

## Genealogical Hints

# Digging for our Italian Roots

by Alan Poletti

This is a revised version of the talk given by the author to the Società Dante Alighieri in Auckland on 1 December 2002. It will be of great assistance to anyone with Italian ancestry researching their family history in New Zealand and Australia. Alan can be contacted by e-mail at [a.poletti@xtra.co.nz](mailto:a.poletti@xtra.co.nz)

## Introduction

Seeking our Italian roots needs to be more than a search for the place and date of birth of our ancestor. It is an important first step. But then we must try to understand the society of which they were a part, the history of their region and what drove them to migrate to *la fine del mondo* - to New Zealand and Australia. I will talk about the places where we can find the information. The best place to start is 'at home' - with family records (written or oral) if you can. Official records can often give answers to some questions, though they, like the family records can be incorrect or misleading. Accessing Italian official records can be done by mail, but it is more fun and you are more likely to get results if you go there. Using illustrative examples, I will discuss some of the archives and the material they are likely to contain.

## Where to start

First, arm yourself with an exercise book and a pen - a laptop will do instead. As your hunt develops, record the date, what you are doing and what you have found. If you have not found anything - record that too. It is at times as useful to know what you haven't found, as it is to know what you have.

Now it's time to talk to that very old aunt or grandmother. What do they know? Write it down. You will find that some of what they tell you is quite right, but commonly some will be exaggerated, some events telescoped, some attached to the wrong

person and so on. Nevertheless, write it all down. Even almost mythical stories can hold important clues. Sometimes there has been a family reunion. With a bit of luck someone will have produced a small family history. Get a copy. Again, as your search continues, some of the things may turn out to be not quite right, but even these can give you very useful clues. Keep on writing it all down. You may even know of the descendents of other Italians who migrated to New Zealand or Australia who may have interacted with the subject of your search. See if they know anything. Write it down.

It's now time to look for information in the many archival sources which are available. But keep on writing.

## Example

The descendents of Domenico and Maria Moratti held a reunion in 1983 and for the occasion, Fred Moratti, one of their grandchildren, wrote a family history of a few pages. Of Domenico and Maria's early life he said:

Our Grandfather, Domenico Moratti, born 1850, came from Lombardy, Italy. Our Grandmother, Maria, born 29th February 1859 - died 8th September, 1939 (80 years), formerly Maria Turchi, came from Leghorn, Tuscany, Italy. They emigrated (government assisted) to New Zealand from Germany on the *Reichstag*, landing in Wellington, 6-8 August, 1874, continuing on to Jackson Bay.

They presently came to New Plymouth where they were married on 12th June 1879. They settled at Ratapiko, where they bought a rough farm on Tariki Road, which at that time was heavy dense bushland.

He also mentioned:

Little is remembered of our Grandfather other than that on a return visit to Italy in later years, he fell ill with Pneumonia and died... Granny made several trips back to Italy, during lonely years after Grandad died....



But these extracts illustrate very well the strengths and weaknesses to expect in family histories. What is correct? What is supposition? Have events concerning one person been attached to another? Have events been transposed or telescoped? Is it possible to confirm the several statements? If not, can their origin be understood and explained?

## Archival sources in New Zealand and Australia

Where can we check up on these family histories and flesh them out? In general, most civic libraries contain a wide variety of archival material and many have family history sections. National Archives, Wellington and its various branches hold many records detailing the interaction of individuals with the government of New Zealand at many levels, as of course does National Archives of Australia. You will find more general material both in university and civic libraries.

