



## House of Assembly

Thursday, 10 February 2011

### **LOVEDAY INTERNMENT CAMPS**

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (15:47): On the weekend of 11 and 12 June this year, the Barmera branch of the South Australian National Trust will be holding a celebration to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Loveday Internment Camps.

On 1 June 1941, a number of officers and non-commissioned officers under the leadership of Officer-in-Charge Lieutenant-Colonel E.T. Dean arrived at the camps to commence guard duty. The camps housed both internees and prisoners of war. A number of Australian residents and citizens of Italian, German and Japanese ancestry were interned as enemy aliens despite living here for many years, many of whom were hostile to the fascist governments in their countries of birth.

Unfortunately, camp commanders did not appreciate the strong feelings between internees who supported the fascist government or those who opposed it. This ignorance led to the death of an

anarchist internee, Francesco Fantin, at the hands of a pro-fascist prisoner of war, Bruno Casotti, on 16 November 1942. This event led to changes in the housing of camp prisoners.

Internees came from across Australia and many theatres of war. Many internees were removed from their homes and families with little notice, often leaving behind family members who did not know where their husbands, brothers or fathers had been taken to. While internees and prisoners of war were generally well treated, the internment of Italo-Australian residents and citizens did generate some bitterness, given that they were interned not because of any unlawful activity or any intelligence suggesting they were pro-fascist (or politically active at all) but purely because of their place of birth.

Interestingly, about 40 per cent of Italian migrants living in Queensland were interned, compared to only about 4 per cent of Italian migrants living in Victoria. I think these figures reflect the nation's insecurity about being invaded from the north.

On 11 June 1941, 458 Italian internees arrived by train from Hay in New South Wales and were placed in prisoner of war camp No. 1. A further 502 prisoners of war arrived the following day. At their height, the camps at Loveday appear to have housed 5,382 internees, or prisoners of war. Many of the internees and prisoners of war were placed on farms as POW workers, as the war

effort had left many farms short of labour. Many Italian prisoners of war worked on numerous farms throughout the Adelaide Hills.

My interest in this matter, apart from being very interested in history, is that my family migrated to Australia as a result of two of my uncles being prisoners of war in Australia. Both uncles were originally interned at Hay in New South Wales following their capture in Libya. According to national archive records, one uncle was transferred to South Australia. He was placed as a prisoner of war worker on a farm owned by L.S. Crowhurst at Gumeracha. While spending most of his prisoner of war time working on farms, he did spend some time at the Loveday camp pending his repatriation to Italy at the end of the war. My uncle was repatriated on 3 December 1946 on the *Rangitata*.

The story does not end there. My uncle's experience in Australia was sufficiently positive that he applied to migrate to Australia with his wife (my dad's sister) and their two children. My uncle and his family returned to Australia on the *TSS Hellenic Prince*, landing at Melbourne on 24 January 1952. Their first place of residence in Australia was on the farm of L.S. Crowhurst at Gumeracha. They later moved to Marden, Campbelltown and then to Smithfield (modern day Kudla) in 1962. My uncle became an Australian citizen in 1959.

My uncle's journey could be summed up as: 'From POW to Citizen; Stories from the Loveday

Camps'. My uncle sponsored my family and we arrived in Australia in March 1963. My family has lived in the local area ever since.

I wish to congratulate the Barmera branch of the National Trust on its effort to bring the camps to the attention of the wider community through a range of activities on that weekend. The activities include a bus tour of the camps with a local historian, and museum displays, amongst other events. Further information about the weekend of activities can be obtained from the Barmera National Trust at post office box 472, Barmera, South Australia, 5345, or they can contact Ms Helen Barney on 0408843240.

**Time expired.**