

THE LETTESI STORY

A COMMUNITY IN SEARCH OF PLACE

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A Tribute to Lettesi Women

- And to Filomena who opened the door

In any account of Lettesi re-settlement, the contribution of women must be acknowledged. Without their presence there would be no community; no story to tell. For without their support the men may have come, for a time, perhaps; but they would not have settled, permanently, as a community. Their Little Italy - Little Lettopalena, in Hamilton, Australia, would not exist. But theirs is another story of courage and of caring. This is the story about the men who led the way.

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PART A
COMMUNITY AND TERRITORY

1. THE LETTESI COMMUNITY

The *Lettesi* in Newcastle are the extended family members of 145 households, where either one or both partners were born in Lettopalena, Italy. Most of this core group of first generation immigrants arrived in Australia over the seven-year period from 1950 to 1956 and after working in the cane fields, settled mainly in Hamilton, a working-class suburb, close to the heavy industries and port facilities of Newcastle.

The community evolved through a chain migration process that began with the arrival, in 1925, of Giacomo De Vitis. In 1927, Giacomo *called* his brother-in-law, Arcangelo Rossetti. In 1938 Arcangelo's sons, Antonio and Giacomo, bought a cane farm in Proserpine where the brothers later purchased farms of their own. These farms became the focus for a major post-war exodus, sponsored mainly by Antonio, with assistance from Giacomo, and other Italian farmers.

Emigration from the village was not a new phenomenon, for many had left earlier for America and Argentina; but during the war, in 1943, after suffering two months of German occupation, the people watched as their homes were destroyed. At the end of the war there was nothing left but the ruins of a village and what remained of the stables. The result was an exodus on a scale never before experienced by the village.

I first came to know the Lettesi community during the course of research in 1971 when a random sample of 45 Italian households revealed seven families from a single village. The village was Lettopalena; and the pattern was surprising as Lettopalena's population had less than a thousand people.

Among the seven families interviewed were Fiorindo Martinelli and his wife, Filomena; and when I showed surprise at the high number of Lettesi, Filomena offered to have a gathering at their home so I could hear first-hand of the events that had brought them all the way to Australia in such large numbers. It was a powerful, engaging story, but I had to leave it till another time. Four years later, in 1975, the opportunity came to examine it further.

Meanwhile I had interviewed immigrants from different countries, to learn about their origins and destination patterns. What I found among the southern European groups, from Greece, Italy and the former Yugoslavia, were distinctive patterns of residential concentration that reflected the town or region of origin.

The Lettesi, in particular, were a distinctive *village* entity. The pattern did not apply to those from Germany and the Netherlands; and was not quite so marked for other southern European groups. I wanted to know how this community had evolved; how it managed to retain its distinctive identity; and how it functioned within the wider society. The story, unravelled, had a human dimension that encompassed the very essence of the meaning of *community* - a locality where social life is characterised by a set of common values and beliefs, a strong sense of identity and belonging, social coherence and functional interdependence.

My second meeting with Lettesi, four years later, was the result of a mistake. Hearing a radio announcement of a dance to be held in Hamilton, in support of the victims of an earthquake in Italy in 1975, and being organised by Lettesi, I decided to attend. Being shy by nature, I was grateful for the company of an Italian friend, Luigina Barile, who agreed to come along. We were unaware that the announcement was a strategy for reaching the large community membership; and that the invitation was not directed to the general public. We had gate-crashed a Lettesi community event; and it was hugely embarrassing.



At the door we were met by members of the Committee, and for a second time I experienced the overwhelming hospitality of this exceptional community. Extra places were set at the Committee's own table where we were treated with a dose of true Italian hospitality, as though we were honoured guests. My embarrassment was complete when, on winning the door-prize, a huge bottle of champagne, I was required to walk the length of the hall, to the stage, then back again, carrying the spoils. This conspicuous introduction was not the one I would have planned.

A commitment to record the full Lettesi story was the outcome of a meeting with Antonio Della Grotta, President of the Lettesi Club. Antonio's significance to the welfare of the group could never be overstated; nor could his importance to the progress of my research. He led me through the extended family networks that comprised the Lettesi. Then, following a year of in-depth interviews with Lettesi families in Newcastle and recording their accounts of emigration and re-settlement, I went to the village in July 1977.

In Lettopalena I met, for the first time, Antonio Rossetti, brother of Giacomo, and son of Arcangelo, the Lettesi pioneer. It was a chance meeting; but a very timely one. He was visiting family, including the D'Acciones. Antonio was a cousin to Antonio D'Accione who, in 1976, followed Antonio Della Grotta as Lettesi Club President. It was he who had arranged accommodation, in Lettopalena, for me and my family.

Antonio Rossetti was the principal link in the chain migration process. This meeting was fortuitous for Antonio had not been interviewed as he was one of the few Lettesi not resident in Newcastle. He had sold the farm in Proserpine and was living in Brisbane where Angelo, his son, had set up a pharmacy. Pasquale Martinelli whom I had interviewed the year before was visiting the village also. It was his first visit to the homeland.

Both men were indispensable, not only in the roles of informant, guide and interpreter, but also as a channel through which I could identify the connections that linked Australia to the homeland within the maze of complex extended family interrelationships. They were a welcome mat to the community, a bridge to their hospitality. They showed me over the rubble of the old town, sharing their memories as they formed among the ruins of what had once been family homes.

These memories reclaimed the town, generations of Lettesi families, and traditions of a way of life that was practised there for centuries. There, upon a mountain ledge, almost hidden in the undergrowth, were remains of an ancient village where families had lived for countless generations, reaching back to the 12th century. And there, beyond the river, spread out across the relict fields, was the new town of Lettopalena for which Antonio and Pasquale now felt a kind of strangeness. Their memories were embedded among the ruins of the old town.

I recognised in the new town with its spacious layout, comfortable homes and neat kitchen gardens, a way of life that lay in stark contrast to that experienced in the old town, clustered on a ledge of the mighty Maiella massif and overlooking a ravine of the Aventino River. It contrasted, too, with the makeshift homes that Lettesi had forged from the stables of solid stone, in the fields just across the river when the village was destroyed, and at the end of the war. I could see how these changes were symbolic of the break in the chain of continuity of emigration from the village.

There was a story, published in 1998, of Lettopalena's early history till 1943; a heart-wrenching tale of its total destruction, and of the epic struggle for survival experienced by its people.

Our story begins in 1943 with the destruction of the village; then follows an account of chain migration from the village to the cane fields of Proserpine, northern Queensland; then from Proserpine to Newcastle. It is a story of *Lettesi* people, of the roles and relations that formed and sustained them, and their spirit and well-being, as a close-knit community in an alien, unfriendly setting. It is a story of *community* in search of *place*.

2. LETTOPALENA AND THE WAR

Look around you. Look at the mountains. See, we are closed in. What you get unless you open the door? If you don't open the door the walls surround you - you will remain inside forever, without future.

Some words are remembered, over one's lifetime, spoken by someone now gone, but not forgotten, because the words marked one's life, became signposts to a new direction. The above were the words of an old man in the village, Pietro Palmieri. He had emigrated to America and experienced its opportunities, before returning to spend his final years in the homeland.

When the immigration notice arrived in the village with the offer of assisted passage for emigration to Australia, the wisdom in his words must have passed through the mind of Antonio Della Grotta as he filled out his application. It was 1951 and the chain migration process that was set in motion in 1925, by Giacomo De Vitis, was gathering momentum.

Chain Migration - Origin and Destination

This story is about the migration of people from Lettopalena, Abruzzi, Italy, and how *chain migration* led to the formation of a *village* community in Newcastle, Australia. The emergence of this community has been part of a wider pattern of continuing emigration and community formation which began before the turn of the 20th century and abated during the late 1960s.

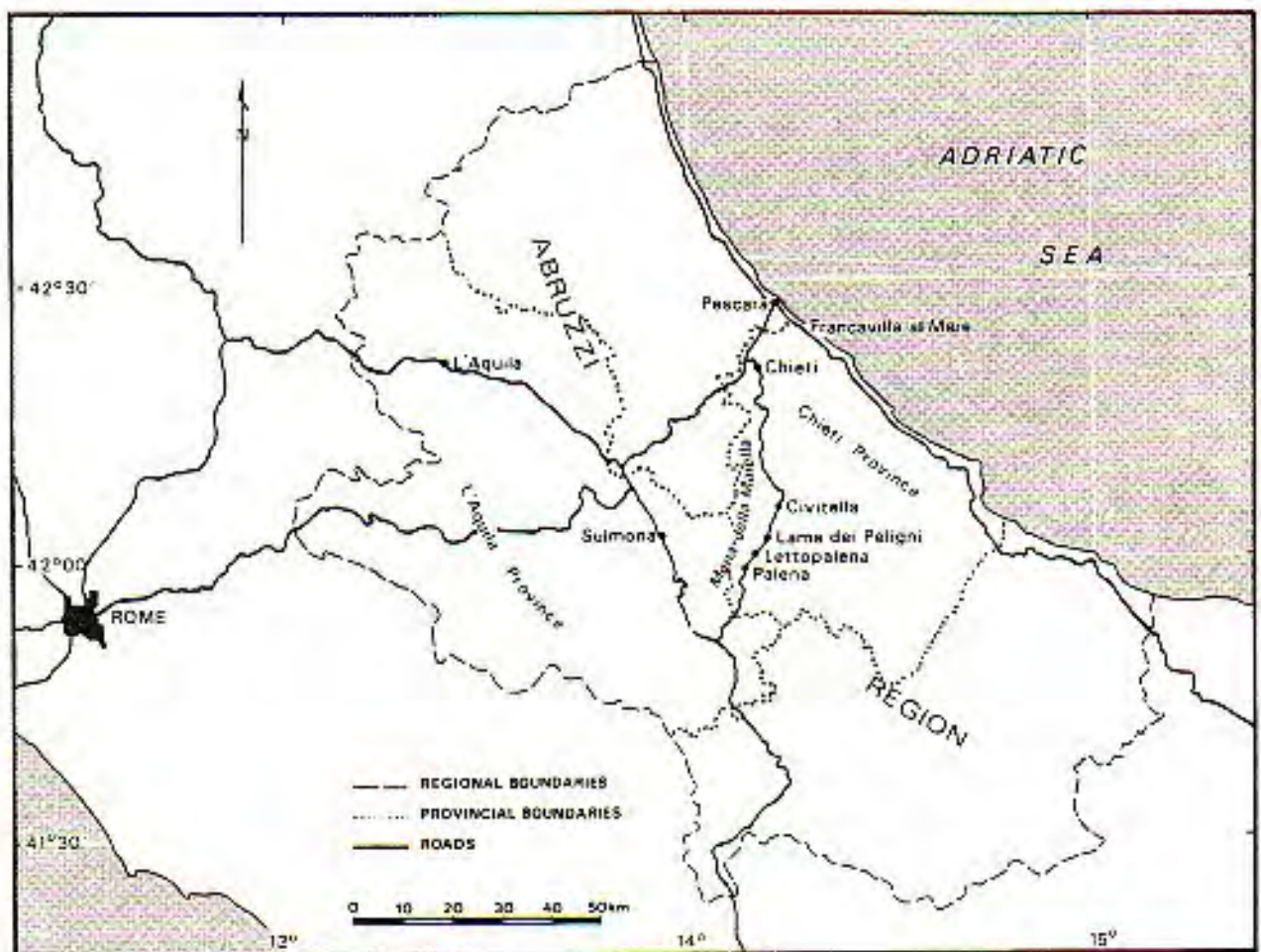
It is a process that has created three widely dispersed, yet highly localised, *Lettesi* communities - in Turtle Creek, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.; in Caseros near Buenos Aires, Argentina; and in Newcastle, Australia. All three communities identify with one another and the parent village of Lettopalena. This story first outlines the village site and situation, the patterns of migration to and from the village, the causes that drove the process of emigration, its ebb-tide in the 60s, and its impact on the town.

Lettopalena - Site and Situation

Lettopalena's situation is characterised by its remoteness, for the village lies deep within the mountainous Abruzzi region, in the south-west of the province of Chieti where the Maiella Range divides Chieti from L'Aquila. Here, in the shadow of the mighty Maiella, are sites that mark three stages of its development which, in turn, reflect the patterns of Lettesi emigration.

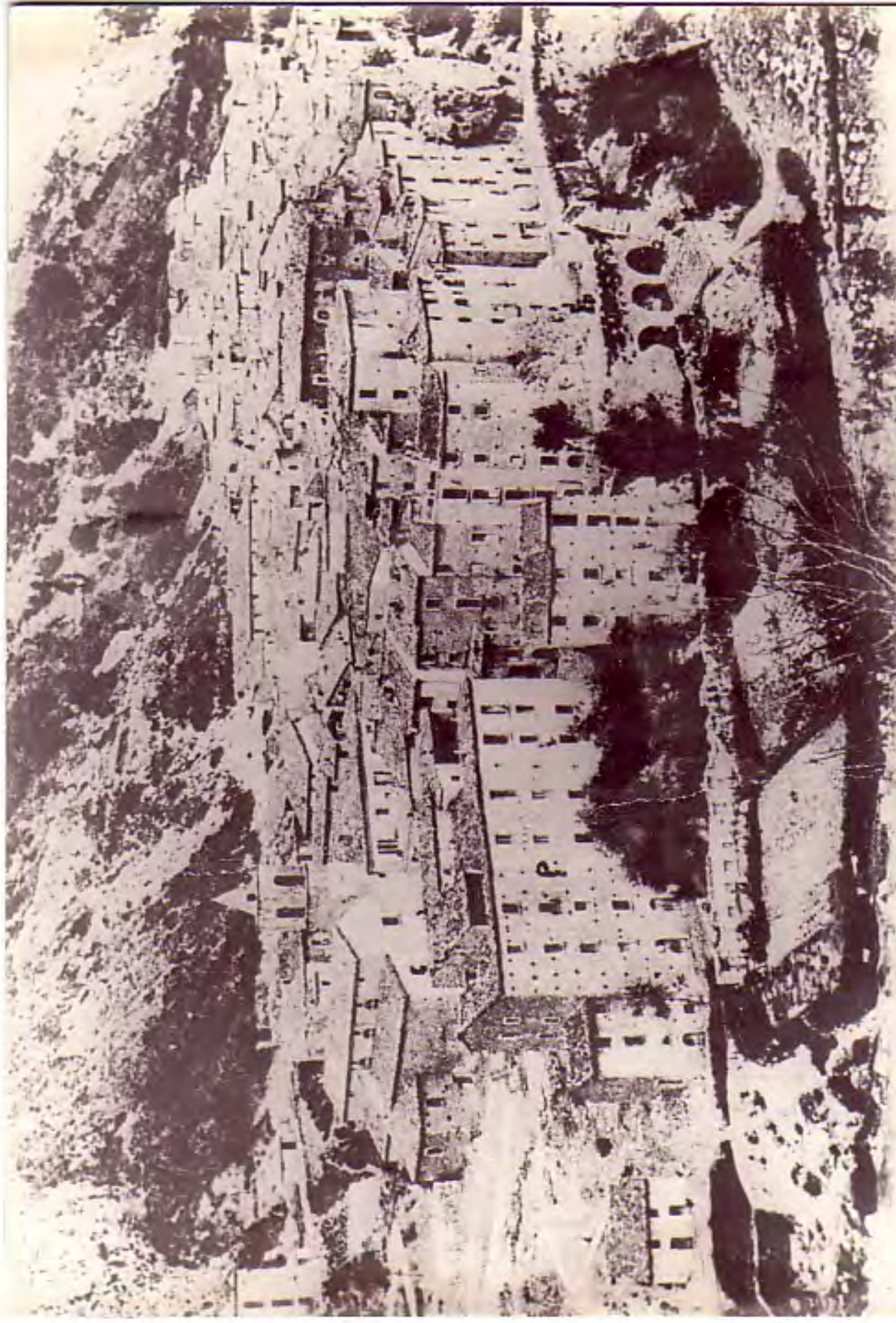
The original village site was a ledge covering less than four hectares, etched from the wall of the towering Maiella massif, and above a deep ravine of the Aventino River. It was similar, in form, to other Abruzzi fortress towns, most of which shared the emigration experience, for emigration was endemic to the whole of the region.

In the post-war years prior to the town's reconstruction, and while awaiting the opportunity to emigrate to Australia, the Lettesi created homes from the then unused stables, on farmland across the river from the original site. In the fields beyond the stables lies the new Lettopalena, strange in its newness from neighbouring Abruzzi villages.



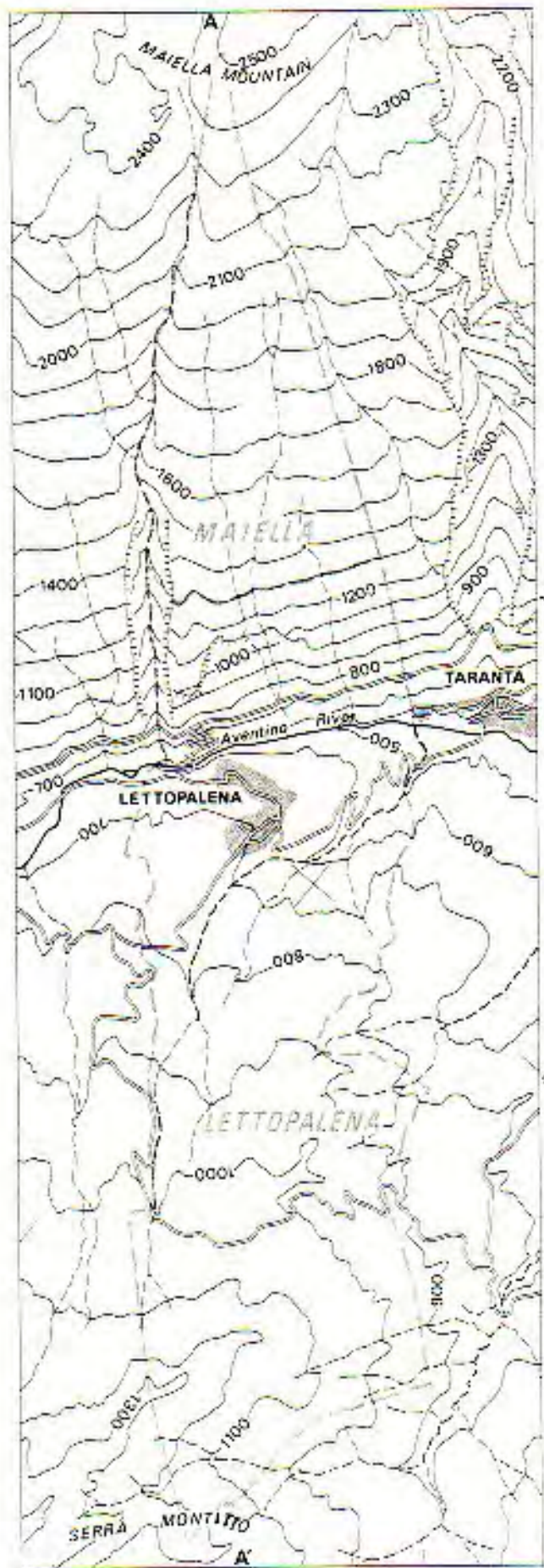
Source: Comune di Lettopalena

Figure : Lettopalena, Situation in Abruzzi



Distrutta dagli eventi bellici nel 1943

Bellopolena (Chieti) - Panorama



LETTOPALENA
ABRUZZI
ITALY

CONTOUR INTERVAL- 100m

CROSS SECTION A-A' AT THE SAME SCALE - NO VERTICAL EXAGGERATION

- Administrative Boundary
- Roads
- Built up Area



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Lettopalena, Site and Cross Section through Village

Migration Patterns

Migration records for Lettopalena, though neither entirely accurate, nor complete, do provide an indication of international migration flows and the patterns they suggest do support the accounts of Lettesi in Australia. When I examined the village records in 1977, there were 752 Lettesi who had emigrated permanently since 1900, their main destinations being the United States (36%), Australia (33%), and Argentina (18%). There were smaller emigration flows to Canada (3.6%), France (3.2%), Belgium (2.6%) and to Germany (1.4%); and just a few had settled in Switzerland, England, Corsica, Africa, New Caledonia, Mexico and New Zealand.

Prior to World War II the principal destinations were the United States and Argentina. Of the 267 immigrants to the United States, 54% arrived in the period before the war; and of the 130 people arriving in Argentina 29% were pre-war immigrants. In contrast only 5% of the 243 Australian intake, emigrated during the pre-war period; 95% came after the war. Australia was the principal post-war destination.

The period of greatest population loss, sustained by the village in the post-war period, was from 1947 to 1956. As post-war immigration opened first to Argentina, some young men, returning from the war, left early to prepare the way for their families; and others were sponsored by family in the United States. However, once immigration to Australia was an option, most of the Lettesi emigrated there. The majority were sponsored, through a process of chain migration, initiated, in the first round, by Antonio Rossetti; then more directly, as the numbers increased, by male family members then resident in Australia.

Of those settled in Newcastle, only a small minority, just twelve Lettesi men, received government assistance. It was a pattern that reflected an immigration policy that discriminated against those from southern Europe, generally, and from southern Italy, more particularly, while favouring British and northern European immigrants through an Assisted Passage Scheme. Despite their lack of government assistance, Lettesi men set out in the early fifties to be followed by their families just a few years later. The process took only seven years, but carried a heavy burden of debt.

As this wave of emigration subsided in the sixties, migration from Lettopalena found a whole new direction. Europe, by then, had recovered from the war and was experiencing an unprecedented economic boom. With work now available closer to home, men from the village were quick to respond. This marked a turning point for the survival of the village.

Migration continued from Lettopalena at an annual rate varying from 0.2% to 11.2%. Simultaneously, however, there was an increase in in-migration, reaching a rate as high as 5.1%; and, for four of the years, even exceeding out-migration. The effect was a reduction in the net loss of people from 369 for the years 1950-1960, to 111 in the decade 1960-1970.

As permanent migration to distant countries no longer presented the only option, most of the moves were now short-term and to destinations closer to home. Of the 37 returning from other parts of Abruzzi, 25 returned the same year they left, and a further seven, after only a year's absence. Of the eight returning from Germany, two returned the year they left, four remained a year and two remained for four years.

For those who did not return there was the reassuring knowledge that at any time they could. Many went home for their annual vacation which usually coincided with the feast of San Vincenzo, a time of much rejoicing; for it was also the time when *paesani* from Australia, America or Argentina would be visiting the homeland.

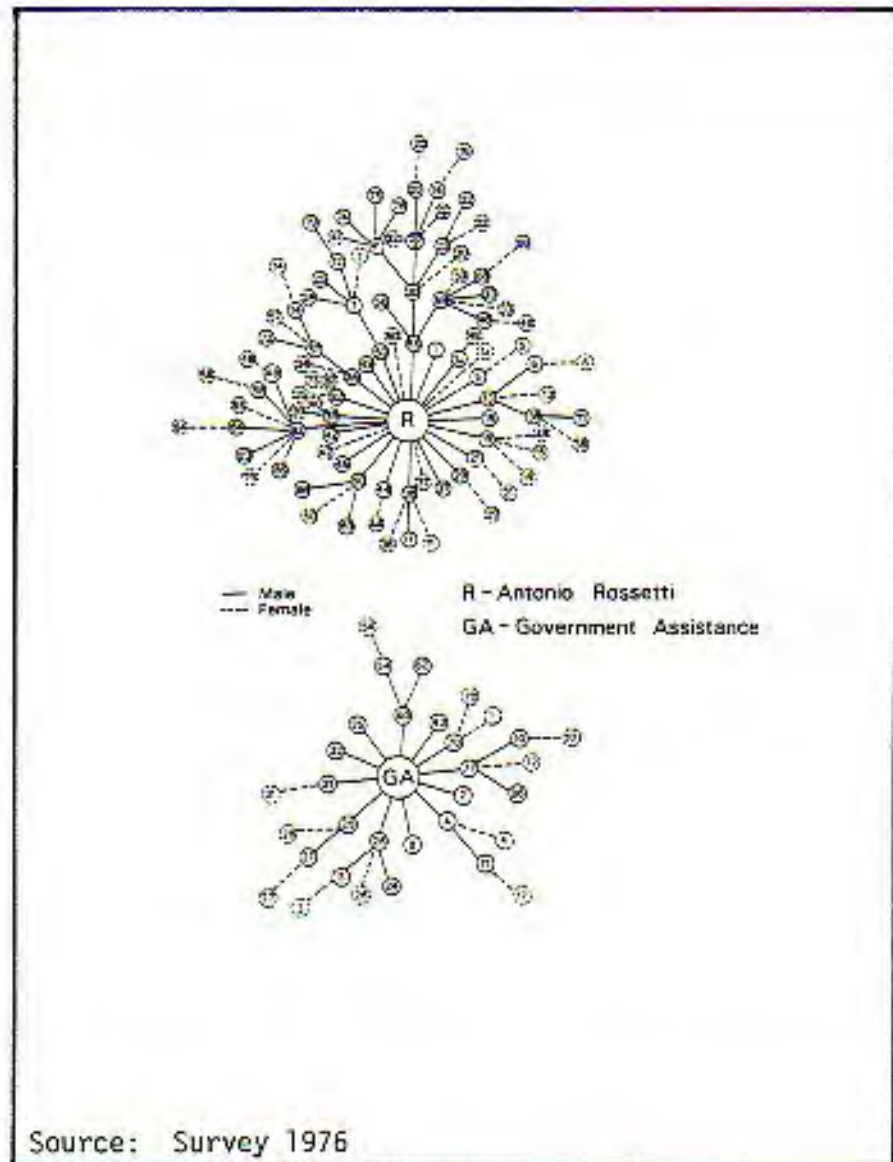


Figure : Chain Migration Networks, Antonio Rossetti and Assisted Immigrants

The Emigration Experience

In his book, “*The Italian Emigration of Our Times*” Foerster (1919:47) described the wide array of factors that had led to emigration:

Hopes, passions and calculations . . . have been the immediate precursors of the decision to emigrate. One man gazes ahead, another is driven from behind; one dreams, another measures and weighs his thoughts; one reasons then follows with his will, while another unquestioningly accepts the decision of a first.

There were long-term causes of Italian emigration that had been endemic throughout Abruzzi, and in southern Italy, generally. Farming conditions inhibited improvement; soils were depleted by erosion and by leaching; farming methods were inefficient; there was increasing pressure of population on the land; and land fragmentation was greatly exacerbated where inheritance required that property be subdivided.

In the 19th century, with the opportunity to emigrate, mainly to America, there was an exodus of Italians, mainly from the south. It began in the 1820s, gathered momentum in the 1870s, abated in the 1920s and resumed after World War II. In *The Two Rosetos* (1974:3) Bianco described the condition of the peasantry, in another mountain town, and how such conditions had led to the emergence of an *urban village*, *Roseto*, in the US.

The poor farmer was abandoned to himself and to the land which he could only exploit over and over again, and the only assurance in his life were his debts, poverty, disease and the destruction brought by wars.

Charles Price (1963:112) concluded that the causes of emigration were exceedingly complex, representing an assessment of the relative advantage of the homeland to place of settlement. Thus the tendency was for movements to occur from economically disadvantaged, overpopulated regions to those which could offer economic opportunity. The driving forces were described as 'push' and 'pull'. There were other factors, too, such as natural disasters, political instability, and personal considerations.

Jerzy Zubrzycki (1976:133) claimed that, whatever the causes, when a *village* pattern evolved in the place of re-settlement, it was usually the end- point of a chain migration process that was generated and sustained by primordial bonds of kinship, belonging and identity. Such bonds were characteristic of small village communities, like Lettopalena. They were the bonds that sustained Lettesi in the past, in the lands to which they emigrated.

The Destruction of the Village

For Lettopalena, emigration had long reflected a basic inability to make a living from the land. The immediate cause, however, was the destruction of the village that occurred in November 1943, after two months of German occupation of the area. The destruction of Lettopalena led to emigration on a massive scale. The devastation and the trauma of what had been experienced, and the anxiety and despair over what could lie ahead, were factors driving the decisions to leave. This can be seen from the mixed but graphic accounts of Lettesi recollections of that terrible event.

