

Petticoat Pioneers

a collection of

Exceptional Women

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by The Rev Kaye Pitman

To mark Pioneer Sunday - 7 July, 2002.

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MARIA SPINAZE

Marietta Capelin*Triumph in the face of Adversity*

The settlers brought to Queensland by The Rev John Dunmore Lang on board the *Chasely*, *Lima* and *Fortitude* received silver service treatment compared with the Italian contadine [farmers] who were utterly duped c1880 by the Frenchman Charles Marie Bonaventure du Breil, Marquise de Rays.

These men, women and children were ordinary people who lived off the land in small communities in the Province of Venezia. Life was not easy and they were concerned about their future and what was in store for their children and their children's children? There must be a better life somewhere!

Advertisements so cleverly worded by de Rays were seen in Venezia and interest was sparked in *Novelle France* a new colony in another part of the world. The mere mention of glorious sunshine, beaches and lush vegetation kindled the flame of interest. Many agreed that they should think of this land where there was no dictatorship. Many a night would be occupied with the elders drinking their brewed wine-coffee and endeavouring to get to a point of decision. There would be argumentative discussions - everyone, young and old would state an argument for or against freedom. This was their foremost thought. Their patriarch would see that all was fair. He had carefully read and approved the information prepared by de Rays and said "Yes! it is the best you can do for your family! How else can your son get any land. You have little reason to stay here when there is limitless space in this new country".

News from the south said "Do not be misled". The Government authorities said "Do not be taken in by these exaggerated stories. Stay in your own homeland. Those strange lands over the seas are yet to be civilised". The messages continued with a truthful warning as to the dubious character of de Rays.

Lorenzo and Caterina Capelin with their daughter Marietta [born 1868] and sons Dominico [b1872] and Nathaniel were among those who spent their meagre savings in journeying from Borniara in the Province of Venezia in northern Italy; first to Marseille, France, and then Barcelona in Spain. Three Spinaze brothers Dominico, Lorenzo and Giovanni and their families; fifteen in all, from the villages of Orsago, Codogne and Conegliano, Venezia Province as well as their widowed mother Lucia [aged 58] also went to Barcelona. All went to make up the 340 souls who were to participate in de Ray's venture bound for *Nouvelle France*. The new colony was to be situated in the south-west Pacific Ocean, at a place called Port Breton on the island of New Ireland, part of the Bismark Archipelago and opposite Rabaul.

Precious time was spent in Barcelona, Spain in appalling and squalid conditions through lack of funds, awaiting the issue of Passports by Spanish authorities. The Italian and French Governments were aware that de Rays was dishonest and refused travel documents. As De Rays was a convincing con-man he persuaded the travellers to go on to Spain.

Finally on 9 July, 1880 the *India*, an 885 ton steamer of 90 horsepower, sailed. The *India* was much faster than the *Genil* and *Chandernagore* both slow ships which had already sailed. The time spent in Barcelona had drastically affected already frail constitutions and men, women and children began to die. In the heat of the passage through the Red Sea, Giovanni and Maria Spinaze's two year old son was buried at sea. Eight other children and several adults died during the voyage to the phantom paradise in the Pacific, and before land fall Giovanni's wife Maria nee Mellare [whom he had married in Orsago in 1877] also died.

In the Indian Ocean eighty barrels of meat had to be thrown overboard as they had not been stored correctly. Land fall was made on 14 October and the settlers were aghast to find that there was nothing except tropical forest, heat and insects. Neither did the promised houses exist.

For the present everyone was forced to live on board in the same cramped conditions which they had endured throughout the voyage. The hot wet season was approaching and the women and children old enough, worked beside the men from dawn till dark building bridges across streams, clearing the land and planting what seeds they had brought with them. All worked very hard as that was their habit but food was being consumed at a far greater rate than it could be produced. Then the wet season arrived. Children, men and women still in their prime now died from continued privation, near starvation and simple broken spirits. Numerous children were left both mother and fatherless.

