Passage through the Suez Canal and entering the Red Sea

MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

1944 to 1951

Our family from Hungary finally found a haven at the end of the world in Australia.

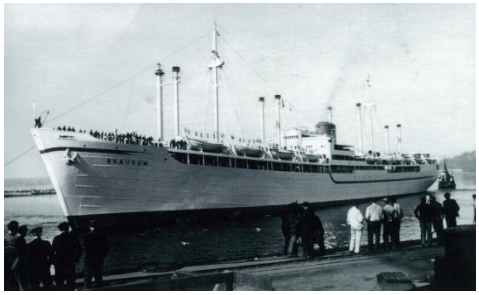
Written by Leslie (László) Török
Much of which is contained in my father's book

Journey to Australia

Extract from Dad's book

"Then they disclosed the passenger's names for the ship. Our names featured on the list. The ship's name was Skaugum, a 12,500 gross ton originally German now Norwegian ship headed for Australia leaving Naples on 2ND November 1949. We said goodbye to our new friend Francis (Ferenc) who because of illness had to wait a little longer in Bagnoli Italy and in the evening of the first of November, we climbed onto one of the trucks and were delivered to the port. The embarkation went smoothly. The sailors were amused by our three little boys in their straw hats, as they climbed along the bridge like the three little "garden gnomes", as was named by my friend Alex (Sándor) Bedö.

The ship sailed in the early hours of the morning of the 2nd. By the time we got to the deck after breakfast, we could only see the shores of Sicily disappearing.

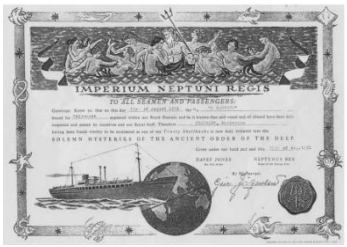


SS Skaugum

This was the second trip of Skaugum to Australia under the refugee program. In later documents it was known as Skaugum II. The relatively small ship carried 1,200 passengers, so it is understandable that the accommodation was pretty Spartan. Families were split up, with Ica now with our youngest as Andrew was only four, while the big boys were with me, 6-year-old Béla and 7-year-old Maxi.

Boys on the Deck of the Skaugum

The big boys were proud to be separated from the children and women. We had bunk beds and were crowded together, but the sheets were clean and white and we also had washing facilities. The meals were of hearty portions and we often were not been able to finish them. There was no butter but this was substituted by margarine, and orange-marmalade was available at breakfast. My wife Ica liked neither, but none of us complained. The trip was really interesting. While we sailed the Mediterranean, no one was sick. We once stopped in the Red Sea before heading for the Indian Ocean and there our ship was stormed by Arabian merchants. A lot of Ukrainians and Polish bought the colorful Arabian scarves and carpets. We had no money for such things, besides which we regarded most items as tasteless and unappealing.



Certificate often issued for Crossing Equator

During these shopping scenes, we recognized the difference between the Hungarians and other nationalities on the boat. The latter had been well-looked after as refugees and were in a position to take advantage of the benefits of the black market for years. We, however, were enemies and were regarded as pariahs of this society. However, this situation had begun to change during the ship's journey. The Hungarians, with slight English knowledge, were able to assist as ship police and with hospital care, etc. I became an English teacher, teaching elementary English courses for all applicants. For this I received two dollars remuneration per day, which we were able to spend in the canteen.

Then we sailed into the Indian Ocean and we encountered sea-sickness. A huge monsoon whipped up the waves which raised and lowered the ship without stopping for almost three weeks.

Many lay weakened in cabins, while others went on the decks to revive themselves and feed the fish. Our family survived over these weeks without major inconvenience. As we approached the Australian continent, the great waves subsided. When crossing the equator, we enjoyed the tradition of the amusing antics of the sailors pretending to being sea creatures in one of two swimming pools. We, also, had a dip once or twice. In the evenings, the music played from load speakers as we walked around on the deck. We felt like we were on a luxury cruise.

Off Melbourne, when we had turned into the Tasman Sea, the weather changed again. The hot summer weather turned to cold, windy and stormy. We could only be outside for a few minutes. Then it was quiet again. Australia could be heard on the radio now and we listened to the news with interest. In general, they broadcast local news and so, even though grammatically some of us knew what the announcer said, we did not understand what he was talking about. We then realized how far we had come from our country and Europe and what a strange world we were in now.

During the voyage, the Ministry of Immigration officials interrogated us and studied our papers again. We showed them our qualifications and previous experiences with job opportunities in mind. It encouraged me, that they said that everyone was going to work in their profession. We did not like it then that when we produced a diploma, which was an ornate instrument, to the officers they were laughing among themselves while staring at these types of items. Somehow, we then felt that all these proceedings were considered unnecessary.

We spent one more night before reaching Sydney. Then we learned that we were headed for Newcastle and would disembark there. This is when we heard that the Greta camp was waiting for us. On 29 November, the ship's engines stopped after dawn. For the first time, after a four-week trip, we contemplated the continent from the ship's deck.
We had arrived in Australia."

Extract from The Newcastle Sun, dated 29 November 1949

BOTANIST MISSING WHEN MIGRANT SHIP ARRIVES IN NEWCASTLE

An Estonian botanist, who was to take up a position in Canberra, was missing when a check of passengers was made on the migrant ship Skaugum before it arrived in Newcastle this morning. A thorough search of the vessel directed by I.R.O. officers failed to locate him.

The missing man, Sandur Hario (39), a former Director of the Botanic Gardens at Tarty (Estonia) was last seen yesterday afternoon.

When he had not returned to his cabin by 11.30 p.m. his disappearance was reported to the ships' officers but a search and the check of the passengers proved fruitless.

Another migrant, Anton Bruckner, a former professor of philosophy, said Hario, who appeared depressed, said to him yesterday, "This will be my death."

Bruckner said he advised Hario to regard his arrival in Australia "as the key to a new life."

Small Case In Bed

A cabin mate of Hario's said he had often admired a small case belonging to the missing man. Yesterday afternoon he found that the case had been placed among his bedclothes, Hario having apparently placed it there.

The search for Hario will be continued on the ship when the other passengers have disembarked.

Hario was a man with high scholastic attainments and had the promise of advancing his career as a botanist in Australia, fellow passengers stated

May Be Hiding

The menus provided throughout the voyage were designed to give each migrant between 4000 and 5000 calories daily. There are special kitchens for the preparation of children's food.

A picture theatre, two swimming pools, a library, dances three times a week and educational facilities were among the services for the migrants.

Provision of anti-seasickness tablets helped the migrants to enjoy the amenities provided.

Police Action Against Sydney Taxi-drivers

SYDNEY: The police took direct action against taxi-drivers who avoided Central Railway Station last night when they ordered cruising cabs to the railway to pick up hundreds of train passengers who had waited nearly an hou

Chief of the Traffic Police (Supt. W. R. Lawrence) said today that he watched hundreds of men, women and children—many of them with heavy luggage—wait at the taxi rank between 5.15 and 6 o'clock. Not one cab pulled into the rank in that time.

"I finally sent police in a car into the city to direct taxis to the station rank."

WHITE RUSSIANS and now new Australians—Maksis Hadzi Yukovic, Lyta Gadelkyte, Zety Lydija and Luigi Nikaj, had a look at the city over the rail of the migrant ship Skaugum which arrived in Newcastle Harbor this morning and told each other how satisfied they were. Young and with a new life ahead of them they were quite happy with their prospects.

THIS TRIO OF DOCTORS was not discussing medical science on the migrant ship Skaugum this morning but were expressing their happiness on arrival in their new land. They are Drs. Benedetto Cavero, Conchita Prato and Alberto Esposito, who were on the Skaugum which arrived in Newcastle from Naples today.