German soldiers come in the night to push us away from Lettopalena. Gangs of soldiers pull us away from the bed - 'away'.

We watch from the stables across the river as they blow up each house, one by one. Made us go to Palena, then Roccapia. What was so silly was we went over the mountain, back to the village.

They sheltered again in the village stables, but because they were still in the way of the fighting they were rounded up a second time and forced to return, in blizzard conditions, to Roccapia. On reaching Roccaraso twenty-six had died. Some were lost in the snow; some died from severe exposure; and a woman gave birth just short of the destination. When the soldiers left them again at Roccapia they climbed once more across the Maiella and made their way to the Allied zone, for it was no longer safe to remain around the village. Some people were sheltered in nearby towns like Civitella and Fara san Martino; many were taken to Bari in the south where they remained until the end of the war, for only then was it possible to return to their village.

After two years we went back. Everything destroyed. People cry and cry. Nothing there . . . When Australia opened immigration - that was the solution for Lettopalena.

In 1945 the Australian Government launched an immigration program that aimed to achieve a 1% increase, annually, from immigration. The Lettesi, nevertheless, endured six more years of struggle before the program became reality through a Governments' agreement in 1951; and, even then, only 14% of the Lettesi interviewed received Australian government assistance.

The Aftermath of War

When the people returned to Lettopalena they fashioned their homes from the derelict stables. These had been torched, but while roofing had collapsed, the substantial stone walls had resisted destruction. The living conditions experienced by the people were barely tolerable.

From the stables they could see the ruins of the old town, and this must have been, for them, very depressing. The makeshift homes had only a few rooms, without adequate air, light or services. Families were often large, so conditions were very crowded. Maria recalls how at night she would sleep at her grandparents' home across the street, for their home was too small for their family of four. Yet little could be done to hasten home reconstruction. After 1948 emergency housing was available, but this could accommodate relatively few. War compensation provided 80% of a home cost, but there was no way for Lettesi to raise the remainder.

Feelings of despair were strongly reinforced by the fact that work was virtually unattainable. Farming was not a viable option. Men tried to work the fields but the task was daunting, for the long, tiring hours yielded little in return. Inadequate shelter, combined with lack of work, weighed so heavily upon the people that they sought an escape. Emigration seemed to be the only way out.

When the village employment office finally received the notice inviting applications to emigrate to Australia, the circular was passed by hand around the village. Men grouped to discuss it, deciding whether to apply. Four men were *called* in December 1951 and another eight men, in February 1952. Of Lettesi men in Newcastle, only twelve were *assisted* immigrants. Meanwhile, through the efforts of Antonio Rossetti, others began leaving through the sponsorship scheme. Chain migration was offering a pathway to a collective future that was largely unknown.

3. LETTOPALENA POST-WAR

We never, never had money in the pocket. Never! Didn't know what money looked like.

In the years following the war, Lettesi lives were on hold; and there was little expectation that things would improve. It seemed that the only hope for a decent future was to leave their homeland, and to find a new place and a new life, in a new land. They were a community in search of *place*.

By the 1960s, the combination of factors that had generated emigration had changed to the extent that permanent migration was no longer seen as the only real option. While the impact from emigration, not only on population size, but also on age structure, had threatened the town's viability, other post-war changes now offered the town new hope.

There were employment opportunities closer to home, the new and attractive townscape, the comfortable modern homes, and the relative security and pleasant way of life being offered in the new town. Along with these changes came the ebb-tide of emigration.

Population Change

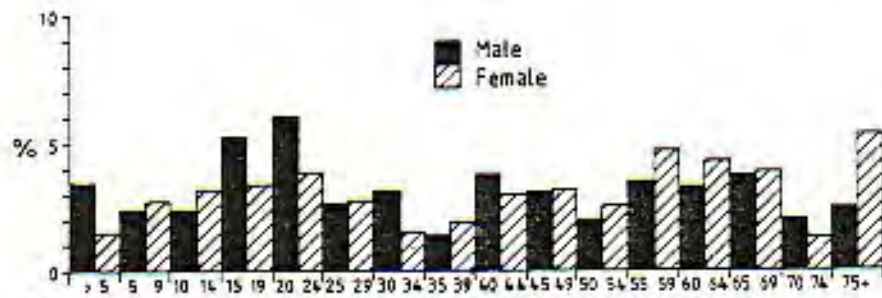
Emigration had made a considerable impact on the size and composition of the village population, and, in turn, this had influenced the course of migration. The population size by 1977 (466) was only half of what it was in 1947 (926). Initially, in the period 1947-1950, there was population increase, despite emigration, possibly because of the post-war baby boom. However, during the early fifties, as emigration gained momentum, there was a period of marked decline, most pronounced in the years 1951 to 1955. Allowing for time in transit, these years correspond to those of the highest intake of Lettesi in Australia.

The trend continued, though the gradient was less marked, until 1971 when population numbers finally reached a plateau. The village population experienced net gains only in 1962 and in 1965, when the increase was 13 and 7 persons, respectively. By 1971 the census recorded 145 families resident in the village. This was about the number in Australia where a new generation of Lettesi was emerging, Australian-born.

The Italian census of 1971 showed how emigration had changed the population structure. It was a process that selected the youth of the village, and its working population. The average age for men, on arrival in Australia, was 24 years, but with 20% aged between 16 to 20 years, and 18% between 21 and 25 years.

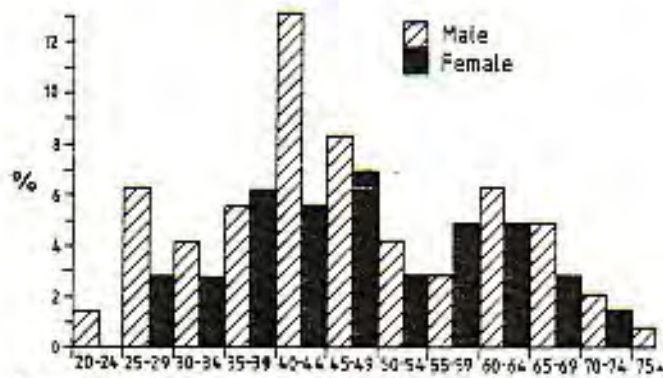
Because women came later, they were older on arrival, their average age being 29 years, but with 25% aged between 21-25 years. Although the majority of emigrants were young, there were two generations participating in the process, and these represented the working population. Those left behind were the aged and younger families.

The 1971 census clearly reflected this loss to emigration of the working population and the dominance of dependents. Lettopalena's age structure showed the categories within the age group of 55 to over 75 years to be proportionally larger than all other age groups except those representing the post-war baby boom (i.e. 15-19 years and 20-24 years). The single exception was the 70-74 year category which was nevertheless larger than the 35-39 year group. This latter category, in fact, was significantly smaller than all the other categories of the age pyramid. In 1976 when I carried out the survey it was clearly apparent that emigration was



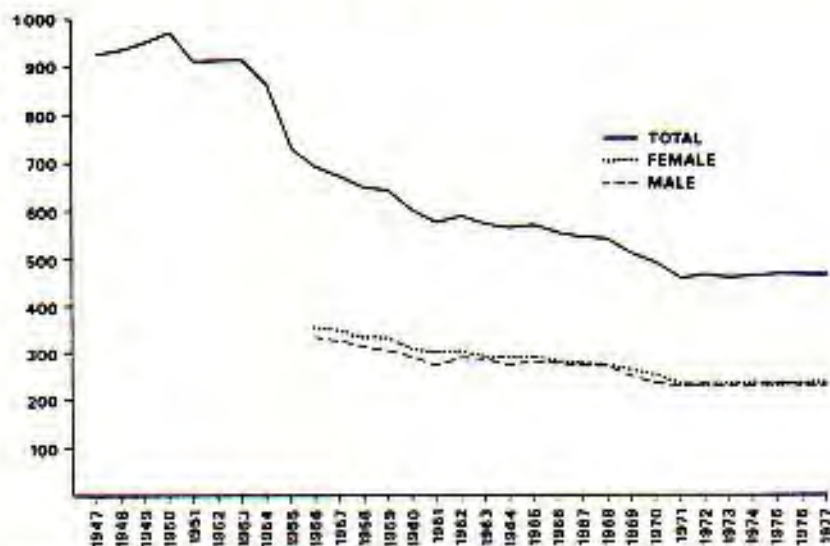
Source: Italian Census 1971

Figure : Population Pyramid, Lettopalena



Source: Survey 1976

Figure : Population Pyramid of Lettesi Respondents, Newcastle



Source: Comune di Lettopalena

Figure : Population Change, Lettopalena 1947-1971

responsible, for this category corresponded to the largest age group of Lettesi then in Newcastle.

There had been, in the village, during the post-war period, an imbalance of the sexes. This would have been particularly apparent had statistics been available for the early 1950s. Emigration was then in a high state of flux with men preceding their wives and families, then sponsoring their immigration four or five years later. According to the annual population records, the village women out-numbered the men, except for the years 1972 and 1975; but by 1971 a plateau had been reached with a low degree of variation between the two groups.

For Lettopalena, the impact of emigration had been substantial; but by the 1970s emigration had run its course. The population had been reduced to 50% of the 1947 numbers so there were fewer people to emigrate. Emigration was selective, so the ones who remained were those who had been the most reluctant to leave. By this stage they were mainly younger families and older women for whom Lettopalena was now a safe haven.

Economic Change

Prior to the war, a family derived its income mainly from farming; but the work was arduous and unrewarding. When I visited the village, in 1976, I could see across the hills, beyond the new town, where the old fields had been abandoned, their relict outlines still etched into the landscape in shapes that reflected generations of inheritance. Some fields were still in use, in close proximity to the village; but apart from the land reclaimed for forestry, there was no visible sign of agricultural reconstruction. Farming, for the Lettesi, was not a viable option.

To find employment, in the pre-war period, men had to leave the village for extended periods. Work opportunities were limited in Europe and modes of transport were too inefficient to allow for commuting on a regular basis, so emigration to the United States and to Argentina, presented the only options. The purpose was to remit the greater part of their earnings to support their families, and to purchase land, for they always meant to return to the village. But because the United States offered far greater opportunity, homecomings were brief, and departures were common, till a family would be *called* to settle there permanently. Argentina, on the other hand, had proved a disappointment, with many remaining trapped there.

By the 1970s the situation was such that to secure work one still had to leave the village; but because of post-war industrial growth with the emergence of the European Economic Community (E.E.C.), and the vastly improved communications in Europe, commuting could occur between workplace and village. The pattern of commuting was a function of distance, occurring daily, for some, to neighbouring parts of Abruzzi; for others, perhaps weekly or monthly to the larger cities; and for *guest workers* within the E.E.C., visits to their homes occurred less frequently. Families, however, would usually remain at home, in Lettopalena.

Maintaining the village home was not necessarily a choice. Douglass (1980) had written critically of the *guest worker* system where foreign workers, including Italians, were frequently the objects of overt discrimination, being used as a source of cheap, unskilled labour that could easily be repatriated with a downturn in the economy. Between the years 1946 and 1970, Douglass had estimated that of the 4,534,000 Italian *guest workers* to E.E.C. countries, 3,011,000 had returned to Italy.

The situation of southerners was little better in northern Italy where job opportunities in the *Industrial Triangle* had led to high rates of internal migration. Douglass(1980, p.31)quotes the following advertisements stating:

Southerners need not apply, and We do not rent to Southerners.

By the 1970s, with the high proportion of aged persons, welfare generated much of the village income, providing a sense of financial security that few could achieve prior to the war. Life had, indeed, been precarious for the farmer. Aged pensions had been restricted to those in government service; and despite the National Pension Scheme, introduced in the 1930s, farmers and fishermen had not been included until 1946.

The ill and unemployed had been dependent on local government and on religious orders like the Silesian Fathers with their weekly distribution of fish for the poor. The poor could obtain *Certificates of Poverty* which entitled a man to just sufficient food or money to enable him and his family to survive. Money was scarce, as one Lettesi recalls:

There was a tobacconist-cantina. We could play cards and have a drink of wine. He had a book for us to sign for what we owed him. Summertime we'd work for him to pay him back. We never, never had money in the pocket. Never! Didn't know what money looked like.

Some had received additional assistance. Through the Ministry of Defence, the *Knights of Vittorio Veneto* (those who had served in the Great War), had been entitled to an annuity in recognition of their services. The sum was small but those who were wounded had also received a partial pension in proportion to their diminished capacity to work. The wives and children of those who had died, either during the war, or as a result of war injury, had also received a war pension. The amount was not significant but it had eased their situation.

The reforms introduced in 1946, and further amended in 1948, extended the National Pension Scheme to everyone; and workers' unemployment and sickness benefits and retrenchment allowances were part of the new provisions for Guest Workers within the E.E.C. Through compulsory contribution to the Integrity Fund, a worker, if dismissed due to closure or lack of work, would receive, from the company, six months pay; and if work was unavailable at the end of that time, unemployment benefits would be payable by the State. An employee who contributed for a 15 year minimum would be entitled, at 60 years, to a minimum sum. Such provisions, by providing income security, alleviated the need for permanent migration.

The New Village Townscape

High above the ruins of the old town, the provincial road, like a drawing on a map, traced a fine line across the smooth face of the Maiella Range. From this road I could view, directly below, the confined site of the old town that had occupied a narrow ledge, 3.8 hectares in area, overlooking a deep ravine. Within the now crumbled walls the density of buildings had been extremely high, with houses packed tightly and generally occupying five or six storeys. Apart from the village square, open space had been non-existent, and roads extremely narrow.

Gazing beyond the ancient bridge that spans so majestically the Aventino River, where the land slopes more gently, I could see the remains of the old stables marking the site of a temporary home-place. Just beyond the stables was the reconstructed village, dispersed across 29 hectares of land; while supporting about half of the old town's population, it covered 7 times the expanse of the original site. Unimpeded by the physical constraints of the old site, a

settlement had emerged that was dramatically different in form and size from the old town, and from other Abruzzi towns.

This unique settlement had a relatively low density. Although there were units, most buildings were detached and most of the households had their own kitchen garden. Private homes comprised a high proportion of the buildings and a number of these had more extensive gardens. Uncharacteristic, also, were the tree-lined streets and footpaths, their generous layout providing ample space for leisure.

The quality of the buildings stood in marked contrast to what was apparent from photographs of the old town. They were solidly constructed, internally spacious and the finish and furnishings were of a high standard. Census figures (1971) showed that in contrast to nearby villages, most of the homes were adequately serviced.

Lettopalena's new townscape projected, for the people, a settled feeling of comfort and security; while high above the town the Maiella stood sentinel, still a symbol of strength, endurance and identity.

The New Way of Life

The villagers enjoyed the easy rhythm of living that was so much in contrast to the pressures forcing emigration. In the morning when it was cool, the village came alive and the people did what needed to be done.

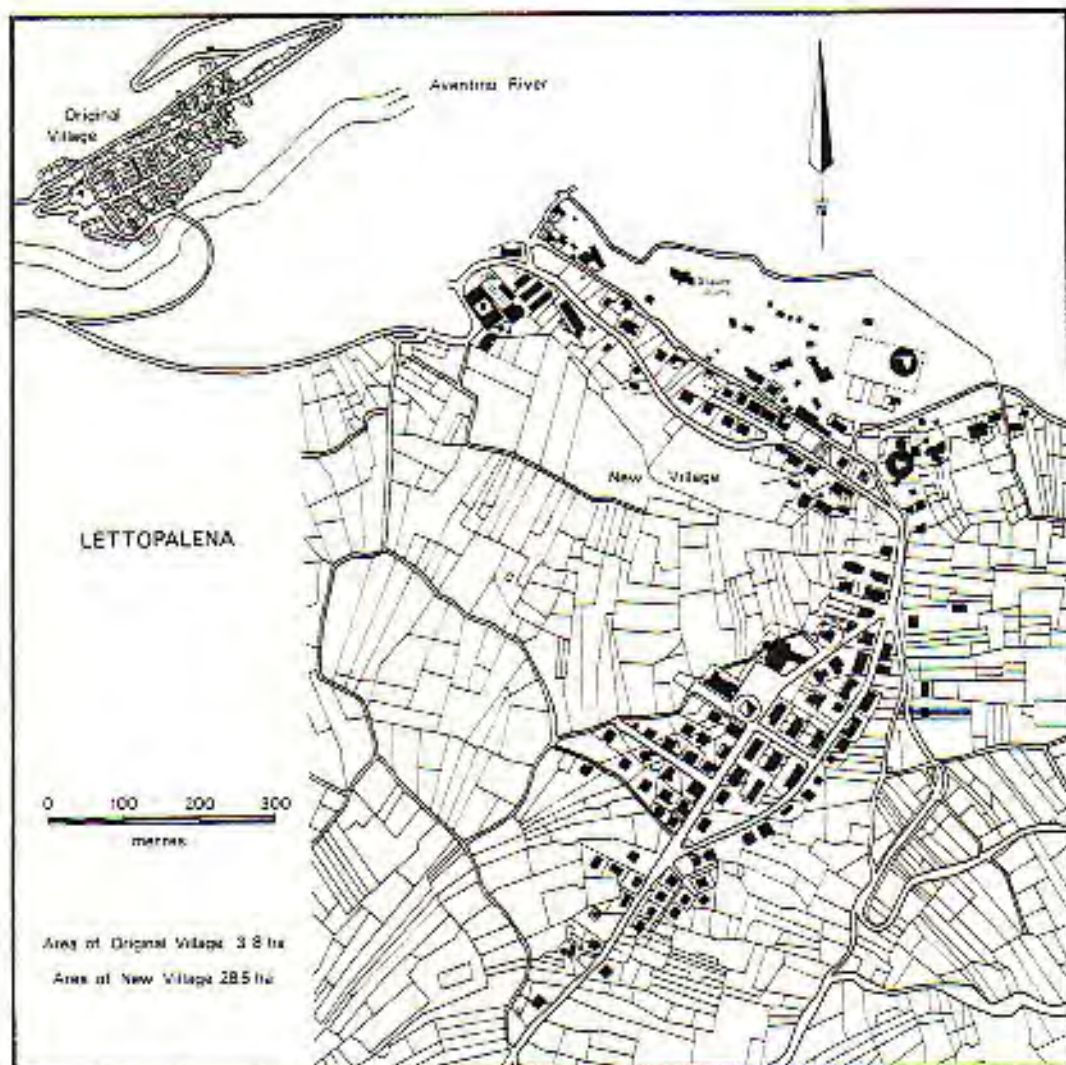
The *Commune* or Council Chambers would open at 8.30, and the other shops, around 9 o'clock. There were two *cantinas* (bars) in the old village; now there were three, two with adjoining grocery areas; and there was a butcher's shop and a post office. From the early morning one could hear the calls and the music of tradespeople selling their wares. Driving through the village, they sold anything from fruit and fish, to children's clothing and mattresses. Some of them set up stalls to sell hardware or regional handcrafts and the people milled around to see what was offering.

At one o'clock the shops would close and all the streets would be suddenly deserted, for the heat of the day was a time for relaxation over the midday family meal, then the afternoon siesta. In the silent streets the only form of life would be a cat stretching languidly beneath the shade of a tree.

Then in late afternoon the village would come alive again, life spilling everywhere, onto the streets, men gathering in groups outside the *cantinas*, arranging a game of cards in the shade beneath the trees and talking and joking while enjoying a drink and cigarette.

The women would sit apart, in small groups beneath the trees or along their front steps leading down to the footpath. They would chat to one another as they watched the children playing along the footpath and on the street, their hands moving rhythmically at their sewing or knitting.

In the cool of the evening, when the sun had set, it was a favourite pastime to walk through the village, especially on Saturday when the main street thronged with people. In winter the pattern changed but the pace of life was still relaxed. Some might describe such a life as idyllic. It seemed so to me.



Source: Comune di Lettopalena

Lettopalena, 3 Sites - Old Town, the Stables and the New Village



The End of Emigration

In summary, the process of chain migration that had led to the formation of Lettesi communities in Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania; Caseros, Argentina; and in Newcastle, Australia, had its origins in the village of Lettopalena, Italy. Here, for generations, in the mountains of the Abruzzi, emigration had been part of the way of life imposed by the agricultural marginality of the land. Against such a background Lettopalena was destroyed and the village faced an exodus that threatened her survival. However, now that the village had been rebuilt, with a safer more secure existence guaranteed, and an easier way of life, there was no imperative to leave.

4. THE CHAIN MIGRATION PATHWAY

When the reasons for emigrating have been compounded the strength of such a chain may have the effect of creating a community more significant in size than that remaining in the parent village (Price 1963).

The migration of people from Lettopalena to Australia follows the chain migration process common to southern European immigrants. The associated pattern of Lettesi *group settlement* is the one of five types of ethnic concentration that Price had identified as *major village to village*. It was the type responsible for 46% of the southern European immigration to Australia (1963, p.112).

The Lettesi story illustrates the significance of this link between *chain migration* and the type of *group settlement* and the role of such a settlement, often called *urban village*, in the process of integration. The term *group settlement* or *urban village* implies the existence of a community support system comprised of a web of primary group relations. It will be seen that such connections, by supporting and informing the Lettesi community on essential life matters, were vital during the period of their immigration and re-settlement.

Choosing Emigration - A Family Affair

Zubrzycki (1976:133) had stressed, in his many writings, how a chain migration process leading to *village* concentrations was dependent upon the basic and compelling human need to maintain *primordial* kin relationships. This basic human drive was fundamental to the emergence of a Lettesi *village* community in Newcastle - a community with a structure made strongly cohesive through an extensive kinship network; a viable structure that functioned to ensure that community needs were met.

When asked about the reasons for their choice of destination, 63% of Lettesi said that family were here; and another 17%, that friends were here. Family and friends were the most important reason; and they, in turn, made community reunion possible, through participation in the sponsorship scheme. The sponsor had to guarantee both work and accommodation, requirements that helped to consolidate communal ties.

My father was in Australia, and elder brothers. Was a new land, new promise. I knew a lot about Australia, even before I came here.

Knew something about it - a new country. Leone already here, Frank Delmonico. All you knew were here. Was desire to be with friends.

Although family and friends were the primary basis for the choice of destination, availability of work was also significant, and was stated as a reason by 26% of people. These factors were closely linked for it was through Lettesi networks that the people had heard about work opportunities and the other advantages offered by Australia. Information about Australia had influenced a further 19% of Lettesi decisions.

Australia said to be the rich country. Guido and Vince Gizzi said it was good. Antonio Rossetti wrote and said there was work.

Uncle Filippo wrote to my mother - 'It's rich country. You find job everywhere. And pay's not too bad.' Filippo arrange accommodation next door.

While similar information could also be obtained, through the community networks, about the United States and Argentina, the United States restricted voluntary entry to those whose families were already there; and many were unimpressed by what they knew of Argentina.

Before the war some went to Argentina. They met misfortune. Had to abandon their families. Had no choice - couldn't support them. Couldn't afford fare back to Italy. Some died miserably.

Immigration was a family and community matter, allowing minimal room for independent decision. Indeed, pressure imposed to hold a family together was often decisive, as it was for Giacinto. On completing military service Giacinto had thought about emigrating to New Caledonia.

Mother cry every day and say - 'Why don't you go to Australia with your father? Whole family go there.' My father say to come, because friends were here.

There were other reasons given by just a few Lettesi. Climate was mentioned by only one person; and so, too, was the prospect of adventure. There were 6% who came with no intention of ever staying; and 7% came because alternatives were unsuitable.

Immigration to Australia was a *community* undertaking. Correspondence with kinfolk, their return visits home, and tales of their experiences were very influential in choosing the place of destination. But family and community were of prime importance, not only in relation to the choice of destination, or as a medium for supplying essential information, but as a vital link in a chain migration process towards *community* re-settlement.

Chain Migration

While Charles Price identified five stages of chain migration, his summary will suffice here. Price states:

The first stage begins when some wanderer from the old world establishes a foothold in the new land. Feeling strange and alone, he either visits the homeland or writes urging friends or family to join him; others from the village or district may follow. Soon, those who become more satisfied or secure sponsor their wives, children and fiancés and before very long a community is established.

At this stage older people feel sufficiently secure to follow their sons and daughters and their families; and others will allow their children to emigrate. Then as the village becomes increasingly depopulated, those who remain may also want to leave. When the reasons for emigrating have been compounded the strength of such a chain may have the effect of creating a community more significant in size than that remaining in the parent village
(Price 1963, p.112).

The Early Pioneers

he first Lettesi to settle in Australia was Giacomo De Vitis in 1925. Giacomo and his brother-in-law, Arcangelo Rossetti, like many from the village, had already been to America. Giacomo had been there four or five times. Arcangelo went, as a boy of seventeen, in 1900, returned there twice before the outbreak of World War 1, then again in 1923. His father had previously been to Argentina, sometime before the turn of the century. As mentioned before,

Giovanni De Vitis in Proserpine





Nick De Vitis in Proserpine



this pattern was typical of the pre-war immigrants, not only from Lettopalena, but from southern Europe generally.

On arriving in Australia, Giacomo De Vitis found work in the cane fields near Proserpine, north Queensland, with Giovanni De Martini at Kelsey Creek. Giovanni had sponsored first Giacomo, then Arcangelo, in 1927. Each of them then sponsored other members of their families, Giacomo his brother Giulio (1928), then his son Giovanni (1932). Shortly before the Second World War Giulio left for America, then returned to Lettopalena.

Arcangelo, meanwhile, sponsored two of five sons, Antonio (1929) and Giacomo (1931). On a visit to the village, in 1935, Antonio married and returned to Australia. Arcangelo, however, on revisiting the village in 1932 had remained there for 25 years. But with the family then all settled in Australia, he returned in 1958, and remained until his death in 1974.

In the earlier years thoughts were directed towards Italy and emigration was seldom regarded as being permanent. The turning point came for emigration to Australia when Arcangelo's sons, Antonio and Giacomo, bought the cane-farm at Foxdale in 1938; then after the war, when Giacomo sold his share to Antonio and bought the farm at Strathdickie. Work and accommodation could now be guaranteed; and so the farms became a base for sponsoring Lettesi immigrants, providing the impetus to chain migration and community consolidation, *en route* to their destination.

Key Link in the Chain - Antonio Rossetti

In his efforts to guarantee both work and accommodation, Antonio engaged support from other Italian farmers, who were then gaining strength in the sugar industry in Queensland. Such guarantees were necessary to satisfy the requirements of the Australian Government's sponsorship scheme.

Antonio's support and personal influence facilitated the process, either directly or indirectly, for the majority of Lettesi. While there were only twelve men who had gained support through the Government Assisted Passage Scheme, Antonio had either sponsored, or acted as intermediary, to 25 people, 21 of them men. These men, with his support, then sponsored their own families.

Antonio's significance to the chain migration process can be seen from the diagram. It shows that Antonio, by being responsible for the immigration of 25 people, had initiated further chains that, in only four relays, had assisted the immigration of most of the community. Those *called* by their relatives, and sponsored, officially, by other Italian farmers, depended on his support, and that of his brother, Giacomo.

There are others who may have been part of his network. Fourteen respondents were sponsored by seven people who have since died, or left the community, so their method of arrival is not known. Most of them, however, were older men and were probably sponsored by other Lettesi and supported, in some way, by Antonio Rossetti.

Antonio was also involved indirectly with some who were assisted by the Australian Government. There were 22% of Lettesi respondents who were either assisted or were part of a chain that was initiated by assisted Lettesi immigrants. Of the twelve men directly assisted by the government, five did not initiate further immigration. Of the remaining seven, one



*World War II Australian Army Serviceman, Giacomo Rossetti in
Brisbane, 1943*



*Vincenzo Rossetti, Giacomo De Vitis, Giovanni De Vitis and Angelo Rossetti,
Bonegilla*

sponsored his wife, while the rest of them sponsored several other persons. Five of these people then sponsored their wives.

Although they arrived independently of the community, half of those assisted gravitated to Proserpine where they worked cutting cane for Antonio or Giacomo, or for one of the other farmers known to Antonio. Some of their nominees were helped by him, as well. By initially sponsoring so many Lettesi and providing a base for community growth, Antonio facilitated community survival.

