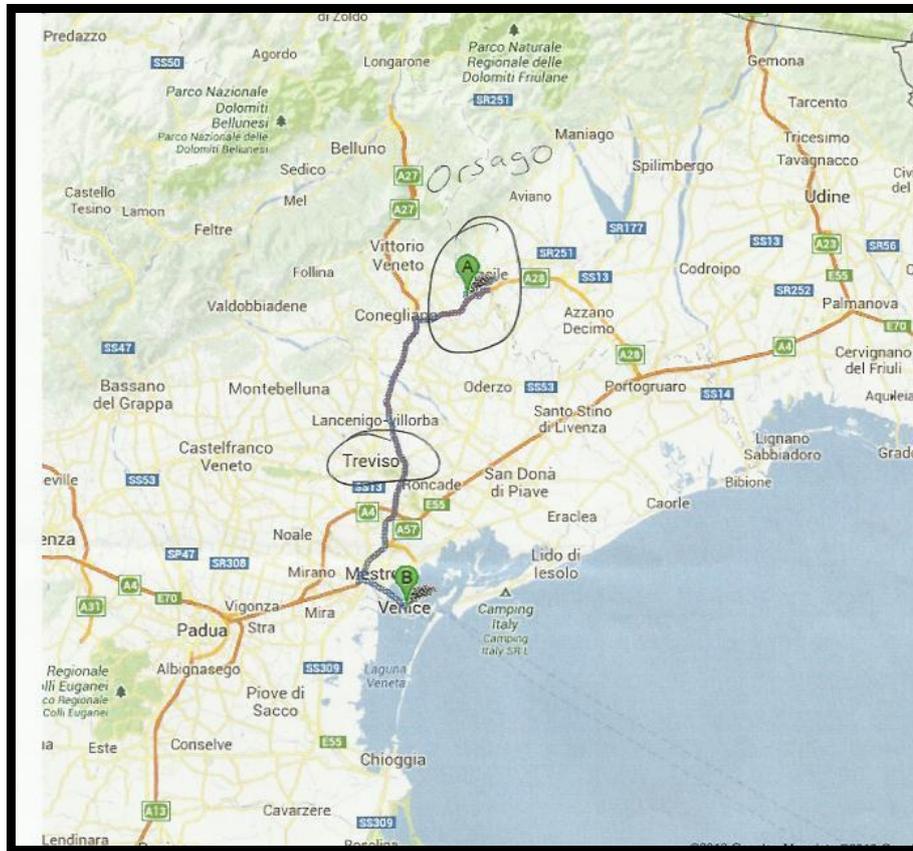


The Piccoli and Belotti Families: Accidental Migrants to Australia

By Bev Phelts

What could be described in today's terms – the Piccoli and Belotti families along with fifty other Italian families, were scammed into leaving their homes in the Orsago area just north Venice. They were farmers and wine growers in Veneto region (near the Austrian border).



Map showing Venice at “B” and north of Venice is Treviso and Orsago “A”. Just further north are mountain ranges and Austria. To the east is Yugoslavia.

What possessed them to leave their familiar land and country to travel to Barcelona and across the other side of the world to an unknown environment? Reasons that have been forwarded by authors are that constant farming had rendered their land infertile and Italy was still trying to recover from the Napoleon Wars. Author, Rosemary Harrigan interviewed some of the Italians in their later years. Tome Girolamo's reason was heavy taxes to the Italian government and the failure of crops that “I did not see my way to get a living” and Maria Spinaze said “we were as poor as church mice in Italy and there were wars”.¹ For whatever reason they left, it was a brave step and they must have been wholly persuaded by de Rays that a rich, fertile paradise laid waiting for them.

¹ Rosemary Harrigan, *They were Expeditioners: The Chronicle of Northern Italian Farmers – Pioneer Settlers of New Italy: Documentation of the Marquis de Ray's Fourth Expeditions to New Ireland between 1879-1881*, self published, Werribee 2006, page 55

The De Rays Expedition

Marquis de Rays, a French nobleman had visions of starting a new French colony in the eastern part of Papua New Guinea and on islands in that region. He had named the land, La Nouvelle France or New France. It was also referred to as New Ireland.



Advertising the promised land

In 1879, the Marquis de Rays had distributed and promoted the “paradise empire” called New France. Its capital, Port Breton on an island north east of Papua New Guinea near Kavieng, was described as an established settlement which had been colonised by prior expeditions. It consisted of large buildings, a beautiful climate and arable farmland.² Agents throughout France, Belgium and parts of Germany said that “there were vast tracks of the best agricultural lands ... the climate was one of the finest in the world, the harbour of Port Breton one of the safest and most commodious in existence, and that the extent of the country available for settlement was practically unlimited. They were shown maps of imaginary towns with facilities for a constant supply of good fresh water, surveyed streets and squares, sites for churches, schools, and public offices, and portions of the land set apart for the erection of private buildings, shops, and swelling houses were carefully divided.”³

The price to join the expedition was 1800 francs in gold or a person could offer their services in labour for five years. For this, they were offered 20 hectares of land and a four roomed house, transport to the new colony, rations for six months, for those who paid in gold and five years for those who offered their labour.⁴ Only Antonio Nardi had paid in full while all the rest came out under contract.⁵ According to reports, de Rays was to receive over 7 million francs for his four ill-fated expeditions.⁶

