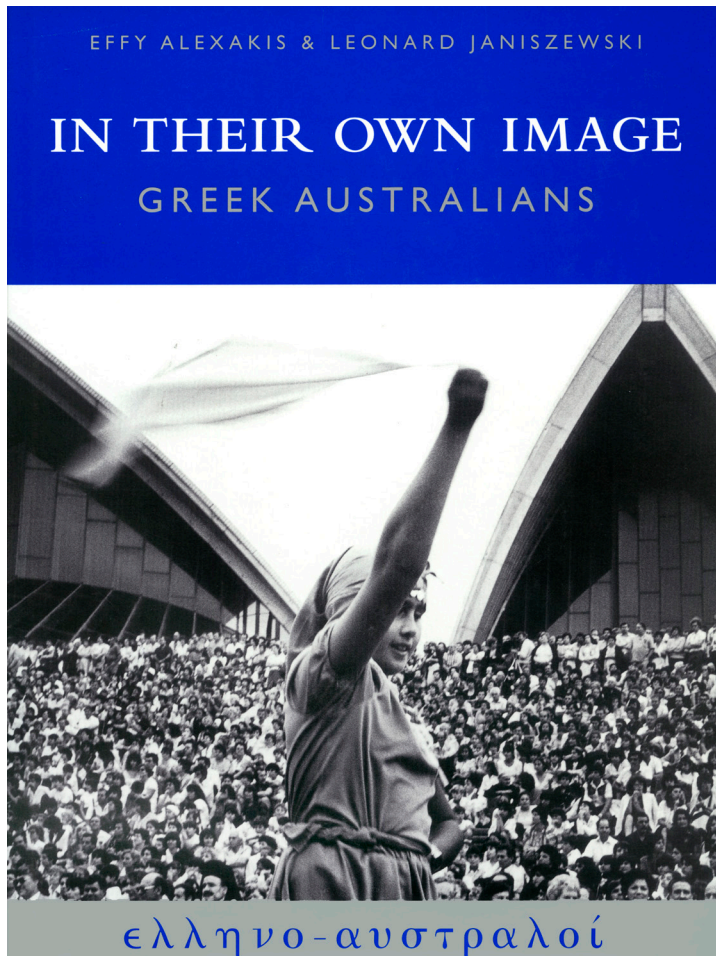


Australia's Hardworking Greeks

By Kalie Zervos

On 1st February 2017, I was lucky enough to have attended an interesting talk which took place at History House on Macquarie St in Sydney called "Enterprise and Diversity –Greek Australian Occupational Pursuits". The talk was presented by Leonard Janiszewski and Effy Alexakis (writers of the books, Greek Cafes & Milkbars of Australia and In their own image).



Leonard spoke of the various occupational pursuits undertaken by Greeks in Australia during the 1800s, 1900s and the current century, complimented by slides of historical photos.

Note: One fact that presented was that the earliest documented Greeks to come to Australia were seven convicts. This fact was not new to me as I had done some research into this matter years ago, at the State Archives and NSW Birth Deaths and Marriages. My interest was sparked when I worked in The Rocks with a puppeteer called Sue who had told me she was a descendant of

Bulgari, one of the Greek convicts who were transported to Australia and ended up settling here. He was one of the seven sailors from the island of Hydra convicted of piracy in Malta by the British in 1828, and who were sentenced to transportation to NSW to serve their terms. Of the seven men, four received a fourteen year sentence of which Bulgari was one and the other three were sentenced to life. They arrived on the Norfolk on 27th August 1829. Before serving their whole sentences they were all pardoned in 1837, and the five men choosing to go back to Greece were granted their transport costs back to England. The two who settled in Australia were Ghicas Bulgaris aka Jigger Bulgary, (who died in 1874 and is buried as Jekier Bulgair in the Nimmitable cemetery near Cooma NSW) and Androni tu Malonis (who died in 1880, and is buried in Picton NSW as Antonio Manolis). (A full story about my research into Ghicas, aka Jaickar Bulgaria, aka Jigger Bulgary aka Jekier Bulgair and my own family connection to Cooma will appear in the Genealogy section of coming newsletters).