Passage to Australia - Mr. Celedonia

Antonio could arrange both work and accommodation and official sponsors for prospective immigrants; but in almost every case loans had to be negotiated to cover the cost of passage to Australia. Most of the loans (40%) came from Mr. Celedonia, an agent from Sulmona, a town in L'Aquila Province, west of the Maiella Range. Relatives provided 48%; and the remainder came from the following sources: family in Lettopalena (5%), Antonio Rossetti (5%), the Australian Catholic Union (1%) and kinfolk in America (1%).

A comparison of men and women shows that 47% of men received a loan from Mr. Celedonia, compared to 29% of women. Having acquired a loan, a man would often emigrate, then save sufficient money for his family to follow; so that 62% of female fares came from family sponsors compared to 36% of male fares. Either directly, or indirectly, Mr. Celedonia made emigration possible for most of the community, for without that passage, sponsorship was useless.

Otherwise nobody come to Australia. He was a nice fellow to everybody.

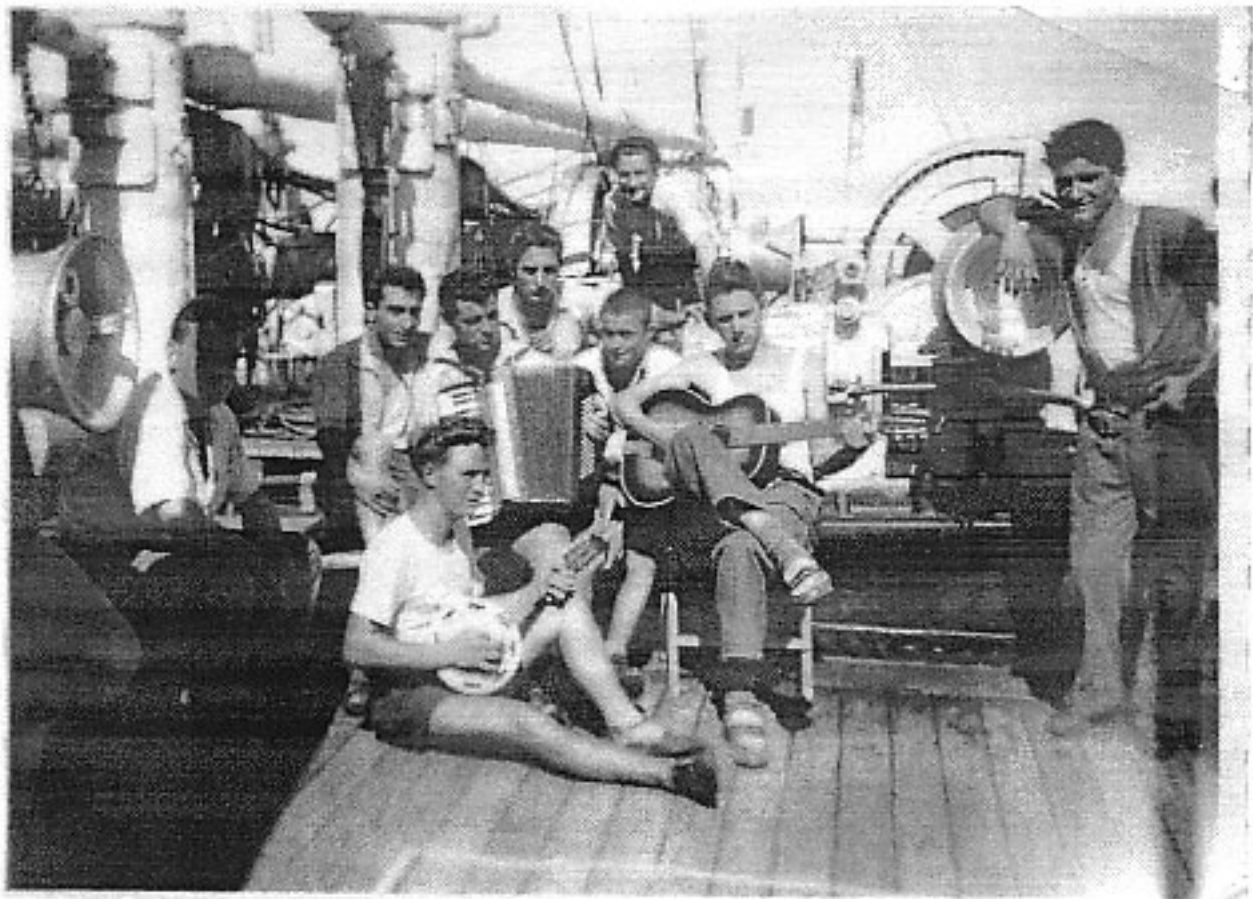
Was godfather to Lettesi.

The Core Support Unit - the Family

The role of the early pioneers was crucial and little could have been achieved without help from Mr. Celedonia; yet the process was, essentially, one of family migration. Nuclear and extended family relationships were channels of communication providing a flow of information and material support. This kinship system was the engine room driving the emigration process from Lettopalena to Australia and the system of support that sustained the community during the period of re-settlement .

The degree of interconnectedness was exceedingly high. On the assumption that information would pass to first cousin, three relays were extended throughout the community. After a single relay, 29% of potential community links were connected; by the second relay, 59%; and by the final relay, 80%. There was a high degree of Lettesi interaction with only one family that was isolated from the rest. Such a degree of connectivity was highly significant, not only to the process of chain migration, but to community formation and stability through time.

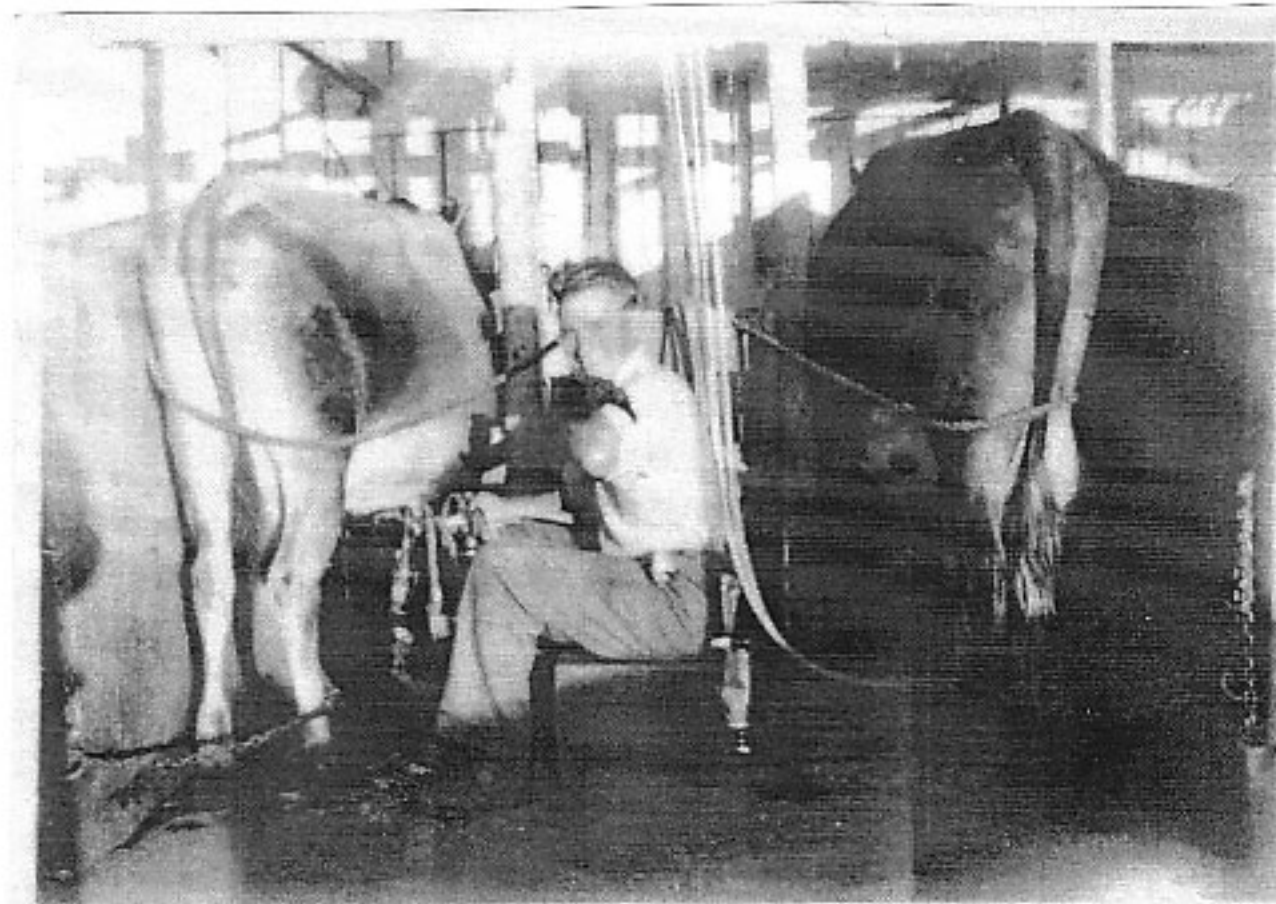
Most sponsorships occurred within the nuclear family. Excluding the direct nominees of Antonio, family members sponsored 80% of those remaining, with husbands arranging 43%, fathers 33%, brothers 20%, and sons 4%. A further 13% were sponsored by members of extended families, mostly by brothers-in-law. Only 7% were arranged by a person outside the



Nicolino De Vitis on board ship to Australia



Nicolino De Vitis, Tasmania



family. Leadership was essential for community survival but the primary support came from adult male members of nuclear and extended families. They, too, assumed the ultimate responsibility for the crippling debts incurred by emigration.

The Wider Support Network - the Lettesi Community

The chain migration pathway, via Proserpine in Queensland, to an emergent *group settlement* centred on Hamilton, though consistent with Price's *major village to village* type, was nevertheless unique in terms of the personalities and the extended family networks that made the process happen. The pattern of co-location, first in Proserpine, then in Newcastle, was one that represented the collective decisions of Lettesi people functioning as *community*. It was a community with a structure of roles and relationships that supported its members, both practically and emotionally, during the long period of adjustment.

5. STEPPING STONES TO COMMUNITY

It's the places you've been to - the place you live - like a bird comes back to where it's been - to the places that are familiar.

The early years of re-settlement brought a high level of mobility, for to earn sufficient money to repay their debts and to sponsor their families, men had to be on the move. The moves, in these early years, except for those of the assisted immigrants, were mainly associated with seasonal work in the cane and tobacco areas of northern Queensland; and to a lesser extent, in the fruit-growing areas of the Murray Valley and the MIA.

In the off-season period a pattern emerged where Lettesi found work as labourers in heavy industry, mainly in Newcastle. It was a mirror-image of the pattern that was centred on Proserpine; and though Proserpine was, initially, the place to which they gravitated, in time its importance became that of a stepping-stone, a secure resting-place *en route* to their destination.

Proserpine - A Stepping Stone

The chain migration pathway led 50% of the men into work cutting cane, for periods of time, in farms around Proserpine; but their stays were usually of short duration due to scarcity of work during the cane off-season.

The majority (66%) remained for the full six months season, with only 15% leaving within six months, mainly in search of work. For the remaining 19% the length of stay ranged from six months to six years; and many returned for successive seasons - 5% for four seasons, 12% for three and 28% for two seasons. The 56% who had only one season there were mostly the late arrivals or the older men for whom cutting cane was very demanding. Their immediate priority was family reunion, and this demanded a permanent job, and a home where the family could, finally, settle. Giovanni De Vitis, great-grandson of Giacomo, the first arrival, was their link to this destination.

Newcastle – the Destination

While preferring to be with *paesani* in Proserpine, work was not always available there; and yet, it was essential. While some found work in other places nearer-by, at Mareeba, Innisfail, Mackay and Ingham; others had to venture further afield to the fruit-picking areas of Mildura and Griffith. At most of these places the only job available was in seasonal agricultural work. At the end of the season, some would head south; but most of them alighted when the train pulled into Newcastle. Giovanni was there and there was work in the heavy industries.

The twelve assisted immigrants had limited choice, being bound to work wherever the government decided for a two-year period. On landing in Melbourne they were taken to Bonegilla camp, then sent to locations far away from one another - to Melbourne and Adelaide, to power plants in Yallourn and to the Snowy Mountains Authority, to dairy farms in Tasmania and in Gippsland, Victoria, to a wheat farm in Orange, to the Forestry Commission, and to an irrigation project in Millicent, South Australia. There was rarely the opportunity to see one another, or to communicate, at all, except by letter. Antonio and Nicolino wrote letters in English, correcting one another, as a way to learn the language.

Few of them remained for the full two-year term, however. Without family and friends they felt a strong sense of desolation, and there were periods when the government could not provide work. They eventually made their way to either Proserpine or Newcastle where Lettesi were creating a more permanent home. Meanwhile those from Proserpine who had gravitated to Newcastle, on a temporary basis, just for the off-season, began to stay longer because jobs there were permanent; but mainly because a community was now emerging as an identifiable support group.

Linking Proserpine to Newcastle - Giovanni De Vitis

Giovanni de Vitis was the principal link in the chain migration pathway leading from Proserpine to Newcastle. He was the great-grandson of Giacomo De Vitis, the first pioneer and brother-in-law of Arcangelo. Following the war, Giovanni went to Newcastle in 1947 to find permanent work in industry, and later, on the wharves.

Unlike his Rossetti cousins, Giovanni had been unable to provide the guarantees of work and accommodation that were required to sponsor *paesani* from the village. But now, through his guidance, a community was evolving, not in Port Kembla where the jobs were more abundant, but in Newcastle, mainly, because Giovanni was there.

Re-uniting the Family

The older men who were the first to join Giovanni worked tirelessly to support their family in the homeland, to purchase a home and to repay their travel costs and those of family members still awaiting emigration. Fathers and sons, wherever they were working, would pool their income to buy the family home and to pay it off, as soon as possible, for word had got around that *interest was the killer*. By continuing to pool income, a home would then be purchased for each of the sons. It was a huge family undertaking.

The first Lettesi to join Giovanni in Newcastle came in 1949, another five in 1950, then only one in 1951. As others began to join them there was a marked increase, peaking in 1952 (17) and in 1954 (19). Of the 90% of Lettesi male adults who had settled in Newcastle by 1957, not all had remained on their first occasion; but by 1962 the migration flow had stopped. They had reached their destination.

The Role of Chance

Chance factors played a part in the community's development, especially with the vagaries of work opportunity. Giuseppe, for example, had a ticket to Mildura where he planned to pick grapes during the cane off-season; but on the announcement of the train's arrival in Newcastle, and recalling this to be the place where some Lettesi friends lived, he broke his journey - just for a visit. By the following day, however, he had found a job and stayed on.

His father-in-law was not so lucky. Arriving there with the intention of staying, he went in search of work. Having no money for a bus fare, he walked to the industries, only to be told that there was nothing at all available. Despite help from Lettesi friends, he finally gave up and left for Melbourne. Some Lettesi, a minority, settled in other parts of Australia; but the majority still reside permanently in Newcastle.

Italian Links

by
Franco Ridenood



THE JOHN DE VITIS FAMILY STORY

My father, Giovanni (John) De Vitis, was born in Lettopalena, Italy on 22nd February 1915 and my mother, Orsina De Vitis (nee Martinelli), was born in the same town on 17th July 1922. Sponsored by the Demartini family, Dad arrived in Australia in 1932 when he was only 17 years old. His cousin, Jim Rossetti, had migrated from their town in 1931 and they were meant to come together but Dad's departure was delayed for 12 months.

John's father, Jim De Vitis, had also been sponsored by Demartinis who provided work for him on their Kelsey Creek farm on his arrival in Australia in 1927. His mother Rosa, had passed away in Italy. His father was working on the Daffara farm at Strathdiekie when John arrived and obtained work on the neighbouring farm of the Cortese family before going to Home Hill for the cane cutting season. Reminiscing on John's life in those early days, Jim Rossetti and Fil Daffara say he was "happy go lucky, an easy fellow to live with. He loved dancing and never missed a dance at the Strathdiekie Hall. He was a pretty natty dresser too!" adds Fil with a grin.

John cut cane for Aldo Zeglio at Foxdale, then on the Origliasso/Fiorito farm at Crystalbrook for some years before the war. In 1942 he was recruited into the Civil Construction Corps and was not released from these duties for three years. He first worked in the Northern Territory and was then sent south where, in 1943, whilst working in Yelarbon, he met Iolanda (Ioli) Buzzi, who, as fate would have it, later married Jim Rossetti.

Franca continues: After the war, Dad returned to Proserpine and stayed with his cousin Tony Rossetti and family at Foxdale. Finding that cane cutting would not resume for a while, he talked it over with the Rossettis and decided to try for work at BHP in Newcastle where many Italians had found work.

Dad worked at both BHP and the dockyard.

It was at this time that he wrote to Mum and asked her to marry him. This was after much letter writing and looking at photos from a mutual paesano who brought news and photos of their home town. Needless to say, Mum accepted and they were married by proxy. Dad going through the formalities on 20th June 1950. Mum and Peppino Rossetti (Jim and Tony's brother, who stood in for Dad) had the wedding day in Italy on 21st October 1950.



Left: Domenica Gizzi, Rosa, Orsina, Franca and John De Vitis c 1958

The first thing Dad did when he arrived in Newcastle was to apply for Australian citizenship. It took a while for the applications to be processed in both countries so that Mum could migrate to Australia.

In 1953, Mum arrived and Dad continued to work at BHP. My sister Rosa was born on 22nd July 1954 and I arrived into the world on 11th March 1956. The family went to Proserpine in 1958 and over the next nine years Dad worked on the farms of Fil Daffara, Ron Peterson, Reg Muller, Jim Rossetti, Mr Renwick, Herb Winton and Mr Thompson.

In 1959, the late Ron Peterson had a farm at Strathdiekie and was grouped with Fil Daffara for the crushing. Mrs Peterson recalls an incident when John, riding his bike

(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 9)

between the farms, fell and gashed his arm deeply. He refused Mrs Peterson's offer to take him to the doctor, simply asking her to help bandage the wound so he could get to the paddock to cut the cane. Domenico Gizzi, nephew of John's and cousin of the Rossetti families, was John's cutting partner at the time.

Franca concludes: *Rosa and I attended school at Foxdale, then Lethebrook, St Catherine's and Proserpine High School. We worked at Fausti's on school holidays: filling shelves, rolling up calendars, weighing and bagging lollies, measuring fabric at stock-take time and packing people's groceries. Rosa also worked at the newsagency for a time. The highlight of our week was going to the Eldorado or Grand Theatre and I'll never forget those adjustable canvas chairs at the theatres. I recall it was only a shilling to go to the pictures and then went up to fifteen cents when the currency changed. I remember so many things about Proserpine.*

My Dad was a tall, solid looking man who liked simple pleasures of a good story and a hearty laugh with his family and friends, and a beer of course. (Just remembering those very hot days and how appropriate a cold XXXX or VB was!) On occasion, the men would go and catch some mud crabs and we would have a feast. Our family frequently visited Rosa and Guido Tocco, Barry and Dolly Fahey, Silvana (now deceased) and Frank De Vitis. Such good times! Dad was a very good provider who strongly believed in a good education and that one could never have enough education. Mum dearly loved to sew and she sewed all our clothes, every stitch we had on, even our hats. Machinery took over the backbreaking work of cutting cane, so Dad's last days of employment were spent working on the railway. At times he would go for the whole week, with Mum cooking enough prepared food for him to take to the railway camp.

As Mum recalls, it was 26th January, 1968 Australia Day celebrations at the airport where Miss Proserpine, Maria Tocco, had won a joy flight. It was very

exciting for us just to see the planes take off as we waved to Maria a long while. On the way to the airport, Dad had accidentally run over a particular lizard. He was later told that the incident was considered bad luck, perhaps a bad omen of sorts. From that night Dad was never the same. He began to have chest pains but did not allow Mum to send for the doctor. The next morning the doctor told him that he required a non-physical type of work and to take things easy. He had a full physical check up at Townsville Hospital: everything checked out okay so he went back to work until he had more severe chest pains and was admitted to Townsville Hospital for three months. Dad returned to Proserpine where he stayed another three weeks in hospital, but died of another heart attack on 13th February, 1969, nine days short of his 54th birthday. He rests in peace at Proserpine cemetery. To say the least, we all love him and miss him very much. We remember and appreciate the kindness and



Standing: Domenico Rossetti, Rosa Tocco, Lina De Vitis, Rosina De Andrea.
Sitting: Orsina De Vitis, Marianna Rossetti, baby Tony Tocco, Iolanda Rossetti
c1958

support of dear friends and the community. Mum began to work at the Proserpine Hotel a couple of days a week and then worked at the Convent. We then moved from Zeglio's old house in Mill Street to a shared flat of two rooms in Smith Street until we moved to Newcastle. We left Proserpine in 1970 during cyclone 'Ada'. (A cyclone had also greeted us when we arrived)

Today my Mum is still going strong and my sister is happily married to Robert Ferfaglia with two grown up boys (Michael, 22 and Andrew, 18). I also am happily married to John Ridewood and have two girls (Bridgette, 14 and Beth, 10). I visited Proserpine in 1974 and again in 1996 but found everything had changed. The things that I did find the same were Dad's grave site (very well kept as if we had just left it), the huge tree that I spent hours climbing and the merry-go-round in the park next door to the policeman's home were still there. Last, but not least, it was so good to see Barry, Dolly and all the Fahey family again. Arrivederci Proserpine, Franca.

Some of the Lettesi left Australia altogether, though the returnee rate was low, about 8% of adult males. The reasons for leaving varied. Two of the men left, intending to return but their families in the village persuaded them to remain there; one returned because his wife was ill; another to care for an aged parent. Giuseppe had left for New Caledonia, because he wanted to join his girl who was living there; and a few more left for reasons unknown.

The returnee rate of 8% was exceptionally low, especially when compared to the general rate for Italian males of 26% (1947-1971); and a comparative rate for foreign-born males of 23% (Price and Martin 1975, p.A25).

The Role of Community

The low returnee rate implied a high degree of satisfaction with life in Australia. Lettesi feelings of satisfaction would have been enhanced from being part of a close-knit community. The community was a buffer between Lettesi and the host society. It could satisfy the basic, primary human need of belonging, sharing and identifying with the group; while, at the same time it could function as a vital support system, facilitating access to services and resources via the networks of the group. This could provide the higher living standard and quality of life that could increase satisfaction and their desire to remain on a permanent basis.

6. A COMMUNITY RECLAIMED

To me everyone is a relation. The heart speaks to one another . . . It's something different, the community. It gives you a feeling of belonging.

Community Bonds

These were the words of Antonio Della Grotta, long-term President and Secretary of the community. His words touch the very core of the meaning of *community*, being those primal relations referred to by Zubrzycki, and the spirit that gave life to the Lettesi as a group.

The Lettesi story shows how kinship ties bind more strongly than nationality, or other *social* ties; for the village social structure was woven down the centuries into a closely-knit web of kinship interrelationships in a pattern that persisted from the village to Australia. There was continuity, and change, as well; for while kinship remained the main driving force in the emergent social structure, new roles evolved to meet the new challenges, with the dominant function of the community, as a whole, becoming that of a *support system* in facilitating integration.

The Urban Village

While ethnic social areas in the cities of Australia have often been identified from mapping census data, such data disguises the existence of complex, and socially meaningful, *urban village* settlements. These settlements are spatially and socially distinctive, evolving through a process of change and continuity of structure and function, from origin to destination. However, census statistics tell us nothing of this story. It is the story of a people and their relationships with one another.

The Lettopalena community, as a distinctive entity, is a special example of a *village to village* settlement, formed by a process of chain migration that was dependent mainly on kinship ties. But while community formation, through chain migration, was a process common to other southern Europeans, the solidarity and stability that has characterised this community, by comparison to other groups, is an outcome that reflects their personal history - the destruction of their village and its regeneration, as a functioning community, bridging Italy and Australia.

The Lettesi Sick Fund

The roles and relations that guided emigration and forged new pathways for internal migration that led to the emergence of a community in Newcastle, continued to function in response to changing need, and, in time, there emerged a formal committee structure. The committee was called *The Lettesi Sick Fund*. It evolved, informally, from the need to resolve a recurring pattern where, responding to a need, individuals would do the rounds, cycling or on foot, to take up a collection. At that time needs were great, financial pressures ever-present, and the community was of a size that made this process too cumbersome, too disorganised, and too inefficient.

A formal committee structure could identify specific roles and establish a sustainable financial basis to ensure that funds would be instantly available, where and when the need demanded. The committee that evolved was a microcosm of a system of interconnected

kinship networks, with committee positions representing some of the largest extended families. There was a sense that the formal committee structure, endorsed by the members, conveyed a true reflection of the informal roles and relationships between the members. This coherence, or *wholeness*, of form and function conveyed that sense of the Lettesi representing an *ideal type* community.

Leadership and Support

Needs were, by nature, both emotional and practical and covered every aspect of a person's life. Expressive, or emotional needs were an interpersonal matter, and could be met, most effectively, within the family and community. On the other hand, the practical, or instrumental needs required access to services and resources that were available through mainstream institutions or private enterprise, somewhere - out there, in the wider community.

Those most adept at searching for solutions and finding out what was available and where to find it, soon assumed roles of leadership and support. These leaders forged connections with the wider society to access information and material resources in the areas of housing, employment, health, education, welfare and recreation; and they disseminated information via the interpersonal channels of the Lettesi social networks. They became, in effect, *opinion leaders* and/or community *gatekeepers*.

Continuity and Change

The changing fortunes of Lettopalena are reflected in the pattern of emigration to Australia. During the long pre-war period of sustained emigration the early pioneers began to settle in Queensland; and when the village was destroyed, so many had to leave that a permanent community became established in Newcastle. Once the flow had subsided, the community worked to accommodate a range of new social needs.

The Lettesi community remains closely linked to that of the parent village, and to communities in Turtle Creek (USA) and Caseros, Argentina, through strong kinship networks; for the roles and relationships that were adapted by the community to the needs and aspirations of the new social setting, are embedded in the history and kinship structure of the village. These ties remained strong during emigration and re-settlement.

7. FINDING A HOMEPLACE

All the friends, we talk. You pass the voice to one another . . . The voice was there all the time. If something was going on, we all knew about it.

The primary need was shelter. The key resource was information. Lettesi consolidation as an *urban village* community was achieved through a series of interdependent choices on where to make a home. It was a community undertaking.

During the period of high mobility, residential needs varied, relating, first, to the mode of immigration; and, secondly, to the stage that re-settlement had reached. Immigrants who arrived with assisted passage had been housed, initially, by the government, in Bonegilla; then wherever the government sent them. Others were accommodated by sponsors in Proserpine. A decision to live in Newcastle meant the loss of these supports; and so Lettesi turned to one another for assistance.

Islington - First Port of Call

The first arrivals in Newcastle, mainly older men, were met at the station by Giovanni de Vitis, their primary contact. Their aim was to find cheap board so they could save; something that was temporary and close to one's friends, as long as it was cheap. Islington, a poorer, inner-city suburb, met that initial need. Not only was board cheap, but there was transport to the industries. The real goal was to buy a house - *a roof over the head*, so they could reunite the family, as quickly as possible.

Cheap board was first provided by Polish refugees who, having arrived a few years earlier, had bought up cheaper homes and were struggling to pay them off by taking in boarders. They rented out rooms to Lettesi from Proserpine, and with sharing of accommodation there was much over-crowding. When Lettesi, themselves, began to acquire homes, many would rent to fellow *paesani*. The shortest stays occurred at the place of initial residence, the length of stay increasing with subsequent moves.

Domenico Tranchini was one of the first to buy a home. It was in Watson St. Islington. With Domenico's home being a primary focus for information and support, Islington became a rallying point and first port of call.

Hamilton - Home - 'Little Lettopalena'

Later arrivals came to depend on the older generation leaders, who, being the first to buy homes, would let rooms to *paesani*. But when selecting a home they looked beyond Islington to adjoining suburbs where housing densities were lower and the homes somewhat larger. Some of them chose Mayfield, the suburb closest to the industries; but it soon became clear that Hamilton was the preferred choice.

As more Lettesi arrived, accommodation was provided by a wider range of households, including family and extended kin. The trend towards home ownership increased community solidarity; for not only did it mean that board accommodation could now be provided by other Lettesi; but it also gave permanence to the sense of community, a community for whom Hamilton had come to mean *home*.

