

A country of nations

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Australia has opened its doors wider than many would have dreamed, writes Vanessa Walker

THEY were six migrants — from Spain, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Norway, Greece and France — smiling at the camera on the steps of Canberra's Kurrajong Hotel.

Dressed in their finest threads, they had been brought together, each from a different state, to celebrate Australia's first citizenship ceremony on February 3, 1949.

More pointedly, the government had selected the photo subjects by their European nationalities, in a bid to represent what they perceived as the "unified, all inclusive" migration future that Australia aspired to, or — in the view of the day — had been reduced to.

Before the Nationality and Citizenship Act of 1948, the status of Australian citizenship did not exist. Instead, all people born in British colonies, and migrants who had been naturalised, were deemed to be British citizens.

Between the "all inclusive" photo of Europeans celebrating their Australian citizenship in 1949 and the present lie 53 years of migration, each journey undertaken with dreams of a safer, brighter and more prosperous future.

Those years have seen Australia open its arms wider than it could ever have anticipated, with the number of nationalities taking citizenship (excluding the fragmentation of some countries) burgeoning from 53 to more than 200 last year.

Today, as Australia marks its 54th year of citizenship ceremonies, more than 7735 people will pledge their allegiance, joining a country which has accepted 10 million people — the fourth largest migrant intake in the world — since the First Fleet sailed into Sydney in 1788 to a place long inhabited by Aborigines.

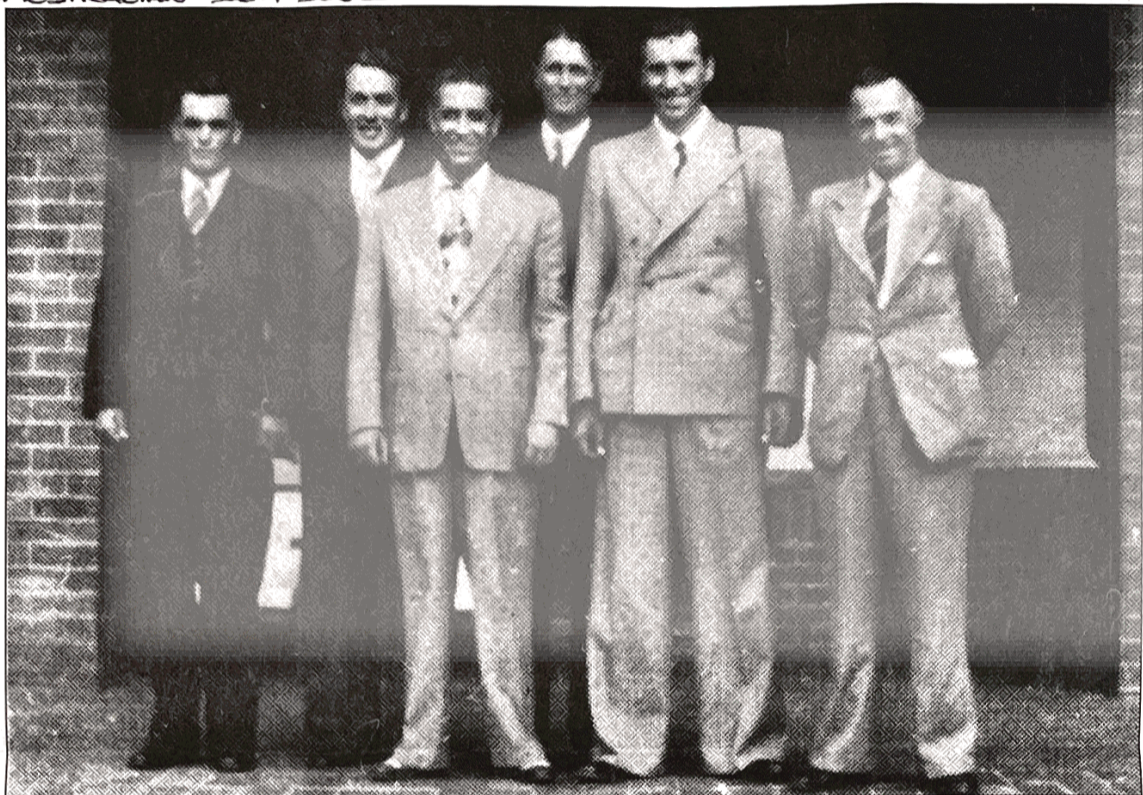
"That mix has brought to this country, especially into the metropolis, a diversity of arts and culture and literature," says Ian Burnley, author of *The Impact of Immigration in Australia*.