For Australia, computer searchable indices have been produced by each state and the Family History section of most city libraries can be expected to have them. Having found the index entry, a photocopy of a certificate might cost around A\$18. For New Zealand a project to produce a similar searchable index has just begun, however indices by year should be available on microfiche in most city libraries and Births, Deaths and Marriages Registries. In this case a photocopy of a certificate will set you back NZ\$30. You need to be selective. (For New Zealand, birth certificates were compiled quarterly and indices to the

Registers can be used to find the place of registration - perhaps you can do without all birth certificates?) These certificates can at times be extremely useful. At times, the information they lack can be extremely frustrating. It can also be wrong. Marriage certificates in the state of Victoria from as early as 1865 were quite detailed. However those for two men from Villa di Tirano illustrate the problems: the birthplace of Martino Borserio (b. ~1838, married 1865) was given merely as Lombardy, while the birthplace of Giovanni Poletti-Riz (b. 14 Nov 1823, married 1868) was recorded quite wrongly as Ancona which is on the Adriatic coast. So - don't forget that exercise book. It will let you check one source of information against another.

Before 1880, Marriage Certificates in New Zealand didn't record the place of birth or the names of parents of the bride or the groom. The search is just that little bit harder. The image below is that of Domenico and Maria's marriage certificate. Ages were generally given, but not always - sometimes age was recorded as just 'full'. Witnesses' names were however recorded and for Domenico and Maria's marriage, they were Carlo Turchi, labourer of Inglewood and Carolina Turchi, spinster of Inglewood. What was their relationship to Maria?

[illegible]

Marriage certificate of Domenico Moratti and Maria Turchi. 12th June 1879. New Plymouth

1 July 1894	Marie Agostina	+	<sup>March 1894</sup> Domenico <del>Marinetti</del> Lombardy	12 June 1894	<sup>March 1894</sup> Maurice <del>Marinetti</del> Hornsea, Suffolk	<sup>March 1894</sup> Domenico <del>Marinetti</del> Lombardy	16 August 1894
Lariki Road Aurora	Not present		Virano Lombardy Italy	New Plymouth New Zealand	Lighorn Suffolk Italy	Lariki Road Aurora	Ref. to Mrs. Agostina

Birth certificate of Maria Agostina Moratti, born 1 July 1882



Birth certificates can sometimes be unexpectedly useful. That for their eldest daughter (born 1882), gave Domenico's birthplace as Tirano (which was nearly correct) and confirmed Maria's birthplace. I will talk about death certificates later.

### Passenger lists

Vogel's assisted migration scheme brought over 100,000 people into New Zealand in the 1870s. They travelled on more than 350 ships and passenger lists exist for essentially all of them. Photocopies are available in National Archives, Wellington. They have also been microfilmed, for instance, Auckland Museum has them in this form. That for the *Reichstag* (from Hamburg) revealed Domenico and six other Italian names, but not Maria.

The extract from the passenger list below illustrates a number of 'traps for young players'. Three of the four Italian surnames are spelt incorrectly. They should be 'Borserini', 'Moratti' and 'Pasini'. While the ages of the first two are correct, Pasini's should have been 42 (not 39). I remind you that this is actually a very clear list. Others give wildly idiosyncratic spellings. Misinterpretations by compilers of indices can compound the problem.

Of course, there are other passenger lists and there are even indices for some of them. Also, as ships arrived, the local papers would publish such lists, but most of our ancestors would probably have been in the section: '... and 37 passengers in steerage class'.

55	1	Lindauer Gottfried	35
56	2	Haverbie Hans Aug	29
		Ernestine	30
		Auna	
57	2	Joachim	35
		Mari	31
59	1	Grünke Carl	22
60	1	Bug Arnold	23
61	4	Borserini Giovanni	30
		Moratti Domenico	24
		Pasini Carlo	39
		Negri Giacomo	26
132			31 31 24 18

Extract from passenger list of *Reichstag*, arrived Wellington, 6 August 1874. The last four names are 4 of the 7 Italians aboard. Respectively Giovanni Borserini, Domenico Moratti, Carlo Pasini and Giacomo Negri. Note the uppermost name on this extract: Gottfried Lindauer, renowned for his portraits of Maoris, who gave his occupation as 'gardener', the four Italians gave theirs as 'farm labourers'.

### Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR)

All of the voyages under this assisted migration scheme are recorded in AJHR (available for instance in University of Auckland library). Passenger lists for other ships from Hamburg were examined and finally on the *Gutenberg* we found Carlo Turchi, his wife Santina and their seven children. Further digging in the National Archives revealed that indeed they were from Livorno (Leghorn) and that Carlo and his family moved to Jackson's Bay in July 1876. (Both the recruitment of Italian

settlers from Livorno and the settlement of Jackson's Bay are immensely interesting stories in themselves, but we will need to put these aside.)

### Italian censuses in Westland in 1877 and 1880

Sometimes you get lucky. Bruno Ballara wrote and published in Auckland a charmingly idiosyncratic book in Italian, *La Presenza italiana in Nuova Zelanda*. In it was a much reduced facsimile of one of these census forms. I do not know how he came by them or where he found them, but he deposited them in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. They are a goldmine of information. I have written a little paper<sup>1</sup> on them. In particular, Domenico and also Carlo Turchi, with his family, figure in them together with quite detailed genealogical information: parents' names, dates and places of birth. Carlo was from Campiglia Marittima while Domenico's birthplace was given as 'Vella'. Note that Carlo's wife was listed under her maiden name. The practice continues to this day. If you can't find a married woman's number in a telephone directory in Italy, look under her maiden name. There are other examples.

6	Turchi Carlo	45
	Santina	25
	Maria	14
	Carolina	13
	Enrico	9
	Louisa	8
	Emma	5
	Caterina	3
	Francesco	1 1/2

Extract from passenger list of *Gutenberg* arrived Wellington, 23 March 1876. Carlo Turchi and his wife, Santina, with their children: Maria, Carolina, Enrico, Louisa, Emma, Caterina and Francesco. Carlo gave his occupation as 'labourer'.



Information extracted from the 1877 census:-

## Register of Naturalisations

I found Carlo Turchi and one of his sons, but not Domenico. In general the files concerning all naturalisations are available at National Archives, Wellington. (Compared to Australian naturalisation records, New Zealand files are not as complete - still you take what you can get). At least Carlo's birthplace was confirmed.

### Other sources

Domenico and Carlo both appeared in 'A Return of Freeholders of New Zealand as at 1st October 1882' and 'New Taranaki Crown Grants - an index to land records': Domenico with 161 acres and Carlo with 70 acres, both in the Huiroa survey district.

There are still other sources - contemporary newspaper accounts, gold mining records (National Archives, Christchurch), Register of Aliens (1916), Post Office directories, etc. But the thing to stress is that we have found out a great deal about these people and we have not left New Zealand.

Many Italians who finally ended up in New Zealand arrived first in Australia. Clearly, similar archival sources are available there - some of them much more accessible. For instance National Archives of Australia's web site (<http://www.naa.gov.au>) allows you

to search for records of individuals, held not just in Canberra, but also in the state capitals. Public Records Offices in the different states have web sites of varying quality. For instance that for Victoria (<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au>) allows you to search passenger lists. We have already mentioned the computer searchable indices to births, deaths and marriages.

### Archival sources in Italy

If you are serious about further searching, then *Italian Genealogical Records* by Trafford R Cole is a must. Many city libraries would have it and 'Amazon Books' stocks it (amazon.com is its web site). Cole gives much very sound advice and suggestions as to how to do it by mail. Since I have been able to travel to Italy, I took a different tack. I have written letters (in my best Italian!) to the archives I hoped to visit. They have always worked. However, I must admit that whenever I visit these archives and introduce myself: '*Sono Alan Poletti di Nuova Zelanda e ho scritto una lettera.*', in almost all cases the archivist reaches for my letter (generally in the second drawer down), re-reads it and smiles to himself. But on every occasion they have indeed been most helpful.

