



# Migrant Stories in the Sunnybank District

1885-1954

Dr Neville Buch, MPHA (Qld)

[Opening Slide] Greetings and thanks

# Queensland 1882

Current News. *The Queenslander*.  
Saturday 25 March 1882, p. 357.

## First Migrant Wave

THERE is no reason to doubt that the work of canvassing or recruiting for emigrants to this colony is now being vigorously pushed in England and Scotland. Mr. Bonwick has, we are advised, been lecturing in the English towns and villages, of Essex principally, to large, most attentive, and very deeply interested audiences. He has been rigorously cross-examined by his hearers, and vigorously interviewed by reporters, and the result will, in his opinion, be the direction to this colony of a large number of farm labourers, farmers, and others. Mr. Randall, too, has been holding forth in Cambridgeshire, and the *Cambridge Express* and other papers speak in most commendatory terms of his lectures, which are well attended and well received.

Vigorous canvassing in England and Scotland for emigrants to Queensland

The local and regional areas have to be contextualized by what was happening in Queensland.

We find in the 1880s, when the Sunnybank urban and rural construction takes off, that Queensland colonial government have sent their agents across England and Scotland, to places, like the towns and villages of Essex, as mentioned in this 1882 newspaper article.

Primarily, Queensland is looking for English and Scottish farmers and farm labourers as migrants.

A few hundred of them will find their way to the Sunnybank area from the 1880s to the beginning of World War I.

## Coopers Plains 1902

### White Australia Policy

“Yesterday morning the dead body of a Chinaman was found hanging from a tree near Cooper's Plains.”

*The Brisbane Courier*. Friday 14 February 1902, p. 4.

In connection with the recent beer stamp prosecutions, opinions of Mr. Irving, head of the Excise Department, are published elsewhere.

Mr. James Stodart addressed a meeting of the electors at Runcorn on Wednesday night.

Yesterday morning the dead body of a Chinaman was found hanging from a tree near Cooper's Plains.

A shipment of horses will be despatched by Mr. A. J. Cotton for Durban in a few days.

A meeting of those favourable to the formation of a Christian Citizens' Association for Brisbane, and a league for Queensland, was held in the Albert Hall last evening.

The Minister for Railways has replied to charges made against him on retrenchment in the service.

Several important tenders for coal have been accepted by the Railway Department.

Messrs. Higgins and Portus, of the Bates Dredge Inquiry Board, are expected to

From 1901, the start Australian Federation, and Australia as a nation, immigration was defined by the White Australia policy. The policy has a complex and lengthy history . A few significant facts should be mentioned:

In 1901 the Constitution denied citizenship and voting rights to Aboriginal People, Asians and Africans.

The Immigration Restriction Act is first act of Federal Parliament. It prohibited migration of non-Europeans. The Act allows exclusion of any immigrant who fails a dictation test in a European language.

After the Immigration Restriction Act is passed, Queensland begins expelling Melanesian workers. By 1906, three quarters have been deported.

# Sunnybank 1934

## The Scottish Migrant

Charles Weston Davidson, a Scottish migrant who fought in the Maori Wars, took up land at Sunnybank.

*The Courier-Mail*, Wednesday 27 June 1934, p. 18.



Many of the major land-owners in the Sunnybank District were migrants from the United Kingdom who were passing through in a stage of their life journey.

For example, we see here a former Scottish migrant, Charles Weston Davidson, a soldier in the Maori Wars, which took place from 1845 to 1872.

From New Zealand, he arrived in Queensland and worked as a senior warder on St Helena Island.

He takes up land in Sunnybank, but also resided in Toowoomba and Redcliffe.

## Kuraby 1936

*The Courier-Mail*. Saturday 22  
February 1936, p. 11.

### "HINT OF SOME ONE ELSE"

Giving evidence, the plaintiff said that his father and mother, brothers, and sisters had come to Queensland from Wales in 1929, and he was now living with them at Kuraby. At the time he left for Australia as a nominated immigrant his wife agreed to follow him, and rejoin him as soon as finances permitted. She put him off for various reasons, and two years after he had left Wales he ceased sending his wife money, because she was in employment, and by reason of the adverse exchange. He had destroyed letters she had sent in reply to his letters, and had not kept copies of them. At that time there was no thought of divorce. The first time she definitely refused to join him was in 1928. In 1932 she again refused, hinting that there was "some one else."

### The Welsh Migrant

A Welsh family settles in Kuraby. Wife refuses to follow husband from Wales. A divorce ensues.

In contrast to a very different life, we have this story of an extended Welsh family who came to Kuraby in 1929, or there about. The significance of this story is the family members of migrants left behind. In this particular case, the wife was to join her husband later in Queensland, joining her husband's Welsh migrant father, mother, brothers and sisters.

The wife decided she did not want to emigrate. She had her own employment. Subsequently the couple divorced.

The story represents a whole range of different circumstances where migration divides families. The same sense of lost happens with internal migration, but with overseas migration there can be a deeper experience of isolation within the adopted local area.

# Acacia Ridge 1937

## The English Migrant

Many aged and former migrants from England living in the local districts.

Mr. W.M. Richards arrived in Australia in 1883. Living in Acacia Ridge in 1937, 54 years later.

*The Telegraph*. Thursday 30  
December 1937, p. 11.

### Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Richards Celebrate Golden Wedding

*To-day is the golden wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Richards, of Acacia Ridge, Beaudesert Road. Mr. Richards, who was born in London in 1861, sailed from England on his twenty-first birthday for Australia, arriving in Sydney in January, 1883.*

ON December 30, 1887, he married at Grafton, Miss A. S. Kipping, eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Kipping, Grafton, and a niece of Mr. James Treat, a Grafton alderman. Mr. and Mrs. Richards came to Brisbane in 1896 and have lived here ever since. There were six children, five of whom are living. Mesdames W. Wren (Milton) and W. Pegg (Tarragindi), Messrs. W. C. Richards (Kangaroo Point), E. F. Richards (Moorooka), and A. M. Richards

In contrast, the migrant experience can be more established in the local area.

English migrants, traditionally in Australia, were quickly adopted in local areas as natural Australian citizens.

Prior to World War II, there was a cultural outlook that Australians were British citizens, and England was “the homeland”.

English was the official language, thus it was the culture. Even migrants from Scotland or Wales were considered, to some degree, exotic with Gallic accents.

# Acacia Ridge 1949

*The Courier-Mail*, Friday 9  
December 1949, p. 9.

## The Irish Migrant

### Migrants keen to buy small farms

A NUMBER of recent British migrants have bought small farms near Brisbane. Poultry farms are the most popular.

Mr. Ray White yesterday told of the following purchases:—  
Mr. W. Fennell of London, 34 acres unimproved at Strathpine for £700. He intends to build home and raise small crops.  
Mr. J. P. Markey, from Ireland, bought a poultry farm of five acres at Acacia Ridge as a going concern for £3800.  
Mr. W. G. Morley (Kent) paid £1400 for a fully stocked poultry farm at Caboolture.  
Mr. W. Booth intends to begin pig farming at Aspley, having paid £750 for 12 acres unimproved.

from Mr. C. R. Gamble, builder. A brick home in Newman Avenue, Camp Hill of 1250 square feet was passed in at £3400 when offered at auction by McNulty, Ward and Kennedy under instructions from Mr. P. J. Hickey.

### BIG WASTAGE IN CARROTS

Agents are dumping between 75 and 100 per cent.

“Mr J.P. Markey, from Ireland, bought a poultry farm of five acres at Acacia Ridge as a going concern for £3800.”

Irish migrants also have had a history of cultural discrimination within the Anglo-centric British Commonwealth.

However, the Irish migrant community did have the advantage in Queensland of being one of the largest groupings with favourable political representation in Labour Governments and parts of the public service.

The Irish migrant Catholic Brisbane Archbishop, James Duhig, also held considerable political influence.

The local migrant picture, so far described, existed up to the late 1940s.

## Acacia Ridge 1953

### 'The Weird Mob'

The Post-World War Eastern and Southern European Migrations challenged Local and Australian views of cultures and traditions.

Polish and Italian local farmers brought a rich multi-lingual outlook for Australia society.

*Sunday Mail. Sunday 26 July 1953, p. 22.*

#### REX - DOG LINGUIST



REX, a farm dog from Acacia Ridge, in Brisbane, understands three languages. Previous owner of the farm was Italian. If he said "Silentia" (quiet) Rex would understand. Rex's present owners are Poles. When they say to him "Nie denerwuj sie" (Don't be frightened) he understands, too. And when you say in English "Good dog, Rex," he wags his tail.

The famous Australian comic novel of 1957 had the title of "They're a Weird Mob". The message of the novel, and later the Australian cinematic film in 1966, is the tension between

- the expectations for Post-World War Eastern and Southern European migrant to assimilate to the 'Australian Way of Life' and
- the fact that migrants were now starting to change the 'Australian Way of Life' into a modern cosmopolitan experience.

We see something of the same message in this Sunday Mail piece. It is about a farm dog in Acacia Ridge who has multi-linguistic ability.

The journalist claims that the dog understands commands in three different languages because its owners were local Italian and Polish migrants.

## Coopers Plains 1954

Brisbane Telegraph. Tuesday 5  
October 1954, p. 25.

### Dutch want to mix

The formation of a new Red Cross branch covering Orange Grove and Coopers Plains will open the way for newly settled Dutch women to meet Australian women and take an active part in the community life of the district.

Sixteen Dutch women attended the inaugural meeting of the new branch at the Orange Grove State School yesterday.

### Migrants, Assimilation, and Ethnic Identity

Concrete Development Pty Ltd, an Australian-Dutch partnership, built 300 houses in Banoon for the Queensland Housing Commission, from November 1950 to October 1955.

By 1955 about 75 Dutch families involved in the project had emigrated to Australia and settled in the Coopers Plains public housing estate, representing 25% of the estate.

The message about the expectation of migrants to assimilate into the established activities and traditions of the local community came in the period of early 1950s with the largest influx of a single ethnic grouping into the local area.

I am referring to the arrival of 75 Dutch families who had emigrated as part of the building of the Coopers Plains public housing commission estate, in a precinct that became known as Banoon.

The Dutch migrant community represented a quarter of the 300 house estate, which was probably the biggest migrant conclave in the Sunnybank region at the time.

# The Global Migrant Society

*The Queenslander* Saturday 4  
February 1922, p. 29.

“We feel that it is an opportunity for Queensland to give real assistance not only to the sufferers in Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Galicia, but also to Australia desirous of showing herself to be one of the great nations of the world, having a wide charity unchecked by selfish views and untrammelled by vain prejudices.”

Sir Matthew Nathan



File:Queensland State Archives 3769 Portrait of Sir Matthew Nathan Governor of Queensland 1925.

Let me conclude with the words of the Queensland Governor, Sir Matthew Nathan, which comes from speech he delivered in Sunnybank in 1922.

In his words, in seeking to provide overseas refugees support,

“Australia [is] desirous of showing herself to be one of the great nations of the world, having a wide charity unchecked by selfish views and untrammelled by vain prejudices.”

Think about that as you pass below the Nathan ridge on your exclusion today.