firm documented proof that he was indeed Sicilian, since his naturalisation certificate of 1910 clearly shows that he was born in Messina. His children and grandchildren became very well known in the crayfish and prawn industry. There is no doubt that the three generations of the Corigliano family of Beachport were instrumental in establishing the fishing industry in South Australia, on a par with, from the 1960s, the Puglisi family in the tuna industry in Port Lincoln, who were also of Sicilian background and originally from Ulladulla NSW. Carlo Corigliano's son, Frank, was a founding chairman of SAFCOL (South Australian Fishermen's Cooperative Ltd), while Maurice, Frank's son, i.e. Carlo's grandson, became president of the SA Fishing Industry Council in 1980 and in 2013 was inducted into the National Seafood Hall of Fame.

Of Carlo's five sons, four fought in the first world war, two in the Australian army and two in the navy. One son, Maurice, was killed in action in July 1916 in France in the tragic Battle of Fromelles, where in one day 2,000 Australians lost their lives. Just three days before he was killed, Maurice sent this postcard home to his father, Carlo, in Beachport:

Dear Dad, Just a line to let you know I'm well so far, but things look dirty ahead. I hope you get my pay alright. [...] I wish I was just enlisting now, as all troops, well, I suppose you know where they're going. Oh well Dad I say goodbye. Remember me to all at home and other Beachportians. I remain your affectionate son, Maurice.

Following the German advance, Maurice and another 190 dead Australian soldiers were buried unceremoniously in a mass grave. This mass grave has now been located in Fromelles and excavations are under way. Maurice's nephew, who bears the same name, has supplied a sample of his DNA and this has enabled his uncle's remains to be identified.

During the first world war Italians living in Australia who wished to enlist in the AIF could do so if they were naturalised. Since proof of citizenship was often not requested at the time of enlisting, an Italian not yet naturalised could find an expedient to circumvent the regulation. Angelo Maddalozzo from Arsiè (Belluno), for example, claimed when enlisting in the AIF in Adelaide in early 1916 that he was born in Malta. He was accepted and spent two years fighting in France and Belgium. Only in 1949 did he apply for naturalisation:

Felice (Philip) Barbuto enlisted in the AIF in March 1917 claiming to be a natural born British subject, whereas he was actually born in Leni (Messina) and applied for naturalisation only in 1919 on his return from the war, which he spent in Egypt in the 3rd Light Horse. At the time of enlisting he was presumably able to hide his non-British status, since he had emigrated with his family from Messina to New York in 1905 at the age of six and moved to Australia in 1913. After the war he settled for a time in Adelaide working as a fruit packer at the Adelaide market.

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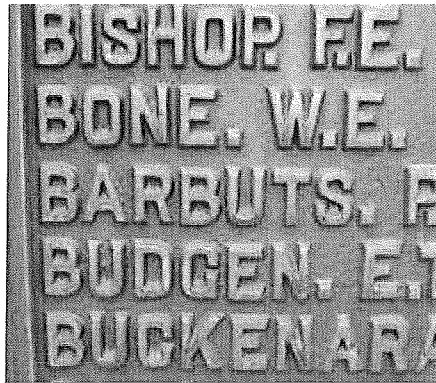
His name appears on the Lower North Adelaide Soldiers Memorial, but his identity and Italianness, indeed his Sicilianness, have been obliterated, thanks to the misspelling "Barbuts" (see photo).

Italian-born who were not naturalised found themselves in difficult circumstances at the beginning of 1918 after Italy had sustained huge losses in the Battle of Caporetto. The Australian government through the Italian Consul-General acceded to the Italian government's request to round up, by force if necessary, all Italian aliens of fighting age and ship them back to Italy to join the severely depleted Italian army. As aliens they were obliged to register and advise the Australian authorities when changing residence. Several hundred Italian reservists in Australia

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were forcibly conscripted in this way. Vito Piccolo from Falcone (Messina) was on the register of aliens in SA but managed to avoid the police round-up, probably because he kept on the move during the war years, living and working in various parts of rural SA.

By the 1930s Sicilian communities had consolidated in several Australian states: Italian fishermen from Capo d'Orlando (Messina) were conspicuous in Fremantle; Sicilian trawler operators were active in NSW, in Ulladulla and Wollongong; Sicilians had a strong presence on the cane fields of North Queensland; in Melbourne a tight-knit community of Sicilians from the Aeolian Islands engaged in small business, especially as fruiterers. Since the 1960s the Sicilian-born represent the second-largest Italian regional group in Australia, after Calabrian-born. Today Italian citizens born in Sicily and living abroad number over half a million world-wide, of whom 24 thousand live in Australia.

In South Australia the demographic picture is noticeably different: only 48 Sicilians landed here between 1927 and 1940, far fewer than the 728 migrants from the Veneto and the 512 from Calabria in the same period. After the second world war, between 1948 and 1971, 1,300 Sicilians settled in SA, just 3.6 % of all the Italian-born, whereas Italians from Campania and Calabria together account for over 50% of all the Italians in the State. Unlike other States, in SA in the twentieth century a strong migration chain of Sicilians did not develop, owing to the absence of the formation here of a localised "village" settlement of Italians originating from the same or a nearby Sicilian town and with a common interest in a particular occupation, as was the case of Molfettese fishers in Port Pirie, market gardeners from Calabria and Veneto on the west side of Adelaide and from Campania on the north-east side.

Despite these proportionately small numbers, today Sicilian-born Italians in SA, together with their second and third generation families, make up a close knit and conspicuous community, whose public face is most evident in the active Sicilia Social and Sports Club in Klemzig and the annual religious festival in honour of Santa Lucia di Siracusa.

01 Postcard from Maurice Corigliano to his father

02 Maurice Corigliano

03 Carlo (Charles) Corigliano

04 Barbuts misprint