The Newcastle Sun, Tuesday, November 29, 1949

New Fed Security S Now Oper

MELBOURNE: Australia's new Security Service has now taken ove ility for uncovering spying and s ties in the country.

Top - ranking investigators, many of whom were entrusted with the war's greatest secrets, have transferred to the Security Service, functioning under the direction of Mr. Justice Reed.

So hush hush is the new service that even the location of each State headquarters is a closely - guarded secret.

Mr. Justice Reed will have his headquarters at Canberra.

Special investigators, trained in the detection of espionage

The vessel carried 1701 immigrants and travelled direct from Naples.

There was comparatively little illness on the voyage the majority being children who suffered from measles.

Dr. H. Loedrup, the ship's doctor, said that the health rate among the pasengers was very high. Fourteen of the children would be removed to hospital for further observation.

A report by the Education Officer (Mr. D. Gravenall) supplied by Captain Holst stated that "an initial check up showed that many of the children were very fit and from general health standpoint far better than on previous voyages."

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Bruckner who tried to lift Hario out of his depression is a grand nephew of the famous Austrian composer of church music, Anton Bruckner.

He gained his degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Prague University and lectured in that city prior to World War II.

Leader of a youth underground movement he was captured by the Germans and sentenced to death.

"I was under sentence for 52 days when Hitler directed that my sentence be commuted because of my ancestor, Bruckner the composer, and I was sent to a concentration camp where I remained for more than five years," he said.

Wife, Son Gassed

Bruckner, after his liberation in 1945, was taken to England where he worked for the Political Intelligence Branch of the British Foreign Office on the re-education of German prisoners of war.

After he was liberated he learned through the Red Cross that his wife and son had been gassed at Auchswitz concentration camp.

"Now I want to go onto a farm to readjust myself before I take up my career again," he said.

"I want to be in the open for a while until the bad dream of the war years passes."

Reprint of above Article

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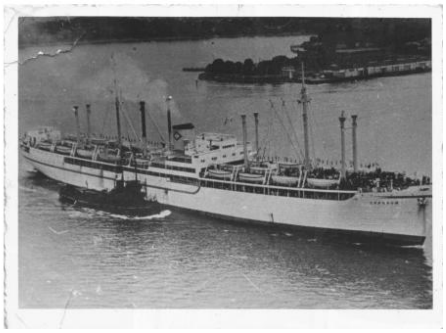

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'Little Illness'

The Skaugum berthed at Lee Wharf a few minutes after 10 a.m. after having been anchored in the stream for several hours for medical inspection. Captain H. Holst said that the voyage had been very pleasant with good weather all the way. The vessel carried- 1701 migrants and travelled direct from Naples. There was comparatively little Illness on the voyage the majority being children who suffered from measles. Dr. H. Loedrup, the ship's

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Timeline of Australia's Migration Agenda 1947-1971

https://reftracker.naa.gov.au/reft110.aspx?pmi=JmXqYTYFke

Timeline [edit]

Period	Events
1947	Australia's first migrant reception centre opened at Bonegilla, Victoria - the first assistant migrants were received there in 1951.[8]
1948	Australia signed Peace treaties with Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary and accepted immigrants from these countries.[2]
1949	In 1949 assisted arrivals reached more than 118,800, four times the 1948 figure[2] In August Australia welcomed its 50,000th "New Australian" — or rather, the 50,000th displaced person sponsored by the IRO and to be resettled in Australia. The child was from Riga, Latvia.[7][9] Work began on the Snowy Mountains Scheme - a substantial employer of migrants: 100,000 people were employed from at least 30 different nationalities. Seventy percent of all the workers were migrants.[10]
1950	Net Overseas Migration was 153,685, the third highest figure of the twentieth century.[2][11]
1951	The first assisted migrants received at the Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre.[8] By 1951, the government had established three migrant reception centres for non-English speaking displaced persons from Europe, and twenty holding centres, principally to house non-working dependants, when the pressure of arrival numbers on the reception centres was too great to keep families together.[8]
1952	The IRO was abolished and from then most refugees who resettled in Australia during the 1950s were brought here under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM).[7]
1954	The 50,000th Dutch migrant arrived.[12]
1955	Australia's millionth post-war immigrant arrived.[2] She was a 21 year old from England and newly married.[13][14]
1971	Migrant camp at Bonegilla, Victoria closed - some 300,000 migrants had spent time there.[8]