The *Genil* was sent to Sydney in early December to obtain urgently needed food but its boiler broke down and it had to put in to Maryborough, Queensland for repairs. In the meantime, the Australian Colonial Government had become aware of the settlers and the *HMS Beagle* had been sent to assess the situation.

Between the 16th and 20th of February three families lost family members. "Nona", Grandmother Lucia Spinaze, was one of those who died and she was buried along with others who had succumbed on the island of New Ireland. On 20 February, 1881 those settlers remaining, boarded the *India* and sailed from Port Breton down the St Georges Channel to New Caledonia. This second voyage was also a nightmare of breakdowns, scarcity of food and water and finally near wreckage upon a treacherous reef which surrounded the island. It was one of the settlers who alerted the crew to the presence of the reef and the ship finally docked on 12 March.

Sir Henry Parkes, Colonial Secretary, had no hesitation in allowing the settlers to be brought to Australia but did hold some reservations as to them becoming *vagrant without means of subsistence*. He need not have been concerned.

The *India* was sold and the proceeds used to pay the passages to Sydney. Before the settlers boarded the Australian Steamship Navigation Co vessel *James Paterson*, 1 man, 2 women and 4 children as well as Caterina Capelin - who died in childbirth, were buried on the island of New Caledonia.

In all, one hundred and twenty-three settlers had died in the nine months since sailing from Barcelona and the survivors were thankful to depart on 2 April and arrive in Sydney on 7 April, 1881. All were immediately accommodated in the Agricultural Hall of the Sydney Exhibition Building². The Sydney papers of the day gave a gory and detailed account of what the residents of Sydney saw with their own eyes.

Nothing could adequately describe the thoughts and feelings of those who had experienced the last year of their life. Sydney people were generous and gave food, clothing, toys and shelter. The settlers had *arrived!* They knew they must work, and for now the members of *la Cella Venezia* were to be separated.

Work was found in and around Sydney, at Penrith, Gosford, Singleton and as far afield as Young. Marietta Capelin then aged 13, her two brothers and father Lorenzo found employment. Marietta went into service and later in 1881 Lorenzo took as his second wife Maria Tome, also a member of de Reys' venture and they went to live at Thornleigh. On 12 January, 1885 at Parramatta, Marietta Capelin then aged about 18 married Giovanni Spinaze, the widower aged 30. They, along with many others, moved north to the Richmond River district near the township of Woodburn where Dominico and Lorenzo Spinaze had taken up land.

At last they had their own land! Little did it matter that they again had to clear the land, plant crops and build houses. The women and older children worked beside the men performing hours of physical labour, but this time it was different. The men could find paid employment and were able to feed their families. The climate was healthier and the women and children, although reluctantly, could

² Like Brisbane and Melbourne; Sydney had constructed an architecturally outstanding Exhibition Building. The Sydney building, all timber, completed in 1879 burnt to the ground in September 1882.

be left safely in their rough homes while the men went off for days at a time felling timber which was plentiful and found a ready market.

Gradually, little by little they cleared the land, grew food crops, and established sugar cane plantations and a dairy industry. Livestock, chickens, orchards and vineyards were flourishing. Sturdy homes, a school and a hall formed what then was known as New Italy.

Marietta and Giovanni remained at New Italy until c1910. They raised a large family:- Katterina, Lucy, Lorenzo (Lawrence), Giovanni (Jack), Antonio (Tony), Lodozico (Victor), Guiseppi (Joe) Dominic (Dom), Theresa, Angelo and the last, George, was born in Pomona Qld.

Giovanni and Marietta had decided to branch away from New Italy and in doing so they travelled overland and were followed by members of the Bazzo family also from New Italy. Not to be daunted they set about once again to clear the land. These Italian men were now proficient at tree felling and showed other settlers how to 'quick fall trees' and make the most of the timber. Dairy farms and crops were quickly established. The two families lived in the Pomona district for many years and were well respected. All of Marietta and Giovanni's children married anglo-saxon partners. Giovanni died at Middle Creek on 2 November, 1932 aged 81.