² Report of J. Milbourne Marsh, Water Police Magistrate and George F. Wise, Agent for Immigration, Appointed by the Honorable the Colonial Secretary, as a Board to Inquire into the Circumstances and Future Plans of the Italian Immigrants who arrived in Sydney by the Steamer “James Paterson”, from Noumea, on the 8th April, 1881: Together with Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Board, 1881, Sydney Government Printer, page 4

³ Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, pages 28-29

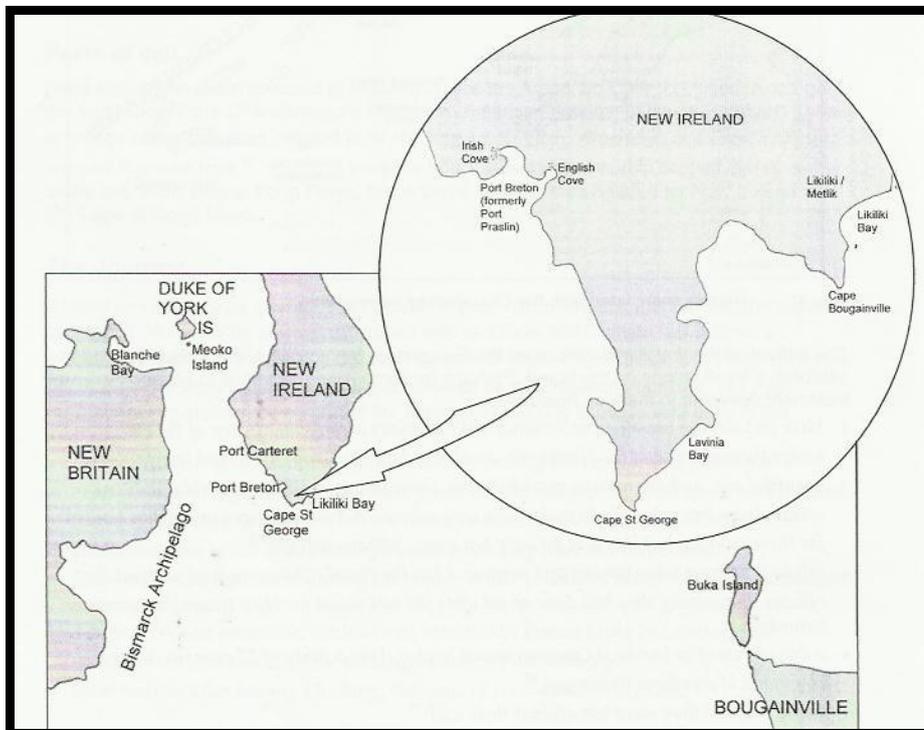
⁴ Wikipedia, *De Rays Expedition* by Ken Baker, a descendent of the De Moris

⁵ *The Richmond River Herald & Northern Districts Advertiser*, 10 April 1931

⁶ Wikipedia, *De Rays Expedition* by Ken Baker



Vicinity of Port Breton and Port Moresby



⁷ Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, page 12



A millstone brought to Port Breton by the 3rd expedition in 1880. The stone was never used and is mounted in Rabaul as a memorial.

8

CONDITIONS POUR LES COLONS-ÉMIGRANTS



vers la NOUVELLE FRANCE.

LES ÉMIGRANTS-COLONS	LES OUVRIERS AGRICOLES (1 ^{re} CL.)	LES PASSAGERS
<p style="text-align: center;">LES ÉMIGRANTS-COLONS</p> <p>Les émigrants colons sont admis à bord de nos navires sous les conditions suivantes :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ils doivent être âgés de moins de 40 ans. 2. Ils doivent être célibataires ou mariés sans enfants. 3. Ils doivent être de nationalité française ou d'une autre nationalité reconnue par le Gouvernement de la Nouvelle-France. 4. Ils doivent être en possession d'un passeport en règle. 5. Ils doivent être en possession d'un contrat de colonisation en règle. 6. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de santé en règle. 7. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de moralité en règle. 8. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de solvabilité en règle. 9. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de non-condamnation en règle. 10. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de non-contrainte en règle. <p>Les émigrants colons sont admis à bord de nos navires sous les conditions suivantes :</p> <p>1. Ils doivent être âgés de moins de 40 ans.</p> <p>2. Ils doivent être célibataires ou mariés sans enfants.</p> <p>3. Ils doivent être de nationalité française ou d'une autre nationalité reconnue par le Gouvernement de la Nouvelle-France.</p> <p>4. Ils doivent être en possession d'un passeport en règle.</p> <p>5. Ils doivent être en possession d'un contrat de colonisation en règle.</p> <p>6. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de santé en règle.</p> <p>7. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de moralité en règle.</p> <p>8. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de solvabilité en règle.</p> <p>9. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de non-condamnation en règle.</p> <p>10. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de non-contrainte en règle.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">LES OUVRIERS AGRICOLES (1^{re} CL.)</p> <p>Les ouvriers agricoles sont admis à bord de nos navires sous les conditions suivantes :</p> <p>1. Ils doivent être âgés de moins de 40 ans.</p> <p>2. Ils doivent être célibataires ou mariés sans enfants.</p> <p>3. Ils doivent être de nationalité française ou d'une autre nationalité reconnue par le Gouvernement de la Nouvelle-France.</p> <p>4. Ils doivent être en possession d'un passeport en règle.</p> <p>5. Ils doivent être en possession d'un contrat de colonisation en règle.</p> <p>6. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de santé en règle.</p> <p>7. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de moralité en règle.</p> <p>8. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de solvabilité en règle.</p> <p>9. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de non-condamnation en règle.</p> <p>10. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de non-contrainte en règle.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">LES PASSAGERS</p> <p>Les passagers sont admis à bord de nos navires sous les conditions suivantes :</p> <p>1. Ils doivent être âgés de moins de 40 ans.</p> <p>2. Ils doivent être célibataires ou mariés sans enfants.</p> <p>3. Ils doivent être de nationalité française ou d'une autre nationalité reconnue par le Gouvernement de la Nouvelle-France.</p> <p>4. Ils doivent être en possession d'un passeport en règle.</p> <p>5. Ils doivent être en possession d'un contrat de colonisation en règle.</p> <p>6. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de santé en règle.</p> <p>7. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de moralité en règle.</p> <p>8. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de solvabilité en règle.</p> <p>9. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de non-condamnation en règle.</p> <p>10. Ils doivent être en possession d'un certificat de non-contrainte en règle.</p>