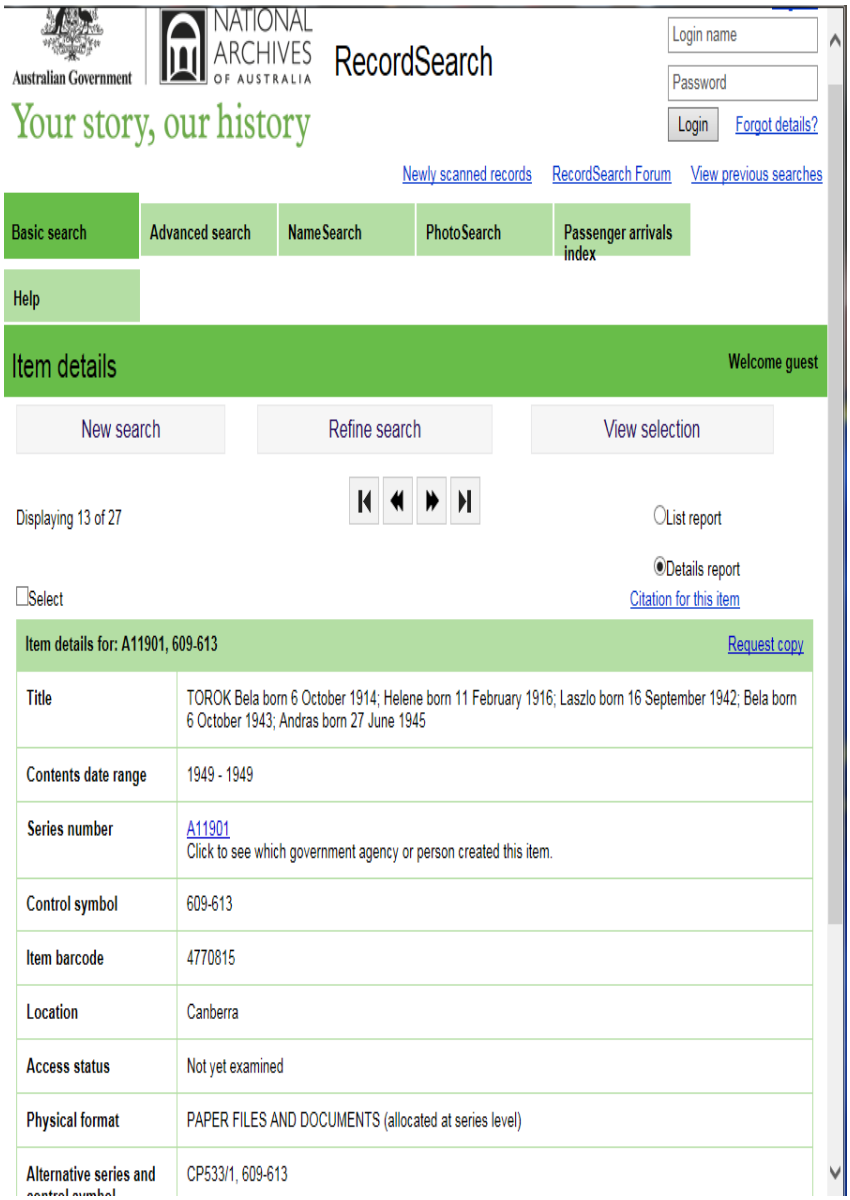
Ships of the Fifth Fleet

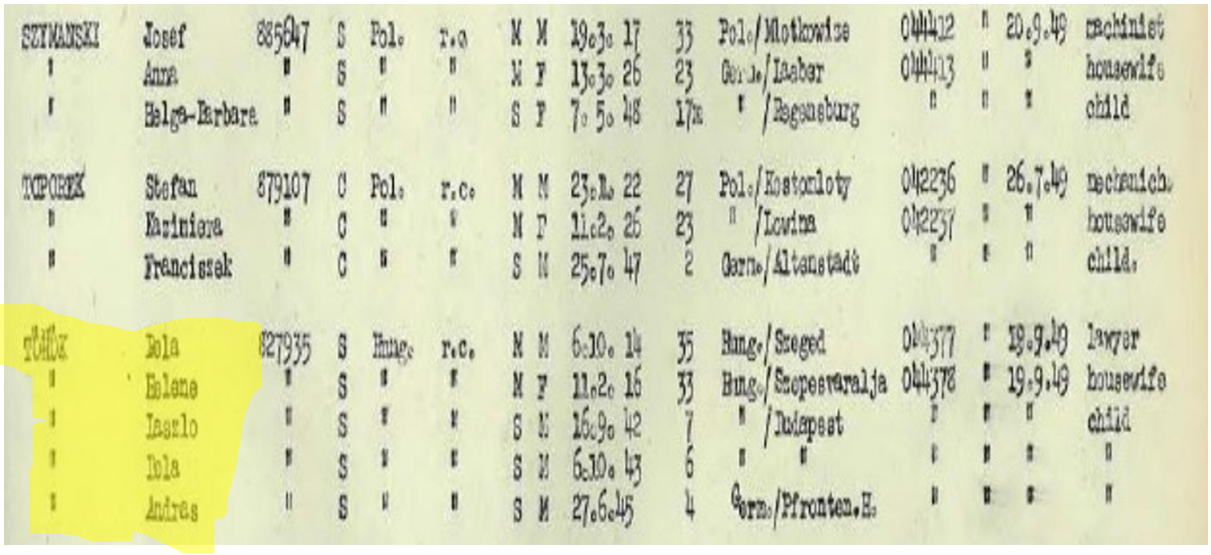
The list
More ships
Some interesting facts

This list of ships which brought Displaced Persons to Australia between 1947 and 1951 is based on Appendix 1 of Egon Kunz's "Displaced Persons: Calwell's New Australians" (publication details here). Amendments have been made in the light of examination of the original files on the ships in the National Archives of Australia.

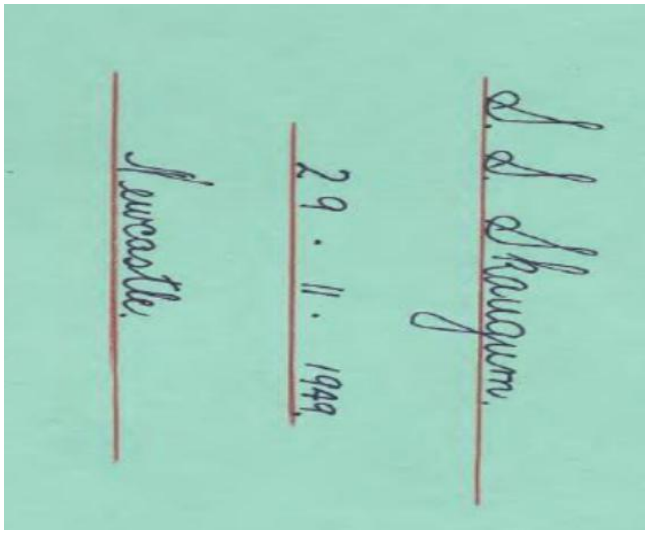
Order of arrival	Date of arrival	Name of ship	No. of DPs	Port of arrival
1	28-Nov-47	General Stuart Heintzelman	839	Fremantle
2	12-Feb-48	General MB Stewart	857	Fremantle
3	27-Apr-48	General WM Black	860	Melbourne
4	14-May-48	General SD Sturgis	860	Sydney
58	22-Sep-49	General WC Langfitt	826	Melbourne
59	28-Sep-49	Skaugum	1792	Sydney
60	05-Oct-49	Canberra	766	Sydney
61	06-Oct-49	Wooster Victory	855	Adelaide
62	08-Oct-49	Svalbard	819	Melbourne
67	24-Oct-49	Castel Bianco	900	Sydney
68	25-Oct-49	Anna Salen	1566	Fremantle
69	09-Nov-49	General AW Greely	576	Sydney
70	11-Nov-49	General RM Blatchford	1219	Sydney
71	14-Nov-49	Nelly	1564	Melbourne
72	15-Nov-49	General WG Haan	1303	Melbourne
73	21-Nov-49	Dundalk Bay	1019	Melbourne
74	23-Nov-49	Oxfordshire	675	Adelaide
75	24-Nov-49	General Stuart Heintzelman	1301	Sydney
76	29-Nov-49	Skaugum	1707	Newcastle

http://www.fifthfleet.net/pb/wp_6a2460ca/wp_6a2460ca.html





SZYMANSKI	Josef	885847	S	Pol.	r.c	M	M	19.3.	17	33	Pol./Mlotkowice	044412	"	20.9.49	machinist
"	Anna	"	S	"	"	M	F	13.3.	26	23	Germ./Iaaber	044413	"	"	housewife
"	Helga-Barbara	"	S	"	"	S	F	7.5.	48	17m	" /Regensburg	"	"	"	child
TYPOREK	Stefan	879107	C	Pol.	r.c.	M	M	23.8.	22	27	Pol./Kostomloty	042236	"	26.7.49	mechanich.
"	Kazimiera	"	C	"	"	M	F	11.2.	26	23	" /Lowima	042237	"	"	housewife
"	Franciszek	"	C	"	"	S	M	25.7.	47	2	Germ./Altenstadt	"	"	"	child.
TÓTH	Bela	827935	S	Hung.	r.c.	M	M	6.10.	14	35	Hung./Szeged	044377	"	18.9.49	lawyer
"	Helene	"	S	"	"	M	F	11.2.	16	33	Hung./Szepesveralja	044378	"	19.9.49	housewife
"	Laszlo	"	S	"	"	S	M	16.9.	42	7	" /Budapest	"	"	"	child
"	Iola	"	S	"	"	S	M	6.10.	43	6	" "	"	"	"	"
"	Andras	"	S	"	"	S	M	27.6.	45	4	Germ./Pfronten.H.	"	"	"	"



Australian Camp World

Extract from Dad's book (continued)

"A nice summer day greeted us in Australia. In late November, there were no heat waves, the temperature was enjoyable in the sunshine with blue skies, and we were in a peaceful world. We immediately noticed that the tops of the trees were not as bright green as in Europe, but even though the color looked a tired green, it was picturesque.

We noticed the waterside workers first. As the workers went about their business on the berthed ships, they waved to us in a friendly way. My first impression was very positive. I noticed that the workers were well dressed, shirts were ironed and their faces were freshly shaved. I felt the prosperity they lived in and that their work was valued and their social position was secure.

The next day we boarded a train. The rural carriage was not modern, the cars shook at high speed and it somehow felt unsafe, but the cars had leather seats and everyone had plenty of space.

We looked out of the window with interest at the small 3–4-bedroom, free standing houses. Leaving the Newcastle suburbs, we started to perceive the extent of the continent - through long miles on the brushy, wooded areas, the train sped and yet people were almost never seen.

The Greta station was small in an almost uninhabited area. Here the camp authorities had sent us brand new, modern buses and we were transported for only a quarter of an hour trip to the central area of the camp.