*sources State Archives of NSW, NSW Birth Deaths and Marriages, Ancestry.com.au, Trove, Hugh Gilchrist Australian and Greeks

The following is a summary of only some of information presentation. Thanks to Effy and Leonard who have granted me permission, to summarise their talk from notes I made on the day and have allowed me to share these interesting information with you all.

Early Agricultural Pursuits

Wine Production

There were not many Greeks in Australia prior to the 1850s. Antonio Manolis as mentioned, was one of the two Greek convicts who settled in Australia after being pardoned. He lived in the area of Picton and became involved with wine production as a vine dresser.

Goldfields

The limited Greek migration of earlier years changed during the period of the Australian Gold rushes of the 1850s, which saw more Greeks coming to Australia in search of a fortune. Many were not successful in foraging for gold, but saw an opportunity to make money by setting up shops in towns near the goldfields. Spiro Bennett was one of these enterprising Greeks, who establishing market gardens which not only stocked his shop in the

town of Gulgong but also serviced Hill End. There was an area near Hill End known as Greektown.

Sultana Production

Nikolaos Kolios who settled in Mildura, was instrumental to the cultivation and export of sultanas in Australia. He has been credited with the development in export quality production of sultanas in Australia and establishing Mildura as the sultana capital. A Greek from Smyrna, had been exposed to the high grade quality of Smyrna Gold sultanas and when he came to Australia realised that the methods used here were not yielding golden sultanas but dark brown hardened ones. He sought to introduce the cold dip process which uses potash and oil. His method was so successful that the industry grew with export of Australian sultanas reaching Europe and his homelands of Greece. In 1928 he sadly took his own life as a jacket found at Melbourne's St Kilda beach contained a letter explaining the reasons for his actions. His legacy remains and up to the late 20th century there were up to thirty five Greek growers of sultanas in the Mildura region.

Sugar Canes

Up in Childers Queensland Nikolaos Komino was one of the Greek cane cutters. He along with other Greeks and Cypriots became owners of sugar cane fields. They went on to control the cane cutters and growers association.

Cotton

David Andronico was a cotton farmer in Mt Morgan Queensland in 1917. By the 1930s there were at least 500 Greeks living just south of this area .

Rice

In Wee Waa NSW Luke and John Comino had about 3000 acres and were involved in wheat growing and rice production.

Olive groves

Greeks were involved in olive oil production in South Australia by the 1950s. With many more Greeks around the country now producing olive oil, one of which is the Comino family who have a vineyard near Toowoomba QLD.

Pastoral Activities

Ghicas Bulgaris who was one of the first seven Greeks in Australia, he herded sheep in the Monaro district of NSW.

Research into other early Greeks has revealed a George Papas, born in Sydney in 1814 of a Greek sailor and Aboriginal mother, could have been an agriculturalist.

Other pastoralist included George North (Tramoundana), who was believed to be the first Greek to settle in South Australia. A wedding photo of George and his wife Lydia (nee Vosper) is believed to be the oldest photo of Greeks in Australia taken in 1858 in Port Lincoln, SA.



Photo of George & Lydia North, © photo courtesy Purcell family, from the In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians National Archive, Macquarie University.

Other early pastoralists include Mike Manus a grazier of Gilgandra, Sir Nicholas Laurantus a hotelier who also owned a picture theatre, owned sheep properties which combined formed an area larger than his homeland island of Kythera. Greeks are still involved in sheep and cattle stations two of these are Louis Elias who owns a cattle station named 'Yanina', near Rockhampton, Queensland, and the Casimaty family who run a sheep station near Hobart in Tasmania.

There are Greek families still running Pig Farms in Port Lincoln South Australia and the Zarimis Family of the Northern Territory have chicken farms. Goats herding was introduced near Cottesloe WA by John Doscas and the Atypas family are goat breeders in Tasmania in 1910.