TERMS AND CONDITIONS IMPOSED UPON THE PROSPECTIVE COLONISTS

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⁸ Photo & information from the University of Wollongong D160/4/93
⁹ J H Niau, *The Phantom Paradise: The Story of the Expedition of the Marquis De Rays*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1936, p.156

By the 3rd expedition, both the French and Italian governments had wised up to de Rays and his scam and tried to prevent Italians from joining the expedition. The Italian government decreed that no Italian taking the journey would be issued a passport. To get around this, de Rays organised the 3rd expedition to depart from Barcelona.¹⁰ About fifty Italian families made the journey to Marseille without passports but encountered further difficulties there with the Italian Consul. However, de Rays had an agency in the French port and he made arrangements for them to travel by sea to Barcelona.¹¹

The Piccolis' and Belottis must have been a determined lot to travel all the way to France then on to Spain to join the 3rd expedition. On the passenger list, there were eight Piccolis' who were listed as "Picoli". My great great grandparents Andrea and Giovanna Piccoli aged 60 and 58, with their children and grandchildren. Their children were Caterina aged 24 (my great grandmother), Giacomo aged 14 (my great great uncle), Antonio aged 35 (my great great uncle) and his wife Maria aged 28 and children Giovanna aged 4 and Dominic aged 2.¹² The Belottis were listed as 3 people under the name "Belotto". Antonio Belotti aged 36 and his two children, Pietro aged 13 and Anna aged 11.¹³

About 300 people (mostly Italians and some French & Germans) joined the 3rd expedition on the ship *India*.¹⁴ *India* was the largest of de Rays' ships used to transport his migrants. It was a 885 ton steamer with 90 horsepower. The first two ships sent were only 350 ton. The new settlers boarded the ship on 8 July 1880¹⁵ and the ship sailed the following day with the journey taking three months. Cramped conditions, disease, lack of ventilation, limited rations became common.¹⁶ Supplies of good food ran out and water supplies became almost exhausted and at times had to be rationed out in small quantities.¹⁷ The ship arrived at Port Breton on 14 October 1880.¹⁸ Amazingly, they arrived in reasonable health with only a few deaths on the voyage.¹⁹

On arrival, the colonists found no town, farming or housing. They used the *India* for accommodation and salvaged what they could from the two previous attempts at settlement.²⁰ Some made crude huts on shore and the ones who slept on the ship, slept together in two tiers of bunks with heads to the sides and feet to the centre of the ship.²¹ In the tropics, many became sick and malnourished. The heat was excessive with the latitude only about 4 degrees below the Equator. The provisions that came with them were uneatable and a large quantity had been thrown overboard. Forty-eight people died.²² According to the passenger death list, no Piccolis' died on the voyage to Port Breton or at Port Breton.²³

¹⁰ Wikipedia, *De Rays Expedition* by Ken Baker

¹¹ Anne-Gabrielle Thompson, *Turmoil, Tragedy to Triumph: The Story of New Italy*, 1980, pages not numbered.

¹² *James Paterson* Passenger list, Wikipedia, KMB Associates, Brussels.

¹³ His first wife, Maria Butignol and mother of his two children died in 1877 most probably in Italy. He travelled with his second wife, Pia and she is noted on the passenger list collected by the French authorities, New Caledonia, listed as having died on 16 February 1881 at Port Breton. The list states "Pio Bellotto" aged 35. A mystery is that on his naturalisation papers, he states that he arrived in Sydney on 21 May 1881 on another ship rather than 7 April 1881 on the *James Paterson*. He married Caterina Piccoli in 1882. Information from *James Paterson* De Rays Passenger list, Wikipedia, KMB Associates, Brussels

¹⁴ Wikipedia, *De Rays Expedition* by Ken Baker

¹⁵ Anne-Gabrielle Thompson, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ Wikipedia, *De Rays Expedition* by Ken Baker

