

Braidwood and Beyond: Lebanese Immigration in South Eastern NSW, 1880s-1930s
Australian Lebanese Historical Society, 24 September 2005, Braidwood

The Noel Butlin Archives Centre has a memoir written by George Ashton (born 1889) – he was a Commonwealth public servant in his later life working for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics as Editor of Publications from 1948 to 1956, and he also wrote a multi-volumed work, *Dairy Farming in Australia*. But he also spent some time in the Braidwood area before the First World War running an operation producing eucalyptus oil.

This is what he writes of Braidwood:

Braidwood in the 1850s and 1860s was a thriving mining town of nearly 20,000 people and I recall possessed 19 pubs, as well as stores, banks, billiard saloons, and a jail built like a fortress. The activities of bushrangers, particularly the Scott gang, had resulted in the stationing of a strong police force, whose weapons included carbines, pistols and bloodhounds. When I first knew Braidwood, the force consisted of no more than half a dozen mounted policemen under the sergeant. These men were still armed, though they carried their weapons only on gold escort duty; the bloodhounds had long ago been written off the strength ... Like all mining towns, when the gold petered out, Braidwood began to die, and by 1912 had a population of less than 2,000, and only two pubs left.

Another factor in the town's decline was the pattern of landholding. Although the broad valley in which the town lies was productive cattle raising land, watered by the Shoalhaven River, and numerous tributary streams flowing from the ranges to east and west, all the good land was held by members of one family, descendants of the original holder, a convict ship captain who, on completing a specified number of voyages, had been given a crown grant ... Braidwood was in consequence what is known in New South Wales as a land-locked town. Hence its slow decline after the exhaustion of the goldfields. Since those days, the cattle runs have been subdivided and sold either for fat lamb grazing or dairy farming, and the resulting increase in the population of the valley has brought about the revival of Braidwood which is now a prosperous and growing country town (Noel Butlin Archives Centre: P91, George Ashton's memoir, pages 12-13).

The Noel Butlin Archives Centre also has a number of photographs of Braidwood in the 1920s and 30s particularly of hotels, such as the Royal Hotel and the Commercial Hotel. Tooth and Company kept records of sales of beer to

each hotel it supplied, the name of the publican, facilities such as mirrors, offices and garages, but also information about the town – the main industries and where other hotels located. There are also records for hotels in Braidwood which have since closed down:

- Willow Tree Hotel, closed 1924
- Criterion Hotel, closed 1924
- Court House Hotel, closed 1924
- Albion Hotel, closed after fire 1933

These records are particularly popular with heritage architects and with family and local historians, as they cover both city and country New South Wales, not just Braidwood.

Looking further afield to south-eastern New South Wales, the Noel Butlin Archives Centre holds records of pastoral stations near Bungendore, Bodalla, Bombala, Binalong, Yass and Young, and stock and station agents such as Dalgety's, Elder Smith Goldsbrough Mort Ltd, Pitt, Son & Badgery Ltd, Younghusband Ltd and R A McKillop & Co Ltd in Cooma. We also hold records of the mining company Lake George Mines Pty Ltd in Captain's Flat.

It is much more difficult to identify trade union records for the area as the workforce was largely non-unionised. There are trade union membership records in our collection which include Lebanese names but these are much later in the second half of the twentieth century. There are also staff records for companies such as CSR Limited.

Moses Moss & Co, Sydney and Melbourne, took photographs of all the towns and suburbs where their advertising panels were displayed and two of these happened to be in Braidwood. They are identified by the name of the owner of the property, and the name of their product prominently displayed was Wolfe's Schnapps.

The Braidwood entries in trade and pastoral directories also provide valuable information, for example:

- List of stockowners in the Colony of New South Wales 1891 and the State of NSW in 1907 which gives name of owner, name of station, number of sheep and number of cattle. The list of owners are all Anglo-Celtic names.
- Commercial directories for 1928, 1935 and 1942 – *Sands Directory*, *Wise's Post Office Commercial Directory*, and the *Country Trade Directory*

(Merchants and Traders Association) list the names of tradesmen and shopkeepers.

Directories such as these can give a good picture of the town at a particular time, for instance by noting particular trades: blacksmiths, saddlers, skin buyers, and how many there are at a particular time.

There are a few Lebanese traders listed in the entries for Braidwood: Abrahams (draper), Moses (skin buyers), Taffaha (general store), and Wehby (draper).