Mining Activities

There were several Greeks who were involved in the mining Industry in the early days. It was dirty and dangerous work, but Greek migrants took up the work.

One of these was Jeremiah Perry (Vasilakis) in 1863, who worked in the mines of the Victorian goldfields.

A great number of Greeks were drawn to the Opal mines of Cooper Pedy. There was a high Greek population in the 1960s and 1970s, one of these men was Costas Papadopoulos.

Sea Related Activities

John Peters was believed to have been the second free Greek settler to arrive in Australia, he was employed as a ferryman, perhaps on the Parramatta River.

There were 132 Greek fishermen registered in South Australia alone in the 1920s. Greeks got involved with oysters, both in farming and in the running of Oyster Saloons which were fashionable in the early 20th century. John Comino was known as the Oyster King. In the 1930s Gregory Cassimaty was a lobster fisherman and his business became quite successful exporting lobsters to France. He was also involved in Boat Building.

Shark liver oil was considered therapeutic for many ailments and so there were many Greeks who became shark fishermen.

The Haritos Brothers fisherman from the Northern Territory exported their fish to feed the athletes and officials at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Nigel Haritos in the Northern Territory was a croc hunter and Efstathios Haritos established salt works in Darwin.

G P Kailis Family of Western Australia were a dominant presence in the Fishing industry of Western Australia from the 1940 to the 1960s. In present day Sydney the Fish market is dominated by the businesses of Di Costi and the Poulos Brothers.

The boat building industry of Geraldton WA too featured a prominent Greek ship builder by the name of Georgios Karageorge. Amongst the boats he built were prawning vessels. The Kailis family of Western Australia exported prawns to South East Asia.

The Kalymnians known for their talents as great sponge divers were hired by the Paspaly and Haritos families working in the pearling industry in the Northern Territory. Many perished due to rough seas and changing tides. Mary Dakas (nee Paspalis) was the only female operator in the pearling industry who owned five boats. Con Denise George was instrumental in the development of the cultured pearl industry in Australia through his study of earlier Australian scientists work in this field he experimented and was successful in producing cultured pearls in the 1950s and 1960s.

Industry

Michelides Pty Ltd in the 1930s was a tobacco factory

based in Perth. Jerry Comino ran a food distribution company in Newcastle. Greeks worked in the Port Pirie smelter in South Australia and in Port Kembla and Newcastle in NSW. Many Greek immigrants worked in a variety of factories throughout all industries here in Australia.

Medical Field

Dr Pericles was probably Australia's first Greek Australian doctor who set up his surgery in the gold fields of Gulgong NSW.

Service Industry

There have been numerous hundreds if not thousands of Greek Taxi drivers in Australia. The first Taxi was in Darwin then followed by Melbourne, which were driven by Greeks.

Thousands of Greek Families owned and ran the iconic milk bars and small businesses around Australia from the early 1900s and some continue to run cafes today.

Public Life

Elly Lucas an Ithican was Australia's first supermodel. She modelled Christian Dior in Europe and when returning to Australia set up her own modelling agency.

Nick Leeno (aka Lianos) was a successful Tenor in the 1930s and 1940s.

Prominent Greeks in the public eye of later years just to name a few include Nick Bulkus and George Souris - Politicians, Mary Kostakides- broadcaster, George Miller and Chris Tsoltas film directors, Vicki Varvaressos - activist and Nick Papas- Lawyer.

Sporting Life

There have been many Greeks who excelled in sports in Australia.

There was a Greek in the very first Australian Cricket Team of the 1880s.

There was a champion weightlifter by the name of Stelios in the 1900s. George Samios was a wrestler. The Likiard sisters were swimmers in the 1930s and 1940s and Catherine was a champion diver.

These stories are only a few of the many you can read about in depth in the book titled "In their own image" by Effy and Leonard.

If you would like to purchase a copy of this very informative book, please contact Effy Alexakis on 0411 193 625 or visit www.cafesandmilkbars.com.au

Please note the book IS NOT for sale by the Kytherian Association.