¹⁷ *The Richmond River Herald & Northern Districts Advertiser*, 10 April 1931

¹⁸ Wikipedia, *De Rays Expedition* by Ken Baker

¹⁹ *Report of J. Milbourne Marsh, op.cit.*, page 4

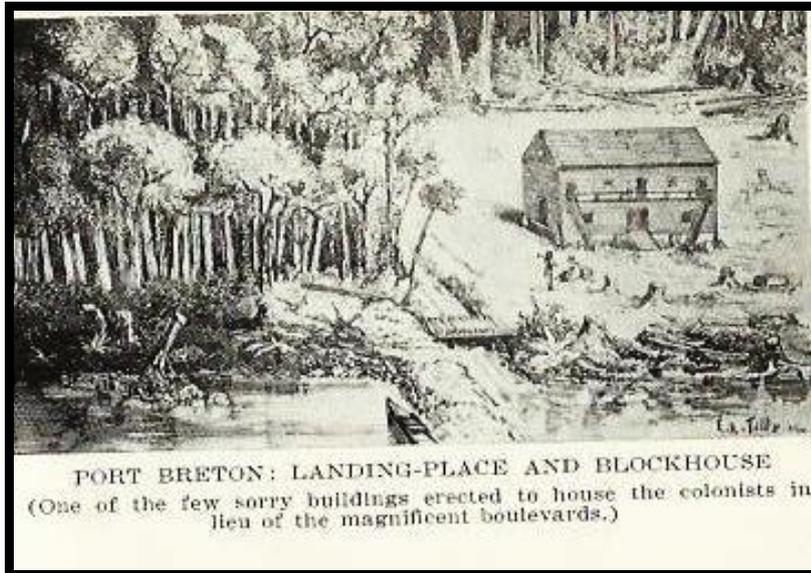
²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *The Richmond River Herald & Northern Districts Advertiser*, 10 April 1931

²² *Report of J. Milbourne Marsh, op.cit.*, page 4

²³ Wikipedia, *De Rays Expedition* by Ken Baker & *Report of J. Milbourne Marsh, op.cit.*, page 5

The colonists set about building infrastructure and planting crops. A magazine, two bridges, and buildings were built within two miles. A house 160X35ft which was brought on the *India* was put together. Roads were constructed with a hope that a future road would be built from Port Breton to Likiliki (5 miles away). About 30 acres of land was planted with beans, indian corn, coffee, vegetables, salad and radishes. Most of it was experimental to see what would grow.²⁴ They soon became aware that cannibals were nearby and were told to never leave the colony. One officer from the *India* went exploring and disappeared. The following day one of the friendly natives brought his scalp back to the settlement. Maria Nardi who was seven at the time, said that “we never saw any blacks, but the doctor went out with his friend and never returned.”²⁵



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The blockhouse built by the 3rd expedition

The Australian Government was already well aware of de Rays' earlier attempts of colonisation and the Government kept watch on any further settlement. As a result the colonists were visited by the *HMS Beagle* not long after they had arrived. Captain de Houghton of the *Beagle* had praised the industriousness of the settlers as they had cleared land, were building houses and planting seed. However he was concerned about the unsuitability of the site. Reverent George Brown of the Wesleyan Mission on nearby Duke of York Island also visited the settlers. And he too was not hopeful about the settlement's future.²⁷ Reverent Brown had provided substantial assistance to the sick and staving colonists of the first expedition to Port Breton. He played an import role in their rescue. He kept vigilant over the colony and photographed the colony sending photos and articles to the *Sydney Mail* which were published on 30 October 1880 and 16 April 1881. He later died in Sydney in 1917.²⁸

By October 1880, crops had not been producing and food became scarce. The daily diet consisted of thin and watery coffee for breakfast, a piece of meat with some rice and wine for lunch and for supper, a soup made of meat and beans. Throughout November and December, six people died. In January and February, a further eight people died.²⁹

²⁴ Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, pages 65-66

²⁵ *Ibid.*, page 156

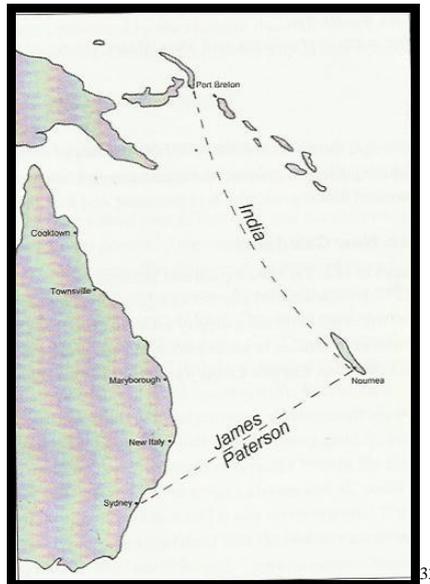
²⁶ J H Niau, *op.cit.*, p.60

²⁷ Anne-Gabrielle Thompson, *op.cit.*

²⁸ Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, page 160

²⁹ Anne-Gabrielle Thompson, *op.cit.*

The *Genil*, a previous expedition ship which had been anchored in Port Breton harbour, had left for Sydney on 14 December with the expectation that it would return with provisions within fifty days. Two months had gone by without the *Genil* returning. Unbeknown to the colonists the *Genil* had to moor at Maryborough, Queensland for repairs on its boilers. The situation had become desperate for the colonists. So while they still had some food, the colonists decided to take the *India* to Sydney.³⁰ So on 20 February 1881, the colonists left Port Breton. Although Captain Leroy headed for Sydney, after a few days at sea, “the machinery of the vessel broke down” and as a consequence they had to sail the ship to Noumea which was closer. The captain said they would stock up with food and coal at Noumea and then sail on to New South Wales.³¹ Four more people died on the journey to Noumea.³²



