



SPRING 2017

IL GIORNALE

CIAO E BENVENUTI AL GIORNALE PRIMAVERA!**IN THIS EDITION:**

- From our President John Barnes OAM
- Enterprise, Courage and Service: a Caminiti family legacy
- What's on and what's happening at New Italy... the Museum upgrade

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

While the Pacific Highway and the car park construction and museum refurbishment continues, it is a good opportunity to relate another historical story of interest.

During my 16 years in Papua New Guinea (1964 – 1980) I knew the Melbourne-based company chairman, Mr Jim Cromie. He had been a solicitor in Rabaul in the 1930s before WWII. Knowing of my family's connection to the Marquis de Rays expedition, he told me that he had conducted the many legal affairs of a Mr Jean Baptiste Octave Mouton (1866 – 1946) - a survivor of the expedition.

A French-speaking Belgian national, the 14 year old Jean and his father had become colonists on the expedition, that had condensed into reality by 1880. In the course of preparations for departure they travelled to the French port of Le Havre. Here, in a second rate boarding house in September 1870, the Moutons met with the Marquis de Rays to discuss some aspects on the venture. The Moutons then travelled to Barcelona where they boarded the last of the expedition's vessels, *Le Nouvelle Bretagne*, for the voyage to the settlement site. After an eventful trip, they arrived at Port Breton on the very day that the destitute colonists of the *India* had arrived in Sydney – 7 April 1881.

Quickly realising that the settlement attempt was a failure the Moutons along with about 10 others decided to stay in the area and become employees of fledgling copra trading firms. When Mouton senior died in 1888, the 22-year-old

Jean started trading independently and he developed his own copra plantations.

In the course of time Jean Mouton developed not only a considerable number of plantations but also supporting trading ventures. He owned Rabaul's first cinema and the Rabaul Times newspaper. These undertakings largely withstood many upheavals: the annexation and government of the area by Germany (1884 - 1914), the occupation and later government by Australia (1914 - 1941), the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Japanese invasion and occupation (1941 - 1945), the heavy fighting during WWII and the re-establishment of Australian control in 1945. Widely travelled, he married three times. Considering all, no wonder he needed a good solicitor!

In later life he lived in Sydney and largely left his South Pacific enterprises to be managed (sometimes poorly) by others. Jim Cromie told me of Jean's halting English, fluent Pigeon English, pragmatic yet generous nature, business skills in a often hostile environment and because of his knowledge of native customs, he had an ability to get along well with them. Jean Mouton died of cancer in Sydney in 1946.

Now why am I telling you all this? Well if you read it again you will see that I knew a man – who knew a man - who had met the Marquis de Rays 137 years ago this month.



Jean Baptiste Octave Mouton
Photograph courtesy of J. Sturrock



Jim Cromie

Footnote: Some survivors of the expedition made their way to the Cooktown and Cairns area where they settled and their descendants still live. Of interest is the story of the three Pitay children and their cousin. They all travelled on *Le Nouvelle Bretagne* with their parents. Both parents died in Port Breton and the orphaned children were eventually escorted to NSW where their descendants still live. I wonder if they could be traced.

Important dates for your diaries:

Sunday 1 October *Piazza in the Park*, Spinks Park Lismore.

Sunday 26 November *NIMI 2017 AGM*, New Italy Museum Complex.

John Barnes

ENTERPRISE, COURAGE AND SERVICE: A CAMINITI FAMILY LEGACY

Readers would be familiar with the story of how Rocco Caminiti, together with Antonio Pezzutti, was instrumental in encouraging the Italian survivors of the Marquis De Rays expedition to acquire land in the area now known as New Italy. Rocco Caminiti was not part of the De Rays expedition. Rather, he arrived in Sydney in 1881 as a 31 year old sailor on the 'Sanif'. His home was the small town of Gallio in the Veneto province, approximately 80kms NW of Venice. After arriving in Australia Rocco worked for the Grafton Steam Navigation Company and it is likely that is how he heard about the availability of land along the Richmond River.

While in Sydney Rocco had become acquainted with Catarina (Catherine) Gava, a survivor of the expedition and 15 years his junior. They were married in Sydney and Charles (born Carlo), the first of their nine children, was born at New Italy in 1882. A further 2 children were born there - Rose and John - but by the early 1890s it appears they had relocated back to Sydney where Rocco earned a living as a fisherman on Sydney harbour. Their other children, Mary, Joseph, Antoinette, Rocco (Junior), Albert and Thomas were born in Sydney. Rocco passed away in 1907 aged 58 years.

