

MIGRATION OF SLOVENIANS TO AUSTRALIA

Majority of immigrants from Slovenia to Australia arrived after The Second World War, but evidence shows the arrival of the very first Slovenian, Matija Kliner, between years 1857 and 1859, working as an attendant on board the Austrian frigate 'Novana'. Second Slovenian, Rihard Pogačnik, arrived in 1860 as a navigational officer on one of the steamships owned by the Austrian-Triestine shipping company Lloyds. Anton Dolenc, an officer with the Austrian navy, kept a diary based on experiences and observations whilst aboard the Austrian ship 'Saida'. His diary, written originally in German, expressing a point of view of an European visitor, was translated and published in *Ljubljanski Zvon* in 1892, with a shorter version in *Slovenski narod*. He described in details the topography, society, cities (Albany, Adelaide, Portland, Melbourne, Esperance, Hobart and Sydney), customs of the white Australians and observational accounts about Aborigines.

It is not known precisely when the first Slovenians settled permanently in Australia. The Slovenian names appear in the records since before the First World War and increased during the interwar years. The Slovenians, being under Austrian Hungarian Empire at the time of The First World War, had to fight on the Austrian side and were branded by Australians as enemy aliens. In Kalgoorlie, the Australian miners demanded that all Slav miners be interned and government eased tension by dismissing them.

According to report by C.A. Price, in 1891 Slovenians made up 0.3% of the total number of Southern Europeans in Australia.

The Depression in 1929 increased racial violence against all immigrants, living in Australia, combined with inherent fears of competition for jobs, and many homes of workers from Slovenia (and other migrants from the then Yugoslavia) in Boulder-Kalgoorlie were burned down.

An article by Mirko Cuderman, Queensland, states: *After a long and unsuccessful search to identify the first Slovenian to come to Australia, Dr Zlatko Skrbiš began to explore the validity of a story about a relative by the name of Drolz who lived in Australia around the turn of the century. In 1885 Drolz embarked on an epic journey to find gold and get rich during the gold rush in California. He never made it there. After his ship arrived in Melbourne, a young local lady supposedly caught his eye. It was said that he spent the rest of his life in Australia.*

(<http://www.qldmigrationheritage.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Slovenians1.pdf>)

The most recent large scale migration took place during the three decades following The Second World War, as a direct result of the mass immigration programme introduced by Australian Government in 1947.

The first groups were the Displaced Persons refugees, individual refugees and escapees, who were forwarded to Australia from camps in Austria and Italy, where the escapees sought asylum.

July's issue of *Vestnik* brought an article regarding the refugee camps in Europe after the Second World War.

It lists the camps at Palma Nuova, Monigo, Trevis, Riccione by Rimini (mainly people from Carst – Kras and Gorica region), in Senegalia, Servigliano, Forli, Jasa, Modena, Eboli and Napoli, later at Servigliano, Riccione, at Pragma near Padova (mainly Slovenian students of Theology), where the Theology Faculty was established. In Rome the Slovenians had a literary paper *Lipica – The Little Linden Tree* and for ladies *Nova Slovenka – The New Female Slovenian*.

In some camps the cultural life has developed and the Slovenians have some publications such as *Slovenski glas – The Slovenian Voice* and *Mi in svet – We, and the World*.

In Austria there were after the war refugee camps at Vetrinje (Viktring) near Klagenfurt, in the town in ruins; Lienz, where the Slovenians organized for the paper *Demokratična Slovenija – The Democratic Slovenia*, living in the old Russian camp, having a school, choir, kindergarden, sports activities and lectures. The paper *Domovina v taborišču – The Homeland in the Camp* followed, as well as the weekly *Slovenska beseda - The Slovenian Word*, the *Novice - The News* and *Slovenec v Tirolah - The Slovenian in Tyrol*. In camp Spittal an der Drau the Slovenians were mixed with other nationalities in the barracks. The children could visit school and the trade's people could develop their skills. The farmers' school and the knitting schools were running. The crafters from Ribnica have their own workshop. A smaller camp was at St Vid, where there was a choir and the paper *Slovenski taboriščnik - The Slovenian refugee camp person*. Close to Russian border was camp Judenburg, where the Slovenians had the paper *Dom ob Muri - The Home along River Mura*. Only a small number of the Slovenians, who migrated to Australia in earlier after war years, were in those camps in Austria as well.

But many young Slovenians have decided to leave Slovenia during and after the Second World War and in the years following, leaving behind parents, other family members, and the economic hardship. Cautiously, mostly during the night, they crossed the well-guarded borders with neighboring Italy and Austria and found themselves in the numerous refugee camps. Many have experienced the heartbreaking, yet hopeful life in the refugee camps, some of them being the ruins of camps of prisoners of war, other unclean army quarters. The heartbreaking journey continued, together with refugees from other countries, on special ships (and some planes) carrying migrants to a far away, foreign destination: Australia.

In 1951 Italy and Australia signed an Assisted Migration Agreement, financing the passage of Italian migrants, including Slovenians.

Most of these Slovenians were eligible to be brought to Australia under the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration Trieste agreement, the Italian and Austrian Assisted Passage schemes, sponsorship by Catholic

organisations. Others were indebted to the International Catholic Migration Loan Fund or sponsored by friends or family. There were also a number of women who left Yugoslavia legally, sponsored as “proxy” wives by Slovenian men already in Australia.

Upon the disembarkation in Australia, usually Sydney and Melbourne, the refugees were taken to either Bathurst, Greta, Liverpool or Villawood in New South Wales, or to Bonegilla, Williamstown or Nunawading in Victoria. Slovenian Franciscan priest, Father Basil Valentine, OFM, MBE succeeded to open a migrant hostel, The Slovenian Hostel, at Padua Hall, Kew in 1960, where many young men of different nationalities lived. Young Slovenian females were found accommodation with families (mainly Jewish).

The earliest arrivals were the Displaced Persons — those who had been displaced by World War Two or who had fled the impending communist regime and could not or would not return to former Yugoslavia. In the years that followed, many more Slovenians crossed the well-guarded borders illegally and at great personal risk for one or a combination of reasons. These ranged from political harassment, religious persecution, economic hardship, and evasion of conscription to marriage or the sheer sense of adventure.

Many Slovenian immigrants to Australia were economic immigrants, being a major source of unskilled and semi-skilled labour force. The Slovenian men worked at major Australian projects as Snowy Mountains Project, The Australian Train Line and many others. Some migrants from Slovenia were intellectuals, but their degrees and professional qualifications were not recognized in Australia and they had to seek employment in the blue collar and service industries.

Draga Gelt and Veronika Ferfolja