Lettesi home ownership achieved its peak with the move to the fourth residential location; and four residential moves was the most common number to be experienced by Lettesi. By their fourth location 62% of the community either owned or shared in the ownership of a home.

The Channels of Information

When finding accommodation or selecting their first home, most Lettesi used interpersonal channels for information on where they were available. In time, however, with successive home purchases, the source of information ranged from other Lettesi, through impersonal agents to mass media channels.

In the early years, interpersonal Lettesi channels were invaluable for finding temporary accommodation; then, again, in relation to the first three home purchases. There was a decrease in their importance only by the fourth and subsequent homes, for which English-speaking agents, becoming marginally more important, were initially approached.

In the beginning, the most significant source of information were some older generation men - Corrado Martinelli, for 13 people, Donato De Vitis (11), Giovanni Tranchini (9), Guido Gizzi (9) and Francesco Del Monaco (9). Then there were the newer generation leaders, family and other kin.

Lettesi informants were effective channels, providing information, via their social networks, relative to their proximity to the ever-changing housing market. *For Sale* signs, nearby, provided a ready source of information. Agents did not initiate any first home purchase and Australian-born agents remained unimportant. A pattern of dependence did emerge, however, with a few European agents, one Polish and two Lettesi.

The Polish agent, Stan Kuzmik, took a personal interest in tenants, often lending them heaters and other household items. His approach generated trust. For a period of time, he had a Lettesi in his employ, and *paesani* were encouraged to engage his assistance. Being fluent in a number of European languages, Stan was significant as a residential *gatekeeper* to immigrants, generally, and to a number of Lettesi. Other Europeans were rarely consulted, but some Italians were.

Another Lettesi, Giuseppe (Joe) Borrelli, later became an agent and ran a successful agency. As a boy Giuseppe had been sent from the village to receive an education at a seminary in Italy. Most likely this gave him the confidence and skill that he needed to establish a complex, competitive business; and Lettesi home-seekers provided a ready market.

Mass media channels were insignificant, especially in relation to the first generation. These channels, consisting of English advertisements, placed either in newspapers or in agency windows, were used by only a minority of Lettesi. *For Sale* signs posted on properties, however, were a most effective media for disseminating information via interpersonal channels. This media, nevertheless, was restricted to areas familiar to the potential informants.

Access to the urban housing market, generally, was limited to information available to the community, and most of this information was centred on Hamilton, or on suburbs along the way to their work at the industries.

The Lettesi Residential Pattern

The process and pattern of Lettesi immigration, mobility within Australia and re-settlement in Newcastle, were distinctive to Lettesi, despite their apparent marked similarities to those of other southern European groups. So, too, was the on-going process of adjustment, or social integration, that came to be reflected in their particular pattern of residential concentration. In contradiction to the old mistaken concept of *ghetto*, this pattern of voluntary concentration was one that facilitated adjustment and integration, in particular for members of the first generation.

The pattern of Lettesi residential change, from the time of initial settlement until 1976, can best be seen by considering the spatial indices, the distribution maps and the linear graphs showing trends over time. Indices show a decrease in concentration and segregation; and in dissimilarity from the host community. Nevertheless this trend is considerably less marked than that for Italians, generally, and for other southern Europeans.

Despite some degree of residential dispersion the Lettesi retain a relatively high level of concentration and segregation. It is a pattern consistent with that of a closely integrated, functioning community; and one that is characterised by a very high degree of kinship connectivity.

Distribution maps give spatial expression to the measures of association; and the linear graphs show residential change, on an annual basis, until 1976. One can see an initial concentration in Islington; then movement towards the adjoining areas of Mayfield and Hamilton. There is a secondary concentration emerging in Lambton, a middle-range suburb, consolidation in Hamilton, and dispersion, by a minority, to more distant suburbs.

Maps can only show a pattern - point to something that is there. The real Lettesi story has to be told in the way that it happened. It happened through communication.

All the friends, we talk. You pass the voice to one another . . .

8. HARDSHIP AND SOLIDARITY

When we first came we had no beds. Was hard to find a boarding house - if you wanted board you had to sleep on the floor.

Sharing the Hard Times

Islington became the focus of initial settlement for many of the post-war immigrants to Newcastle, as well as for Lettesi. Though not as close to the heavy industries as Mayfield, Tighes Hill, Maryville or Wickham, it nevertheless presented a housing market that met their immediate accommodation needs. It was adjacent to transport, serving the heavy industries; the commercial area was nearby; and rental accommodation was comparatively cheap for the housing comprised mostly weatherboard dwellings in ageing and relatively poor condition.

Lettesi men shared whatever they had with their fellow *paesani*, including accommodation. They tolerated the crowding in the rooms that they rented from Polish refugees, or in other cheap accommodation, gathering together in a small concentration that was centred on Watson Street, Islington, at *Tranchini's Place*. Islington landmarks came to symbolise a shared experience, not only of poverty and alienation, but also the sense of identity and belonging that was deepened by bonds of mutual support. Donato De Vitis recalled how it was:

When we first came we had no beds. Was hard to find a boarding house - if you wanted board you had to sleep on the floor. There were nine people, apart from the Polish family, who boarded at one place - two in the laundry, four in one bedroom and three in another - all on the floor. One night the owner of the house, he got drunk, threw them out, and they slept in Islington park.

Group Solidarity

The priority was family, still living among the ruins, surviving on hope and word from Australia. From a weekly wage of eleven pounds plus overtime, Donato paid his board (one pound), and sent eight pounds ten shillings to his family in Italy. In addition he repaid the loan for his fare, saved for the passage of his family to Australia and the deposit required to buy a home.

Despite personal hardship there was group solidarity, perceived through those people and places that symbolised shared meanings and understandings. For a people with no private corner of the world, who were hustled along wherever they gathered, were told to move on and not to cause trouble, Domenico's home, in Islington, was a small but significant *place* where they could gather together freely, discuss common problems and enjoy the company of fellow *paesani*. Domenico would order Italian wine from Griffith and sell it to his friends for 2/- a bottle, and those with cigarettes would share them with the others. There, as Joe says, they would pool their information.

The voice was there all the time. If something was going on, we all knew about it.

There were other symbols of identity - Domenico's neighbour, Mrs. Myra Kelly, a lifeline figure to many Lettesi; Mr. Small from the local delicatessen, who not only was the first to provide spaghetti, but also lent money for a family's passage from Italy; the Regent Theatre

Corner at Maitland Road, Islington, a place where they would gather, if only to be *moved on*; and the first Italian club to open in Beaumont Street. Such symbols relating to people and place through conveying a meaning that was shared by Lettesi, gave coherence to their awareness, as a distinctive *community*, during this first and critical stage of settlement in Newcastle.

Finding a Place

By 1952, 30% of the Lettesi community were settled in Newcastle and 50% of these were living in Islington. By 1956, 74% had arrived but by then the distribution had radically changed to only 12% in Islington but increasingly to more than 30% in both Mayfield and Hamilton.

Of the suburbs nearer Islington these were the two that had resisted the invasion of non-residential uses that was so characteristic of the *zone in transition* and was radically changing the residential character of inner-city suburbs like Islington and Wickham. The housing market in Mayfield and Hamilton also satisfied their needs, for as well as providing a more liveable environment, there was a high proportion of older cottages, many of which could be bought very cheaply as the ageing population declined. These cottages could be improved once the family was settled.

Family Reunion

By this stage of re-settlement, family reunion had become an imperative. To achieve this goal in minimum time, house size and quality were not priorities for the cost of a home had to be finely balanced against all the other financial commitments - the cost of repaying the passages to Australia, the impending costs of resettling the family, providing a livelihood for the family in the village and one's personal board and living costs in Newcastle - costs incurred by the process of migration. Whatever could be saved on the cost of a home could be re-directed towards the more important goal of achieving an early family reunion.

To achieve this goal they would pool their resources. They would board together or buy a home with members of the nuclear and extended families; but sometimes, also, with friends from the village. It was the most effective means of maximising savings - of buying a home and avoiding rent, of repaying a loan quickly and reducing interest, then of purchasing homes for the separate family units. In 1953, within a year of living in Newcastle, Domenico and his father had bought their first house, the small, timber cottage in Watson Street, Islington. Three years later they bought a house for Domenico. He says:

All the time I worked I give all my money to him. We put our money together. When you split the money it's gone.

Many remarked that when buying their home - *Interest was the enemy.*

Another pointed out how - *Someone first has to fall in the mud. Then you learn from that . . .* Loans were repaid in minimum time. Ugo, for example, paid off his first home in 2½ years, by having a daytime job, as well as a nightshift at B.H.P. Marcello remembers:

We were so poor we always think of tomorrow. We scared. We afraid. We been going that road so long we couldn't change.

Having a home of one's own gave immense satisfaction. Francesco Del Monaco bought the first home in Hamilton, and Vincenza, his daughter, recalls their delight when she and her mother received her father's letter:

I remember, it was a palace, the way he told it to Mum.

When selecting their first home the decision had focused on two considerations - family and community. Social status was not an objective. All the Lettesi wanted was *something to move into, a roof over the head*, close to *paesani*, so they could sponsor their families. Buying a house, whether in Hamilton, or in Mayfield, not only provided the means to this objective; but also to maintaining the community support on which they depended in their struggle for a better life.

Creating the Urban Village

The concentration of this *village* community in Hamilton was the spatial outcome of an adjustment through time. A tension between Mayfield and Hamilton was still apparent until 1956; but by 1957 when 90% of the Lettesi in Newcastle had settled there permanently, the community was showing a preference for Hamilton, and this preference continued.

From comments on suburbs where they did not want to live, it is clear there was a negative image of Mayfield, their describing the general area as being too polluted. The adjoining suburbs of the *zone in transition*, Carrington, Islington, Tighes Hill and Wickham, were unpopular because of heavy traffic and pollution. By 1961 when emigration had subsided, nearly 50% were resident in Hamilton, a proportion sustained until the 1976 survey.

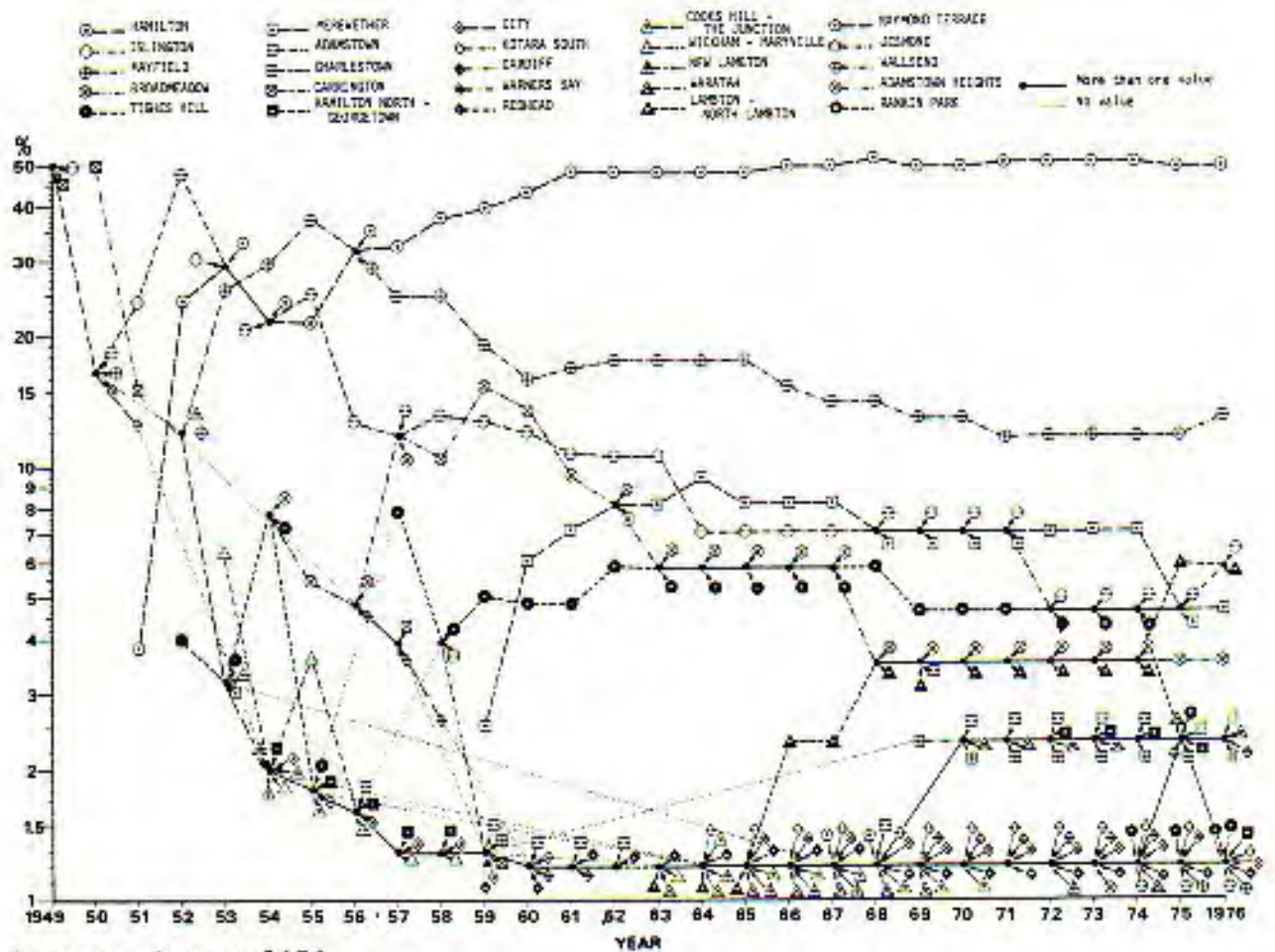
Between 1956 and 1960 the early popularity of Mayfield had declined, its proportion showing stability until 1965 then continuing a decline until 1971. Mayfield then retained about 11% of the community, mainly older couples and some married children who chose to be near the family.

Most remaining families became part of the Lettesi inner-city concentration, living mainly in suburbs contiguous to Hamilton, with proportions varying between 2% and 8%. The rest had dispersed into middle range suburbs. As the graph suggests, the community shows a remarkable degree of residential stability. This was the end stage of re-settlement and adjustment and the beginning of a new stage of family consolidation.

With family reunion now achieved, and day-to-day survival a thing of the past, leadership assumed a recreational role. Despite these changes, community remained a major factor in residential location. The majority continued to identify with *community*, and with Hamilton as their *territory*.

Community Support and Social Integration

The residential dispersion of an ethnic community has often been assumed to be an index of integration with the mainstream community. The assumption implies that residential concentration indicates a deficit of social integration. The paradox is, and the Lettesi story demonstrates, that integration was achieved via the networks of their community and that the process was facilitated by residential concentration. Lettesi solidarity and community support, spatially expressed through a pattern of concentration, are values representing a Lettesi



Source: Survey 1976

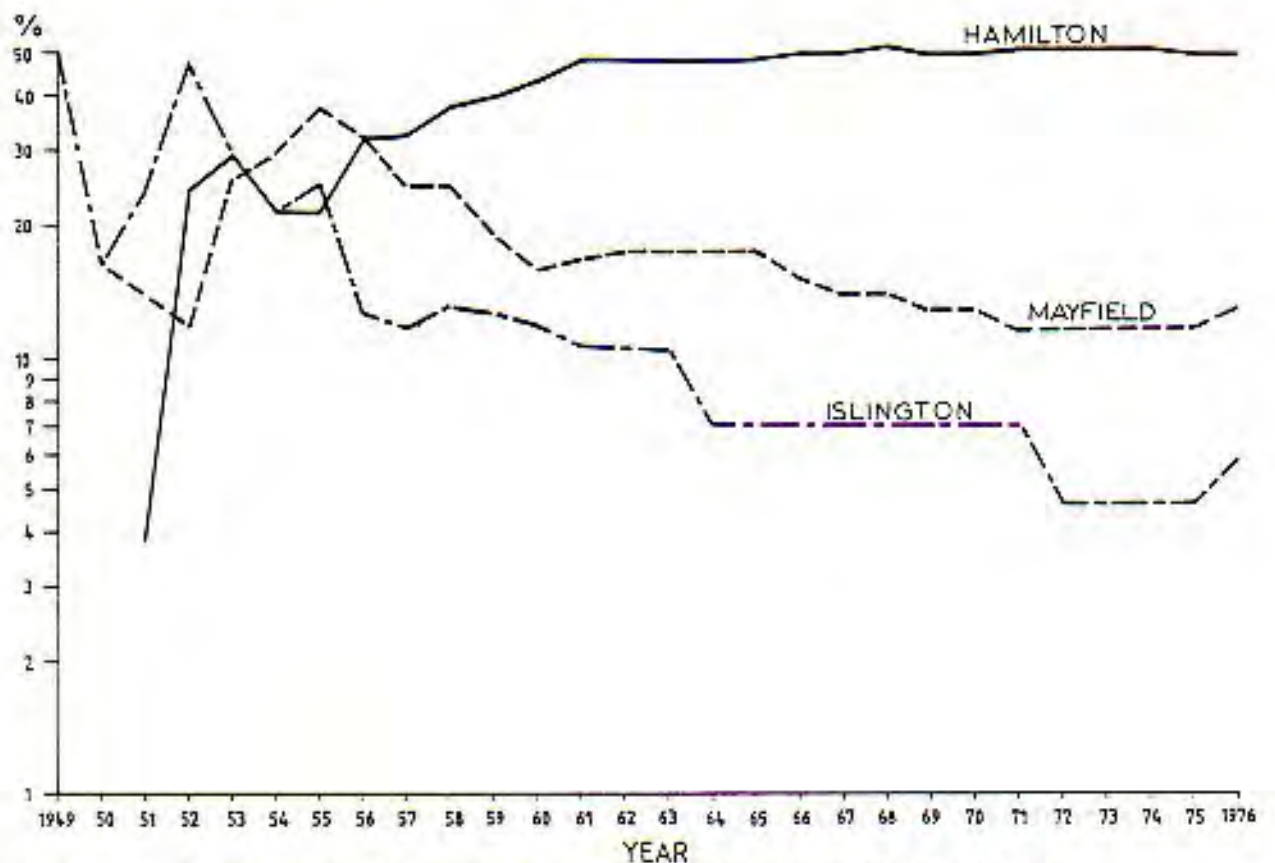


Figure : Proportions of Lettisi Residing Annually in Different Suburbs



Figure : Suburbs Considered, First Residence

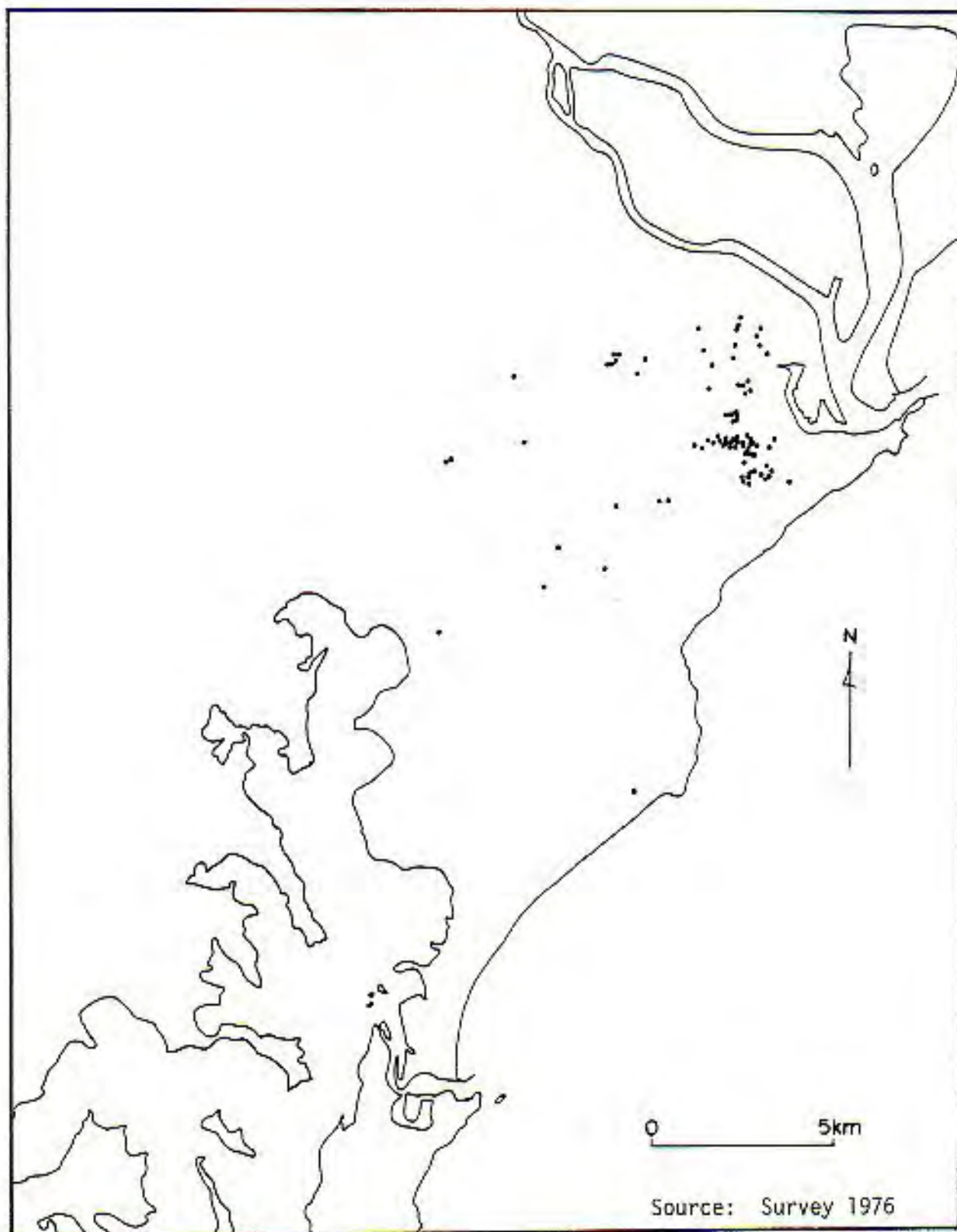


Figure : Lettesi Residence 1976

contribution towards positive social outcomes for the community as a whole. The outcome of Lettesi community support has been social integration in a real and positive sense.

Only nineteen Lettesi families lived in suburbs not contiguous to the core concentration centred on Hamilton, seven of those residing within the secondary concentration already noted in North Lambton. The twelve *dispersed* families therefore represented only 14% of Lettesi respondents. These were considered in terms of their relation to families residing in the secondary concentration, and within the community focused on Hamilton.

Social Interaction and Social Support

A comparison of the patterns of social interaction of those who were dispersed, with other Lettesi, shows that families more dispersed interacted less frequently with other members of the community. None had participated on the Lettesi Committee; nor were they high on the list of nominations of those with whom families interacted frequently. Interaction, in all but two of the twelve cases, mostly occurred with extended family members, suggesting that while the second generation provided support in the process of integration, this role was mainly confined to kin. It was peripheral to the community as a social entity. Those, on the other hand, who facilitated integration for members of the Lettesi community, as a whole, resided in the primary or secondary concentration.

For the first generation of Lettesi immigrants, the spatial form of residential integration was, overwhelmingly, one of concentration. This pattern, a reflection of Lettesi solidarity, identity and belonging, had, as its basis, a community structure, fashioned and strengthened by reciprocal bonds based on kinship relationships from a shared village past.

9. THE STRESS OF ADJUSTMENT

They ridiculed me. I couldn't do anything because I couldn't speak English.

Meeting the 'Felt' Needs

The Lettesi community, during the early years of re-settlement, functioned very effectively as a system of support, in response to members' needs, whether practical or emotional. While practical needs are met through services and institutions, in line with formalised norms and procedures, one's emotional needs are met informally, within the closer bonds of family, extended kin, neighbours or friends, and are expressed more interpersonally.

I shall outline, first, within the context of the family, some of the 'felt' needs, as expressed by Lettesi.

I asked family members how long it had taken to 'feel at ease' in their new situation. While problems of adjustment were often presented by reference to every-day practical needs, people would often refer to their feelings of loneliness, frustration, anxiety and depression. The feelings resulted from a combination of factors, from a general inability to function adequately, and from having to rely on others for support, usually family and friends.

There was variation in the period of adjustment with a few reporting having *never felt at ease*; for some it was ten years; for others it was five years; and for the majority, only *one year*. The determining factors were often interrelated, being stage of the life cycle, time and age on arrival, sex, personality and social support. One woman put it simply:

Four to five years I cry every day, every night, because I understand nothing.

Lettesi who arrived as very young children were generally not aware, till commencing school, of experiencing a period of 'settling in'. Till then they were enclosed within the safe walls of community, their other contacts being minimal and voluntary. Now, at school, they were forced, for the first time, to confront the problems of the immigrant child. The first six months were generally very difficult, especially for an eldest child.

For the first few months he cried all the time - vomited every morning.

When he wanted to go to the toilet he couldn't explain. Didn't want to go to school.

I used to stand on our second storey veranda. I could see the girls in the playground - all by themselves. They just stood in a corner, all sad. I used to cry and cry for them.

I began school with no English - it was very hard. I'd come home crying and need my parents to help but they couldn't.

. . . We couldn't help her at all.

As language barriers were overcome, the dominant feeling was that of being different; and getting to know the language could compound this perception. There were so many ways that a child could be 'different'.

I wasn't like anyone else at school. If they said, 'Get your parents to come', mine didn't, because they couldn't speak English. We always had the uniform but I always felt different.

Some children accommodated to both situations, being 'Italian' at home and at other times, 'Australian'. This was often the case for an eldest child where the parents arrived somewhat older than the norm, then depended on the child for day-to-day interpreting.

Some children had to bridge an enormous cultural gulf to meet family demands and responsibilities. These could range from day-to-day interpreting, dealing with adult medical matters, to sorting out tax returns. The situation at school was seldom any easier.

Most of those arriving in their primary school years did adjust fairly easily, managing to complete their secondary education, with many proceeding to tertiary level. But for teenage arrivals, especially boys, school could be tough, and the playground, a scary place. As one boy said:

They ridiculed me. I couldn't do anything because I couldn't speak English. There were fights nearly every day.

Despite much good-will, teachers were not equipped with the training and resources for assessing the special problems of their non-English speaking pupils, so as to deal with them constructively. They just had to cope the best way they could; and so did the children.

I remember, I was eleven. I was very unhappy, depressed and frustrated.

If a child did not speak English there were generally two alternatives - placement in a class with younger children, or in a 'general activity' class for slower learners. Then, rather than prolong the misery of school, they would leave as soon as they attained the legal age. One parent recalled:

They thought because he couldn't speak English he knew nothing. They gave him very simple things to do, things he could do in Italy. He lost interest.

Most of the earlier arrivals in Australia were young adult males between the ages of 18-25 years. This group comprised the greatest number of Lettesi immigrants, some being married, but many still single. The period of prolonged separation from family was the time when they faced their most difficult adjustment. A multiplicity of problems contributed to this but underlying it all was the nagging loneliness.

Felt bad for three years. Felt better only after the wife came, after 16 months; but it's still hard. It was language, bit of everything.

Language was the most pervasive problem, especially in the case of the earlier arrivals and for those who came by Assisted Passage.

At Bonegilla there was no interpreter. Had to use sign language.

Proserpine presented a temporary respite, for being always in the company of Lettesi and other Italians, there was seldom any need to communicate in English. Even in Newcastle, one could still be lucky:

Went to Proserpine and all spoke Italian. Came here and boss spoke Italian. Always had friends.

Newcastle was an urban industrial environment. Settling there meant confronting the language problem across all facets of life. It could present a barrier to obtaining even the bare necessities of living. It was also a marker that Lettesi were *different*.

New country is like a jungle. You have to survive. You have to work. Is very hard - No matter what you are in Italy, what I am here - I'm nothing. Can't even look for a job. You think to yourself 'I never be able to talk English'.

Couldn't find the proper food. We lived terribly over there, but still we had spaghetti and gravy.

For five years very hard. Australians didn't like New Australians then. All the time, trouble at the pub. Everywhere - all the time.