Parish Baptismal and  
Marriage Records  
(*Atti di battesimo e matrimonio*)

These are not public records. It is as a favour that the priest helps in these searches. All of the records I have encountered are in church Latin, which

makes life a little interesting. A knowledge of Italian helps, even if, like me, you never learnt Latin. In all cases, the priests have been most obliging. Sometimes, the archives have been indicated to me and I have been invited to search myself. At other times, the closest I got to the records was to look over the shoulder of the priest while he searched. On other occasions, the priest, although at first reluctant, ended up being more enthusiastic than me in the hunt for a particular 'act'. In general there are no indices, so you need to have some idea of the year of birth or marriage. Every last bit of genealogical information you have managed to glean from New Zealand or Australian sources is often needed.

As it turned out, my first searches for Domenico Moratti in the Parish Archives of Villa di Tirano were fruitless. My father was wrong about the birthplace of Maria - was he wrong about Domenico's birthplace? (I did later find the marriage of Domenico's parents. This *atto di matrimonio* is so beautifully written, that I just have to show it to you).

But before we go on, I had better digress for a moment and explain a little about Italy's local government divisions. (See the box on the next page.)

Comunale archives  
(Archivio comunale)

A *comune* is perhaps similar to a New Zealand county, but it has wider responsibilities. In particular, it is responsible for the registration and recording of vital records. A letter to the mayor (*sindaco*) of Villa di Tirano led to my

Feb 14.

[illegible]

Jacobus Merzatti  
A  
Biancotti fatherina

Marriage of Giacomo Moratti & Caterina Biancotti, Villa di Tirano, 21 September 1846



(Isola, Piazza, casale o casa sparsa)  
COMUNE DI Villa di Tirano

## REGISTRO DI POPOLAZIONE

Foglio di Famiglia N. 187

Via dei Pedosi

Casa N. 418

Numero d'ordine della persona che compagina la famiglia	COGNOME	NOME	PATERNITÀ	SESSO	RELAZIONE di parentela o di convivenza col capo della famiglia	PROFESSIONE CONDIZIONE MESTIERE	LUOGO della nascita	DATA della nascita	STATO CIVILE	DATA dell'ingresso nel Comune	LUOGO del domicilio legale	LUOGO di residenza od abitazione	LUOGO dell'ultima residenza	DATA della morte	OSSERVAZIONI
1°	Moratti Macaco	Giacomo	furono Domenico e Moratti Agostina	m	Capo famiglia	Prestinaio	Parr. di Stazzona Com. di Villa	16 Dicembre 1821	Marito di Biancotti Caterina 18.9.1846	1 Gennaio 1865	Villa	Villa	Brescia 1867		1867 il 15 luglio iscritto nel registro di popolazione nel Comune di Fiumicello assieme ai figli. Attestato 1867 n. 55
2°	Biancotti	Caterina	furono Giacomo e Bertola Lucia	f	Moglie	=	Parr. Com. di Villa	24 Settembre 1819	Moglie di Moratti Giacomo 18.9.1846	1 Gennaio 1865	Villa	Villa		21 settembre 1866	
3°	Moratti	Domenico	di Giacomo e Biancotti Caterina	m	Figlio	=	Parr. di Stazzona Com. di Villa	3 Gennaio 1850	Celibe	1 Gennaio 1865	Villa	Villa	Brescia 1867		
4°	Moratti	Maria Lucia	di Giacomo e Biancotti Caterina	f	Figlia	=	=	18 Marzo 1852	Nubile	1 Gennaio 1865	Villa	Villa	Brescia 1867		

meeting Fausto Schivardi and he has been an invaluable source of information. As a long shot, I asked him if Domenico had perhaps died in Villa di Tirano. Yes he had - in 1920. But more than that, he introduced me to the 'Registro di popolazione di Villa di Tirano, 1865' - a census by household of every family in the *comune* in 1865. Actually, it continued to be updated for some years and even if a certain member of the family was *al estero*, they would still be listed and the name of the country they were living in given. (The clarity of the form above is due to the skill of Giovanni Battista Moratti of *Poletti Tipografia*, Villa di Tirano, but all of the details are quite clear in the original.)

