

CROATIAN PIONEERS OF VICTORIA*

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Later this year a book will be released on "Croatian Pioneers of Victoria" that caters for both the Croatian and Australian audiences. The book is a result of seven years of extensive research carried out throughout Australia, Croatia, Austria, USA, New Zealand and Italy. It shows that Croatian pioneers and their descendants made important contributions to the development of Victoria.

Few Croatians settled in Victoria prior to its establishment as a colony on 1 July 1851. The first wave of Croatian migration to Victoria was caused by the news of the discovery of gold in Victoria in 1851. These Croatians arrived in Victoria on ships usually from England or by deserting ships on which they served. By 1854 there were over 60 Croatians settlers in Victoria. Most were miners and worked many goldfields with varying success. After spending time on the goldfields some became seamen, labourers, fishermen or had catering businesses. By 1890 over 450 Croatians has settled in Victoria. Most of them married women of Irish, English or Scottish descent and had families. Over 28 per cent of the early Croatian settlers never married and others who married died childless or only had female children resulting in many Croatian surnames dying out in Victoria. These Croatians came from the Croatian coastline and islands. Areas of higher migration from Croatia to Victoria include the Rijeka/Bakar district, Dubrovnik district, and the islands of Brac and Hvar.

There was a large gender imbalance in the Croatian settlers that came to Victoria prior to 1890. They were almost always single men on arrival. They did not establish any formal Croatian societies or organisations. However, they did form Croatian communities and maintained ties with other Croatian settlers in Victoria. They worked, socialised and lived together. There is written evidence that over 54 per cent of Croatian settlers had

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connections with other Croatian settlers in Victoria. However, the real figure is probably much higher since they very often had mutual friends, lived in the same towns or had mining claims near one another. Since only a few Croatian women migrated to Victoria prior to 1890 and once a few Croatian pioneers in a given community died, the Croatian pioneers quickly assimilated. Croatian pioneers spoke English with their wives and children.

One of the most successful Croatian pioneers in Victoria was Antonio Radovick (Antun Radovic) who was dubbed "the father of Korumburra". He was born in Potomje on the peninsula of Peljesac and arrived in Victoria in about 1861.

Radovick married an Irish woman Elizabeth Gill, they subsequently had six children. In 1874 he managed the "Railway Hotel" in Prahran and from 1875 to 1891 he owned the "Exford Hotel" on Russell Street Melbourne. Radovick contributed significantly to the development of Korumburra into a prosperous town. In 1888 he purchased land when the first allotments were sold in Korumburra. At the time the land was dense forest and after it was cleared he built the first house there. Within a year he had built "Radovick's Korumburra Hotel", a fine two-storey wooden hotel that had 50 rooms. The hotel became the central public meeting place where much of the future town was planned. Almost every society and sporting group in Korumburra had their meetings there. The first Catholic services were held on the steps of his hotel. He also owned the adjacent buildings where the National Bank of Australasia, Post Office, first police station and the town's newspaper operated. Radovick had the first saleyards in Korumburra behind his hotel. In the early days of Korumburra he paid for deputations sent to Melbourne on public matters, he also had banquets in his hotel to promote the town's interest. Radovick was a great patron of sport in Korumburra. He generously gave prizes and trophies at various sporting events. He allowed Radovick's paddock to be used for cricket, football, athletics, horse-racing and wood-chopping. Radovick's paddock was also used as the showground. He gave land or funds for the Mechanics' Institute, school and Catholic church. Radovick helped the coal miners in the district and even represented them in talks with parliamentarians. Radovick later pursued a career in dairy farming. He became well-known as a breeder of Shorthorn

cattle and other prize stock. Radovick died on 11 December 1903. One of the main streets in Korumburra is named "Radovick Street" in his honour.

Previously Korumburra was in an active coal-mining district. Today Korumburra has a population of about 2739 and is in an important dairy and farming district. It services many of the smaller towns and dairy farms in the area. Antonio Radovick had documented contacts with at least another 11 Croatian pioneers in Victoria. However, the real figure is probably much higher since at one stage he had a hotel in the centre of Melbourne. These contacts and much more information on Antonio Radovick's contribution to the development of Korumburra and the surrounding district will be detailed in the book "Croatian Pioneers of Victoria". He is just one of the 450 interesting Croatian pioneers that are detailed in the book.

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