On the day the *India* sailed into the French harbour, their journey was described by a journalist:

“at 4pm on the 12th March 1881, a disabled steamer struggled into Noumea Harbour, having on board over 300 starving souls, with not a drop of water to drink... The vessel on arrival was boarded by one of our merchants, who was commissioned to furnish the food required by the people on board – literally in a starving condition. He went to the nearest butcher’s and ordered a quarter of beef...The ship was first taken to be American but she proved to be the British India Steam Navigation Company’s *India*, 900 tons, Captain Leroy flying the Liberian colours, Port Breton on her stern and having on board the remnant of the Marquis de Ray’s New Ireland ... victims, numbering between 250 and 300, including upwards of eighty children, from infancy to the age of 14 years. When water and food were taken on board a rush was made by the poor creatures starving for both. The vessel was a horrid spectacle. Finding themselves abandoned at New Ireland by the *Genil*, for which they looked for in vain. .. the remnant of the Marquis’ victims held a consultation and decided to leave for Noumea whilst they had a few days provisions left. As well to perish at sea as die of starvation, fever, and other miseries on that inhospitable island. On the 20th of February, they embarked everything on board and started for Noumea, having only eleven days provisions and fifteen days water and a very small quantity of coal. Their machinery provide almost useless, owing to faulty boilers. .. At the north end of New Caledonia, the greatest difficulty was experienced in keeping off the reef, 500

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, page 74

³² Anne-Gabrielle Thompson, *op.cit.*

³³ Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, page 75

yards distant one time, and again, on entering the Pass, the machinery stopped but a fortuitous breeze came to their aid. The voyage was thus prolonged to twenty instead of ten or twelve days, causing much additional suffering to the already over afflicted emigrants, seven of whom died trying to reach here, and four the day after. Two hundred and sixty Italians and thirty French started in her from Barcelona eight months since. Of these, forty-four have died. They were from the ages of 1 up to 79 years, but the majority were men in the prime of life... Efforts had been made to induce them to come ashore. Very naturally they have refused to quit the ship unless with a sure guarantee of their being properly disposed of or returned to their homes. Living on two decks, having two rows of sufficiently comfortable berths on each, women, children, and men pass away the heavy hours as best they can. Kind hearts were not found wanting in helping the most pressing wants of the poor creatures. The situation of those on board is most embarrassing and difficult to deal with. .. the supply of provisions to so large a number of people has been too heavy to be continued by the merchants. Consequently they have been stopped, and the people thrown upon the humanity of the Government, which is now caring for them awaiting information from Sydney.”³⁴

The settlers wanted to go on to Sydney but the French authorities claimed the ship unseaworthy and would not allow it to leave the port.³⁵ The ship and its cargo were then advertised for sale.³⁶ An Australian, Howard Walker bought the *India* for £1500 when Marqui de Rays reportedly had paid £6800. The ship was taken to Sydney for servicing and then went on to take cargo between Newcastle, Sydney and New Caledonia. In June 1882, it was reported that the *India* was en route to Noumea, evidence of trading between Australia and the French colony.³⁷

Although the Noumean Government and its citizens were generous and treated the colonists kindly, they did not want to remain in New Caledonia.³⁸ The British Consulate Noumea wrote on 18 March to the Governor of NSW stating that although the Noumean Government had offered the Italians land and rations for some months, the Italians state that they have “been so deceived by Frenchmen, that they will trust them no more, and they are urgent to be sent to Australia”.³⁹ The colonists appealed to the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales for assistance in getting to Australia. This was granted and the Australian Government/Sir Henry Parkes sent the steamer the *James Paterson* to collect them. The Noumean Government paid for their passage to Sydney at a cost of £3 per adult.⁴⁰

On 7 April 1881 at 11.30pm, the *James Paterson* docked at Fort Denison, Sydney. The Consular Agent for Italy at Sydney, Dr V Marano and other officials met the Italians on their arrival. There were ninety-nine adult men and women and about 100 children who could not speak English. The Italian Consular secured accommodation for them in Sydney’s Agricultural Hall (corner of Campbell & Pitt Streets) in the Domain.⁴¹

³⁴ New Caledonia Correspondent of the SM Herald, *The Brisbane Courier*, 28 March 1881

³⁵ Wikipedia, *De Rays Expedition* by Ken Baker & *Report of J. Milbourne Marsh*, *op.cit.*, page 5

³⁶ *Ibid.*

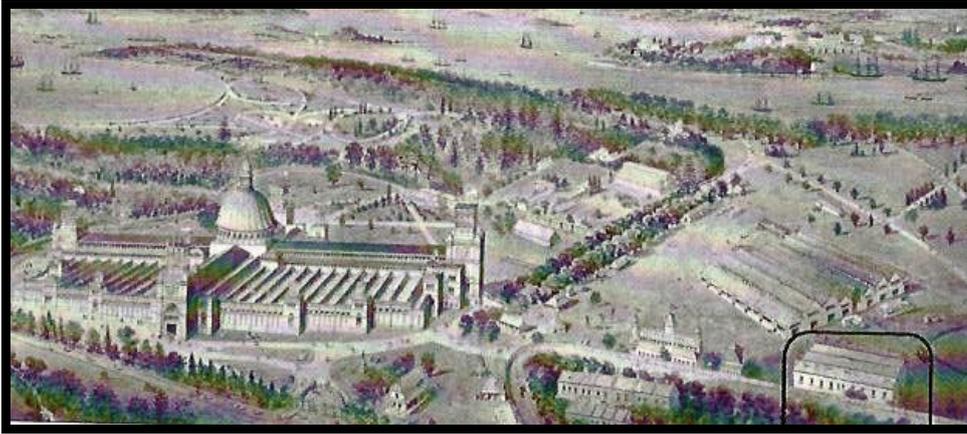
³⁷ Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, page 116-119

