



The History of Serbian Migration in Victoria

*What Shapes my Identity Today*


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## The History of Serbian Migration in Victoria

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*This volume on **The History of Serbian Migration in Victoria** aims to provide an insight into the personal histories of Serbian migrants who came to Victoria in different waves of migrations since World War II. The oral stories collected here provide a window on the different experiences and challenges faced by the Serbian people during their migration and their integration into Australian society, as well as their reconstitution into a Serbian community in Victoria.*

*The short introduction deals with some statistical facts: an overview of the regions in Serbia and former Yugoslavia from which the Serbian people originated as well as the regions in Victoria in which they settled.*

## INTRODUCTION

Many migrant communities in Australia have produced oral histories. These have become part of the heritage of Australian migrant cultures and are preserved for posterity in the Immigration Museum of Victoria. In the 2011 Census, the "Ancestry by birthplace of parents" data shows that a total of 22,066 people of Serbian origin live in Victoria today. Despite such numbers, the Serbian community in Victoria does not have a public record of the history of Serbian migration to Australia. The present volume of personal oral histories of Serbian migrants and their descendants is intended to fill this gap.

The main body of this volume is organised in chronological order, based on the four waves of Serbian migrations: the First Major wave of immigration of Displaced Persons, political refugees and family members of these displaced persons (1948s-1967s); the Second Major Wave of the Assisted Passage Scheme Migrants (1968 – 1970s); the Third Major Wave of the Skilled Migration Program (1980s onwards); and the Fourth Major Wave of Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants (1991-1995 – the period of the Civil Wars in the Former Yugoslavia). In addition, the personal stories tell the history of first, second and third generation Serbian migrants and their interpretation of the notions of belonging, identity, heritage, and ancestral culture. Underlying these personal stories is the broader issue of identity. The Serbian Migrations in Victoria is ultimately an attempt to understand how identity is experienced and known. The personal stories are contributions of twenty people interviewed or who provided one-page autobiographies about their migrant experience. These stories consist of personal feelings, opinions, comments or answers to specific questions regarding the notions of belonging, identity, citizenships and heritage.

Identity is a complex concept that has many theoretical approaches, from sociology and psychology to politics and fiction. To the participants in this oral history of Serbian migrations to Victoria, the term "identity" also meant many different things. The common ground, which all the respondents shared on the issue of identity, was an understanding of the individual and personal nature of their experience and the distinctive individual character of their response to historical circumstances in which they found themselves. What all the personal testimonies to the circumstances of history showed was loyalty to a value system and personal ethical standard which they brought with them from the land of their birth or which they inherited from their Serbian-born parents. The ethical values, which the Serbian migrants transplanted into their new abode in Victoria, together with the struggle they had gone through in their new country, were the distinctive features of identity formation attested to by all informants. Sometimes the struggle was against overwhelming odds; sometimes the experience of the new country was a welcome stabilisation after conflicts and upheavals in the old country or along the refugee route. The overall insight into identity, which this oral history of the Serbian migrations reveals, is that individuality is shaped by social factors, through the social trials of life that involve family and peers, religious and political beliefs, cultural awareness through family history and traditions, and "a way of life" as habit, which is learnt, shared and transmitted from generation to generation.

It is hoped that this publication may become the basis of further studies into the important subject of identity formation in migrant communities in Australia, and that it may serve as a valuable educational tool to assist with the raising of awareness of the migrant experience as a legitimate subject of historical research in the Australian multicultural community.



Suzana Mihajlovic, President, Serbian Community Association of Australia Inc.

*We all have a story to tell. We are fortunate to live in a multicultural Victoria where so many cultures, religions, languages, and traditions are shared. The History of Serbian Migration in Victoria has provided an opportunity for Serbian migrants in Victoria to tell their story. It gives the Serbian community a voice...*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT OF SERBIAN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

On behalf of the Board of Directors for the Serbian Community Association of Australia Inc. (SCAA), I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) for funding The History of Serbian Migration in Victoria and for making this important project possible.

The Serbian Community has made significant contributions to Australia, with the first Serbian settlement dating back to the 1900s. As evident from the outstanding work and effort that SCAA's Project Manager, Mirjana Margetic, who has brought this project to completion, there have been four major waves of Serbian migration to this country, which has become the home of so many Serbs, far away from their Motherland, Serbia.

Today, there are over 22,066 people of Serbian origin living in Victoria. The Serbian Community has made significant contributions to the economic, social, and cultural development of this state and country. The parents and grandparents of the current Serbian population in Victoria have worked hard to assist with the growth of this magnificent land and have contributed economically by working in the goldfields, in factories and in manufacturing, as builders and tradespeople and, more recently, as professionals in various fields – in medicine, as doctors and dentists, as lawyers and magistrates, as engineers, designers, and architects, as teachers, academics and professors, as journalists and TV reporters, as senior managers in various fields – both in the for profit and not for profit sectors. The Serbian community has impacted on the society, which the Serbian migrants and their descendants share with other ethnic peoples living in this country, which all call home. All of those who count themselves as part of the Serbian community know that it is a community which has experienced many difficult and turbulent times, both in the country of origin of its members as well as in their new home, Victoria.

During the past 20 years, or since the conflict in Former Yugoslavia began, the Serbian community has felt marginalised, stereotyped and vilified particularly from the media. It is hoped that the personal testimonies offered in The History of Serbian Migration in Victoria will go a long way towards rectifying the stereotyping of the Serbs as a group past.

We all have a story to tell. We are fortunate to live in a multicultural Victoria where so many cultures, religions, languages, and traditions are shared. The History of Serbian Migration in Victoria has provided an opportunity for Serbian migrants in Victoria to tell their story. It gives the Serbian community a voice. Such an endeavour is always of mutual benefit: it empowers the Serbs in Victoria to feel that they have been acknowledged by the mainstream community, and it allows their fellow Victorians, who have their own stories to tell, to become part of a history which makes up Victoria's cultural heritage.

The History of Serbian Migration in Victoria is a first of what is hoped would become a set of volumes about the history and experiences of the people who make up the Serbian community and how this community fits into the colourful, rich and vibrant multicultural community we all share in the State of Victoria.

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Mirjana Margetic

Melbourne, October 2012



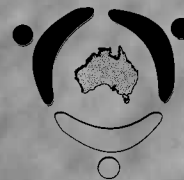
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