The 1949 celebration was held on the eve of the nation's second determined attempt, after the 1901 White Australia Policy, to control the mix and origin of arrivals to this country.

While the White Australia Policy smacked of exclusion and racism, it also established in Australia a bedrock layer of British and Irish migrants — nationalities that dominated our overseas arrivals over the next century.

The 1901 Census showed that 58 per cent of the foreign population had come from the UK, one-fifth from Ireland, followed by Germany, China and New Zealand.

Almost 50 years later, in 1949, the government, anxious to expand heavy industry and build the Snowy Mountains hydro-electric dam in a country depleted of young men in the wake of the war, set about to replenish the population. To do so, it re-



In the beginning: Six of the first seven Australian citizens pose on the steps of the Hotel Kurrajong. They were, from left, Angel Muguira (Spanish), Jan Jandura Pucek (Czech), Paul Marvig (Danish), Thiel Marstrand (Norwegian), Michalos Mavrokefalos (Greek), Auguste Leon Durand (French). The seventh, Mladen Bumbak, from Yugoslavia is not pictured

A century of changing migration

Top 15 nationalities

1901	
Foreign-born people living in Australia	
British (incl. Irish)	879,168
German	38,362
Chinese	29,807
NZ	26,788
Norwegian	8883
Indian	7837
USA	7448
Danish	6287
Italian	5678
French	3692
Japanese	3583
Russian	3368
Canadian	3150
Swiss	2038
Austrian	1802

2001	
Nationalities who pledged citizenship	
British	12,474
NZ	11,007
Chinese	6890
South African	2992
Bosnian	2661
Indian	2335
Filipino	2211
Vietnamese	1953
Iraqi	1862
Sri Lankan	1672
Fijian	1398
Yugoslav	1175
Malaysian	1057
USA	1004
Korean	966

invigorated the migration cycle. This time, though, it was forced to open the gates to wider Europe as Britain couldn't furnish its colony with the numbers required.

Then immigration minister Arthur Calwell had drawn up a campaign — *Populate or Perish* — with a goal of 2 per cent population growth per annum, half of which was to come through immigration.

Largely through sentiment, he turned to the UK for new citizens, but when the well ran dry, the gates were opened to Europeans who wanted to escape the ravages of war.

First were 170,000 displaced people, mostly from Eastern Europe, including Ukrainians, ethnic Russians, Poles, Slovaks, people from the east Baltic states and Romania, as well as 15,000 Jewish survivors of the Holocaust.

But after trawling the German and Dutch populations, Australia was still under target. In desperation, the government turned to southern Europe for its new citizens, an offer which Italians and Greeks took up with gusto. By 1955, just five years after they were encouraged to come to Australia, 88,068 migrants from Italy and 32,804 from Greece had taken up citizenship.

Between 1949 and 1960, 260,000 migrants took out citizenship, with the vast majority, 90 per cent, originating from Europe. This wave of new Australians marked the beginning of cultural diversity and brought with it an ethnic mosaic that would forever change society.

"The first generation of Greeks set themselves up in cafes and catering — then the second generation established themselves as solicitors,

accountants and travel agents," says Burnley. "Italians, like the Grollo brothers, were some of the first magnates in Australia. Massive companies like Transfield were also established by postwar migrants."

Serbs and Croats also planted the first market gardens.

Decades later, Australia again tried its hand at British migration with the "£10 pom" policy, but it wasn't until 1975 that the third discernible migration cycle began.

This started when Vietnamese boatpeople arrived in Australia seeking sanctuary from the war in their country. Australia's commitment to the war — it had sent troops in 1965 — gave it a moral obligation to help those fleeing its consequences.

From 1976 to 1981, almost 50,000 Vietnamese found their way to Australia — almost all as refugees. Between 1980 and 1985, 30,302 Vietnamese had acquired citizenship, making them the third largest migrant group behind people from the UK and (the former) Yugoslavia.

The number of Chinese, Filipinos and Malaysians taking out citizenship also hit its peak, as did Lebanese who had fled the civil war.

In 1995, another milestone in Australian migration history was passed when New Zealanders exceeded Britons as the largest group of settler arrivals — duly reflected when 11,007 Kiwis vied with 12,474 British at citizenship ceremonies last year.

Latterly, a small but steady stream of Middle Eastern migrants, most fleeing Saddam Hussein and the Taliban government in Afghanistan, have taken out citizenship.

The numbers are so negligible as not to have been counted before 1988, and have never reached beyond 800 Afghans, 2877 Iraqis and 1143 Iranians in any one year. Yet their inclusion represents the latest cycle in nationalities coming to our shores.