³⁸ *Report of J. Milbourne Marsh*, *op.cit.*, pages 1 & 5

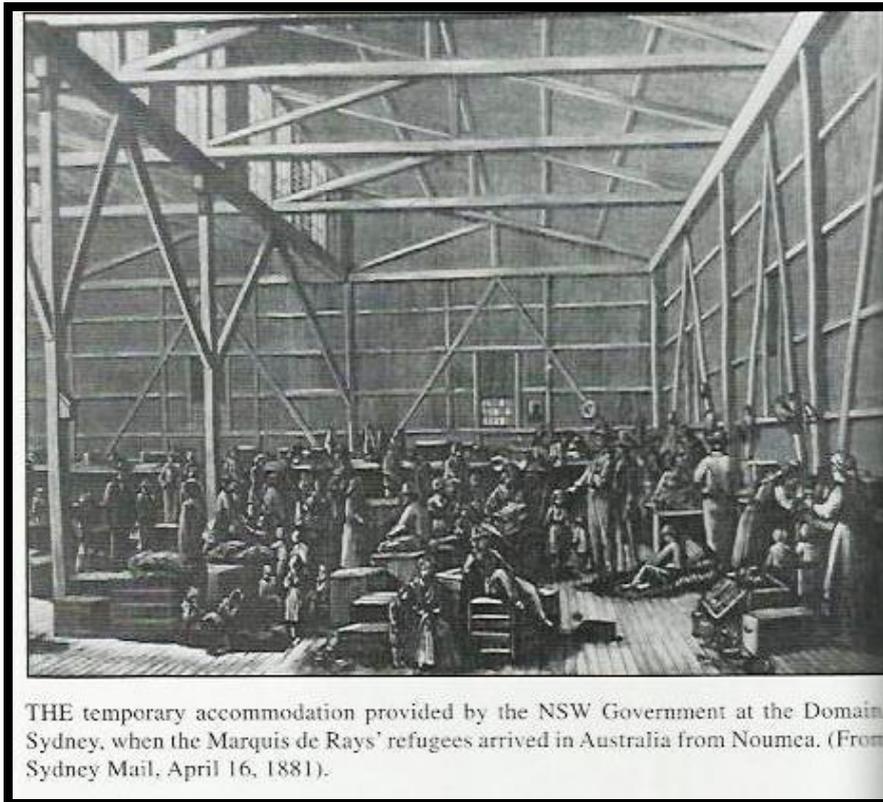
³⁹ Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, page 78

⁴⁰ *Report of J. Milbourne Marsh*, *op.cit.*, pages 1 & 5

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, page 2 & Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, page 85



This is what Sydney looked like at the time of their arrival.
 Their home for the following weeks was the Exhibition Building/Agricultural Hall which is circled ⁴²



On the day of their arrival, each individual signed an “agreement” with the Australian Government which read:

“We, the undersigned Italian immigrants, who came out under the auspices of the Marquis de Rays, and who have just arrived from Noumea, New Caledonia, by the ‘James Paterson’, being without home or means, request the Government to afford us shelter and food for a short period, and a small change of clothing, and that we may be assisted to obtain some kind of employment; and we do hereby agree to submit ourselves entirely to the regulations of the Government of New South Wales or any constituted authority appointed by them for the time being.” ⁴⁴

⁴² Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, page 90

⁴³ *The Dream that Wouldn't Die: The tragic Struggles of Gallant People to Build a New Italy Far from their Homeland*, Jim Briginshaw, Watson Ferguson & Company, Moorooka, Qld, 2006, pages 184-185

⁴⁴ *Report of J. Milbourne Marsh, op.cit.*, page 2

Dr Marano tended to their needs as both Italian Consul and a medical doctor. He must have been very influential as the Australian Government bent over backwards providing the immigrants with all their needs – food, clothing, medical attention, a makeshift hospital within the Hall, the Roman Catholic clergy had ready access to their new flock, a government interpreter was at hand to assist and to document their plight. “These immigrants..., during the time they have been under our [government] supervision their conduct has, in every respect, been most satisfactory, and many have repeatedly expressed their gratitude for the generous treatment which they have received in New South Wales. We have also much pleasure in testifying to the great kindness evinced toward them by the citizens of Sydney; clothing of every description having been forwarded for their use; also fruit, and even toys and playthings for their children, and many ladies have constantly visited the people, ministering to the sick and cheering all by their presence.”⁴⁵ Also the Sydney Italian community rallied and provided donations, supplies and support to the immigrants.⁴⁶