Greta Camp

Camp officials looked after us; they welcomed us in a friendly manner and informed us, using marked cards, where our accommodation was located. For us, the biggest surprise was that we received a lot of sympathy from brotherly Hungarian officials, who encouragingly told us that the dining facilities of the camp were good; thus, we saw the world through rosier colors. The buses transported us to our designated area and the district supervisors directed us to our rooms.

The camp consisted of wooden cabins. Rooms were built on stilts and the roofs were made of corrugated iron. We had two small rooms which meant that the three little boys had a separate room. It is true that there was no door between the rooms. This had some inconvenience, because if one cried you had to go in through the outside corridor to their room. But the bed sheets were clean and the equipment and furnishings were brand new. Ica was very satisfied with these surroundings and she especially enjoyed being on solid ground after the four-week voyage. (She was absolutely thrilled with the clean white sheets, the beds and the fact that there would be no more wondering about where the next meal would come from)

I had a surprise that one of the host Hungarian officials signaled to me that he had already found a position in the administration department. The camp was led by Brigadier Durant and Mr. Schwitzer was the deputy in charge of the camp's operation. Administrative tasks, associated with the camp, were directed by Theo Probst, a Romanian immigrant who had only been in Australia a few months. Theo had been born in Temesvár (Timisoara) from a Hungarian-German family with one sister still living in Hungary. He had recently signed an agreement with Colonel Brown to establish a new Holding Centre and was assigned to help organize the new camp. This camp was near Sydney at Scheyville (near Windsor) and Probst found that it would be to his advantage to complete his two-year contract near Sydney. Deputy Probst, therefore, had to find a replacement. Browsing the Skaugum II contacts, he noticed that I was a lawyer and thus he picked me from the beginning to offer me the job.

In the following days we met and he introduced me to the Director and the Administrative Officer along with all those involved in the selection process. Soon the decision was made on December 6 and I became employed.

Meanwhile, I also had a sad task. I was sent to Gosford (a small, seaside town not far from Sydney) where I had to identify the body, taken from the sea, of an Estonian young man who had committed suicide on the last day of our journey. I drove with a young man of German descent to Gosford; we had known this Estonian boy well. Undoubtedly, he was one of those people who found it very hard to take this long journey away from his country, but what the direct cause of his suicide was, I never found out. We identified the body which had been in the sea for a week; it was sad to be confronted with the decomposed body.

Gosford Area

We explored the town of Gosford and this was encouraging. The beach, tennis courts, and the sight of bowling greens showed that this was a prosperous population and we believed that maybe we could manage to become part of this peaceful and beautiful place.

The next day I started work as well. I got to know the camp organization, aims and work required. This camp was established as the host camp. The original idea was that the immigrants were to spend only a few weeks here. The camp had a labor office and from here the workers were directed to their future place of work. When the family members could not go with the bread earners, they were transferred to the so-called Holding Centre which was near our camp and was

built of metal plates; this was nicknamed Silver City. Our barracks were called Chocolate City, after the colour of the brownish wooden walls.

Gosford Central Coast

Terrigal Beach

Australia accepted the immigrants at the time by requiring them to sign a two-year contract which was a commitment to accept the government jobs designated to each worker by the authorities. This condition was quite hard for the majority as this meant that the families were often broken apart, at least for the time being, and obviously it was not certain that each person would find a job in their own profession.

Greta camp

It was pretty shocking when the loud speakers called for immigrants to get ready for their departure – namely those whose names started from A to K were required to go to Queensland for sugar cane cutting and those beginning with L-O were to be applied in the service of the military, while the R-W were to work in road and railways construction.

Now we understood why the ship's officers laughed and smiled when the different degree qualifications were exhibited to them by the immigrants; they knew how the authorities would direct us on arrival. However, this could not be fully implemented. A few months later immigrants built up connections and plants and factories requested the services of some immigrants. Within half a year, without permission, hard-working immigrants left the jobs assigned to them and took the management of their future into their own hands. The official system was not economical – those assigned to the army often spent their time just weeding the gardens of the officers' villas and this, as such, could not be called nation building.

Among the Hungarians in Queensland many were able to travel to Sydney to start new lives. Hungarian Jews found themselves in a very positive situation. In Australia's major cities there lived a fair number of Hungarians who had immigrated to this distant continent before 1939. They were in a position, in 1949, to help their brothers and sisters and they rushed to help. Through their connections they could help their relatives and friends to find an apartment and a job. In several cases, the news that they could travel on to Sydney or Melbourne reached them before they arrived in Australia.

Greta was a reception camp and the administration's main task was to pre-register all individual ships arrivals, locate, and manage them after further clarification of their situation. These tasks were seen to in the so-called 'Record Section'. I became the head of this department and we processed one ship of 800-1200 people almost every month.

Due to my job, our family was transferred to the administrative block. These homes were not different to other homes in the camp, but they were quite near the office and we were in a separate barracks and had a different mess hall as well. The family, therefore, had some advantages in terms of my job. The boys soon went to school. This was a Catholic school under the leadership of nuns and thus had a religious environment and the children learnt their first English words

Later I managed to get Ica a job. Firstly, she had a job as a waitress in the kitchen and when her English improved, she worked in the payroll department.

Ica and the Kitchen Staff

The government set the minimum level of remuneration for immigrants. The breadwinner's salary could support his family, but to save or put aside anything from his income was not possible. Any surplus barely covered the much-needed clothing. This was despite the fact that the government's deduction from my income, for the cost of accommodation and food, was calculated benevolently. Thus, the wife's income was needed to save some money. There was a housing shortage and it became clear that sooner or later, we would definitely need to buy a house.

In these first few months, of course, our heads also wrestled with the problem of how much we could spend on Christmas gifts for our children. I was helped by a young unmarried Hungarian man who loaned me £20. With this we could really offer the little ones a "rich" Christmas. There was a soccer ball, toys and chocolates. The camp also arranged a Christmas celebration. Yes, we found this summer heat very strange for Christmas; it was a happy and more carnival-type celebration. When the popular tune of Jingle Bells played and the children danced around the Christmas tree, the mothers' eyes filled with tears and sorrow, as we all remembered the snowy, mysterious atmosphere of the holy night of Christmas Eve.

Then, when the children were already in bed, we supported our backs against the barrack's wall and talked to a couple of our colleagues about our fate. The young men bought a bottle of fortified wine, because these wines were then in fashion. We raised our voices in Hungarian songs and confirmed the saying that Hungarians celebrate whilst crying.

It was hard to feel the Christmas spirit, because in the second half of December we were in the middle of the Australian summer. The sea winds, that can make the summer heat bearable in the coastal areas, cannot reach the interior of the continent. While the red sand was blown by the westerly winds, we thought that we may have made a mistake selecting this continent as a refuge.

Ica was very sweet and never blamed me. When she stopped in front of the large map in the camp recreation hall, she said she was unwilling to settle down anywhere north of Sydney. I had played with the idea that maybe I could more easily find employment in the law field in Brisbane, Queensland's capital. I saw that this state was still at the beginning of its development.

However, I began my orientation of Sydney. I took a couple days off work and travelled to the New South Wales capital, Sydney.

The city was almost like home to me. Walking down the main street called George Street, before my mind's eye I saw one of my childhood books with photographic images that portrayed this street. 'Travel Around the World' by Gáspár, a six-volume collection of travel writings, that featured Sydney. Indeed, the picture had not changed much between 1905 and 1950. The American style of skyscrapers had not yet started in Sydney; the central rail network boasted only two-stations and the Anthony Hordern's Department store was the largest building with five-stories.

Sydney 1950's

I stayed at night at a small private hotel. It had primitive conditions, but I appreciated the fact that the hotel only wanted to know whether I had the two pounds for the night and did not ask for an application form making it clear to me that here was freedom without restrictions.