Now all was clear: my father was right, Domenico Moratti had been born in the *comune* of Villa di Tirano, but in the *parish* of Stazzona. (Does 'Vella' in the 1877 Italian census tell us something of the regional accent?) Furthermore I now know that in 1865 he was living a few doors down from the house of Giovanni Poletti's parents! But look at all the other information on the form - parents' and grandparents' names, dates and places of birth and even the fact that in 1867, after the death of his wife, Domenico's father moved to Brescia.

### Parish archives (again)

Having failed in my first attempt to find Domenico's baptismal act, I had to follow this lead and with the help of a friend, we made an appointment to visit Don Cirillo, the priest in Stazzona at 9 am on a Monday

morning. The archives were impeccably organised and the baptismal acts of Domenico and of his father were quickly found and photocopied. By 9:30 am we were finished. We chatted for a while and then Don Cirillo asked if we would like a 'vodka'. Good manners dictated that a 'yes' was required. Don Cirillo did not join us, but it was the best grappa I have ever tasted. What sacrifices you have to make in pursuing Italian roots! (We later found out that Don Cirillo had been an expert mountaineer as a young man and had guided many refugees to safety over the alps to Switzerland in the second world war. At that time, the parish he cared for was very poor. It was Bratta, high above Bianzone, the neighbouring *comune* to Villa and very close to the Swiss border. To assist with its financing he had even turned to smuggling - but that again is another story.)

The baptismal act confirmed the information in the 'Registro di popolazione', but one of the Godparents, Domenica Spandoni, the wife of Giuseppe Zanolari is from Brusio which is in Switzerland. This is not so surprising when it is realised that for nearly 300 years until 1797, Brusio in Val Poschiavo and Villa di Tirano in the Valtellina had both been part of the Grigione Canton. In 1850, Villa was under Austrian rule, but Brusio was in Switzerland.

Now - could I find the baptismal act of Carlo Turchi. Campiglia Marittima was a small *comune* south of Livorno - again a letter to the priest, Don Marcello Boldrini.

### Regions, provinces, communes and contradas (Regioni, province, comuni and contrade)

In comparison with Australia or New Zealand, Italy has an extra level of local government. There are firstly the twenty Regions (*Regioni*), ranging in size from Valle d'Aosta (3,264 km<sup>2</sup>, pop 119,000) to Sicilia (25,707 km<sup>2</sup>, pop 5,100,000). Lombardia, the fourth largest Region, at 23,872 km<sup>2</sup>, is the most populous, with 8,900,000 inhabitants. Each region is divided into Provinces (*Province*). In addition to its capital of Milano (*capoluogo regionale*), Lombardia has ten Provinces. Among these are the three alpine provinces of Varese, Como and Sondrio and the three provinces of the Pre-alps, Lecco, Bergamo and Brescia. The Provinces in turn are further subdivided into *comunes* (*comuni*). There are 78 *comunes* in Sondrio Province, among them, Villa di Tirano. A single *comune* will generally contain several population centres, for instance the Comune of Villa di Tirano, has within its borders Villa di Tirano itself on the slopes on the right of the Adda River and on the opposite side of the river, the smaller villages of Stazzona and Motta, as well as even smaller centres. Each of these centres can be subdivided further into *contrade*. Certain small areas of a *comune* may also be referred to as localities.



1850.

Anno Domini millesimo octingentesimo quinquagesimo die  
 quarta mensis Januarij; Ego Gennius Albijus Parochus  
 Praepositus baptizavi infantem huius natum ex legitimi:  
 moratti conjugibus Jacobo Moratti filio Dominici, et  
 Catharina filia Jacobi Biancotti de Massima, cui  
 imposui nomen Dominicus. Patrimi fuere  
 Roserini Petrus filius Abundi, et Dominica Span:  
 doni uxores Jacobi Landolani de Brusio.  
 Gennius Albijus Parochus Praepositus.