The report went on to state: “The immigrants did everything asked by the government which included adhering to the sanitary and safety regulations necessary to house them. None wanted to return to Italy and they wanted to form their own colony in Australia. They appeared to know each other and were willing as a group to support six widows and their children. They were a moral and sober group and were penniless with only little clothing. They declined to blame de Rays of their plight but found fault “with the administration of affairs by others.” Of their skills, with the exception of two, all were agricultural labourers and vine growers, and all could produce olives, wine, able to milk, the men could fell trees. The young women were not skilled in domestic duties but rather, were all skilled outdoor labourers”.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pages 4-6

⁴⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 April 1881

⁴⁷ *Report of J. Milbourne Marsh, op.cit.*, pages 4-6

Regulations for the information and guidance of the Italian immigrants

On 11th April a list of regulations, written in English and Italian, was posted around the Agricultural Hall;

Every person has strictly to conform to the following

Regulations:—

1. *No person is allowed to leave the Domain surrounding the building in which they are at present located without special permission.*
2. *The heads of families are responsible for the good conduct, cleanliness, and general discipline of those under their charge.*
3. *At 8 a.m., at noon, and at 8 p.m., every person has to answer to the call.*
4. *The hours for meals are –*

For breakfast,	8 a.m.
" dinner,	1 p.m.
" tea,	6 p.m.
5. *At 6 a.m. all persons in good health may go to the baths, which will be pointed out to them by a person in authority.*
6. *Everybody has to be in his respective dormitory at 8 p.m., when all are expected to go to bed, and no one to sleep in any other compartment than that which is allotted to him.*
7. *All persons requiring medical assistance have to report themselves to the Doctor on his arrival.*
8. *No wine or spirits allowed without an order from the Doctor.*
9. *Smoking strictly prohibited within the building.*
10. *Strict cleanliness must be observed; all must attend both to their persons and to their dress; nuisances of all kinds strictly prohibited both inside and outside the building.*
11. *No men to be admitted into the single women's compartments.*
12. *Single men not to be admitted into any other compartment except their own, unless duly authorized.*
13. *No stranger admitted within the building without permission*
14. *In case of any disputes arising amongst the immigrants, immediate reference must be made to the police in charge of the building.*
15. *No person can enter into any agreement or contract whatever without special authority.*
16. *Everybody is required to follow the directions which will be given to him by his respective superintendant.*
17. *All persons not conforming with the above Regulations will forfeit all the benefit and advantages at present extended to them.⁴³*

Although offers were made by two farmers to have all of the immigrants located on their farms for 12 months with wages and rations, the Government preferred disbursement. The Italians needed to learn English and Australian farming practices.⁴⁹ On 20 April 1881, the Government advertised in three daily newspapers for employers for the immigrants. Although the immigrants didn't want to be parted from each other they agreed to accept employment. The Government noted that they all obtained a fair rate of wages considering they could not speak English.⁵⁰ Families were sent to various NSW regions which included Sydney. Carlo Marina of Murrumburah near Young engaged five families with my ancestor Antonio Piccoli "and family".⁵¹ Besides Antonio's wife Maria and two children, "and family" could have included his parents Andrea and Ciot Giovanna and his sister Caterina and brother Giacomo. It seems that this was the case, as Giacomo in interviews held in 1931 and 1950 stated that he went to Young.⁵² Several Italian families went to Liverpool.⁵³ I suspect this could have been the destination for the Belottis' because in 1882 Antonio Belotti and Caterina Piccoli married in Petersham and in 1883, the next generation of Belotti children were born in Liverpool. The last of the Italian families found employment on 27 May and the Agricultural Hall closed as a residence to the Italians on 31 May 1881.⁵⁴

The trial of the Marquis De Rays

De Rays was born in 1832 into a noble family in Finistere, France. He failed at finding fame and fortune in America, Senegal, Madagascar and China and then turned his attention to unclaimed tropical land north of New Guinea. He heavily promoted its cheap "fertile" soil, the market for tropical produce, an infrastructure consisting of houses, schools, roads, and a cathedral to the European population.⁵⁵

Between 1880-1881 de Rays ran four expeditions on his ships the *Chandernagore*, *Gentil*, *India* and *Nouvelle Bretagne* to the new lands. He brought about 570 colonists to Port Breton, mainly French, German and Italian. After landing, most of the colonists fled to Australia, New Caledonia and the Philippines. De Rays never set foot at Port Breton but he must have been aware of the conditions which awaited the colonists – malaria, disease, inhospitable climate and dense and wild rainforest⁵⁶, not to mention the nearby cannibals.

When it all came to a head, de Rays was hiding out in Spain but was arrested in July 1882 and extradited to Paris where he was put on trial in August 1883.⁵⁷ At his trial he was only accused of criminal negligence. It was reported that he had sold 700,000 hectares of land and fraudulently obtained 5,000,000 francs.⁵⁸ The court room was packed to "suffocation".⁵⁹

⁴⁹ Anne-Gabrielle Thompson, *op.cit.*

⁵⁰ *Report of J. Milbourne Marsh, op.cit.*, page 6

⁵¹ Anne-Gabrielle Thompson, *op.cit.*

⁵² Kevin Piper, "Neuma" extract from the *Magazine of the Arts Society of New England University College*, 1950, page 14 – Richmond River Historical Society. *The Richmond River Herald & Northern Districts Advertiser*, 10 April 1931

⁵³ Anne-Gabrielle Thompson, *op.cit.*

⁵⁴ Rosemary Harrigan, *op.cit.*, page 110

⁵⁵ Australian Dictionary of Biography, 2006, Hugh Laracy

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* & *Evening News*, Sydney, 16 October 1880