I enquired at the University of Sydney. I asked for an audience with the professor of political science. I showed him a letter of recommendation from Theodore Unger Surányi who was now an American professor. The professor was very polite, but I felt that he would not deal with me. Later I learned that, from a political orientation, the Hungarians were classified in an enemy camp category.

In the camp we gained new friends and, on one boat, Gyurka Lévay arrived. I also now had the opportunity to help a fellow countryman. Gyurka and Margo were employed as block supervisors. Thus, they also had a little time to collect surplus funds and get to know the place. We established a social life. I had the opportunity to take part in a bridge party and, as a regular, met J. Malcher of Austrian descent, but now an old Australian who was retired and had come to work at the camp. His German language skills and, of course, good English predestined him to teach English to immigrants. Later we stayed in touch and visited them several times in their coastal cottage.

Among our friends at the camp was Dani Holéczy, a young fighter pilot who reinvented himself in camp administration and became one of the block administrators. In the so-called' Hygiene Group' there were many Hungarians. They were trash can workers but did their job cheerfully. Aurél Dessewfy was one of the good workers. His wife was a Mikecz girl, daughter of a former Minister of Justice, so our relationship had a common past. Also working there was Lt Nicholas Meszey, whose wife became good friends with Ica. They also remained good friends over the next decades.

While on the boat we got to know Bandi Csapó and family who later went through all the difficulties of cane-cutting in Queensland, before settling in Sydney. We stayed with them in a lasting relationship. Bandi had become a leading journalist in emigration and my numerous articles were published in his newspapers. He helped in the publishing of my study of Paul Teleki, (Prime Minister of Hungary twice, from 1920–21 and 1939–41). *(The author's archives include this document in Hungarian and has been translated by Les Torok into English.)*

I remember the Romanian-Hungarian-born engineer from Transylvania called Meder, who became my successor in Greta when we left this camp. As mentioned previously the camp leader was Brigadier Durant. He was an interesting character. He was typical of the old colonial English representatives serving overseas. In the evenings he walked with his wife with a riding whip to chase away the persistent flies. He had a superior bearing and kept himself away from the migrants in the camp; it was felt that he was treating them with contempt. Typically, he displayed a sign at the entrance of the public toilet: '**For only Australian staff**'. Thus, even European employees working in his office could not go to this lavatory. It was such a blatant measure of discrimination that someone rung the media and one Sydney newspaper brought down a damning article about the offending sign. It was swiftly removed.

Autocratic and isolationist in nature, he conducted himself sometimes in an almost comical way. One resident of the camp was a Hungarian staff officer who realized that the beer bottles that people were throwing away can be collected and the manufacturing companies would pay a certain amount for them. So, he diligently amassed the bottles, stacked up under his barracks. Brigadier Durant noticed and asked who lived in those barracks and without an investigation of why there was a lot of glass bottles there, the resident was dismissed from his job and promptly shipped to Queensland. He was convinced that the person was an alcoholic.

J. Schwitzer was my immediate boss. He regarded his position a temporary one and completely entrusted all matters to me. He amused himself and his circle of friends at the local pub. I was able to find a position for Gábor Földváry in the office as he was of school leaving age. His task was to transfer the files between different departments. In one such task, he committed some mistake and Schwitzer berated him badly, calling into question his intelligence. Then I spoke up saying in Gabor's defense that, if Mr. Schwitzer should perform similar tasks in a European country, surely, he could also make similar mistakes as well. This produced great laughter; he retold my comments to all and sundry but he understood what I said and Gabor continued to work under him. He also laughed at me when he found out that I had never been in a pub. It really seemed impossible for an Australian that, after work, all workers would go home instead of going to the pub.

Krause was the head of the labor office. He was a very industrious man who kept his distance from the other cheerful camp officials. The Scottish Police Chief was also somehow separate from the rest. As it turns out, he had only recently arrived in Australia and had not yet found his feet. Once he expelled a farmer from the camp who was selling fruit. This was prohibited since the camp management defended the camp residents and did not want anyone to take advantage of the residents by charging unscrupulous prices. The farmer became very angry and for a while just listened to the police chief lecturing him but eventually turned to us and said, "What nationality is this man?" So, I started to learn that even in Britain nothing was uniform; the Welsh, Scottish and English elements quite opposed each other not to mention the Irish, who expressly considered the English as enemies and spoke of the English crown in a derogatory manner.

Slowly we began to learn about the extreme climate of the Australian continent. After the great heat suddenly a strong southerly wind, followed by a cyclone over the continent and the rain poured for almost two weeks. The low-lying areas were under water, because the rivers broke their banks and flooded the plains. In this continent the rivers are yet to be regulated and the land suffers alternately from forest fires and floods.

The summer soon returned and we occasionally ventured to the city of Newcastle. We looked with interest at this city and the children enjoyed the milk bars where delicious ice cream and milkshakes and other beverages were sold. I ventured to explore the waves crashing on the sea shore. We immigrants had swimming costume problems. In Europe it was now the fashion that women wore bikinis and men wore the 'Triangular' swimming costumes. On this continent, the spirit of the nineteenth century persisted and the custom was for men to use a bathing suit that covered the chest, and in order to avoid embarrassment, I rented a bathing suit when I went swimming.

Traditional Milk Bar

Swim suits and bathers

Meanwhile one ship after another arrived. The work was routinely seen to. On weekends, the Australian leaders usually left the camp taking trips to Newcastle and Sydney and, if a boat arrived, it

was left to me. Usually nothing unusual happened but, because of an incident, I had to leave Greta camp.

I realized, while checking the ship's roster, that one of our employees, a Romanian clerk named Borun, was not in his place. It turned out that he thought the time was right for him to take advantage of the situation and that, instead of working; he would join his friends in the local Greta pub. Of course, I took the necessary steps to ensure his return as soon as possible. A few hours later, he arrived but behaved very arrogantly. When I threatened that I will report his conduct he, in a typical Balkan manner, turned his back to me. This was too much for me. I said to him that either he or I would leave our employment.

I reported this to Mr. Schwitzer, who in turn referred the matter to Brigadier Durant. The way the case was dealt with again reflected the head boss's dictatorial character. Borun was dismissed with immediate effect, but I was also dismissed with a two-week notice. He said that the statement I had made that '*either I or Borun would be leaving'* was usurping his powers and in such circumstances, he was not prepared to employ me.

This was a challenging problem. In general, this camp directed everyone towards Queensland. However, we wanted to get to Sydney. Krause whose responsibility was the labor force was very understanding and was critical of Durant for his arbitrary behavior and assured me that if I can find employment elsewhere such as in Newcastle he would agree.

So, I travelled to Newcastle and there I tried to get an apartment. It was not easy. A Hungarian friend of mine introduced me to an Englishman who was planning to go to Sydney and had an apartment available for me. I saw the apartment and found that it would be appropriate for a short time. I paid him forty pounds as a deposit, thinking that I had a good deal. However, when I contacted the people living there it turned out that I had been badly cheated by this man. He had no right to dispose of the dwelling. I attempted to use the police for help, but the person disappeared from Newcastle. I returned to Greta poorer and without housing.

My deflated mood was interrupted by the load-speaker in the camp advising that the employment office was looking for me. Krause told me with great excitement that Scheyville camp was looking for me if I was available. Ervin Altorjay, a Hungarian clerk at the camp, had got a job in Sydney and Theo Probst, the chief clerk, wanted me to take over Ervin's job. Theo planned to leave the camp at Christmastime and move to Sydney. However, he promised Brown, the director, he would ensure that his position would be filled. Indeed, this was the best solution for my situation. Scheyville could only direct people to Sydney, so this made our future planned relocation easier. Scheyville was approx. 35 to 40 kilometers away from the center of Sydney making trips to Sydney easier.