Baptismal act of Domenico Moratti, born 3 January 1850, Stazzona Parish, Villa di Tirano

This time, however, a project to produce an index to baptisms from ~1600 had been completed and there it was (I've abbreviated the entries.):

There were four children of Cosimo Turchi  
(Carlo's father):

Giovanni Carlo Lorenzo,  
born 1828, mother: Caterina Degl'  
Innocenti

Carlo Vincenzo Giov Luigi,  
born 1829, mother: Colomba Chini.

Maria Colomba,  
born 1835, mother: Caterina  
Innocenti.

Maria Fidelma,  
born 1836, mother: Maria Caterina  
Degl' Innocenti,

What on earth is going on? There is Carlo. The mother of three of his siblings was the woman he gave as his mother in the Italian Census in 1877, but his mother is someone else again! Had the person generating the index been confused? Was some dark secret of polygamy in deepest Tuscany now brought to light after two centuries? Well it was neither of the above. I had to check this out and in July 2002 I revisited Don Marcello and the parish archivist, Gianluca Camerini. The answer was quite simple. The parish priest those 170 years ago had absent mindedly written the name of Carlo's maternal grandmother instead of his mother.

Diocesanal Archives, Livorno

Here I am indebted to Tessa Duder who had been previously helped by the archivist Maria Fogolare. After writing 'in my best Italian' to Maria, and a visit to the archives, she found for me two things I never expected to find: the baptism of Maria Turchi (b. 27 Feb 1859) and of her mother, Maria Rosa Artemisia Anna Giannoni. (b. 2 Nov 1840). With four saint's names, it is no wonder she was called 'Santina' in the family.)

*Liste di Leva in Archivio di Stato*

A further archival source which can be extremely valuable stems from the method adopted by the newly unified Italian state to recruit its soldiers. At the age of 18, all young men were registered with the

military authorities and in their 20th year were called before a draft board. There are gaps in these military draft lists, but for men born after around 1860, they can be extremely useful. You can hope to find them in the Archivio di Stato in the capital of each province (Trafford Cole gives all of their addresses). In Sondrio province, for instance, the earliest list is for those born in 1856 (*classe di 1856*), there is a gap then until 1860, with further gaps for the classes of 1879, 1892, 1897 and 1899. Here is an example of the information they can give.

This man is actually a cousin of 'our' Domenico Moratti! Born the 15 August 1862 in Villa di Tirano and the son of Domenico and Agostina Del Dosso-Vanari, he and his father lived in the gold mining settlement of Walhalla, Gippsland for some time<sup>2</sup> in the latter half of the 19th century.

Numero d'ordine	Cognome e Nome dell'iscritto	l'esistenza o la morte	Data	Località	1 Comune	arte o mestiere	professione o l'incarico della classe elettorale	padre, dalla madre, o dal tutore in so- ciazione della sua iscrizione sulla lista
		1 Nome del padre 2 Cognome e Nome della madre	1 giorno 2 mese 3 anno	1 Comune 2 Mandamento 3 Circondario	1 Comune 2 Mandamento 3 Circondario	1 dell'iscritto 2 di suo padre	1 se si è presentato alla iscrizione o se non l'ha fatto e' ufficio o al tribunale del padre, della madre, del tutore o di qualsiasi autorità	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
14	Moratti Domenico	D. Domenico D. Maria D. Agostino	15 1871 1871	1 Villadossola 2 Pinerolo 3 Nizza	1 Villadossola 2 Pinerolo 3 Nizza	1 Agente 2 id. 3 id.	1 Delle 2 id. 3 id.	