The presence of Lettesi or other Italians could be a reassuring buffer:

With language he never had any problems, because there were always Lettesi or Italians boarding there. If someone come to the door they'd get someone to speak for them.

Women, on the whole, being mostly at home, found the learning of English to be so much more difficult. As well, very often, their contact with Australians was humiliating and distressing. They felt additional distress to see their children unhappy; being bullied, ridiculed or rejected by their school-mates; or simply not coping.

They felt powerless, as well, at being unable to help their children. One mother would speak Italian to the children; but they would persist in answering her in English. Yet whenever she tried to speak to them in English they would laugh at her, saying,

Ah, she doesn't speak properly.

They ridicule me. Because I can't speak English, I can't help them.

This was a common problem. Another woman recalled an experience that she had at the butcher's when the shop assistant laughed at her hesitant attempts to ask for what she needed.

I was so ashamed. I was angry. I went straight home, and I cried all night.
Some men spoke on behalf of their wives:

She understand a lot, but too scared to say anything.

She doesn't need to learn more English. I take her shopping.

By 1976 many women had learnt English, 28% being fluent, these mostly the younger ones. None of the older generation of women had fluency in English, for elderly Lettesi women relied solely on their family and the contact they had with other Lettesi; and though isolated, socially, from the general community, they were generally content.

Never felt that bad. Was never on my own. My daughter interprets for me.

My mother's quite happy now. Can manage important things, and they always call on me if they need anything.

Has no problems really. Doesn't get upset if she can't talk to anyone because she has all her friends.

In the years following retirement, many older people had regressed to their native Italian language. Sadly, this observation, made in 1976, applied even to the older generation leaders who had been so active in supporting other members. At the time of the interview they spoke only Italian and lived within the confines of family and Lettesi friends.

Many now too old. . . He just lives Italian, all the way.

In describing their early period of adjustment, Lettesi referred to feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, frustration and very often, anger, at the barriers imposed by the English language, and the feelings of being different. They seldom complained about practical things. What their words strongly voiced was the significance of the role of family, friendship and belonging to *community*. Antonio Della Grotta expressed it so eloquently:

Say I was in a place where there were lot of Italians - I'd feel confident. But if I was with Lettesi I'd feel sure... With father that's different. If friendship is sure, then father must be certainty.

10. THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY

It's something different, the community. It gives you a feeling of belonging.

Community Identity

To be a Lettesi was a mark of identity. Almost invariably when asked to name families with whom they tended to interact most frequently, the Lettesi were reluctant to differentiate. The following were some of the sentiments expressed:

To me everybody is a relation. The heart speaks to one another.

They're all good friends. I couldn't find one better than the other.

The Lettesi defined their social relations in terms of their community. When pressed, however, they named those people who either belonged to their own extended family, were acknowledged community leaders, or fellow Lettesi who were also close neighbours. These facets of community providing symbols of belonging, formed a coherent pattern of community structure, a pattern borne out in detailed analysis of the way the Lettesi community functioned.

The strong kinship basis of community solidarity is apparent from a comparison of the social interaction graph, with the graph showing kinship interconnections. The linkage patterns have a high degree of similarity (Figures).

The bonding function of extended kin relations can be seen, as well, from the kinship matrix that illustrates connections to the degree of first cousin; and from the measures of connectivity that were generated from the matrix. (Figures).

These measures show that after only three relays linkages exist among 80% of all Lettesi, a factor having an impact on levels of interaction, as expressed by one Lettesi:

Oh my God, I see everybody. If it's not a friend it's a relation. If it's not a relation it's a friend.

The Lettesi Sick Fund

The Lettesi Committee was a further focus for identity. As already mentioned, it evolved throughout the period when community solidarity and leadership functions were a response to the hardships faced by the people. If a breadwinner was injured or a family member died, leaders would emerge, arrange what they could, do the rounds of the community, collecting money, to assist the family.

Later they formalised this community support through the election of a Committee for a *Lettesi Sick Fund* to which working members made regular payment. By 1976, the year of the survey, families were self-sufficient and the focus had changed to one of recreation. However, members in special need still had access to the fund and a lump sum was payable to a member on retirement. About 60% of Lettesi still contributed; and many more attended the regular social functions.

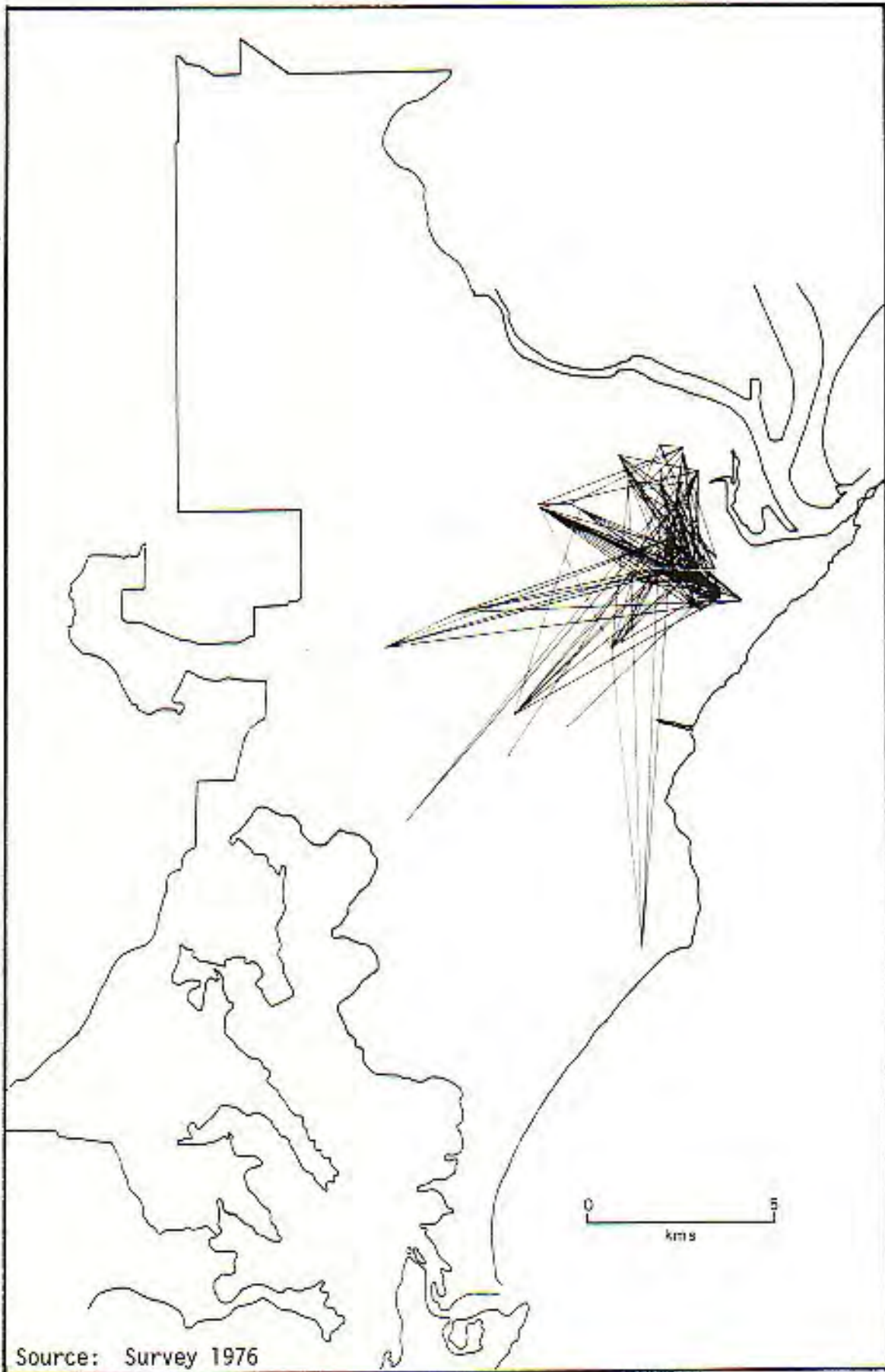


Figure : Kinship Interconnections Graph

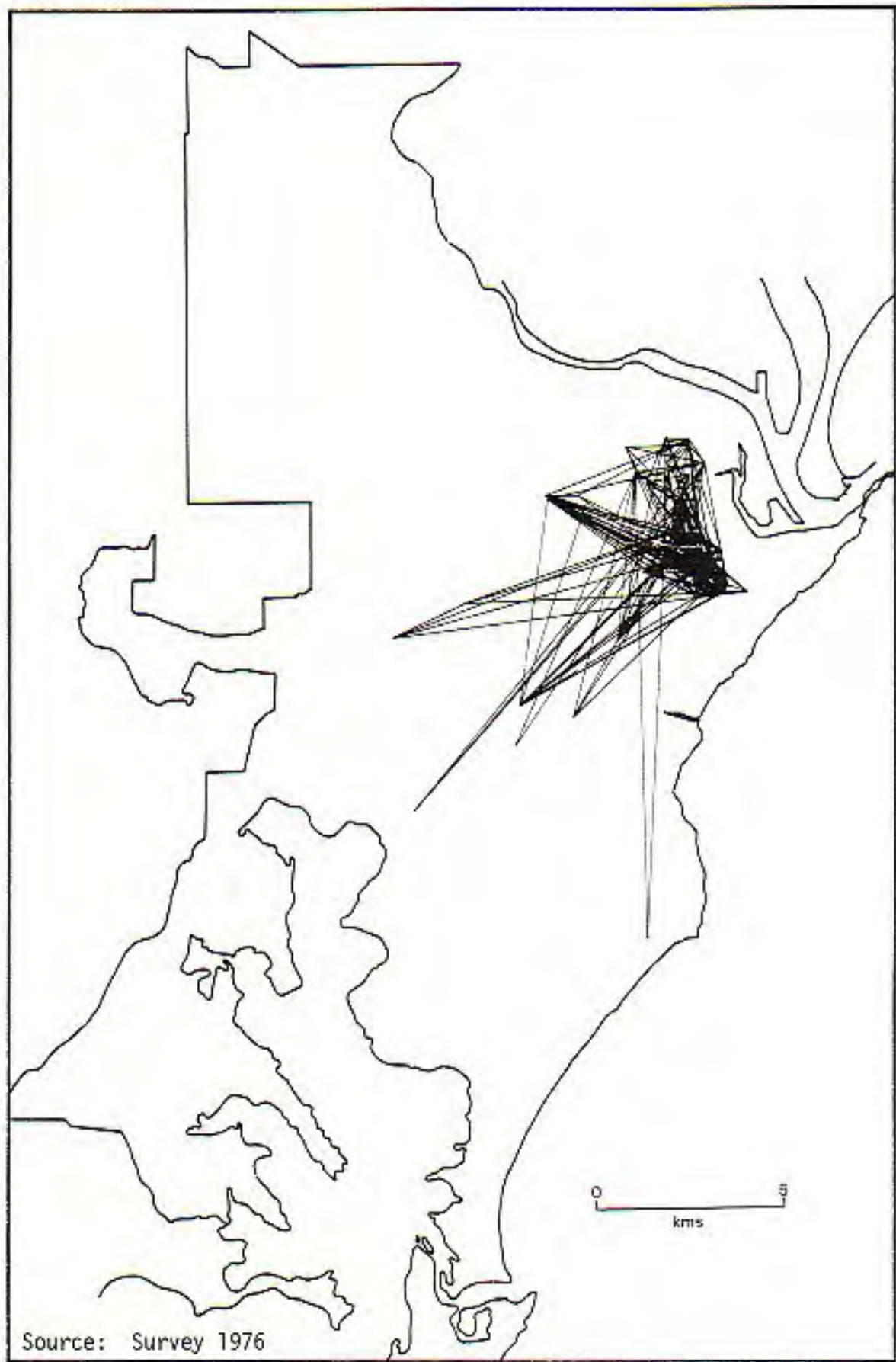
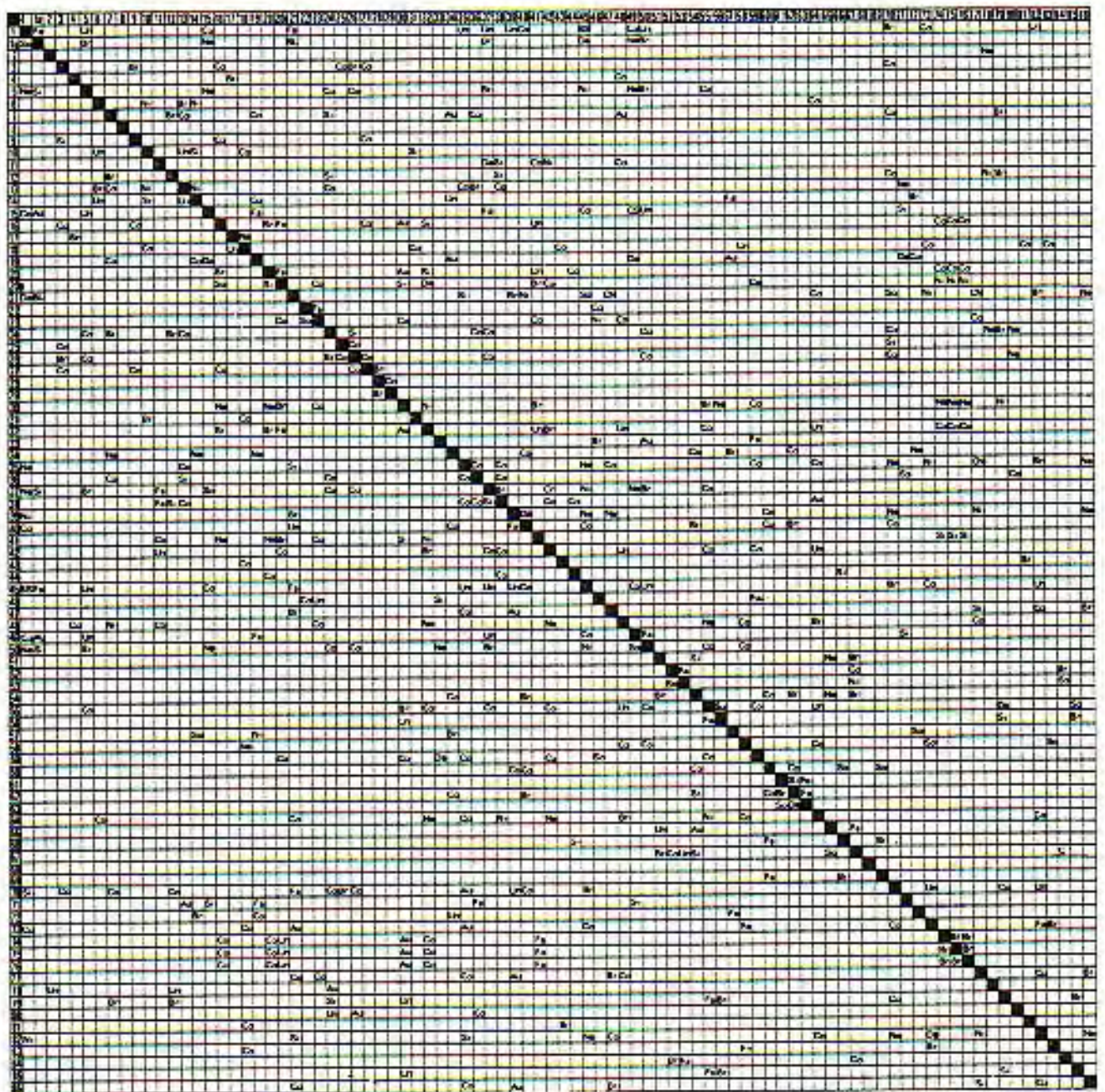


Figure 2 : Social Interaction Graph



LETTOPALENA COMMUNITY

Relationships

Fa - Father	Mo - Mother	Br - Brother	Si - Sister	So - Son
Da - Daughter	Un - Uncle	Au - Aunt	Ne - Nephew	Ni - Niece
Bl - Brother in Law	BS - Brother/Sister	CS - Cousin/Sister	CN - Cousin/Nephew	CNI - Cousin/Niece
		Co - Cousin		

Source: Survey 1976

Figure : Kinship Matrix, Lettesi Respondents

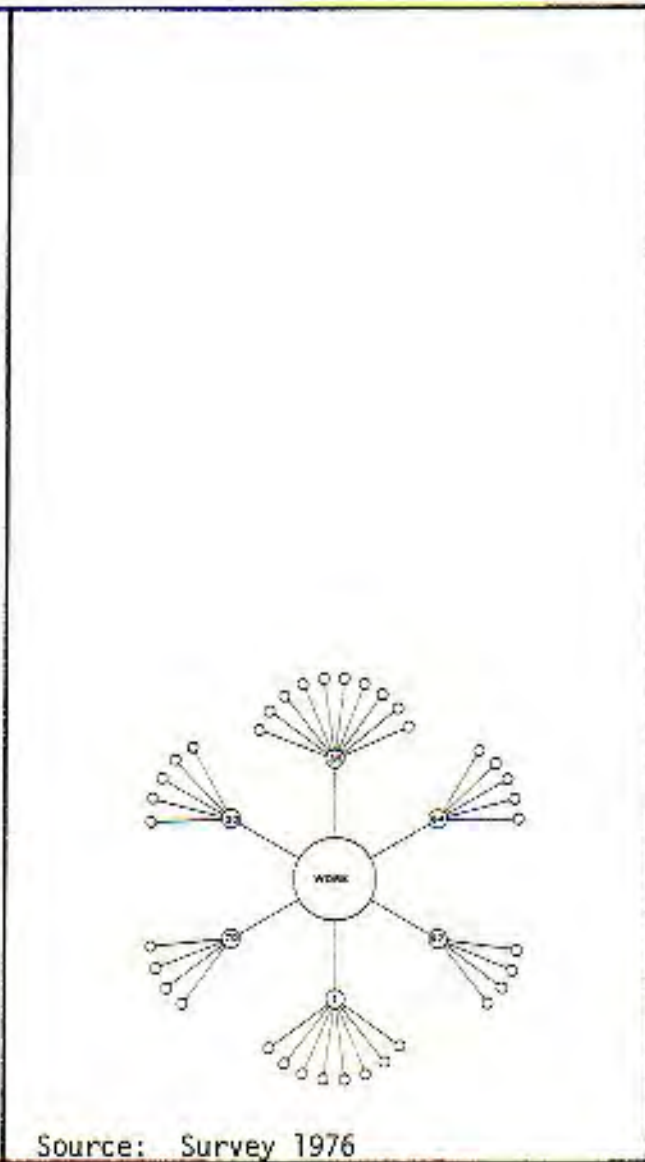
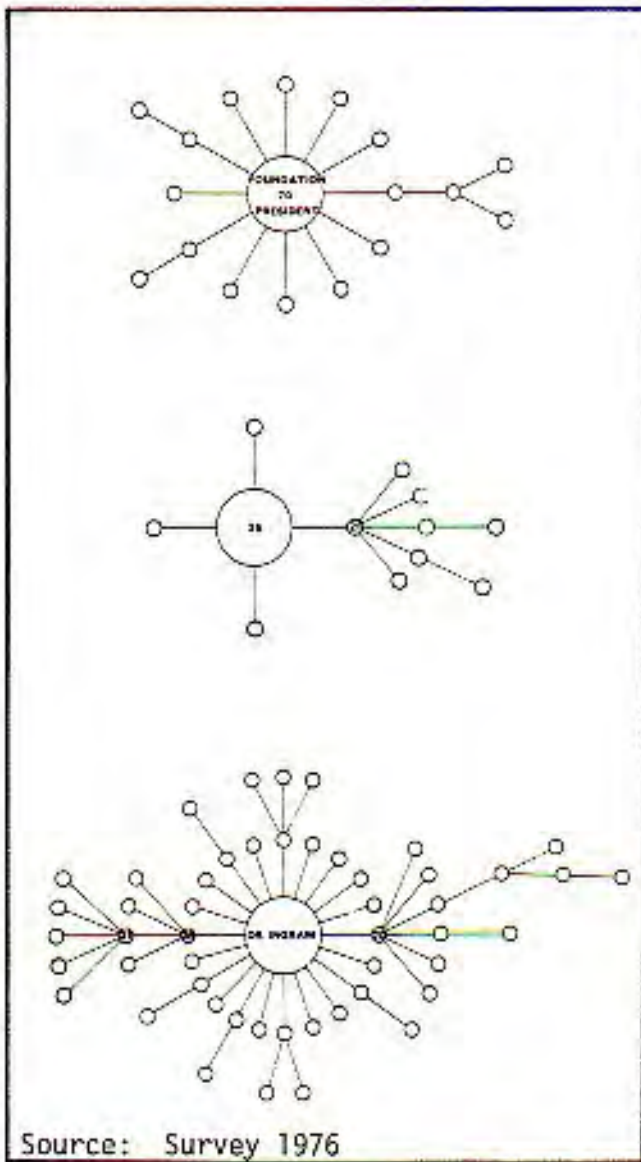


Figure : Access to General Practitioners, Network Graph

Figure : Access to Work, Network Graph

Personalities gave additional coherence to identity. It was seeing familiar faces on a stroll along Beaumont Street or being part of a group of Lettesi men, standing talking on a corner, the De Vitis family's delicatessen, Pina's delicatessen, Ralph the barber, the girl at the chemist counter, the estate agency receptionist, and Frank the local baker. These were all Lettesi faces providing mirrors to one's identity, and symbols of community. Interpersonal symbols were further reinforced by buildings or other *icons* with which they were associated.

Identity and Territory

The patterns of kinship and social interaction, that bonded the community into a complex social web, have a spatial dimension that is evident from the maps. The maps show a high degree of density and connectivity that intensifies at the core concentration in Hamilton. Here neighbouring occurred with a high degree of frequency, close extended family residence was found to be a tendency, and, with only one exception, the leaders of the community lived within the area of densest interaction.

Antonio Della Grotta was the one exception. Antonio, the Committee's Foundation Secretary, had moved out to Lambton, about five kilometres from Hamilton, for reasons of health; but he had, nevertheless, directed most of his time and energies to the Hamilton area, supporting family and friends. He was the key community *gatekeeper*, a role dealt with later.

Another six families settled in Lambton, forming a secondary concentration within a few blocks of one another, two of these families being next door neighbours. Although they had moved from the primary concentration they had not dispersed in any real sense, and they retained close links with their community base. This can be seen from the social interaction graphs.

Hamilton - 'Little Lettopalena'

It is clear from the graphs that Hamilton provided the territorial focus of Lettesi identity. When asked to name suburbs where they would most like to live if cost were not a factor, 45% of men and 52% of women emphatically made Hamilton their primary choice. Their replies, given with conviction, express their attachment. Vincenza, for example, referring to her father, said:

Merewether Heights would be like putting him in a cage. He'd die right away.

Others commented:

I like Hamilton. You know, the place I live. Hamilton. That's all it boils down to - Hamilton, Little Italy. I like it just here. Always liked Hamilton.

Hamilton . . . Little Lettopalena.

People say Hamilton - that's the best. Hamilton only. Hamilton. All Hamilton.

There was a stronger preference for Hamilton expressed by the women, many reluctant to nominate a second choice. This may have been associated with their limited mobility. But while this was the case for the majority of women, 30%, nevertheless, drove a car, and 20% of families owned more than one car. Driving was often necessary because 36% of women

worked and many men did shiftwork. Living close to Lettesi friends and family and to the Beaumont Street shopping area still mattered more to Lettesi women than owning a home in a more prestigious suburb.

Men were, generally, more mobile. Often they had worked in different parts of the city and were more aware of other possibilities. Their increasing awareness and knowledge of other areas was apparent from the contrast in information they gave about suburbs considered for their initial and final moves; and in their residential preferences at the time of the survey. Their *search space*, by the final move, had expanded considerably, yet the decision was weighed in favour of community. As one of the men stated,

It's the places you've been to - the place you live - like a bird comes back to where it's been - to the places that are familiar.

About 30% of men preferred the newer subdivisions of Highfields and Charlestown, preferences reflecting the suburbs' proximity to Highfields Azzurri Club. The club had, by chance, become the focus for recreation, and for *bocce*, in particular. Most men, however, preferred to live in Hamilton and there was no real intention of moving to outer suburbs. Men were happy to defer to their partners, and to the *pull* of community.

Symbols of Territory

A composite mental map of the Newcastle urban area, arranged from information from the male heads of households, showed the dominance of Hamilton, even for the men. It notes symbols of Lettesi territory - the areas, the streets and the landmarks they knew and to which they attached a special significance. The symbols were predictable. Hamilton, again, was the area most familiar; Beaumont Street was the street most often named; and BHP was the dominant landmark. There were many landmarks specific to Lettesi; and others were shared by the general community. The latter included the Workers Club, Royal Newcastle Hospital, The City Hall, David Jones and the Co-op. Store, all key landmarks within the city centre.

Of the Hamilton landmarks, two stood out - the Exchange Hotel and the Scalabrini (Italian) Centre. Most of the men met several times a week at the Exchange Hotel for a beer and a chat. Some Lettesi couples attended dances at the Centre; but it was mainly used by the older men who were living nearby and would meet for a game of cards. Some Lettesi felt that the energy invested in the Centre's development had not been acknowledged through their having a say in its operation. The Centre was a monument to Lettesi identity; the Exchange was symbolic in the life of the community.

The Highfields Azzurri Sports Club was another landmark of significance. Though five kilometres from Hamilton, it had become, by virtue of numbers, a Lettesi club, the men attending often for a drink and a game of *bocce*. Its development was due to the Highfields Bowling Club being under threat, financially, at a time when the Azzurri Soccer Club, with its strong Italian following, was in need of a clubhouse.

The suggestion arose that the clubs amalgamate; and in a marriage of convenience, the name was changed to Highfields Azzurri Sports Club. Those influential in facilitating the agreement included Giuseppe Borrelli, the estate agent. Antonio Della Grotta, the Lettesi President, became the club's Vice-President and a driving force in the longer-term. The Lettesi membership was sufficiently high that many identified the club with their community.

This chance attachment to Highfields Azzurri stalled the attempts by some Lettesi leaders, including Antonio Della Grotta, to establish independent Lettesi club premises. The costs would have been prohibitive, and the degree of support uncertain. Highfields presented the easier option.

By providing a focus for social interaction, the Exchange Hotel and Highfields Azzurri not only represented important symbols of identity; they were a vital part, too, of the physical infrastructure that marked out Lettesi *territory*. Within the boundaries of this *territory* there was a system of interaction, a web of relations, that guaranteed a flow of information and support. It was a community support system.

Ethnic social areas in Australian cities form complex, distinctive, recurring patterns. The *village to village* pattern of Lettesi group settlement, characterised spatially by inner-city concentration, was an outcome of the tragic destruction of Lettopalena, and a chain migration process from the village to Australia. Through the process of re-settlement, community networks provided channels of access along a pathway to Hamilton, their final destination. Here in this place they created an *urban village*, a system of support for re-building their *community*, and a new life in a new land.

PART B

A SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

1. COMMUNITY - A SYSTEM of COMMUNICATION

The voice was there all the time. If something was going on, we all knew about it. . . We spread the voice among us.

Adjustment in Australia

At the time of the interviews the Lettesi community had achieved a remarkable level of adjustment. Emigrating from a region that was economically depressed, the people arrived with minimal education and virtually no industrial skills.

Yet in 1976, a time of high unemployment, no Lettesi was unemployed, the exception being a person injured at work; all lived in homes that were adequate to their needs; there was a generally high level of intergenerational mobility; health and welfare problems were comparatively minimal; and the people expressed a high degree of satisfaction.

This situation was all the more extraordinary when considering that many still had difficulty with English. By providing both *expressive* and practical support, the community facilitated adjustment and integration.

Interpersonal Support

While *expressive* (psychological and emotional) needs, experienced through the early years (Chapter 9), could only be met through the interpersonal support of family and close friends, practical and material needs required channels that accessed the wider community. The community role was fundamental, not simply as a buffer or cultural retreat, but as an active mechanism that facilitated access to services and resources via the networks of the group.