Rocco was very enterprising in seeing the business opportunities from selling the timber being cleared by the Italian families on their small settlements at New Italy. He secured a contract with the Melbourne Harbour Trust to supply hardwood railway sleepers, thereby deriving income for both himself and the Italian families.

Rocco's enterprising character was inherited by Charles. He opened a fish shop in Drummoyne and by the time WWI broke out Charles was married (to Olive Jules) with 4 children. Two of Charles' younger brothers enlisted in the 1st AIF and were shipped off to the war in Europe. John, who was born in Coraki, was killed in action on 10 June 1917 during the battle for Messines Ridge. Like many of his comrades, John's body was not able to be recovered and his name is one of the many thousands listed on the Menin Gate Memorial.

Albert was the other of Charles' brothers to enlist. He saw service on the Western Front throughout 1917 and 1918 and returned safely to Australia. He changed his family name to Cam and when WWII broke out he put his age back 7 years and re-enlisted in the 2nd AIF.



Charles Cam (right) with John Reid, the former captain of Gorangi and co-director of Cam & Sons Ltd, circa 1930. Courtesy of John Reid

In 1923 Charles bought the first of his steam trawlers from the NSW State Government. By the end of the 1920s he had a fleet of 5 steam trawlers. In 1934 Charles' company, Cam & Sons Ltd acquired a coal mining lease on the shores of Lake Macquarie for the purpose of supplying coal for the fleet of trawlers. The coal mining activity operated profitably well into the 1940s.

The Caminiti family's service to Australia extended beyond the individual service and sacrifice of its family members. The fleet of steam trawlers acquired by Charles was a valued component of Australia's naval service before and throughout WWII. The *Alfie Cam* carried Royal Mail between Australia and New Zealand up until the start of WWII. Also, the Australian Navy chartered the *Olive Cam* for several months in 1935 for use in mine-sweeping trials. This was an indicator for what was to happen to the fishing fleet during WWII.

Most of the fishing fleet was requisitioned by the navy during WWII for service as minesweepers. Nine of Cam & Sons ships were requisitioned by the Royal Australian Navy, another by the Royal Navy and one by the US Army. Cam & Sons gave up more vessels to the RAN than any other company. Further, Cam & Sons made substantial interest-free loans to the Australian and British governments which were repaid after the end of the war.

Two of the family's requisitioned trawlers, *HMAS Goorangai* and *HMAS Patricia Cam*, were lost during the war. *HMAS Goorangai*



CURRENT EVENTS: NEW ITALY MOUNTAIN BIKE FOREST

It's just a couple of kilometres up the road from the New Italy Museum site and it's a rapidly growing tourism activity. The mountain bike trail network in the Doubleduke State Forest provides 30 km of purpose-built single tracks that cater for all standards of riding ability – from the beginner to those with advanced skills and fitness levels. Built by the volunteers from the not-for-profit Northern Rivers Dirty Wheels Mountain Bike Club Inc. (NRDW), the trail network opened in September 2016. The facility is now attracting hundreds of local and visiting riders every week.

For information about the trail and events:

www.dirtywheels.org



was the 1st RAN surface ship to be lost in WWII. It was sunk in the Bass Strait on 20 November 1940 with the loss of all 23 crew when *HMAS Duntroon* cut it in half. *HMAS Patricia Cam* was attacked by a Japanese seaplane and sunk off the Arnhem Land coast on 13 January 1943. Eight of its passengers and crew lost their lives and a further passenger, Rev Leonard Kentish, was taken prisoner by the seaplane's crew and later beheaded at Dobo in the Aru Islands. A plaque commemorating the loss of *HMAS Patricia Cam* is now located at Point Danger on the Qld/NSW border.

The Dureenbee was the only vessel in the fleet to remain in commercial operation during the war. It encountered a Japanese submarine off the coast from Sydney on 3 August 1942, two months after the midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour and sank *HMAS Kuttabul*. *The Dureenbee* was torpedoed and sunk when its crew bravely refused a demand to hand over fish for the Japanese crew on the submarine. Three of its crew members were lost.