Actually, he had already left Italy at the time the above document was compiled, for he was recorded as being *renitente*, that is, he had not turned up for his draft board interview.

Note that very specific genealogical information is given as well as both his and his father's occupation (*agricola*). Whether the recruit could read or write was also often stated. A continuation on the facing page gave details concerning the recruit's health, height and chest measurements (if he had appeared before the board), the decisions of the draft board and details of his posting to a military unit. Other Registers also exist, for instance, for those born in Sondrio province after 1875 and who were drafted, there is even a full record of their actual military service.

#### The least reliable public records: death certificates

Do these two records refer to the same man?

Death certificate	
name:	John Poletti
father:	Peter Poletti
father's occ'n:	shoemaker
mother:	Marietta Poletti
born:	~1868
Birth certificate	
name:	Giovanni Poletti
father:	Bortolo Poletti
father's occ'n:	contadino
mother:	Giovanna Bongioni
born:	17 February 1868

Yes - he was my grandfather who was killed in a traffic accident in 1929 near New Plymouth.

**Moral:** be suspicious of information in a death certificate especially if the death was unexpected.

Bortolo, an older brother of Giovanni's, who had never married, died in Victoria in 1938. Not even imaginary parents were given on his death certificate:-

Parents - 'unknown'.

Place of birth - 'Lombardy' and that was about all. Surprisingly his age was right - at 73 years.

There is more chance of family details being right if the person was married to a fellow Italian or lived in an Italian community. Generally the information on the family of unmarried men tends to be sketchy or non-existent.

Stated ages on marriage certificates can often be wrong: Bortolo Presa from Villa di Tirano, reckoned he was 32 when he married his bride of 19 in Victoria in 1896. He should have admitted to 37. Giovanni Poletti-Riz, who we met earlier, gave his age as 35 instead of 44 at his marriage.

**Moral:** any public records can also lead you astray!

#### Conclusion

I hope that this talk has given you some idea of the archival sources available in both Australasia and Italy. At first sight it would seem that it would be much more difficult to trace ancestors in Italy, than in the British Isles. Language is indeed a huge barrier. However in some respects, the searching can be easier. I have been generously helped many times by people who have been most intrigued by this strange person with his terrible Italian who has come from *la fine del mondo* to find out something about people who had left Italy two centuries ago.

Naturalisation applications can be invaluable. There is of course nothing comparable for those who were already British subjects! Furthermore, church records in Italy go back in many cases as far as the 16th century. In comparison in Ireland, for instance, civil marriage records go back only as far as 1845 and birth records only to 1864. Most earlier records were destroyed when the Dublin archives were burnt during the civil war in 1922.

I must now admit, that I have discussed the easy part of an attempt to find our Italian roots. It is rather more challenging to understand the pressures that drove our antecedents to seek their future at the furthest ends of the earth and to understand something of the society which nurtured them and of its history. The information exists. At the regional and

local level it is not easy to track down and of course it is in Italian. But the rewards are there. But think of the added bonus. What a marvellous excuse to visit the land of our forbears in an attempt to find it.

#### Thanks

As well as the people mentioned in the text, David Retter at Alexander Turnbull Library kindly provided photocopies of the Italian census forms. Don Remigio, the arch-priest at Villa di Tirano was the first priest who had to cope with our strange requests. We will always remember his reply to our first stumbling request to consult the parish archives: 'Venga, venga.' We followed him up the stairs to his study and there he said: 'Help yourselves - I am not so interested in the archives myself.' At least that was our interpretation. We were hooked. Francesco Palazzi Trevelli at Archivio di Stato, Sondrio and his assistants have been most helpful in my work on the *liste di leva*.

#### Notes

- 1 Italian Census in Nineteenth Century New Zealand, *Italian Historical Society Journal*, Vol 9, No 2 (2001).
- 2 Winifred Guatta, 'Walhalla Italians' in *Italian Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 8, No 1 (2000).