Interpersonal channels, or social networks, were a highly effective means of communicating information among the Lettesi. Kinship connections across the community have already been shown, in Chapter 4, to be remarkably extensive. If one passed a message via extended kinship channels to the degree of first cousin, 29% of the Lettesi community would have received the message after a single relay; after the second relay, 59%; and after a third relay, 80%. Such a degree of connectivity offered powerful potential for disseminating information.

Communication Networks

The community's main role was communication, channelling information through social networks to those who would otherwise be unable to receive it. It was through these networks that information was obtained, providing access to housing, employment, health, education and recreation. In the process of adjustment, through communication, leadership roles were of vital importance. They evolved and, through time, they were passed on, from the older generation to younger generation leaders, as the needs and the opportunities changed.

For older men the focus was family reunion, shelter and a job. The jobs were in heavy industry and there was limited mobility. For the generation following, the opportunities were widening. And for those who came as children the options were increasing and social networks were extending beyond the boundaries of community, in a process of integration.

Leadership was crucial but so were social networks, for they were the channels through which information passed, so that adjustment took place. Leadership was most effective where energy and information was taken up by members and passed through Lettesi networks. For some young Lettesi, their widening social networks created new options, one of which was concreting. It was a pathway to work that was characteristically Italian.

Information Needs and the Informants

Much has been written, both in government reports, and in ethnic research, on the needs of immigrants. In preparing the interviews I considered this material, then selected those areas of information need that were essential to integration, adjustment and well-being. These areas included those listed above - housing, employment, health, education, welfare and recreation.

My purpose was to identify, first of all, the interpersonal channels that were used by Lettesi for resolving information needs; secondly, the pattern of leadership roles and relations comprising the community's structure; and thirdly, the way that community was linked to its function of support.

When in need of information a Lettesi would approach the person most able and/or willing to respond to their request. The primary source of information would be a family member; then probably a person from the extended family network. An additional source would be a fellow *paesani* - at work, or after work, at the places they gathered, like the Exchange Hotel; or where women met, for example, in Beaumont Street.

The choice of an informant would usually depend on the item of information, its degree of complexity, whether literacy was required, and other factors. And so a pattern evolved that reflected the need and the community's perceptions of those who could provide the required information. It was a community whose structure and purpose was understood, intuitively by its members.

Leadership Roles and Social Networks

Details and summaries of the data that I gathered from the 86 families are included in the main report, copies of which were given to the community, in 1984. That report included tables showing the principal informants for each of the information items. Most of that detail is not repeated here; only the pattern that the data revealed of the leadership roles of particular people. I shall refer to them by name, in tribute to them, for what has been a remarkable contribution and a courageous undertaking.

The contribution of women has not been overlooked. As stated earlier, without their presence there would be no *community*; no story to tell. For without their support the men may have come, for a time, perhaps; but they would not have settled, permanently, as a *community*. Their Little Italy - *Little Lettopalena*, in Hamilton, Australia, would not exist. But that is a story of courage and of caring that cannot be told here.

In the following chapters reference will be made to those most acknowledged by Lettesi families interviewed, as having a major role in providing advice, information and support. I shall focus, initially, on the older generation leaders; then on younger generation leaders who assumed the on-going role of support; then on people who participated as part of the network; and, finally, on networks that opened new options to Lettesi whose youth was disrupted, first,

by war and, secondly, by emigration. Final chapters will focus on the community as part of a wider Australian, and international, mosaic.

2. OLDER GENERATION LEADERS

They'd come for his opinion on all sorts of things. . .

In considering the roles of *gatekeeper* and *opinion leader*, comparisons show there was an age differential. Some older generation men performed the role of *gatekeeper*; but the range of information they provided was focused on sponsorship arrangements and the kind of support that people needed on arrival. While needs related mainly to accommodation and employment, sponsorship support was often extended beyond the nuclear family, to in-laws and other relatives.

In Newcastle, for the first time, the older men were confronted by the barrier of language, a situation undermining both their confidence and independence. Their leadership role underwent a transition to one that was shared between brothers, or with older sons who could learn the language quickly. It was usual for the eldest son to join his father in Australia, to assist in preparing a home for the family, as quickly as they could.

The Rossetti brothers were outstanding leaders, working together to support their community. Among others there was Filippo and Antonio De Vitis and Vincenzo and Guido Gizzi. Father and son partnerships included Leone Della Grotta and his son, Antonio; and Giovanni Tranchini and his son, Domenic. Dominic was married with family in the village waiting to be *called*; and so was Rosina, Antonio's betrothed. Anxious to have their families settled, these men led the way, as did others in their situation.

The following older men were remembered by Lettesi for their support in providing advice and information, on housing, Donato De Vitis (11 people), Francesco Del Monaco (9) Giovanni Tranchini (9) and Guido Gizzi (9); Francesco and Guido also either provided, or assisted in finding, accommodation for 9 and 7 *paesani*, respectively; and Francesco, as well, for about 12 other Italians. Guido and Filippo each helped 5 Lettesi into jobs at BHP, in a chain that was initiated by Filippo's nephew, Giovanni de Vitis.

Francesco Del Monaco

Francesco Del Monaco was among the first arrivals, in 1949. His early passage was possible because his wife, Maria Cavicchia and Domenica Rossetti, Antonio's wife, were sisters; and so Francesco was one of the first Lettesi to be sponsored by Antonio. The letter had said:

Come to Australia . . . Pretty good country. . . Good for the children.

Antonio provided him with work and accommodation and raised the money for the family's fares. His support facilitated family reunion; and Vincenza, Francesco's daughter, captured the excitement felt by the family on receiving the letter telling them about the house he had bought for them. It was a simple miner's cottage with a bull-nose veranda, in Cleary St. Hamilton; and recalling those precious moments, Vincenza smiled, saying:

It was a palace the way he described it to Mum!

Francesco was the first to settle in Hamilton. At about the same time Giovanni Tranchini and the Gizzi brothers had purchased their homes in Islington and Mayfield. Their decisions on where to live reflected the evolving perceptions of the emergent Lettesi community; for in the

years that followed, these were the pathways explored by Lettesi before settling on Hamilton, as their *place*. Vincenza described how that was for her parents:

They both walk up Beaumont St. That's Italy for them. . . Home is where your heart is. Hamilton. Like going home.

The homes of these families became Lettesi information centres; and their owners, and other occupants, became channels of information with solutions and answers to a multitude of questions. With the increasing community move towards Hamilton, the Del Monaco's home became a hive of activity. In the words of Vincenza:

Everyone came to our place. It was always full with people coming to ask.

The Del Monaco home was also a resting place for many new arrivals. Among the boarders there was Leone, Antonio and Raffaele Della Grotta; Giuseppe Del Monaco, Sabatino Della Grotta, Giuseppe Borrelli, Raffaele Palmieri, Giuseppe Martinelli, and Tonino Palmieri - and, in addition, about a dozen other Italians. Such a place could generate a store of information. It was a symbol of *community*.

Giovanni and Dominic Tranchini

There was a close working partnership between Giovanni Tranchini and his elder son Dominic. Giovanni arrived Christmas 1951, and with Francesco Del Monaco and the Gizzi brothers, was one of the first Lettesi to establish a home in Newcastle and to reunite with family.

Dominic came in January, 1953, aged only 20, but with a wife and son in Italy. He was called by his father and assisted by a loan from Mr. Celedonia, the agent in Sulmona; but with sponsorship support from Antonio Rossetti. To reunite the family, they pooled all their income and a few months later, in March 1953, they bought a house in Watson Street, Islington, in the area where most of the Lettesi were boarding, during the cane off-season.

Tranchini's Place became a haven where *paesani* could gather together to enjoy one another's company and to share information; and it presented a model that demonstrated to others that they, too, could achieve their goal. At this gathering place, information could be pooled and passed through the networks to other Lettesi.

Tranchini's was a place where you could sort through your problems: where to find the hospital, the doctor or the dentist; and men would call in for a haircut or to purchase wine. Dominic, Paul Palmieri and Emideo Rossetti were constantly in demand as community barbers.

Dominic recalled how difficult it was:

All Italians came to have haircut. We had to do things ourselves to survive. As soon as we bought the house we bought a 40 gallon keg of wine. I saw the name Rosseto on an advertisement for wine from Griffith. I thought it must be Italian and wrote to them. Everyone called and said - "Can I buy some?" - Was 20 cents a bottle.

He remembered, as well, the cane off-season when he was a contact for information on jobs at the BHP and in other heavy industries. Dominic described their situation vividly:

A restaurant in Brisbane had our address - "Ah, you go to Newcastle! You go to Tranchini's - 15 Watson St." They'd arrive on the Brisbane train, 4 to 5am, - Italians, too, from all over Italy. Every year Italians came down from the sugar cane, and our address was - "Tranchini's Place". . . I never been to that restaurant. When I get there, BHP say - "How many you got?"

Another Lettesi remarked:

Everyone come to him because he could interpret. He learnt so quickly.

Giacomo, Filippo and Antonio De Vitis

Giovanni De Vitis, the son of Giacomo, the pioneer, and his wife, Maria, had 10 children. Four of them had remained in Lettopalena; three were in America; and only three were in Australia. They were Giacomo (in Proserpine), Filippo and Antonio. It was Giacomo's son Giovanni, named after his grandfather, who supported Lettesi on their arrival in Newcastle. Before coming to Australia, Filippo and Antonio had worked, for a time, in northern Italy, with Francesco Del Monaco, *always together*. It was the reason why Francesco had followed them to Newcastle.

Filippo, one of the earliest arrivals, followed Giacomo, his brother, in 1949, at age 39, to Proserpine cutting cane. In the following year he sponsored his brother, Antonio, aged 40. By 1951 both Filippo and Antonio had settled in Newcastle and were boarding with Giovanni, in Carrington, then at Scott Street, locations near the port where Giovanni had been working.

Giovanni found jobs for Filippo and Antonio at BHP where they remained until retirement, 25 years later. Filippo, like Giovanni, became a link in an on-going chain of Lettesi workers, en route to Newcastle, ensuring, through his efforts, the jobs of five men. Among their fellow-workers, at that time, were Giovanni Tranchini, Guido Gizzi, and Fiorendo Martinelli.

Vincenzo and Guido Gizzi

Domenico Gizzi had been to America at the age of 18, but had returned to Lettopalena in 1931. His son Vincenzo set out for Australia in 1950, at the age of 34, under the sponsorship of Giacomo De Vitis, his wife Maria's brother. Maria was also the sister of Filippo and Antonio De Vitis; and she and her son *Jim*, just four years old, were sponsored by Giacomo in 1951.

It was a chain that gathered strength when Vincenzo's brother Guido came, in 1951, at the age of 33. In 1952 Guido sponsored his brothers-in-law, Pietro and Corrado Martinelli (1952); his cousin Andrea Martinelli (1953); then, in 1955, his wife and three children. Then Corrado, alone, provided housing information to 13 other families. Chain migration with community support was a close-knit operation.

Like so many others, Guido's first stop had been a boarding house, in Watson St. Islington. Vincenzo's family was already in Australia and living in Proserpine. So in 1953 the brothers bought their first house, in Mayfield, near the BHP; and one year later, a house for Guido in nearby Tighes Hill. In 1957 Guido moved to Hamilton, as so many other Lettesi were doing.

Vincenzo and Guido Gizzi both worked at BHP. Like the De Vitis brothers, Filippo and Antonio, it was their first and only job until their retirement; and the key link in the job chain was Giovanni De Vitis, Giacomo's son. The Gizzi brothers had a leadership role, meeting accommodation needs for eight and seven Lettesi, respectively; providing housing information to six and nine *paesani*; and Guido, finding jobs for five of them. They were very much part of the community support system.

Leone Della Grotta

Leone Della Grotta's elder son, Antonio, emigrated with assisted passage in 1952. Leone was sponsored, in the same year, by Mr. Botta, a Proserpine farmer and friend of the Rossetti family. Three months later, in 1952, Mr Botta sponsored his other son, Raffaele; then in 1953 he arranged for a sponsor, Salvatore Saputto, for Leone's brother, Sabatino. In 1956, Leone, himself, sponsored two of his daughters, Maria Antonio and Filomena, and his daughter-in-law, Rosina, Antonio's wife by proxy. His other daughter, Vincenza, was living in America.

Re-uniting family was a mammoth undertaking, and could not be carried out, exclusively, by Lettesi. It depended on the Rossetti brothers and their ability to engage the assistance of local farmers to guarantee employment.

On his arrival in Newcastle, Leone boarded in Watson St Islington; then at Del Monaco's in Hamilton. His first family home was in Belford St. Broadmeadow, bordering on Hamilton; and like Tranchini's and Del Monaco's, it was abuzz with activity - Lettesi gathering together, and sharing information. Leone assisted people across a range of information needs. Together with his son, Antonio, and Concerzio Tarantini, he facilitated access for 22 of the 53 families who, at the time of interview, attended a surgery where the doctor spoke Italian.

Leone was a person who continued to be consulted on a range of areas, including housing, health and finance; and, in the eyes of his community, he was a highly regarded *opinion leader*. Antonio fondly recalled how it was:

I remember when I was young I noticed these things. A lot of people used to ask his opinion. They'd say, "I'm thinking of buying a house, Leone. Do you think I'm doing the right thing?" They'd come for his opinion on all sorts of things. They must have respected him. . . Made me feel good.

By the time of the interviews most of the above men were ageing parents who had supported others in the past, but whose English had regressed, and now required support themselves. Others were retired at the time of their arrival and in need of support, mainly from family. These older men included Arcangelo Rossetti, Felice De Vitis and Donato De Vitis.

Arcangelo Rossetti

Arcangelo Rossetti, the brother-in-law of Giacomo De Vitis, and Lettesi pioneer, was the father of Antonio and Giacomo in Proserpine, and also of Alberto, Vincenzo and Peppino, who arrived post-war. He was of tremendous importance to the chain migration process. His significance is understated here because of a 25 year absence until 1958, when he did return, finally, from Lettopalena.

Likewise, the role of Antonio and Giacomo needs special emphasis to redress the fact of their not being interviewed. At the time of the interviews Giacomo was still in Proserpine and Antonio was living in Brisbane.

Though he had died by the time I interviewed the families, a photograph of Arcangelo remains in my mind. I see an elderly man seated on a chair in a garden setting; he sits tall and stately; an air of dignity and pride. His family's special legacy, and that of the De Vitis family, is the remarkable achievement of a community transplanted - the Lettesi in Australia.

Felice De Vitis

Felice De Vitis had experience of English before coming to Australia; and although too late to assume an active role in the process of re-settlement, his contribution to music is outlined in a tribute by Vincenzo Martinelli, in Part 2, Chapter 7. At the age of 18 he had left for America and for nine years had worked in the coalmines of Pennsylvania. There in Turtle Creek, near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a Lettesi community, similar in size, had been evolving during the pre-war period. Felice and his wife, Maria, returned to the village; but reflecting on his years in the United States, Felice said:

In America, people scattered around more. . . I helped a lot, when young.

At the age of 62, they returned to America, spending time with their son and daughters. Five years later, in 1962, at the age of 67, they emigrated to Australia, with Anna, to join their three other children, all married then with families. Mariannina was married to Vincenzo Rossetti; Rosina to a man from Lama Peligna; and Antonio, to Lina Cavicchia.

I could have overlooked the fact that the community in Newcastle is one of three Lettesi communities, all linked to the village, Lettopalena; and to each other, by inseparable bonds of kinship. Felice De Vitis reminded me of that.

Donato De Vitis

Francesco, the son of Donato De Vitis, like Antonio, Felice's son, was a support and a *liaison* between his father and the outside world; and I recall the evening, with Francesco as interpreter, when Donato related his memories of Lettopalena and the way it had been during the period of occupation, when the village was destroyed.

He talked about the German occupation when Lettesi men would be rounded up by German soldiers for failing to cooperate. In one such incident, Donato was wounded, and was lucky to survive.

Shared memories about the past, and particularly this period, had strengthened the bonds of mutual support; so that during the difficult times in Australia, Donato, in spite of the barriers of language, was a *gatekeeper to paesani*, providing housing assistance to eleven other families.

3. YOUNGER GENERATION LEADERS

All together we say . . . “You come with me.”

Younger men contributed to the *gatekeeper* role of having satisfied a wide range of information needs and provided information on a large number of items. To provide information on a wide range of items usually required a fair degree of literacy. Most of those who did were of a younger generation, aged, at the time of interview, between 41 and 56 years. Most of them had arrived aged between 17 and 25 years. Like those above, they were earlier arrivals, having emigrated between 1948 and 1953; and they assumed a role of community support to those who followed later.

Antonio Della Grotta

Antonio Della Grotta arrived in Australia on the 24th of January 1952, at the age of 20. The eldest son of Leone, he was part of a large extended family, and one of the twelve Lettesi who came with assisted passage. On arriving at Bonegilla, authorities could send them anywhere. Antonio worked for two months in the vineyards at Barmera; then in Millicent for five months, building canals. He then made his way to Proserpine to join Lettesi.

While isolated from *paesani* and Italian-speaking people, generally, English and other survival skills had to be learnt quickly, and through one's own initiative; skills that proved useful when rejoining *paesani*. Antonio and Nicolino De Vitis corresponded in written English, sending to one another their critical comment, as friendly encouragement.

Antonio Della Grotta gave, immeasurably, to his community - his gift of ironic humour, balanced by a rare kind of sensibility, uncanny insight, generosity and vision. His measure of responsibility sustained a whole community, for while central within an extended family of sixteen nuclear households, his caring and support was *community*-inclusive.

At the time of the survey (1976), he was Secretary of the Committee. He had been six times President, one time Vice-President and five times Secretary. He was the dominant informant, having provided information to the greatest number of Lettesi; across the widest range of categories (11); and was one of the four people ranking highest for total items (34).

Analysis of the sources of information and support for selected items showed clear differentiation between the roles of *gatekeeper* and *opinion leader*. While the three who had filled the position of President may all have been regarded as *opinion leaders*, only one was distinctive in the role of *gatekeeper*, Antonio Della Grotta.

Antonio had responded to almost every kind of need, including complex areas where language was important; for example, home finance and legal matters; and on matters that demanded both confidence and trust, for example, baby health and a range of health problems. He not only provided information and advice, but would take people to appointments; and being one of the first Lettesi to be fluent in English, he often acted as interpreter. There was hardly a family interviewed who had not named Antonio as providing some kind of information or advice.

With the news his favourite program, Antonio was well-informed. He read two English-language newspapers daily; *La Fiamma*, occasionally; and supported a petition for ethnic radio in Newcastle. Antonio saw beyond the problems to their possible solutions; and he saw such solutions from the perspectives of both his community and social policy.

To counter problems in the workplace he saw, for example, the need for migrant delegates; workplace safety signs and films in different languages; a migrant information centre; English classes in the workplace that would have to be compulsory because of the lack of confidence preventing people from attending. His empathy, knowledge and communication skills were a lifeline to Lettesi and a gift that he gave freely. His own account was not self-promoting; but an account of Lettesi helping one another:

*The voice was there all the time. If something was going on, we all knew about it. We spread the voice among us. Often we went around the places together, looking for any job we could get. . . Good job. Word spreads.
Never been a fight among us - ever. . . Discussions - every day.*

There were other Lettesi leaders providing essential information and support on many items, including Giuseppe Borrelli (43) Salvatore de Stefano (37) and Fiorindo Martinelli (25). But while Fiorindo and Salvatore covered a high range of categories, 9 and 8, respectively, Giuseppe's support was focused on housing and home finance, through his real estate business.

Fiorindo Martinelli

Fiorindo Martinelli was an early arrival. As a grandson of the pioneer, Arcangelo Rossetti, and a nephew of Antonio and Giacomo in Proserpine, Fiorindo was part of a family chain that was initiated pre-war, and resumed in its aftermath. The first Rossetti brothers to arrive, post-war, were Alberto and Vincenzo, in October 1948. Then Fiorindo arrived in 1949 as a youth of 17. Peppino came later, in March 1951.

When the ship disembarked in Sydney, Giovanni De Vitis, Fiorindo's mother's cousin, was there to greet him and to see him on his way to Proserpine. A pre-war arrival, Giovanni had come to work at the Newcastle dockyards in 1947 and was now the main link between Proserpine and Newcastle, not only for Fiorindo but for the majority of Lettesi, on their seasonal journeys south to work in the industries.

It was 1951, and Fiorindo and his uncle, Peppino Rossetti, had been cutting cane together at Antonio's farm in Proserpine. They were now heading south to join Giovanni in Carrington, at Jackson's boarding-house where he was living. Giovanni took them to BHP where they worked as labourers in the blast furnace section, alongside Antonio and Filippo De Vitis, Antonio De Vitis, Felice's son, Guido Gizzi and Giovanni Tranchini. It was the part of BHP that the Australian-born avoided.

His English was very good and he was often requested to fill out medical claim forms and to explain the medical system, an area that worried people. He helped three people to find accommodation; he assisted nine others in finding employment; and seven people with housing information.

Fiorindo was regarded very highly by the community. He had a *gatekeeper* role but was never a committee member. Antonio Della Grotta explained it, saying simply, '*He didn't want to be*'. He was sociable but shy, competent but non-assertive, and he was friendly and approachable. His kinship network of 15 nuclear families was strengthened by his marriage to Tony Della Grotta's sister, a member of 16 nuclear households. When Filomena died, leaving two small children, Fiorindo re-married but has since passed away and would be deeply missed by all in the community.

Salvatore Di Stefano

Salvatore Di Stefano followed the same well-trodden pathway as Fiorindo Martinelli, Peppino Rossetti and so many other Lettesi, from their origin to destination; a pathway paved in mutual support, in the company of *paesani*. With sponsorship support from Alberto Rossetti, and a loan from Mr. Celedonia, the agent in Sulmona, Salvatore left the village in 1952, at the age of 21. On the ship with Salvatore there were the brothers, Pietro and Corrado Martinelli; Giovanni Cavicchia, Sabatino D'Accione, and Giuseppe Borrelli.

Giovanni de Vitis and Guido Gizzi were waiting for them in Sydney and had already worked out an accommodation strategy. It was arranged that Salvatore and Giuseppe Borrelli would share with Francesco Del Monaco and the brothers Filippo and Antonio de Vitis. They were boarding in the home of a Polish refugee, in Watson St. Islington, close to the home that soon became *Tranchini's Place*.

A Rumanian from *across the road* took them to BHP where Salvatore worked as a labourer for three months before moving on to Proserpine to work cutting cane. The Rossettis found him work on the farm of De Andrea, an Italo-Australian; then for the next four years it was seasonal work between Proserpine and Mildura, then from Proserpine to Newcastle. In Salvatore's own words: *All together we say . . . "You come with me."*

Salvatore was both a community *gatekeeper*, and a popular and respected *opinion-leader*. With some help from Giovanni de Vitis, he sponsored five family members - his wife, his mother, two brothers and a sister. After boarding for a time with Alberto Rossetti, then Dionino Cavicchia, he bought a house on a shared basis with the Romanelli brothers, Giovanni and Antonio, who later re-sold their share to him. It was the way it worked.

Then, in addition to accommodating his own family members, Salvatore provided board for at least five more Lettesi, as well as housing information to another eight people. He was responsible for advising eleven families on how to access an Italian-speaking doctor. He provided advice on child immunisation, how to access the dentist and the baby health clinic. I remember attending a Lettesi dance where Salvatore played the clown. He was an extrovert with a great sense of humour.

Giuseppe Borrelli

Giuseppe Borrelli's role, as an agent of change in the Lettesi community, could be described as that of *cosmopolite*. The role of *cosmopolite* was rare to the Lettesi. The *cosmopolite* was one who functioned, equally, within a community, and in mainstream society - who *belonged*, equally, to both.

Unlike first generation Greeks who looked to property and business as a pathway to independence, the Lettesi, throughout those years, followed a way of their own towards seasonal work in the cane-fields, before moving into heavy industry, generally as labourers. After a time there were exceptions. Some people moved towards preferred occupations, some as tradesmen, or as concreters, or into services and small business. Some occupations enhanced Lettesi contact.

Concerzio Tarantini, a builder, for example, either employed or found jobs for ten Lettesi people. Three delicatessens, operated by Lettesi, and located in Hamilton, specialised in *Italian* food; Raffaele Della Grotta was the Lettesi *village* barber, strategically located in Beaumont St. Hamilton; before he trained to be a barber in Sydney, Frank Martinelli had a

baker-run in Maryville; and Giovanni D'Amico could be consulted as a tailor. In addition there was a plumber, a fitter and a boilermaker; and an entry chain, via concreting, into independent business.

Borrelli Real Estate was different in the sense that, at first, Lettesi involvement was substantial; and Antonio Della Grotta, the prime community *gatekeeper*, even worked there for a time. As already mentioned, Giuseppe had been sent to a seminary as a child and was the only Lettesi, of those educated in Italy, to have the advantage of a secondary education.

During the early years of re-settlement when housing was, for Lettesi, their number one priority, there was a greater need for his involvement; but, in time, his networks had increasingly extended beyond the community into the world of business. Along with Dominic Tranchini, an Azzurri Committee member, he had a role in the merger of the Azzurri Soccer Club and the Highfields Bowling Club, to form the Highfields Azzurri Sports Club. Giuseppe's role, within the community, was otherwise focused on housing and home finance, where he provided information, advice and support to 39 Lettesi households.

The Rossetti Brothers

The Rossetti brothers followed in the footsteps of their father, Arcangelo, the pioneer. Antonio and Giacomo lived in Proserpine before the war and had already established an independent life in sugar-cane production. The cane farms were a vital base from which to sponsor a community.

Family reunion was also their priority. Giacomo sponsored Alberto and Antonio sponsored both Vincenzo and Peppino. Alberto came October 22, 1948, at the age of 28; Vincenzo had arrived, just a few weeks earlier, on October 6, aged 25; and Peppino, the youngest, after working for a time in Belgium came in 1951, aged 26. He recalls how good it felt:

I thought I was coming home the first time I come here. I felt that. - My father had been here. My brothers were here. And I felt it was my duty.

And so the chain began that transplanted a community from Italy to Australia; and it was almost accomplished by the time the Rossetti families had moved on to Newcastle. Having a family base in Proserpine, the three had remained longer, sponsoring their families sooner, to live with them there. Alberto and Vincenzo remained for 6 years, until 1954; and Peppino, *off-and-on*, between seasonal work, until 1956.

During that time the Rossetti family had initiated and supported the mass migration of a community in transit to a new homeland. Without the pioneers and without those stepping-stones, the cane farms in Proserpine, it could not have been accomplished. During that time, their level of support for new arrivals was significant because of sponsorship responsibilities undertaken by the family. But then it was time to establish their own home. It was time to rejoin *paesani* in Newcastle.

Alberto Rossetti

While awaiting the settlement of a house in Islington, Alberto boarded with his cousin, Maria Gizzi, the wife of Vincenzo. Maria was the daughter of Giacomo De Vitis, the grandson of his namesake, the first pioneer. Maria's father was in Proserpine. It was her brother, Giovanni,

who assumed the primary role of *godfather* to Lettesi, over-seeing their re-settlement. For Alberto it would have felt like being home - again.

Giovanni took Alberto to a job at BHP where he remained for a few months. Then Alberto's nephew, Fiorindo Martinelli, led him to a job at Stewart and Lloyds, as a machine operator, working alongside Francesco Del Monaco, Emideo Rossetti and Peppino Martinelli. For Lettesi new arrivals, support was always there. Community was all around.

Alberto, in turn, helped two Lettesi into jobs and gave housing advice to six other people. As well, he provided board accommodation to ten people, including Fiorindo, Salvatore Di Stefano, Giovanni Falcocchio, Domenic Palmieri, and to other Italians. Salvatore was his god-son and he had sponsored him from Proserpine.

Vincenzo Rossetti

Meanwhile Vincenzo continued on to Mildura, picking grapes for a season, before settling in Newcastle. His goal was to buy a house so the family could join him; but in the meantime he, also, boarded with Alberto. He went to work first at the Cardiff Railway Workshops with Domenico Martinelli, Fiorindo's father; but then he moved on to Stewart and Lloyds, working alongside his brother Alberto, Fiorindo, his nephew, Emideo Rossetti, Paulo Palmieri, Raffaele Della Grotta and Giovanni Cavicchia.