The war years took a huge toll on Cam & Sons. Charles passed away in August 1947 leaving the management of Australia's largest fishing fleet to his son Rocco. The difficulties in resurrecting the fishing fleet after war service proved too great and in 1961 it was decided to dissolve Cam & Sons (then named Cam & Sons Pty Ltd). While the business may have been dissolved, the story of the Caminiti/Cam family's enterprise, courage and service remains a valuable part of our history.



HMAS Olive Cam

UPCOMING EVENTS

NEW ITALY MUSEUM INC. is a proud sponsor of the 2017 Piazza in the Park. Look for our Gift Shop!

NIMI 2017 AGM

11^{AM} SUNDAY 26 NOVEMBER

ALL MEMBERS WELCOME !

ENQUIRIES:
PETER BLACKWOOD (SECRETARY)
INFO@NEWITALY.COM.AU
0414 673 933

RECENT EVENTS: VICTORIAN VARIETY BASH

On the morning of the 24 August, New Italy had a visit by the Victorian Variety members on their annual Bash to celebrate the end of their fund raising year. They were on their way from Melbourne to Fraser Island in their retro cars and crazy costumes... The Bash consisted of around 300 participants and support crew in 65 cars.

Every year they raise money for different children's charities or help children who are sick, disadvantaged or have special needs. This past year they were able to raise \$1.2 million and that was in Victoria alone!

Job well done guys!

Right: Gail Williams and Victorian Variety bash friends at New Italy



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT NEW ITALY...

MUSEUM UPGRADE UPDATE ... SEPTEMBER 2017

The installation of new displays continues the New Italy story with a focus on the journey to New Italy and the developing community. New and developing displays include:



Builders and NI descendants Jim Barnes (from Spinaze family) and Pete Robinson (from Battistuzzi and Felicetti families) installing the tool display in the Museum.



Shingled roof inside the pioneer kitchen display area.

THE ITALIAN PAVILION

The Pavilion benefits from donations by visitors to the donation box and also by feedback left in the book supplied. When next you visit please remember to add your bit in both places. Also all purchases made from the gift shop goes towards refurbishing the Pavilion as well as many other aspects of the Museum Complex.

Leonie Lane, Italian Pavilion • booyongd@bigpond.net.au • 0423733569

THE CASA VECCHIA GIFT SHOP



A big THANK YOU goes to all the hard-working volunteers who keep our gift shop open 7 days a week. Did you know that all the money raised goes towards the Museum upgrade? The best way you can help support the museum in keeping your family history alive is to volunteer once a month in our gift shop. A small commitment and a whole lot of fun! For more information call Gail - 0414 348 566.

Gail Williams • Casa Vecchia Gift Shop • giftshop@newitaly.com.au

Gift shop co-ordinator Gail Williams and Leonie Lane discussing new museum displays: research and text by Jo Kijas and design by Leonie Lane

2017 MEMBERSHIPS ARE NOW DUE

Download the Membership form from http://newitaly.com.au/?page_id=66

WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO IL GIORNALE?

Email stories, tourist tips to Italy, recipes etc. Summer 2017 edition: content due 16/11/17

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

Peter Blackwood (Secretary)
info@newitaly.com.au • 0414 673 933

VOLUNTEER PROFILE: ROBERT ANTONIOLLI

Robert, a retired bricklayer and a teacher, is the great-grandson of Luigi Antonioli who arrived on the Marquis De Rays expedition. Luigi was the first wine merchant at New Italy. The Halfway House wine shop (halfway between the Richmond and Clarence Rivers) built by Luigi Antonioli was on the present New Italy site. Robert is a NIMI committee member and helps with site's maintenance, keeping the complex in good repair.



Innovative fastening of tools to wall

Curious? Come and have a look! A big thank you to the Evans Head Men's Shed for building plinths for the new displays - and to Jim Barnes and Pete Robinson for all the recent building and tool installation.

We are also adding signage to the entrance door and to assist identifying the family cabinets.

As always it would be great to have more hands on deck to lighten the load and to make it happen quicker. The Museum Monday group is a very small but dedicated bunch of people determined to make the New Italy Museum tell its story well for community and visitors alike. We welcome your input as hands-on help and/or feedback on what we have done so far. Drop in and say hello - 10am every Monday in the hall.

For more information contact Jo Kijas • 0425 793 668 • jkijas@iprimus.com.au