I thanked Kraus for his friendship and expressed that this was a favorable move for us. Justifiably, he asked that I would not tell anyone of my appointment because he did not want the possibility that the news was leaked to Durant, as he may attempt to interfere. We kept quiet about where we were going and the official list only showed the date of the departure.

Before our trip in the afternoon, I showed up at my workplace after hours and I said goodbye to my colleagues. I also paid a visit to Durant to formally thank him for his goodwill towards me during our work together. I do not know whether he learned that I would continue my career in the Ministry of Immigration. He did not make any further comment regarding my future work nor did he take steps to prevent this relocation.

After 2-3 hours of traveling, we arrived at Sydney's Central Station. Soon we found the service to Windsor. After a good half an hour we arrived at the nearest station to the camp. There a car was waiting for us.

Scheyville Camp

The camp lay on the slopes of a hilltop. The administrative buildings were built of brick. (Originally the Army corps was housed here.) The residential buildings were flat cement, tin-roofed huts. We were given two rooms and settled in quickly. Officials had a separate dining area and

waiters served us. The field hospital was available at any time, but dental service was only available in the nearby town of Windsor.

My position was very easy. It was the billeting officer, so I did not have to take care of the newcomers' arrivals or the departing people's registrations. The camp was a Holding Centre, which meant that the majority of the residents were women and children, while the male breadwinners were in Sydney or worked in other local areas. During the week, the days passed quietly in Scheyville. The camp was only busy on the weekends when the husbands arrived on their days off to be with their families.

The administration staff, therefore, had a big advantage in that they remained with their families. In the camp there were no great distances, only a few hundred yards separated the administrative buildings, hospitals and schools. A six-grade primary school operated under the leadership of qualified teachers. The older school children were placed as borders in rural colleges.

The children quickly integrated with their new schoolmates and my wife Ica accepted a position. As a leader, I easily got a job for her as a timekeeper in the payroll department. The boss was Desi Rapaich, an ex-general, who was waiting with his wife for their daughter and son in law to establish themselves in Melbourne before joining them there.

Desi knew many of the old residents of Szeged. We spent many lovely hours reminiscing together and became friends. I soon discovered that the boss and the subordinate timekeeper spent a lot of time gossiping, but I had to turn a blind eye.

Manager Colonel Brown was a kind and humble man. He had a farm nearby and was encouraged to take on this position as his son could attend to the farm.

At the camp we met Valiant Lajos (Louis) Tolnay, previously a Chief of Staff Captain, who worked with the military. His wife and children still lived in the camp. Louis was a childhood playmate of Ica's and they could talk for hours about old Miskolc. Louis's second wife was a very good-looking German lady who lost her first husband in the war and the couple had a son. Louis joked:" It's your child, my child and our child". When it came to sending our children to English-speaking school, he marveled at the high level of literacy being taught them.

The administrative officer, to whom I later became deputy as chief clerk, was a plump, peaceful man who still remembered nostalgically the years he spent in the first years of the occupation of Japan. His main concern was his new vehicle. General Motors had begun to roll out a new car called Holden, which the Australians viewed proudly as their car.

I renewed contact with Altorjay Ervin, who I had already known at Greta and whose job I took over in Scheyville. Ervin was an architect and had been appointed at this time with the Ministry of Road Construction designing and maintaining of buildings. He hoped to use this as a springboard for obtaining recognition of the necessary qualification. Ica also befriended Lujzi, wife of Ervin. Lujzi also served at the same time as Ica with the Government Price Committee in Hungary and had mutual friends. Bori (Barbra) their daughter became a playmate of our young boys.

We built a relationship with Joseph Kovacs and his wife Eve. Eve was in the kitchen trying to 'Hungarianize' the food. Joseph was warehouse manager.

Gyurka (George) Csanády and his wife were also good friends. Gyurka was a village clerk in Pest County and did not want to wait for the Communists. He eventually drifted to Australia. He was a diligent worker who administered the supplies to the camp. We kept in touch with them for many years; I secured him a job in accounting with a Hungarian factory where he performed well.

Here we also met István Börzsönyi. Pista was a leading employee with the Siemens factory. During most of the war, he served in a uniform. He had no serious war injury, but his nerves were frail having been exposed to the front. They had two children, Csaba and Susie; they were older than our sons. We became friends and we started a joint venture with Pista and planned on the expiration of the two-year contract to purchase a house together.

Imre Kalándy was the camp police chief. His father a retired General from the First World War volunteered to assist in the Budapest military headquarters when the capital was surrounded by the Russians. He participated in the organization and management of the defense of Budapest. He Lived through the siege but, as a prisoner of war, did not survive. Details of his death were never known by the family. We liked both he and Boriska his wife. Imre later became Confirmation sponsor to my son Béla. He was a Panzer major so we could talk for hours about our common acquaintances……

As the result of an interesting coincidence, I met another comrade from the armored division, Gyuszi Toronyi with whom I served in 1938 at the Esztergom training camp.

One day I was asked to appear before the district court at Windsor in the case of a Hungarian immigrant who had a dispute with another Hungarian. We arrived at the garden courtyard before the court and I noticed Gyuszi, who was talking with a group of people. We recognized each other immediately and embraced. Then it transpired that he and his opponent had asked for an interpreter. The opponent did not like the look of our friendship, but I calmed them down and I managed to smooth over their opposition. Afterwards Gyuszi told me his story. In the early years of the war, he had asked to be transferred to the air force. He then served as an observer at the front. During the troubled final months of the war, Gyuszi was assigned to Colonel Náday. They were commissioned by government circles to contact the advancing British 8th army in Italy. The Hungarian leaders hoped that, after Germany's loss of the war, the British would retain their sense of European political reality and not allow the takeover of the Danube region by the East. According to Gyuszi, the British warmly welcomed the ambassador but, obviously the American-Russian alliance had come to the fore and the eighth army could not liberate Hungary, but met the Soviets at the Austrian/Hungarian border.

Indeed, the authorities did not offer a lot of help towards us. I endeavored to be allowed to function in the legal field as soon as possible again. A friend wrote to the local representative for me. I asked to obtain a legal assistant office job to progress my return to the legal field. Months later, I received a reply from the office of the Justice Minister that there was no suitable position for me under the Ministry of Justice or the courts. He suggested that I should position myself as an interpreter. This way I could work occasionally within a legal framework.

In the meantime, we had our second Christmas in Australia. The children were given a bicycle and were very happy.

I took over Theo Probst's position in the office when Theo moved to Sydney where he got a job in an insurance company. He called my attention to the fact that if I wanted to renew my legal qualifications, I would have to do it full time through a local university.

However, I decided to take a lighter, shorter course in accounting. I had hoped that I would get an office position quickly. I began my studies in the framework of the International Institute and I received my exams by post. I submitted the solved tasks and, after correcting, they were sent back to me.

The letters came regularly from home (Hungary). We of course tried to paint our position in optimistic colors as our parents needed to be encouraged that we had started a new life. We

regarded our settlement in Australia as a temporary solution. In code we referred to "opusoma", which meant that after the Russian withdrawal, we would fly home.

The Korean War and the anti-Bolshevik sentiment gave us hope which did not seem to be unfounded. If MacArthur won the American political game, the great powers would obviously clash again and in the case of victory, we would be able to go home. But our hopes soon faded. We were approaching the end of our two-year contract with the government when we had to leave the camp, so we began to seriously inquire about our options and the possibility of purchasing our own house. We liked North of Sydney the best. It was a wooded, hilly area and for us was like Buda, in relation to the Pest plain region. Here in Sydney the western areas were the cheaper districts. The eastern section was quite isolated from a transport point of view and only the areas close to the city would have satisfied, but these were already occupied by the Italians and Greeks. ….

We went to a couple of agencies, but, after they realized how financially weak, we were, suggested that we look around Parramatta. Parramatta was, at that time, the capital of the western suburbs. We settled on a house in Guildford, sharing it with the Börzsönyni family".