The necessity to learn English was less acute in Proserpine because everyone spoke Italian. It was difficult, as well, to organise a class because work loads were heavy and people were scattered. Nevertheless, Vincenzo was keen to learn English; so while in Brisbane, for a few months, in 1951, he attended night classes; and after settling in Newcastle, he learnt the language quickly. He used his dictionary, was an avid reader and learnt a lot from the media. He was interested in learning.

The assistance he gave to *paesani* in Newcastle was possibly an extension of his support role in Proserpine, and may have related to the way he was perceived there; but it was one that now depended on local knowledge, and on the literacy skills he had managed to acquire.

Vincenzo provided board accommodation to six people; housing and employment information to three; and was consulted on a range of more complex matters, including home finance, the medical system, medical forms, child health, and the dentist. He was a reliable informant.

Peppino Rossetti

When Peppino and his nephew, Fiorindo Martinelli, finished the season cutting cane, in 1951, they headed south to Newcastle to be met by Giovanni and taken to where he lived at Jackson's boarding house in Carrington. Peppino then moved on to a boarding house in Hamilton that was run by a Polish and Belgian couple. Having learnt some French while working in Belgium, he was able to arrange board there for six of his *paesani*. As well, he helped others to find employment. After five months working with Giovanni, Fiorindo and other Lettesi, at BHP, he returned to Proserpine with Fiorindo and others for the cane-cutting season.

This was the six-monthly seasonal work cycle, followed by Fiorindo and other Lettesi men, prior to their family's arrival in Australia. However, Peppino's wife and baby daughter

arrived in Proserpine in 1952, so his return was delayed until 1956. On their arrival in Newcastle they stayed with Vincenzo until the move to their own home. Although it was the ebb-tide of Lettesi immigration, Peppino was consulted on housing and other matters. He explained:

To each other we used to tell everything. We used to help each other that way. . . I took many people around looking for work.

Antonio D'Accione

By the time of the survey, Antonio D'Accione was Lettesi Club President. He was a person with presence and had the voice of a fine tenor, so that his arias were a highlight of any Lettesi function. Arcangelo Rossetti, the earliest arrival, had a sister, Marietta, who was the mother of Antonio; and so the Rossetti and D'Accione families were cousins.

Antonio was one of a younger group of leaders, having arrived in Australia in 1956, at the age of 18. This was after the formative pioneering stage, when *gatekeeper* roles were already well established, and when people were learning greater independence.

He became Lettesi President in 1976, at a stage when the Committee's responsibilities had shifted from welfare to recreation. His position at the top of the social interaction scale, and at the head of a large extended family system of 13 nuclear families, reinforced his status as the new community President.

Antonio D'Accione and Antonio Della Grotta were the longest-serving Presidents. The change in 1976 was a timely event, for their differentiated roles marked, just as clearly, the kind of transition that had occurred for the community, in moving from the function of welfare to recreation. Welfare had required *hands-on* experience, knowledge of *the system* and literacy skills, a product of the years when in search of a home-place.

Antonio D'Accione was a member of the Committee for 12 of the 14 years recorded (1969-1982), seven times as President, one time as Vice-President, and four times as Treasurer. These positions were a measure of the very high regard that was held for Antonio throughout the community.

As already noted there was a role differentiation between *gatekeeper* and *opinion leader*, though often a person may have filled both roles. Although Antonio became President, held other formal positions and was clearly an *opinion leader*, he was not among the principal community *gatekeepers*. Arriving in 1956, at the age of 18, it was a generation too late.

Nicolino De Vitis

Nicolino De Vitis was highly regarded, also, as an *opinion leader*, throughout the community. He was Foundation President of the Lettesi Committee, had been Treasurer nine times, and Secretary four times. He was the only Lettesi to have held committee positions, continuously, from 1969 until 1982, the full period of recording. His personal traits included a strong sense of caring, responsibility and loyalty.

Lettesi Committee members were generally representative of large extended families. Nicolino's community status was independent of family; for his only close kin, living in

Australia, were his sister Matilde, and her only son, Sergio. He, nevertheless, ranked eighth on the social interaction scale; and was a second cousin to Concerzio Tarantini and to Salvatore Di Stefano.

In Lettopalena, in 1978, the house where I was staying was just across the road from Nicolino's brother, Vincenzo. I remember his kitchen garden, and the vegetables he gave to me. It was probably the best kitchen garden in the village. Nicolino was from a family of ten children, with three brothers and six sisters. Of his brothers, one was in Argentina; the other in northern Italy. Matilde was in Hamilton; another sister in America; and four were in Italy.

I met his sisters, Giuseppina and Giuliana, in Palena, a neighbouring village, three kilometres away where their mother lay dying in Giuseppina's home. It is a memory that I treasure - holding the hand of that tiny person, and feeling it respond. She was resting there on the softest of pillows and covered in the whitest sheets, in a sun-lit room, at the centre of the home, enveloped by so much loving and caring. I remember, above the stairs, a painted dome ceiling, that seemed to epitomise how *Italian* that home was.

Nicolino arrived as an assisted migrant in 1952 when aged 21, and was sent, alone, to a dairy farm in Tasmania. From there, after meeting up with Concerzio Tarantini, he went to Proserpine, and then to Newcastle. There he married Maureen, an Australian-born; he had an excellent knowledge of English and was naturalized in 1960.

In terms of this commonly accepted criteria, Nicolino had achieved a high level of integration and one might expect that, residentially and socially, he would have moved away from Hamilton. He resided, however, in the very core of the community, and Maureen, his wife, was proud to be Lettesi. Feeling at home in the community, she perceived them as '*very lucky*' and had tried to draw closer and to learn to speak Italian .

Nicolino's role as an *opinion leader* was not due simply to his personal skills. It was also an expression of the warmth and affection with which he was regarded throughout his community. It may have been his shyness and gentle, non-assuming manner, in addition to the absence of a large dependent family, that explains the observation that in Nicolino's case, the role of *opinion leader* was more significant than that of *gatekeeper*.

Although he was clearly not a principal informant, I did become aware, through the course of the survey, that Nicolino held a '*special*' place among his friends. Antonio Della Grotta expressed this in his own words:

You want one word? - Humanitarian! If someone's in trouble Nick's the first to try to help. He always try to help everybody. I call Nick 'the Untouchable'. If anyone criticise him it wouldn't be true. If I have to describe my feelings about - and I've never told him how I feel, I'd have to say, like two brothers - the affection between them. With Nick, apart from my brothers and my sisters, my family - that's what I feel towards him and I know that's what he feels towards me.

Raffaele Della Grotta

Raffaele was the younger son of Leone Della Grotta, and the brother of Antonio. His wife was Maria, Fiorindo Martinelli's sister and Arcangelo Rossetti's granddaughter. In 1946 he was sent to an orphanage with Davide Tempesta and Sergio Borrelli in Teramo, L'Aquila; then was fostered with a family in Lanciano, Chieti. Arriving in Australia, in 1953, when 17 years old, Raffaele was assisted by his father and elder brother. Before the family move to Belford

Street, he had boarded with his uncle, Francesco Del Monaco, in Cleary Street. In 1962 his family moved to Beaumont Street.

In the early years Raffaele worked with *paesani* in the industries, and was part of a Lettesi network that functioned as channels providing information on employment. As such he assisted people in finding jobs. Since 1973, as a barber in Hamilton, he has performed a new, but significant, social role. In a formal sense, however, his main contribution was as a member of the Committee; as Vice-President, once; and six times as Secretary.

Belonging to the same, very large, extended families as his brother, Antonio, and his brother-in-law, Fiorindo; and ranking equal second with Salvatore Di Stefano, to Antonio D'Accione, on the sociometric scale, Raffaele's place was central within the networks of his community.

Raffaele's occupational pathway followed that of other *paesani*. His first job was at Stewart and Lloyds with Francesco Del Monaco, with whom he was boarding. He worked there for nearly two years before joining a group of *four or five* Lettesi, including Giuseppe Cavicchia and Antonio Martinelli, at Henry Lane's, the locksmith. After a few months he moved on to BHP, back to Stewart and Lloyd's, then to Proserpine, cutting cane. At the close of the season, he returned to Newcastle, and to a job at Stewart and Lloyd's.

He remembered, at BHP, there being many Lettesi, but working in different departments. At Stewart and Lloyd's Raffaele had recalled at least twenty Lettesi, naming Domenic Palmieri, Giuseppe Martinelli, Fiorindo Martinelli, Nicolino De Vitis, Antonio Della Grotta, Salvatore Di Stefano, Giuseppe Di Claudio, Giuseppe Cavicchia, Francesco Del Monaco, Alberto Rossetti - *and quite a few more*. After working two jobs between 1958 and 1960, he left to become a barber, full-time. After a number of moves to gain experience, he set up business, in 1973, in Beaumont Street, Hamilton.

Concerzio Tarantini

There was a high level of mobility among the Lettesi, for changing jobs was sometimes the only way to improve their situation; and, in the longer term, to gain financial independence. The pathway to independence for Concerzio Tarantini was one that required both confidence and initiative; but it was one that fostered Lettesi opportunity, for he assisted other *paesani* into jobs along the way. Concerzio's personal qualities and drive to independence enhanced his roles of *gatekeeper* and *opinion leader*. So did his role as head of a large extended family of 15 nuclear households.

Concerzio arrived with assisted passage in 1952, aged 19 years. At the Bonegilla camp the Lettesi group were separated, Concerzio being sent to a dairy farm at Murray Bridge, and his second cousin, Nicolino, to a dairy farm in Tasmania. After a long year of coping with loneliness and isolation, they met in South Australia and headed north to Proserpine to join *paesani*. The Rossettis arranged work with local Italian farmers and Concerzio returned for the following two seasons. In the cane off-seasons Concerzio headed south along a well-trodden pathway to the industries in Newcastle.

It is notable that leaders like Antonio Della Grotta, Salvatore Di Stefano, Nicolino De Vitis and Concerzio Tarantini all shared in the experience of assisted passage. They were young men aged from 19 to 21 years; they were all *volunteers*; and they were certainly *survivors*. Was part of their motivation a sense of adventure? Whatever the impulse, they were self-selected emigrants, a decision that required courage; they experienced the necessity to act

upon their own initiative; and isolation had facilitated their learning of English. They were well qualified for leadership.

Concerzio was often in demand as an interpreter, but his *gatekeeper* role was probably most marked in the work situation. Through his initiative and mobility job pathways were created and they were accessed through the Lettesi networks. The process was akin to that of chain migration. For example, while working at BHP during the cane off-season, in 1954, he took his brother-in-law, Leone, and Sabatino Della Grotta, and another Lettesi, to jobs at the Bradford Cotton Mills, in the suburb of Kotara, an area not usually frequented by Lettesi. They were older men and the work was easier than labouring in heavy industry. There they were joined by other Lettesi, including Leone's son, Antonio, and Concerzio, himself, in 1957.

In the cane off-seasons he worked at BHP (1954); at Commonwealth Steel (1955); then, again, at BHP(1956) with Domenic Palmieri. After six months at Bradford Cotton, in 1957, he went to Courtaulds, a processing plant, with Giovanni Terenzini. After six months he moved to Henry Lane, the locksmith, where he stayed for eight years, working alongside Salvatore Di Stefano, Dionino Di Claudio, Antonio De Vitis, Oreste Martinelli and Antonio D'Accione. Eight years later, he entered into partnership with an Italian, Peter Pucetti, to manage an Italian club.

The club had been opened by Peter Pucetti with another Italian, Peter Sandroni. When Sandroni withdrew to open another business, Concerzio joined Pucetti whom he had met when working at Henry Lane, the locksmith. While managing the club, he employed his nephews, Fiorindo Martinelli, and Antonio Della Grotta. Later it was purchased by another Lettesi, Francesco Martinelli and his wife, Erica, an immigrant from Germany.

After leaving the club, Concerzio turned to building. He gained experience with licensed builders, assisted Lettesi with renovations, and worked for a time with Lettesi concreters like Paolo Palmieri. By 1970, he was an independent builder, but working closely with Lettesi and other Italians. His *gatekeeper* role, providing access to jobs, was then largely due to his status as a builder, with a range of useful contacts. At the time of the interview he was building a home for Sergio Pigliacampo, Nicolino's nephew.

As information was disseminated through community networks, leaders like Concerzio could be very influential, for example, where advice had been requested about a doctor, medical fund or source of home finance. A person would be approached because he was perceived to have both knowledge and credibility, or could liaise with the appropriate contact people. The process can be seen by examining the channels of access to family doctors.

For general practitioners, there were three main channels - Antonio Della Grotta, his father Leone, and Concerzio Tarantini. It was on their advice, collectively, that 22 families decided to attend an Italian-speaking doctor, for whom there were 53 Lettesi client families. Those remaining were advised through others in the network. For information on dentists the pattern was more fragmented. Communication with a doctor was of vital importance; but less so with a dentist.

Choosing an accountant was like choosing a good doctor, and for the Lettesi the choice was not easy. The matter was complex. What were the options? And how to make an informed assessment? They needed advice from people they could trust, who had access to information. Two vital sources were Raffaele Della Grotta's barber shop and the Italian club in Beaumont Street where Concerzio had been manager. Concerzio first met the accountant,

Mr. Lindgren, through Raffaele, Mr. Lindgren's barber. In a role one can describe as both *gatekeeper* and *opinion leader*, Concerzio then directed 36 people in selecting Mr. Lindgren as their accountant.

The pathway from Bonegilla had been a long and winding road for Concerzio and others who had arrived through the assisted passage scheme.

Croce Di Stefano and the Lettesi Committee

Croce Di Stefano, Ugo's son, came in 1959 at the age of seven, young enough to obtain an Australian education and to have missed the immediate impact of war. His father recalled the year it took to *catch up*; his being *very close to his grandfather* who, having lived in America, had *helped him a lot*. On leaving school, Croce completed an electrical apprenticeship.

For the past 18 years, Croce Di Stefano has carried the baton on behalf of his community. It was passed to him by Antonio D'Accione after his 10 years as President. Croce's time began in 1984, as Vice-President of the Committee, as Secretary (1985-86), then as President, from 1988, a position that he held for 8 of his 18 years, as a committee member. As Secretary, for the past 3 years, Croce, with support from Sergio Pigliacampo and the Treasurer, Angelo Thodas, has sustained the Committee.

Angelo, the husband of Angelina Martinelli, daughter of Nicole, was Treasurer for 20 years, a remarkable contribution, considering that he is Greek. Other contributors included Jim Gizzi (13 years), Croce's brother, Joe (9), Sergio Pigliacampo (8) and Frank De Vitis (6). Sergio, *the person always there, when there is something to be done*, was President twice and Vice-President four times. Jim was President (3) and Vice-President (3). Giuseppe, Croce's younger brother, provided new generation leadership, as Secretary, for 7 of his 9 years involvement; and there was also support from Giovanni Palmieri.

For this generation, it is a time of decision. Will the community endure as an organised social entity, as a formal symbol of identity and belonging? While the community role as a system of support in the process of resettlement is a thing of the past, Lettesi continue to socialise, more informally, as family and friends; and for many through membership and social interaction at the Highfields Club, as part of a wider social network.

4. THE LETTESI SUPPORT NETWORK

See this one, this day; that one, another day . . . We see everybody! If somebody need help, I try to help.

The previous two chapters acknowledged individuals who, during the hard years of emigration and re-settlement, took a leadership role in support of their community, as *gatekeepers* and *opinion leaders*. While older generation leaders were intent on securing family reunion, shelter and employment, younger generation leaders provided support for longer-term re-settlement needs. These leadership roles spread both energy and information, in a two-way exchange, across community networks. The following examples are of younger leaders whose circumstances varied but who played a role in this exchange of information.

Domenico Palmieri

Domenico Palmieri was five times Vice-President of the Lettesi Committee. Like Antonio D'Accione he arrived in Australia subsequent to the initial stage of re-settlement, in 1955, when 20 years of age. His father died in Lettopalena two years later, in 1957. His father-in-law, Marcello D'Amico, arranged his sponsorship with Antonio Rossetti, the formal sponsor being John Larcel, a Proserpine farmer. There was a loan from Mr. Celedonia.

Domenico's father, a United States citizen, had returned there three times, over an 18 year period, to mine coal in Ohio. He returned to Lettopalena in 1931 and, after the war, was unable to return. Domenico, however, had a brother, Sabatino, in Turtle Creek, Pittsburgh, and could have followed him there. There were other options, too. Another brother, Antonio, and an uncle and cousins were in Caseros, Argentina. Concerzio's brother, a close friend, was in New Caledonia. Collective Lettesi feedback, however, favoured Australia, and his fiancé's family were already there.

During the times in Newcastle, when the cane seasons ended, board was arranged, in 1955, by Marcello in Hamilton, with himself and six others in the home of a Russian immigrant; and in 1956 Salvatore Di Stefano found board for him with a Polish refugee. Then for almost four years, from 1957, till he purchased his home in Skelton Street, Hamilton, he boarded with his aunt, Iolanda Rossetti, the wife of Alberto, at 10 Dent Street, Islington.

On his arrival from Proserpine, in 1955, Concerzio Tarantini found him a job at Bradford Cotton Mills, where he had taken the older Della Grotta brothers. Domenico recalled:

It took me three months to learn weaving. Con helped me. He had a motor-bike then. Transported everybody - helped a lot. Took me to the office to interpret for me and showed me the job.

After five months he obtained work at BHP, then at Stewart and Lloyds where he remained fourteen years, working alongside Giuseppe Martinelli, Orazio D'Amico and Giuseppe Cavicchia. He left to join his friend, Davide Tempesta, and other Lettesi at BHP .

As part of a social network that disseminated information through its interpersonal channels, Lettesi gave assistance when opportunities arose. Domenico provided board to Davide Tempesta when he was sponsored by his father-in-law, Marcello D'Amico; he advised a few people on how to complete their tax returns and medical forms, on child immunisation and home purchase. He was part of the support network.

Giovanni Di Claudio

Giovanni Di Claudio was three times Lettesi Secretary. Part of a large extended family, he was sponsored by his brother, Salvatore Di Stefano, in 1955, at the age of 18. Giovanni then sponsored his sister, Pina, his brother Amedeo, and later, his wife Nina, in 1966. Two of his sisters became the owners of delicatessens, Pina the wife of Antonio D'Accione, long term Lettesi President; and Lina, the wife of Antonio De Vitis, son of Felice. Their father had owned a delicatessen and butcher shop in Lettopalena.

Like others from the village, Giovanni went to Proserpine, cutting cane for three seasons from 1955 until 1957. When the cane seasons ended, he too came south to Newcastle where he boarded, for a while, with Alberto Rossetti. It was Alberto who took him to Stewart and Lloyds where, on the first two occasions, he worked with Lettesi - Fiorindo Martinelli, Giacinto Cavicchia, Giuseppe Martinelli, Salvatore Di Stefano, Raffaele Della Grotta and Paolo Palmieri. For seven years he lived with his brother, Salvatore, until 1963, when, with family support, he acquired his own home.

In 1958, after three seasons cutting cane, Giovanni went to work at NSW Aerated Waters with Giacinto Cavicchia and Amedeo Tarantini. After a few months, to improve his income, he returned to heavy industry, first to BHP, then Lysaughts, BHP, and Lysaughts, once again. Finally, he and Amedeo went to Transfield, then to EPT, Italian engineering firms. He was followed there by *paesani* - his brother Salvatore, Antonio D'Accione and Nelio Martinelli. Giovanni knew about EPT because his father-in-law and brother-in-law, whose village home had been Palena, were both working there.

Having in-laws from Palena, and being within the Lettesi network, in close association with community leaders, Giovanni had access to a vast collective store of vital information disseminated through the networks. He assisted six people in finding accommodation, gave housing information to another two people and helped a few more in relation to a job, finding a dentist and with child immunisation. Giovanni put it this way:

See this one this day, that one another day; and if we go to the club we see others - everybody! . . . If somebody needed help, I try to help.

Davide Tempesta

Davide Tempesta had served as Vice-President for a year on the Committee. He came in 1955, at the age of 21, with a loan from Mr. Celedonia. His sponsor, Marcello D'Amico, was the father-in-law of his close friend, Domenico Palmieri. He sponsored his mother, then his wife, Anna Bonelli, in 1959; then later sponsored Anna's brother and nephew. She came from Teranova, a village in Chieti.

Apart from his mother, Davide had no Lettesi relatives in Newcastle. Three cousins had settled in Adelaide after their government work contracts, as assisted immigrants, had taken them there. Being the primary breadwinner, his family responsibilities, at that time, weighed heavily on him; and community support was very important. He said to me:

First of all I had to get all my debts out. Had no money. Had to borrow money - even for my suits to come here, and my fare . . . Plus my mother was sick and I had to send money to her, and to my wife to bring her here. Here I had most friends - I'd say the lot - only two or three Lettesi in different states. We all landed in Newcastle.

On arriving in Newcastle, Davide boarded for a few months with Falco Martinelli. He then shared board with Emideo Rossetti and other Lettesi at Donino Cavicchia's, in Islington, for a year. He then found board with Polish and Australian families. Then after eighteen months boarding at Antonio Di Claudio's, he bought his own home in 1960, and in 1966 moved out to North Lambton to live next door to Antonio Della Grotta.

For 21 years he worked at BHP among other Lettesi. Some he recalled were Antonio Della Grotta, Nelio Martinelli, Corrado Martinelli and Raffaele Palmieri. With no direct family among the Lettesi, and living within the outer concentration, Davide interacted less on a house-to-house basis than other Lettesi. But that was where his identity, belonging and loyalty resided.

Berardino D'Amico

Berardino D'Amico was an assisted immigrant, arriving at Bonegilla in 1952 when he was 24 years old. In 1956 he sponsored his brother-in-law, Antonio D'Accione, who was then 18 years; then his brother, Giovanni, in 1959, at the age of 29. He had also agreed to sponsor his nephew, Franco, who later changed his mind. His wife was Navilia D'Accione, Antonio D'Accione's sister, a niece of Arcangelo and cousin of the Rossetti brothers.

Berardino recalls how, on arriving at Bonegilla, there were few jobs available; and how, after two months clearing land outside Melbourne, the consulate sent them to a hostel in Footscray. After two months there, he went to Mt. Gambier where a black-market operated selling jobs at 15 pounds a job. Berardino, wisely, took advice not to pay. When the job ended, Concerzio Tarantini *called* him to Murray Bridge where he worked for five months at the water authority, before heading off to Proserpine.

Between 1953 and 1954, Berardino commuted between Proserpine and the BHP. For the first six months, his brother-in-law, Sabatino D'Accione, found him board with a Ukrainian refugee, and a job at BHP in the coke ovens section. From Proserpine he returned to board with Sabatino.

When he came back to stay, he lived for a year with Domenico Martinelli and his son Fiorindo and found a job in the coal wash at BHP. Then in 1956, he and Andrea Martinelli shared the purchase of a home. In 1958, he bought his own home. He remained at BHP for 22 years, working in the same department as Remo Terenzini and Filippo De Vitis.

Berardino provided accommodation to three Lettesi, and housing advice to seven people. Two *paesani* said that he had helped them into jobs; others that he gave them health service information. His perception of himself as part of the Lettesi group, can be seen from a comment on union meetings:

At big meeting we only listen - don't say anything. Friends everywhere. We say - "What did he say?" - and put the hands up.

Giuseppe Falcocchio

Giuseppe spent three years as a POW in England where he learnt to speak some English. Following the war, he and his wife spent six years in Naples, in a refugee camp, awaiting return to Libya to where the family had emigrated, prior to the war. When sponsorship was

offered, through Antonio Rossetti, by a Mr. Materazzo, a farmer in Proserpine, Giuseppe changed plans. With a loan from Mr. Celedonia, he came in 1953, at the age of 33.

After working for a season, cutting cane in McKay, he bought a ticket to Mildura where he intended picking grapes; but on approaching Broadmeadow station, he heard the guard's announcement to alight there for Newcastle. The realisation came - *Newcastle! That's the place where Sabatino and Theresa live!* - and, on impulse, he left the train.

He was assured by Lettesi friends that there was *plenty of work* in Newcastle and the next day he secured a job at BHP where he remained for the following 23 years. He worked, first, in the bloom mill; and then the open hearth. Work was hot, difficult and tiring; but security was guaranteed.

At that time, in 1953, there were only a few Lettesi settled permanently in Newcastle. Giuseppe remembers Giovanni Tranchini, Vincenzo Gizzi, Alberto Rossetti and Francesco Del Monaco. Giuseppe had arrived on the same ship as Giovanni's daughter, and so, having the address, he went straight there. The first two weeks he stayed at Tranchini's place; then boarded with a Polish refugee in Waratah; then at Alberto Rossetti's home at Dent Street, Islington. He later settled in Everton Street, Hamilton.

As part of the Lettesi network, Giuseppe gave support to two Lettesi men on housing matters, directed five people to a family doctor, assisted with filling out medical forms and provided information on baby health services.

Pasquale Martinelli

Pasquale was a young boy, nine years old and in his second year of school, when the village was destroyed. He remembers the trek in the snow from Lettopalena, around the mountain, to Roccapia.

I remember, we had to kill a dog to eat. . . My mother's brother was killed on a bridge, by a mine. . . There was one metre of snow. . . And she dropped her baby daughter.

With others from the village, the family went to Bari where Pasquale completed four more years of school, before returning to Lettopalena. It was then a matter of waiting for the opportunity to emigrate. The time came in 1954 when Pasquale was 20.

His father, Pietro, was working in Newcastle. A loan was arranged from Mr. Celedonia, and Mr. Botta, a Proserpine farmer, agreed to be the sponsor. While still retaining its sponsorship connections, Proserpine could now be by-passed, on a pathway direct to Newcastle. Pasquale arrived in Sydney, two shillings in his pocket, and afraid that he might not be able to find his father. Six years later, in 1961, with Mr. Botta again the sponsor, and a loan from Mr. Celedonia, Pasquale sponsored his wife, Angela Palmieri.

For the first eight months in Newcastle, he boarded with his uncle, Guido Gizzi. A Rumanian refugee, with whom his father had boarded, then found him a room with a Polish refugee where he remained for six months. By 1956, he and his father had bought a home in Blackall Street, Hamilton, close to the community. Like many *paesani*, his first job was at BHP. After a year, however, he found a job at Steggles, close-by in Hamilton; and he retained that position.

He had a part-time job, as well, employed as a waiter at the Premier Hotel. There were no Lettesi working there; only one Italian; but at the end of a work-day, some Lettesi friends would gather there for a drink and a chat. Pasquale provided accommodation for four people, two of them Lettesi, and two from Trieste, housing advice to four Lettesi, and support to find a job.

We helped a lot of people - a lot of our friends. When people came from Lettopalena we took them to a job by pushbike.

Falco Martinelli

There were other Lettesi, like those above, not among the main leaders, but who shared what they knew among other Lettesi. Falco Martinelli had assisted two people to find accommodation, two with housing information, another two to find a job, and a few other people with matters involving documents. His support role appears surprising when one sees how different his pathway was from his fellow Lettesi.

Falco's journey began the same way. Arriving in 1953, at 20 years of age, he spent three seasons in Proserpine cutting cane with Lettesi, and working in the off-seasons at BHP and Stewart and Lloyds. But then the pathways diverged. Falco went to Innisfail; then to Mt. Isa, mining; to the Snowy Mountains Hydro Scheme; then to Canberra, doing building jobs.

He rejoined the community for two years, in Newcastle, until a job with EPT took him, first, to Queensland, then Victoria, then Tasmania. After working nearly four months for an industry in Melbourne, he went to Tonga where he met his wife, Tina, then returned, once again, to Newcastle. There he continued to work for engineering firms like Citra, Eglo and Honneybrook. None of this conformed to the usual Lettesi pattern.

In Lettopalena there was an old man, Ferri Marziale. He had lived in America for 37 years, but had returned and remained in the village until his death in 1966. He had taught some of the young men, including Falco Martinelli and Giovanni Di Claudio, to speak some English and this had undoubtedly increased their self-confidence. Though an independent person, Falco still perceived the value of community. Some of his comments were:

You've got friends there - you need information - that's it! Then you can spread out. . . I travelled by myself. Never felt out of place. Could speak some English before I came here.