Returning to George Ashton's memoir – he travels around the Braidwood area to identify areas of *Eucalyptus amygdalina* and to subcontract land-holders to lease stills from the company to distill the eucalyptus oil. He describes the log-cabin houses the 'cockies' lived in with basic furnishings and kangaroo and possum rugs and then writes about their food:

The daily menu of the average cocky household was of course a restricted one, consisting typically of home-made bread, often extremely good, salt meat from the barrel outside the door, potatoes and if the cocky was unusually affluent, worcestershire sauce with the meat course and cocky's joy (golden syrup) instead of dripping on the bread. It was washed down with numerous cups of strong black tea, generously sugared.

Poor and monotonous as this menu was it nevertheless included items for the purchase of which money was needed... I found that their stores were obtained by a system of barter, carried on with an itinerant gentleman known as 'the Syrian' who travelled the mountain tracks in a horse-drawn van stocked with flour, tea, sugar, salt, cocky's joy, worcestershire sauce and a few additional luxury lines, such as tobacco, jam, condensed milk, baking powder, patent medicines and an assortment of haberdashery and cheap cotton prints and hard wearing worsteds.

These goods 'the Syrian' exchanged for rabbit skins, fox skins, and an occasional hide from a beast killed to restock the 'salt horse' barrel. The native animals which would have provided fur skins were protected and their skins, although used freely by the household, were not openly articles of trade (Noel Butlin Archives Centre: P91, George Ashton's memoir, pages 7-8).

Ashton doesn't give us the name of the Syrian and he puts it in quotation marks so it seems that this is the name by which he was known by the locals.

Anne Monsour in her article about Syrian/Lebanese traders (published in the ALHS Newsletter, no. 16, Summer 2004) writes about why so many Syrian/Lebanese immigrants were self-employed as hawkers and shopkeepers. She mentions 'legislation discrimination in employment that blocked occupational opportunities'. Certainly the Immigration Restriction Act (no. 17 of 1901) was intended to prevent the immigration of many ethnic groups and it's quite clear that the dictation test was only applied where there was an intention to bar immigration – Customs officers were instructed to select a European language 'with which the immigrant is not sufficiently acquainted to be able to write out at dictation' (National Archives: PP6/1, 1927/H/427).

From 1903, Lebanese people who immigrated were barred from applying for citizenship on the grounds that they were classified as Asian. This would have restricted their employment in positions where applicants were required to be British subjects. Some Lebanese immigrants had already been naturalised by colonial governments but found that other members of their families were not eligible under the Commonwealth legislation. The new Naturalisation Act of 1920 corrected this injustice. The National Archives' publication *More People Imperative: Immigration to Australia, 1901-39* by Michele Langfield is a useful general source on immigration policy before the Second World War but does not give any examples of Lebanese people.

There was also discrimination by employers, and particularly at times of high unemployment, for instance the building industry sought to exclude building tradesmen from immigration schemes in the 1920s until all returned soldiers had been absorbed. The Australian Workers' Union and other unions, Chambers of Commerce, and the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, among many other organisations, protested to government about the level of immigration particularly of non-British immigrants. Langfield in Chapter 11 (Public attitudes to immigration) lists files of the Prime Minister's and Immigration Departments which include many of these representations.

In this atmosphere it is understandable that Lebanese immigrants preferred to be self-employed. Monsour also argues that early Lebanese immigrants Joseph Malouf, George Dan, Stanton Melick and Anthony Coorey who had all built up successful warehousing, import and manufacturing businesses in Sydney in the late 19th century made it easier for other Lebanese immigrants to set themselves up as shopkeepers.

One other source of interest held by the ANU Archives are the papers of demographers such as Charles Price – his work involved tracking individual Lebanese immigrants in naturalization records to map which areas of Lebanon immigrants came from and where they settled in Australia. He also used

unidentified census records to draw conclusions about immigrants, eg the high average number of children Lebanese women had once settled in Australia.

He also notes the importance of the Redfern-Waterloo warehousing businesses:

as a service base for hawkers, dealers, skin-buyers and others out in rural areas who found it easiest to work through friends in Sydney when getting supplies or marketing skins, even country based drapers and storekeepers found it convenient to work this way' (ANU Archives: ANUA 72, Box 56, Charles Price, 'Lebanese in Australia: Demographic Aspects', Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs conference, Sydney, 1984).

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about just some of the records that the Noel Butlin Archives Centre holds. In researching this paper I have found out a lot more than I knew before about early Lebanese immigration to Australia – for instance, I discovered that there were a number of Lebanese families in the town where I went to high school, Cootamundra, where there were stores run by the Bakasch, Batros, Sissian and Deep families which I now know were early Lebanese immigrants.