NOTE: Greta Camp is demolished there are only remains are what were once buildings.
Scheyville Camp is still partly intact and worth visiting.

MIGRANT ACCOMMODATION-PROGRAM

In 1944 Prime Minister John Curtin declared that the government would commit itself to an expanded immigration program at the conclusion of the war. The need to increase Australia's population was emphasised by labour shortages in all industries. The demands of war saw the government unable to maintain services that had existed before 1939. There was a shortage of housing, schools and hospitals, transport services were dysfunctional and blackouts were commonplace.

Initial plans to bring large numbers of 'war orphans' were at odds with the reality of post-war Europe. The British and other governments would not cooperate in large-scale child migration, forcing the Australian Government to invite adult migrants. In March 1946 the Australian and British Governments signed an agreement to provide free passage to Australia for ex-British Servicemen and their dependents. In 1947 the Commonwealth signed an agreement with the International Refugee Organisation to bring twelve thousand displaced people a year from refugee camps in Europe to Australia. Australia also entered assisted passage agreements with the Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Greece and other European governments.

The large-scale migration of adult Europeans was a far-reaching change in Australian history and a more significant rejection of the British Empire than Federation and other changes to Australia's political relationship with Britain. Trade unions and ex-servicemen's organisations were initially resistant, but the widening of cultural groups – eventually to include 'non-white' migrants – is today considered a major success by most Australians.

In the immediate post-war years there was a huge influx of migrants from Europe, people traumatised and left homeless and with few resources for survival. By 1950 Australia had received 153,685 assisted migrants who were initially housed in government run migrant accommodation.

Greta

Greta was the second largest migrant camp, with 100,000 residents having passed through, before the camp was closed and buildings were sold off in 1960.

In 2008 the site, while now practically devoid of ‘major landmarks’, was included as an item of local environmental heritage.

The site was first commemorated in a 1984 film about the Displaced Persons (DPs) of Silver City, which was written by Thomas Keneally and Sophia Turkiewicz, a DP romance. the short-term’. Since then, there have been official reunions held on site and the Ethnic Communities Council have also attempted to collect as much information about Greta as possible.

The site has belonged to the Windt family since 1979. Mr. Uri Windt is a property developer who has taken an extraordinary interest in the heritage value of the old migrant centre site. He provided funding, along with the New South Wales Department of Urban Affairs and Planning and the Australian Heritage Commission, for Christopher Keating’s 1997 book, Greta: A History of the Army Camp and Migrant Camp at Greta, New South Wales, 1939-1960. Keating’s history is a positive one and he alleges that: Many Australians will retain forever an intimate and often deeply emotional attachment to Greta Camp … For the multitude of post-war migrants to Australia, Greta was a breathing space between a difficult past and brighter future, a door to great possibilities. Greta Camp will not be forgotten.

For some DPs, of course, this is true. Mr. VL, a Belarussian DP who volunteers as a guide at Greta, says that it is ‘necessary to remember’ and to ‘cherish roots’ as this makes ‘one’s life richer’. He has a ‘great nostalgia and love for the camp’. As well as acting as tour guide for occasional visitors, Mr. VL helped to organise the 60th anniversary ‘shindig’ for 2009. However, he acknowledges that not all former residents are happy to celebrate the memory of Greta: ‘Most don’t want to think about, reminisce about, one or two are disgusted by it, that they ever lived there’. Keating’s book itself reports political and domestic conflicts, with stabbings and suicides. One resident of Greta township

said that many of the DPs ‘had to put up with a hell of a lot before they came here’ and some of them ‘couldn’t take it’. He recalled that one woman hung herself in the lavatory at Greta, after which her husband shot himself. Another man had been in a jealous rage, beating up his wife and then disappearing for three days before hanging himself with fencing wire. Hungarian Edith Noetel, when pressed about memories of Greta, replied reluctantly, ‘It was not too bad really’. For some, the lack of original landmarks at the site is discouraging. Second-generation Ukrainian DP, Mr. LI, remembers driving past recently: The only thing left of the thing is some little old ruins of the stoves out of the kitchen huts and that sort of thing so I just drove past the place … there’s nothing there – all the huts are gone.

In an effort to redress the destruction of the original site, Uri Windt has incorporated a ‘heritage park’ into his $620 million Anvil Creek proposal for a master-planned resort and residential development currently under consideration by Cessnock City Council. The development proposes to celebrate post-war migrant history by creating a ‘focus for gatherings, a publicly accessible park with a large interpretive exhibition, and a walking trail that will mark and interpret important elements of both the indigenous and European heritage on the site’.

The Anvil Creek website now also includes a Greta Camp Photo Gallery, a ‘permanent photographic record of life at the camp’ which ‘can be accessed by the community at large’. The website has acted not only as a ‘research tool’ but as a means of ‘putting people in touch with each other’. The photographs were officially handed over to the custodianship of the Newcastle Region Library by the Windt family at the launch of an exhibition at Wallsend Library featuring 15 storyboards detailing aspects of life at the camp. The photographs were also exhibited in the ECC’s 60th anniversary of post-war migration to the Newcastle and Hunter Region weekend in November 2009. The celebrations included a showing of the film Silver City, as well as a Celebration Ball held at the Polish Centre. Organised bus tours to Greta were also available. It remains to be seen, of course, whether the Heritage Park will attract visitors or whether it is a cynical attempt to include heritage values in a multimillion-dollar property development. The Heritage Park, if completed and along with Bonegilla, may well become a failed site of memory where interest in the project has been assumed rather than examined.

Reunions have also been held at Scheyville, for example, including a recent one in 2011. Former residents were encouraged to bring photographs which were indexed by staff and volunteers of Scheyville National Park on the day. A number of video histories were also completed, and some memories and artifacts recorded as part of the NSW Migration Heritage Centre’s Belongings online exhibition.

Greta Migrant Camp 1949 - 1960
"The Tale of Two Cities"

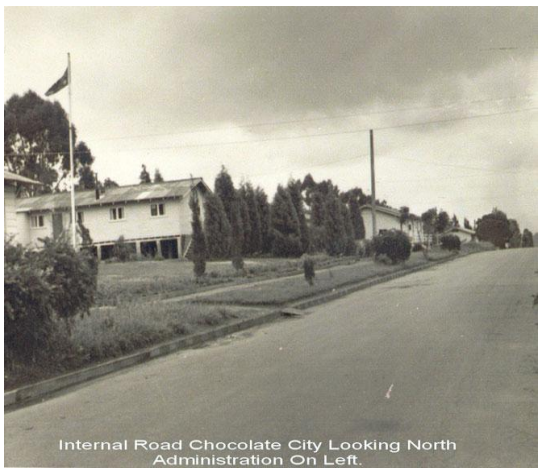
Some excerpts from a story written by Janina Sulikowska for the bi-centennial celebration 20 /8 /1988, "Greta the Camp revisited."

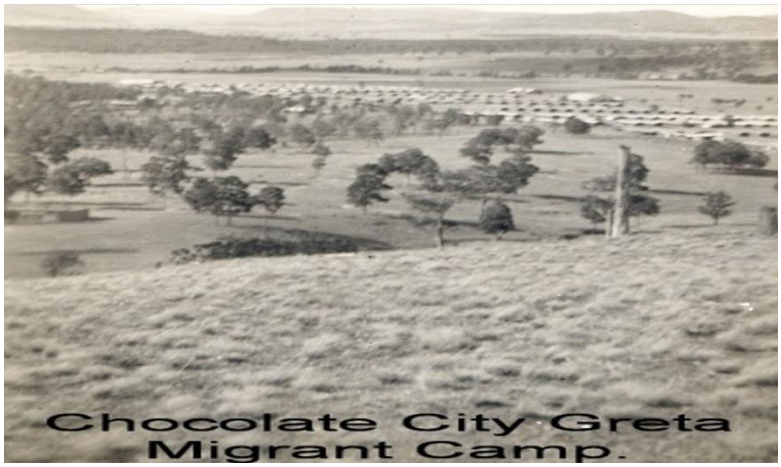
Australia's post-war immigrants scheme had an effect on Australia Society and on National Development. Greta Migrant Camp played a major part in this scheme as it was one of the largest camps in Australia.