Their experience of emigration and re-settlement had been different. Yet they shared that sense of identity and belonging that made them part of a functioning community. Without the contributions of people in the network, the leadership roles would not have been so effective. There were 78 people named as having provided key information, assistance or advice - too many for their stories all to be recorded here. The above are just a few examples.

5. THE WIDENING SOCIAL NETWORKS

*We would always say . . . Why didn't you come and work where I work ?
Friends all very close to me.*

Pathways to Employment

Pathways to employment had led from the cane-fields to the BHP, Commonwealth Steel, Stewart and Lloyds and to other heavy industries. Other smaller chains then led, for example, through the industries to Bradford Cotton Mills; Henry Lane, the locksmith; into smaller private enterprise including delicatessens; to services, like barber shops and baker runs; and to jobs with the new Italian engineering companies, like Transfield and EPT. For younger, stronger men whose education was disrupted by war and emigration, there was a pathway into concreting via wider *Italian* networks that, for some, led to independence.

The Concreting Network

It was an occupational pattern recurring throughout Australia - the chain migration of Italians into concreting; and for young Lettesi men, like Giacomo Gizzi, Francesco De Vitis, his namesake Francesco, the son of Donato and Paolo Palmieri, it was a chance to gain financial independence. It also provided openings for other Lettesi, like Mario Palmieri and Amedeo Di Claudio, to work, for a time, concreting.

Concreting, being heavy work was suited more to younger men, and especially to those who arrived while in their teens; and, because of the language barrier, had cut short their education. As well, there were younger people whose schooling, in Lettopalena, was disrupted by the war; and some young Lettesi, experiencing both, were doubly disadvantaged. For many young men trades courses were not an option. Concreting was.

Giacomo Gizzi

Giacomo was the son of Vincenzo and Maria Gizzi. He was also the grandson of Giacomo De Vitis, who was the grandson of his name-sake, the Lettesi pioneer. He came to Australia in 1951, at the age of four, and for the first two years, he attended school in Proserpine. Then the family moved to Newcastle when Guido, his uncle, purchased a home there.

After leaving school, in 1961, Giacomo, through recommendation of a Calabrese friend, obtained a job at Friars Delicatessen where he worked for a year. Then in 1962, he joined Lettesi friends who were concreting with De Martin Bros. There was his uncle, Antonio D'Amico, another Antonio D'Amico (not related), Giovanni D'Accione and many other Lettesi or *Italians* whom he could not recall. When offered better money, he accepted work with Michilis, in 1964. Michilis had previously worked for De Martin Bros. In 1970, after six years with Michilis, he began working for himself. It was a fast track to independence.

While working independently, Giacomo retained close links with the *community*, twice holding the position of Vice-President on the Committee. He also retained social and working relationships with Lettesi friends, including Giovanni D'Accione, Francesco De Vitis, Vincenzo De Vitis, Mario Palmieri, Angelo Rossetti and Nick Tranchini.

Francesco De Vitis

Francesco, the son of Donato De Vitis, was 12 years old when he came to Australia. As reported earlier, his father was wounded during the German occupation; and when only two weeks old, Francesco had slipped from his exhausted mother's arms, in the winter's snow, on the journey to Roccapia. They had barely survived. Once in Australia, he was old enough for high school, but too old to catch up and to finish his schooling.

Francesco, after a few years fencing, worked for three years for an Italian baker; then another three years for an Italian wine salesman. Being well-known among Italians, he was soon offered work concreting with Agresti; then Suprano in 1970. By 1972 he was working for himself. His father, Donato, during his first six months in Newcastle, when aged 39, had been concreting with De Martin Bros., an unusual occupation for an older man. Francesco's plan was to stop on turning 40.

On the day of the interview, in 1976, Francesco and two others had already laid a slab for a 15 square house. They had then laid the footings for the new house being built by Giacomo Gizzi at Belmont, Lake Macquarie.

Mario Palmieri

Mario Palmieri was born in Bari, during the war, after the village was destroyed. He was twelve when he emigrated, in 1957, the same age as Francesco De Vitis; and like Francesco, he was old enough for high school, but too old to catch up and to finish his schooling. School, in fact, had been a painful experience, not only for him, but for other Lettesi arriving in their teens; and most of them left school as soon as they were able, particularly the young men now eager to begin work to assist the family income.

In 1960, after Mario left school, he worked for five years at an iron gate factory in Islington, with Francesco de Vitis and Tonino Palmieri. In 1965, Paolo, his elder brother, took him to Cantarelli where he learnt to lay concrete. Two years later he went to work for Michilis with Giacomo Gizzi and Giovanni D'Accione. Then one year later he rejoined his brother, Paolo, working for a Lettesi, Francesco De Vitis. For almost six years, the brothers worked as partners; but at the time of the interview, Mario worked for Michilis with Amedeo Di Claudio, another Lettesi friend.

Paolo Palmieri

In some respects, Paolo Palmieri's situation was similar to that of his younger brother, Mario; and to that of Giacomo Gizzi and Francesco De Vitis. Paolo was only in his third year of school when the war intervened; and when able to return to school he was 15 years of age, too old for his younger classmates. But he was soon old enough, at 18 years of age, to be granted assisted passage to emigrate to Australia, along a very different pathway. School in Australia was not his induction, as it was for the others.

In 1952 he arrived in Australia with friends Raffaele Palmieri and Concerzio Tarantini, and they were taken to Bonegilla. After three weeks in Bonegilla, Paolo, Raffaele and Emidio Rossetti were sent to Mt Gambier to work in forestry, cutting timber and planting pines. Three months later Raffaele was sent to factory jobs in Adelaide, then in Melbourne. Paolo and Emidio remained in Mt Gambier for nearly eighteen months. It was a *No Man's Land* for

them. There were few jobs around and Giovanni Tranchini had written to them, from Newcastle, saying - *plenty of jobs here*. Being with Lettesi was a far better option; so they made their way from Mt. Gambier to Newcastle.

On arriving in Newcastle Antonio Della Grotta took Paolo and Emidio to where he was working, in construction at BHP, with Giuseppe Terenzini. When Raffaele Palmieri arrived in Newcastle, Paolo took him there; and then to Stewart and Lloyds where he had begun working with Raffaele Della Grotta (Antonio's brother), Emidio Rossetti, Fiorindo Martinelli, Dominic Palmieri and Tonino Palmieri. He was there for nearly ten years. It was a long hard induction but one that had taught him both the value of *community* and the way to independence.

In 1964, Paolo began concreting, first for Cantarelli; then, for his cousin, Francesco De Vitis, with Mario his brother, his uncle Antonio D'Amico and Emidio Falcocchio. He and Mario did concreting together, for six years, with Concerzio Tarantini, who was working as a builder. Mario returned to Michilis in 1972. For Paolo and Concerzio it was a long road to independence. It began in 1952, with assisted passage to Australia, then progressed via the friendship and support of their community. They, in turn, generated jobs for other Lettesi.

Amedeo Di Claudio

Amedeo Di Claudio was sponsored by his brother, Giovanni, in 1958, when he was 14 years old. His situation was very different from that of his brothers. There was Salvatore who came as an assisted immigrant in 1952, aged 21; and Giovanni who came in 1955, aged 29. By 1958 the community had established its home-place in Newcastle and men no longer commuted from Proserpine. His brother, Giovanni, had been one of the last to do so.

Amedeo's situation was different again from that of his peer group, most of whom had experienced some English language education; and it was different with respect to his wife, as well, for Rosa's education was wholly in English. It was natural, however, that Amedeo would prefer to work among Italian-speaking people; and the opportunity was there to follow in the pathway of fellow Lettesi concreters.

Through Giovanni D'Accione's father he obtained work at De Martins, in 1958, with Giovanni D'Amico. He remained for three years; then after a two-month break, in 1961, he returned there to work with Antonio D'Amico, Giovanni D'Amico, Giovanni D'Accione and Giacomo Gizzi.

Many of those who learnt the trade with De Martin, later became independent, and Amedeo worked for them. He worked for Michilis for three years with Giovanni D'Accione and Giacomo Gizzi from 1963; Manchinelli for six years from 1966; Michilis for six months with Giovanni D'Accione in 1972; Joe Saprano for three years with Antonio Falcocchio from 1972; and, in 1976, again with Michilis. It was a very effective employment network, for young Italians in Newcastle.

Other *ethnic* networks opened opportunities. Francesco Martinelli arrived in Australia at the age of 13, in 1954. His first job was a baker run in Maryville, near Islington. The position was found for him by Dominic Gizzi, his best friend in Lettopalena, already working in Australia. After six months Francesco passed the job to Nick Tranchini, on the understanding that, when he left, it would be offered to his brother, Nick.

Having worked as a barber with his father, in Italy, he obtained his licence then managed a shop, owned by a Greek man. When Concerzio Tarantini left the Italian club in Beaumont

Street, Francesco bought the business from Peter Pucetti. These wider networks were stepping-stones to independence.

The above accounts illustrate how social networks providing access to jobs were expanding to include many other Italians; and how concreting came to be dominated by Italians. It was a reflection of how this younger generation, having their education disrupted by war and emigration, turned to job opportunities where *certificates* were not required, where youth was an asset, and where access was guaranteed, via interpersonal networks. Widening social networks, as in other cities of Australia, reflected the changing patterns of interaction whose genesis was in the schools and playing fields of Newcastle. Lettesi social networks facilitated this process of social integration.

The newly-emergent generation of Lettesi who were born, grew up and educated in Australia found a widening field of employment opportunity. Achievements reflected an innate potential, strengthened by a collective spirit of survival. But so essential, too, was the acquiring of skills to access channels of communication that would open more complex community networks. This second generation of Lettesi families are now an integrated part of the mosaic that comprises the community that is *Newcastle*. The life and colour they have added, through their work and creativity, have been a gift to the city, especially in Hamilton where the city's heart beats strongly.

6. PART OF THE WIDER MOSAIC

What happen to us - if, tomorrow, the club closes?

The Community - Past and Present

To the first generation of Lettesi in Newcastle, their *community* symbolised the shared past and common culture that had given them a sense of belonging and identity. Their solidarity was a response to the need to create a social world that could deal with the problems that an immigrant faced in an alien situation. The Lettesi were clearly an *ideal type* community, with a structure that reflected its primary function as a community support system. That was its purpose. *Home* was Hamilton.

Since 1976, the year of the interviews, community needs have changed. With this new generation, needs are now inter-generational, with the support role confined within extended family systems which tend to be self-supporting. While current needs reflect those of mainstream society, family bonds are often closer, and support, more comprehensive. The generation that supported Lettesi through re-settlement now support their children in the care of their grand-children.

Lettesi networks still flourish; but less from necessity than from bonds of belonging whose roots lay in the past; and though the Committee still supports Lettesi social functions, the position of President currently stands vacant. The focus now is to encourage support from the new generation to volunteer time to keep the Azzurri Sports Club afloat. One of the older generation asks: *What happen to us - if, tomorrow, the club closes?*

Retired older leaders like Antonio Della Grotta and his brother, Raffaele, have worked tirelessly, as volunteers, to control club costs against the new financial threat that is a symptom of the times. The fate of *the club*, now the main Lettesi icon, and the one remaining place of Lettesi interaction, if it were to close, would be a turning point for the community. Whatever the outcome, already there are some, too old or too sick to take themselves there. This has been the story of a community in search of place. It is a community now woven into the fabric of a city, its presence most marked, still, in cosmopolitan Hamilton.

A Stroll along Beaumont Street - 2005

It is Year 2005, and nearly thirty years have passed since I carried out the survey. Before writing this concluding chapter, I took a stroll along Beaumont Street with Antonio Della Grotta. I wanted him to convey to me how he perceives the Lettesi presence, both now and in the past; so for Antonio it was a stroll down *Memory Lane*. We began our walk at the corner of Tudor and Beaumont Street, outside the chemist shop.

The Dolomiti Café No.1

I needed no introduction to the *Dolomiti Café* though it has not occupied its old site, around the corner in Tudor Street, since the Newcastle earthquake in 1989. It was a favourite of mine. The café was tiny but the pasta was delicious and the coffee was superb. It was owned by two brothers, Angelo and Arduino Candian from Padua. Angelo's wife, Lina, was one of the four

daughters of Sabatino Della Grotta, Antonio's uncle. Although not from Lettopalena, Angelo has held positions on the Lettesi Committee.

Pina's Delicatessen No.1

Looking back across Tudor Street, opposite the church, Antonio pointed to a shop where Pina Cavicchia and her sister, Gia, had opened a delicatessen, in the early 1960s. Their father, Dionino, had arrived in Australia in 1951 at the age of 36, his sponsor being Giacomo Rossetti. Pina's husband, Dominic Buresti, though not a Lettesi, was involved with the community and was President of the Azzurri Club committee. The delicatessen offered a handy stop for Lettesi women, between home and other shopping - and it was only a stones throw from the Exchange Hotel, a favourite for the men. It was Pina Cavicchia who first named the shop *Pina's Delicatessen*.

The delicatessen changed hands then was bought, some years later, by another Lettesi couple, Renato Rossetti and his wife, Theresa. Renato was Dionino Cavicchia's wife's cousin. He came to Australia in 1961 at the age of 21, and after working at BHP, had taken up concreting. In 1980 they sold the shop to Pina and Antonio D'Accione. Antonio had been working at Carrington Slipways but he left to help Pina in the delicatessen which they sold in 1986. Their intention was to relocate to a more accessible location.

John Palmieri, Solicitor and Attorney

On turning from Tudor into Beaumont Street, if one glances upwards to the first floor window of the building on the corner, there is the name *John Palmieri, Solicitor and Attorney*. The sign has now changed. I recall it used to read *Attorney At Law*. Antonio Della Grotta stood still, for a moment, then pointed to a location, across the road at No 117. It was the site of John Palmieri's former office.

John is the elder son of Raffaele Palmieri who, with friends Con Tarantini and Paulo Palmieri, arrived in Australia with assisted passage in 1952 when 19 years of age. Angela, his mother, is Giovanni D'Amico's sister; and his grandmother was a cousin to Alberto Rossetti's wife and to Donato De Vitis' wife. She was born in America where his grand-parents lived before finally returning to Lettopalena. John has a younger brother, Mario.

The Flower Palace No.1

At 118, opposite John Palmieri's former office, and where Gerardis is now, there was once the *Flower Palace*. The owners were Leo and Gianna Della Grotta. Leo, the son of Antonio Della Grotta, was a journalist at the Herald, and so Gianna managed the flower shop. They have two children, Adam and Leah. On my last visit to the village, in 1994, the children surrendered their bedroom to me in the home that had belonged to their great-aunts, Leone Della Grotta's sisters. It was the family's first time in Lettopalena.

The Flower Palace No.2

The *Flower Palace* moved to a new location, in a busier section, opposite the paper shop, between James and Lindsay Streets. There, Leo and Gianna sold a half share to Philip Stair

and his wife, Maria, who was Leo's sister and Antonio Della Grotta's daughter. Gianna and Philip shared the management of the shop.

The Flower Palace No.3

There was yet another move of the *Flower Palace* to another shop across the road that provided extra space. Then after Gianna's father died, being around flowers saddened her, and so she sold her share to Philip.

The Rossi Centre

The Rossi Centre is a small arcade of restaurants and offices. A lane leads out the back to a parking area, off Lindsay Street. The business is managed from a Real Estate office, at the front of the arcade, beside the TAB and the Post Office which front onto Beaumont Street and its busiest corner. The Rossi family are not Lettesi, but one of the sons, Randolph, married Davide Tempesta's daughter, Maria; and two *Lettesi* shops were located there.

The Dolomiti Restaurant No.2

The earthquake had determined the fate of the small café, but the outcome was good. The *Dolomiti's* new location, at the end of the arcade, had extensive indoor and outdoor areas with adjacent parking. Being the busiest, yet quietest point, in the Beaumont Street shopping area, the new *Dolomiti* Restaurant was now accessible to the general population. It was always full.

Pina's Delicatessen No.2

When the D'Acciones sold the old shop, in 1986, they moved *Pina's Delicatessen* to a new location, in Lindsay Street, behind Hamilton Post Office. Situated at the rear of the Rossi Centre and adjacent to the parking area, it was a large shop in a prime location, and could now service a wider population. When the business was sold, Pina continued to work there part-time, along with Adriana, Paulo Palmieri's wife. Adriana was from Trieste.

Lina's Delicatessen

Across the road from the Rossi Centre is a delicatessen which, for many years, was owned by Lina Cavicchia (no relation to above) and Antonio, her husband. Lina's family had owned the delicatessen and butcher shop in Lettopalena, in the old and the new town, giving the rest of the family a reason to remain there; and Lina the confidence to establish a business here. Lina left two sisters and a brother in Lettopalena, and a sister in Argentina.

Antonio was the son of Felice De Vitis who had emigrated to America at the age of 18 to work in the coalmines of Pennsylvania. At the age of 62 he returned to America, then emigrated to Australia, in 1962, at the age of 67. Antonio has a brother and a sister in America, and three sisters in Australia.

Giovanni's Deli Cafe

When Lina and Antonio left the delicatessen, for an extended stay with family overseas, Antonio Della Grotta managed it for them. On their return they decided to sell the business. The new Lettesi owners were Giovanni Di Claudio and his wife, Nina, who came from Palena, a town a few kilometres from Lettopalena. The name became *Giovanni's Deli Café*.

Giovanni had arrived in 1955, at the age of 29. He was followed by Nina in 1966 when she was only 17. Giovanni's brother, Salvatore, had arranged his sponsorship with the help of a canefarmer, Giovanni De Andrea, from *Up River* Proserpine. His sister, Pina, had owned *Pina's Delicatessen*. The decisions of some Lettesi to establish a business were influenced by family.

Café De Beaumont

The *Café De Beaumont*, an up-market restaurant, symbolises, in a way, Beaumont Street's triumph - its resurrection from the ruins of the 1989 earthquake. The earthquake destroyed the Beaumont St shopping area so that most of the shops had to be re-built. The transformation, like that of the new village, Lettopalena, was immutable, a metamorphosis. The street had experienced a total transformation. With the mainstream community's whole-hearted support behind the area's renewal, the change was tangible - and not just physical.

Newcastle had taken on *multiculturalism* in a big way, embracing it fully, and assisting in the creation of *cosmopolitan* Hamilton. The *ethnic* community responded with its offering - the celebration that goes with good ethnic food. The *Café De Beaumont* was like the candle on the cake; for now the ethnic communities were marketing their culture to the mainstream population. Perhaps there is a deeper symbolism here, in that Antonio, Leo's father, had been the prime Lettesi gatekeeper and liaison to the outer world. In a sense it represents a monument to him.

Antonio's Café

Leo Della Grotta first made his mark, as a journalist, with the Newcastle Morning Herald. After establishing the flower business, Leo and Gianna set up home above the *Café De Beaumont*. For them the new venture was 24/7, a full-time commitment. After about six years, Leo took a *break* as manager of the *Post*, the *Herald's* Advertising News sheet. They sold the café and opened a new one, around the corner in Cleary Street, and called it *Antonio's*. It was a tribute to Leo's father.

Giannotto's Restaurant

When Leo left the *Post* they sold *Antonio's* and moved to *Giannotti's* in Beaumont Street, below the *Italian Scalabrini Centre*. They bought it from Gianni Fible, the café's namesake. Gianni was an old friend who had played with Leo in the school grounds of Hamilton Primary; and he had worked for them at the *Café De Beaumont*.

Gianna is still there, managing the restaurant; but Leo, ever restless, now directs his energies next door at *Dowling Real Estate*. Ironically, it is the place where Antonio, his father, had worked for Stan Kuzmik, for what must now seem, a hundred years ago.

Dowling Real Estate

There is another Lettesi connection to *Dowlings*. Rosanna, the daughter of Angelo and Lina Candian, and Sabatino Della Grotta's granddaughter, married George Rafty from the Greek community. George is an agent there, working with Leo. This pattern of inter-marriage, reflective of that between Randolph Rossi and Maria Tempesta, is characteristic of the second generation and reflects the widening networks, initially with Italians, then with other ethnic groups. It is part of the face of cosmopolitan Hamilton.

Raffaele Barber Shop

Raffaele Della Grotta, Antonio's brother, had been cutting hair for *paesani* at his father's home in Belford Street, since 1953. He left Stewart and Lloyds in 1960, working full-time as a barber before opening his first shop in Hunter Street, in 1963. In 1964 he employed his first apprentice, Angelo Rossetti, Arcangelo Rossetti's grandson. Raffaele's wife, Maria, is Arcangelo's granddaughter. In 1973 he leased a shop in Beaumont Street. But with the building's collapse and the Beaumont Street closure, following the earthquake, in 1989, he first worked from home, then re-established the business around the corner, in Cleary Street, along from *Antonio's*.

I start to cut hair after my father, Leone, come to Australia in 1952. In Lettopalena, he left a pair of scissors and a hand clipper. I start to cut hair for my friends in Italy; and I continue to do so for seven years, from 1953 to 1960; while working two jobs, at Stewart and Lloyds and a barber shop, in Newcastle West, between 1958 and 1960. In May 1960 I start to work full-time. My wife Maria once told me she would not marry me if I worked night shifts, because she was afraid to stay alone at night. This was the main reason. Also, was a big opportunity for me to start a new challenge.

Dolomiti Restaurant No. 3

If you want the best gelato in town, then go to the Dolomiti. That was an old saying, for *Gelato* has always been synonymous with *Dolomiti*. When the Candians decided to establish their own, independent premises, they bought two adjacent shops, a block away, down Beaumont Street. While they carried out extensive renovations on the second shop, they reopened the first in a way that was reminiscent of their café in Tudor Street, with the gelato bar out front; and the coffee and the pasta tasting just as good as ever.

Antonio and I, having walked the length of Beaumont Street, settled down to a coffee at Gianotti's. It was good seeing Gianna and Leo again. They always remind me of my last visit to their village - Lettopalena, in 1994; the one that I hope to see again, for the fourth, and last time - perhaps, in 2006.

7. MUSIC - THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

I've taken that instrument with me from under the sheets of my bed to as far away as Greenland . . . Vincenzo Martinelli

Vincenzo Martinelli graces clubs and restaurants in Newcastle with the music of his guitar. Many who listen and enjoy it would be unaware that the sounds of Vincenzo's music have reached, not only Greenland, but to many corners of the world. As a student he took the Keith Noake Memorial Prize as the graduating music student of the year and won an Italian Government Scholarship to study in Rome at the Centro Romano Della Chitarra. Later he completed a Masters Degree, on the subject of Flamenco.

Vincenzo is now recording his own CDs and has an agent in Florida who organises his performance aboard the *Silversea Cruise Line* - to European countries including Italy, the Greek Islands, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Poland, England, Ireland, the Scandinavian countries, Russia, Morocco, Mexico, Hawaii, New Zealand, and soon to Asia, including Hong Kong, Singapore and Vietnam. The Mediterranean cruise called at such exotic places as Dubrovnik, Venice, Corsica and Monte Carlo. Vincenzo, in tribute to his teacher, Felice De Vitis, who emigrated to Australia in 1962 at the age of 67, says:

Felice De Vitis was, for me, an inspiration. His was the single, biggest contribution to shaping my musical path in life. He came via the United States where he had studied music, seriously. He was a real academic. He understood music deeply and played a number of instruments - the clarinet, trumpet, saxophone, guitar and the piano accordion.

As a kid I'd go there and begin my lesson, one lesson a week. He would teach me exotic music from Europe and America, big band music and swing music from the United States. For a twelve-year old boy it was like opening up Pandora's box because we never heard that music here.

It was all written down in books in his own handwriting, all of the notes, the manuscript. Anna has his music - a priceless collection. All the music of his era, of times gone by, the melody, the chords, all written down, note by note, in his own handwriting, millions and millions of notes, all his music - and hardly a mistake. He'd open one of his old volumes, his manuscripts, and place it on the music stand; and as he played the melody, I would accompany him on the guitar. That was the way that I learnt the essence of the music. He'd stop me from time to time, discuss the passages, and help me to move on. That's the way I learnt my trade. I love him for that.

I was born a guitar player, not just a musician. That's the way I feel. I've taken that instrument with me from under the sheets of my bed to as far away as Greenland. It's been a huge part of my life and continues to be. It's the whole path of my journey in music that's brought me to where I am now. But there is no more special person along that journey than Felice De Vitis.

My grandfather, Vincenzo Martinelli, after whom I was named, and my father too, Nelio Martinelli, were mandolin players, back in the village. There is no doubt where my interest in music came from. In Lettopalena, Felice and my grandfather played their music together. There is a very strong connection there.

I did my first gig with Felice De Vitis at a Lettesi dance at the Transport Hall in Hamilton, in 1975, when I was 15. As well as the waltzes, tangos, and beguines, we played traditional music from the village. I felt bigger than Elvis in a huge concert hall. I was a little kid and my amplifier was so small that it had to sit on a chair.

Mario D'Andrea, Felice's De Vitis' grandson, was the first guitarist to learn from Felice here. He won nation-wide MO Awards and is doing really well now, as a performer in Las Vegas. He has a cabaret act where he sings, and plays guitar; and he performs as a guest artist while supported by other bands. He plays for cruise ships, as well.

For a man who had emigrated at the age of 67, Felice De Vitis contributed immeasurably to the creative life of the community. He taught music to *countless children* and to other talented Lettesi such as Angelo Rossetti, Vincenzo's son; Frank Terenzini, Giuseppe's son; and Leo Della Grotta. Vincenzo and Leo played, for awhile, in a band they called the *Maiella*.

Antonio Della Grotta took lessons from Felice, too. Being ever true to his calling, Tony now plays for the old people at Lindsay Gardens and Garden Suburb hostels, and at the Scalabrini Centre for the pensioners' group.

8. THE LETTESI - ON REFLECTION

It seems appropriate to end the Lettesi story with the focus on music and the kind of creativity for which Italians are unsurpassed. Music is the one, universal language that communicates across the generations and cultures. The Lettesi have passed on their identity, their belonging, in many different ways, to yet another generation, despite all the challenges and barriers they have faced. Their gift is now part of the wider Australian culture.

Vincenzo's mother, Maria, from the town of Ascoli Piceno, has, through personal courage and tenacity, expressed her creativity through the language of English. She has written her life story, a story of three generations, as a gift to her grand-children - a beautifully constructed story, told with honesty and love. Maria is the wife of Nelio Martinelli.

The Lettesi have touched my own life in singular ways. They have taught me all I know about the meaning of community, bringing theory into life. They gave me the strategies that worked to gain resources for the communities during my ten years with the Migrant Health Unit. They were strategies on how to work *with* ethnic communities, through their own communication networks.

They gave me access to a land, a culture, and a community that I love and admire, in all its strength and creativity. My journey began when *Filomena opened the door*, in 1970. Then I was present at Vincenzo's first *gig*, at Hamilton Transport Hall. It was the time, in 1975, that I *gate-crashed* the Lettesi dance. During 1976 when I interviewed the families, I was always made welcome. It was always so. Otherwise this story could never have been told. I am thankful for this.

Hopefully the heritage, with its memories and values will be cherished and passed on by the younger generation. Hopefully they will see the need for a meeting place for the older people in the time they have left. As I write this last page another Lettesi has passed away - Davide Tempesta. As an Australian-born person of Irish descent, I had never experienced the reality of *community* in the way it existed for the generation of Lettesi who, in search of *place*, made their home here. It is an experience to be cherished.

..... *the Author: Judy Galvin*

Appendix 1.**ASSISTED PASSAGE TO AUSTRALIA**

Peppino Terenzini	Newcastle
Berardino D'Amico	Newcastle
Antonio Della Grotta	Newcastle
Domenico Di Claudio	Newcastle
Antonio Cavicchia	Newcastle
Emidio Rossetti	Newcastle
Benito Di Paolo	Newcastle
Nicolino De Vitis	Newcastle
Raffaele Palmieri	Newcastle
Concerzio Tarantini	Newcastle
Paolo Palmieri	Newcastle
Giuseppe Martinelli	Newcastle
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Dario Tempesta	Lived in Adelaide. Now deceased
Tonino Tempesta	Returned to Lettopalena
Angelo Di Vincenzo	Returned to Lettopalena 1960
Primo Rossetti	Living in USA
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Nicola Bozzi	Not Lettesi but travelled together
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