Marietta had spent her first 12 years in Italy and the following five as a nomad looking for a home. As a young wife she found security for 25 years at New Italy, while her last 44 years were spent at peace in Pomona, Queensland. She eventually passed to her eternal rest 3 April, 1954, aged 86.

Let us ponder the desperation, privation and sorrow, coupled with hard work, success and happiness experienced by this woman and so many of her sisters. Happily, few of us will endure in our lifetime the trauma of leaving our homeland to be abandoned on the shores of a wild and inhospitable tropic island. To journey further to a strange land, and arrive destitute and sick. To have to learn a new language and manage an upside down climate. To realise the promise that only hard work will bring and finally to taste the success of eleven happy, healthy and prospering children.

Lucia Spinaze, Catarina Caplin and Maria Spinaze nee Mellare did not survive to reach the shores of this wonderful land. Motherless Marietta drank long and deep of the fruits of her labour. Long and deep enough to slake the desire of all four Pioneer Petticoats.

Spinaze Family Tree



Giovanni Spinaze
 b.1851 Orsago, Italy.
 d.2-11-1932.Pomona.
 married 12-1-1885.Parramatta.
Maria Capelin
 b.1868 Brugera, Italy.
 d.3-4-1954 Pomona.
 Both buried Pomona Cemetery.



children

(1)
Katterina Spinaze (Kate)
 b.1887. d.12-9-1966.Pomona
 married
James Hamilton
 d.2-3-1952.Pomona.

(3)
Lorenzo Spinaze (Lawrence)
 b.1890. d.10-6-1952.—
 married
Lillian Nielsen
 b. d.15-11-1980

(5)
Antonio Spinaze (Tony—Anthony)
 b.1895. d.14-7-1974 Brisbane. aged 79.
 Married
Harriet May
 b. d.—3-1981 Brisbane aged 80
 both buried Pinnaroo Cem.

(7)
Guisseppi Spinaze (Joe)
 b. 1899. d.30-9-1976 Brisbane.
 Married 25-1-1937. Pomona.
May Rowbottoms.
 b.4-1-1903 England,
 d.19-1-1984.Brisbane
 both buried Albany Creek Crem.

(9)
Theresa Mary Spinaze.
 b.15-1-1903 Coraki. NSW.
 d.2-4-1991.Nambour.
 married 18-2-1925 Pomona.
William John Bull
 b.14-11-1901. Coorparoo.
 d.5-6-1962 Brisbane.
 Both buried Bulimba Cemetery.

(2)
Lucy Spinaze
 b.1888 d.24-3-1950
 married
Gordon Hamilton

(4)
Giovanni Spinaze (Jack)
 b.1892. d.22-2-1955
 married
Beatrice Nevendorf

(6)
Lodozico Spinaze (Victor)
 b.29-12-1896 New Italy NSW.
 d.29-5-1960 Gympie.Hospital.
 buried Pomona Cemetery

(8)
Dominic Spinaze (Dom)
 b.1901 Lismore.
 d.22-4-1971. Buderim.
 Married
Mary Tatnell
 b.1906. d.5-8-1973.

(10)
Angelo Spinaze
 b.30-9-1906 Lismore.
 d. 4-5-1967 Brisbane. aged 60
 Married 28-8-1935 Beaudesert.
Edna Margaret Creedy (Beryl)
 b. 4-4-1907 Charleville
 d.17-1-1989 Brisbane.
 Both buried Pinnaroo Cemetery.

(11)
George Edward Spinaze
 b.10-4-1911
 d. 1979 Brisbane. Aged 60
 Married
Ursula Ford
 b.17-7-1927 Pomona
 d.31-7-2010 Brisbane
 Both buried Pinnaroo Cemetery.