⁵⁷ Australian Dictionary of Biography, 2006, Hugh Laracy & *Brisbane Courier*, 3 August 1883

⁵⁸ *Queanbeyan Age*, 22 January 1884

⁵⁹ *Brisbane Courier*, 3 August 1883

Witnesses of his expeditions were called to give evidence:

On the first expedition on the *Chandernagore*, a colonist stated that they were subject to terrifying horrors on the board the ship. During the four month voyage, they were fed with putrid bacon and beans. The Captain [Rabardy] was always drunk. He was fond of the punishment known as “les Poncettes”. The hands of the victim were tied by a cord passed between the two thumbs and the victim was hoisted up the main mast. At one time we tried to release a victim but the sailors forced us back with guns. When we arrived at Port Breton, we spent eight days clearing the land. The ship abandoned us with only provisions for 15 days and without any means to help the sick. If it had not been for the natives, we would have died of hunger. The natives gave us a boat and we were able to sail to another island where the English missionaries saved us. There were 46 of us but 12 died at sea. The missionaries sent the survivors to France via Australia.⁶⁰ Another report stated that the voyage was distressing, disgusting with fierce quarrels because of the different nationalities. The captain dumped 14 colonists ashore on one of the Laughnan islands with no provisions. Only 6 of them survived. On landing at Port Breton in January 1880, the ship then deserted them for Sydney where the ship was then sold. There were 67 colonists at Port Breton and 5 of them took a boat with the hope of finding a better island. They landed on one of the Bougainville islands and 4 of them were killed and eaten by the natives. The fifth man saved his own life by consenting to join the hideous banquet and eat his dead companions. The man managed to escape. Of those of the first expedition, 39 returned to France via the English missionaries. Twenty-seven died and 21 disappeared.⁶¹

The second expedition sailed from Barcelona on the *Genil*. Twenty-eight Spaniard crew embarked and they fought continuously until Aden was reached. They were put on shore and exchanged for Arab crew. The second in charge with nine others deserted in a boat and were not seen since. At Point de Galle, the rest of the Arabs ran off. At Singapore, half the crew deserted. When the ship reached Port Breton, there were barely enough crew to navigate the ship.⁶²

In 1880, the third expedition left Barcelona on the *India* with 330 migrants – 250 of them being Italians. The Italian Consul tried his utmost to prevent them leaving but without success. De Rays accompanied his colonists a few miles out to sea and then left them with encouraging words. When de Rays returned to shore, he sent a telegram saying “Great Victory Glory be to God. The *India* has sailed. I conducted her myself to sea. Long live Spain and New France!” Among the passengers in this contingent were many women, old men, and children. The *India* reached Port Breton with few incidents. The emigrants were woefully discouraged by their first impressions of paradise. They made a desperate effort to found a colony. Semi starvation soon damped their ardour and those who survived were glad enough to re-embark the *India* for New Caledonia.⁶³

⁶⁰ *Queanbeyan Age*, 22 January 1884

⁶¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 3 August 1883

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.* Giamoco Piccoli remembered de Rays boarding his ship when it was leaving Barcelona, *Northern Star*, 17 March 1945

In November 1880, the *Beagle* visited Port Breton and the *Beagle*'s captain reported that the colony was progressing. Three hundred new migrants had arrived by the *India*. The immigrants were living on the *Genil* and the *India*. There was fever and argue amongst the colonists and three had died.⁶⁴ The *Genil* visited Sydney on 26 December 1880. It was reported to officials that a new site had been chosen. The crews and colonists had started to clear the land and eight acres of land were prepared to plant maize, potatoes and yams. Five large houses were being built and one building was moved from Likiliki [to Port Breton?] to the new site. The largest house was 150 feet X 33 feet. It is said that they are in good health and the future prospect of the new settlement.⁶⁵

The fourth and final expedition was the *Nouvelle Bretagne* in 1881. This group consisted of the colonial army - eighty desperate men who had fought for five years in the Legion and had been promised 15 hectares of land each. Most of this group deserted before arriving at Port Breton. Only a handful landed and they were ultimately sent home after enduring a horrible life.⁶⁶

De Rays was jailed for only six years for criminal negligence. He died near Rosporden, France in July 1893.⁶⁷

In the following year after Port Breton had been abandoned, the *Beagle* visited in June 1882. On board was Reverent Rooney who reported that "we found a large Block House, the ruins of two private houses, and some graves. These, with a little clearing along the beach, already overgrown with dense tropical vegetation, are the remains of the free colony of Port Breton... A more unsuitable site for a colony could not have been selected."⁶⁸

In a strange twist, no country had claimed New France when de Rays took an interest in it. Britain had been reluctant to take any part of New Guinea as the land was considered barren and inhospitable. However de Rays' interest and the belief that France may acquire it, spurred the Queensland Premier, Sir Thomas McIlwraith to acquire the territory. In April 1883, he annexed Papua on behalf of Queensland.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *Evening News*, Sydney, 4 December 1880

⁶⁵ *Border Watch*, Mount Gambier, 29 December 1880

⁶⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 3 August 1883

⁶⁷ Australian Dictionary of Biography, 2006, Hugh Laracy

⁶⁸ *Bruce Herald*, Vol XV, Issue 1447, 20 October 1882

⁶⁹ *Northern Star*, 24 January 1945