The camp was located about 3 kms from the township of Greta. It was built for the Australian Army in 1939. The army occupied the site until early 1949 when Australia's agreement with the International Refugee organization (IRO) to bring Displaced Persons from Europe, was put into action.

The army barrack style buildings were promptly altered to accommodate migrants. The camp was ready to receive the first draft of migrants in June 1949.

It is estimated that some 100,000 migrants passed through the camp between 1949 and 1960. The largest number of people at the camp at one time was in 1950, when some 9,000 people gathered for Christmas.
A change in Australia's Migrant Policy in 1955 saw the camp slowly close from 1956. The camp officially closed on 15th January 1960.
Most of the IRO migrants came from the Baltic countries (of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), Ukraine, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. During the 1950s, agreements were signed with other European nations. There were intakes from Poland, Italy, Greece, Macedonia, Hungary, Austria, Germany and Russia. Passage to Australia was free for migrants. However, men were required to fulfill a 2-year contract once they arrived in Australia.
The first 600 migrants to inhabit Greta were from other Australia migrant camps. They were soon joined by a large group of new arrivals on board the "Fairsea". These migrants were the first draft of Displaced Persons to be landed outside a capital city. 1096 migrants disembarked at Newcastle harbour on the 19th August 1949 and were transported directly to Greta Migrant Camp by steam train.
These migrants suffered hardships before they arrived in our country and the shock of arriving at a camp in the middle of nowhere, at most times in the heat of summer when everything was brown. The accommodation was basic -- huts had no lining, no heating in winter and no internal doors to connect the rooms. Living in the camp was also not easy for most families. Mothers and children lived in Great Camp while their husbands and fathers worked away, in Sydney, Cairns, and the Snowy River. The luckier families had fathers who worked at BHP and came home weekends. Mostly people socialised even though they came from different nationalities and different backgrounds. They were happy. There was plenty food and lots of space for the children to play.
The camp was divided into two separate sections: Silver City and Chocolate City. Silver City was so named because of the galvanised iron sheeting used in the construction of its huts and the brown coloured oiled timber clad huts in Chocolate City which nestled at the foot of Mount Molly Morgan. Both camps were administered separately with a director or commander at the top and several government executives or assistants. Teachers were provided by the Education Department and an Employment office was opened. The bunk huts were divided into ten units, each fitted with a door and lined with thin Masonite. Both camps were run along army lines by army men and names such as mess and recreation hall were used. Both Silver City and Chocolate City had their own school, cinema, canteen and chapels. The main hospital was in Silver City. This was one of the largest migrant camps in Australia with a population made up of many nations. At one stage there were 17 different nationalities at the camp. The rental charged at the camp initially was 35 shillings per week for adults and twelve shillings and sixpence for children.





Maingate Greta Migrant Camp.

Administration

After the closure of the Greta Migrant Camp there were plans to develop the area.

Anvil Creek hits market as Hunter Valley lures developers.
August 4, 2016 — 6.22pm

Advertisement SMH

Developers have identified the Hunter Valley as a growth sector in regional NSW, as improved infrastructure draws residents away from the crowded suburbs of Sydney.To take advantage of the new $1.7 billion M15 Hunter Expressway, the Windt Family are selling their Anvil Creek site, which has development approval in place for a potential $1.4 billion mixed-use project. The Windt family is selling Anvil Creek in the Hunter Valley, which has approval for a $1.4 billion mixed-use project. The family have spent 15 years obtaining the necessary R2 planning approvals and rezoning, which will include as much as 75 per cent of public area. Anvil Creek was formerly owned by the Department of Defence and was the site of the Greta migrant camp, where more than 10,000 babies were born. The Windt family bought the site in 1980 and set about getting the approvals.

The masterplan could include a golf course, vineyard, low-rise residential, an aged care facility and a hotel or tourism business, according to the agents at Savills.
There is a separate entrance that could accommodate an amphitheatre for concerts.

SCHEYVILLE MIGRANT ACCOMMODATION CENTRE 1949-1964

In 1949 as the need for migrant accommodation continued to grow, it was decided that the facility at Scheyville would be established as a Migrant Holding Centre. Between 1950 and 1964 thousands of migrants had passed through Scheyville Migrant Holding Centre, which was then the largest of such migrant centres in Australia during those years.

The Australian Government announced that Scheyville Farm would be converted into a migrant accommodation centre. Scheyville became one of dozens of migrant camps and hostels housing the new arrivals until they were able to find their own accommodation.

The Centre was greatly expanded to accommodate over one thousand migrants. Fibro huts were built at Scheyville, they were divided with partitions to create three rooms with sleeping space for up to five people. The staff dining room remained in the quadrangle building, while the migrants dined in two large semicircular iron huts, recycled from a war time Pacific air field. New buildings housed communal bathrooms and laundries. A school and a Catholic church were also constructed during the 1950s.

Two large SAARS huts were installed on site, one of which contained kitchen facilities to augment those in the quadrangle building. The other hut and some new buildings housed many other health and amenity facilities including a community hall. A large number of prefabricated huts were installed on site to accommodate the migrants. A sewage treatment works was constructed on site in 1949. The installation of a sewage plant and electrical network during the post-WWII phases of use allowed the migrant camp and the later Officer Training Unit to operate as an almost self-sufficient community. The Scheyville Migrant Holding Centre accommodated new migrants up until 1964

On the 14th December 1949 the first migrants were admitted to Scheyville. By the end of the year there were six hundred people in residence. Rent was paid by those able to find employment, although Scheyville's isolation and lack of public transport was an obstacle to job-seeking. People were expected to stay at Scheyville for up to six months, although some stayed for years. The Windsor & Richmond Gazette reported in 1957 that 'some migrants had been living at the Centre since 1949 and they were unable to face the world after experiencing the terrors of two wars in their countries'.

Scheyville's migrants came from all over Eastern and Western Europe. The variety of nationalities and the number of people living at Scheyville created a vibrant community. There was a post office, hospital and maternity hospital, school and pre-school, convent, churches, and a 'modern' recreation centre. There were also many community groups including the Scheyville branch of the Country Women's Association, choral, theatrical, instrumental, social, cultural and religious groups.

These and other social activities provided the opportunity for many to establish relationships that have endured a lifetime. There were many marriages at Scheyville, children were born and baptised, and families raised. The war had severed many contacts and for some Scheyville was a place to be reunited with friends from their former countries.

All the services were communal. Food was provided in one of three messes, two for the residents and one for the staff. All food had to be eaten in the mess, this was a restriction which, until a violent incident, was enforced by patrol officers. Sometimes however when the situation demanded, food was hidden under clothing to bring back to the rooms for the children who were sick or when it was too cold.

Residents lived in small rooms that have been described as cramped and spartan. Some families, as large as six, were accommodated in two small rooms in which they lived for a number of years. The rooms were furnished with the basics which residents would brighten up with colourful pieces of fabric which were placed over packing cases or hung on walls. Photographs and calendars or cards were also popular additions, anything to make the rooms their own.

‘We had the run of the place!... Basically, the freedom we had as kids to be able to roam around without fear or anything like that. We made our own fun you had all the children basically 'round the same ages separated into little groups, we did our own thing. We went out bushwalking, exploring, hiking, whatever you know, especially in the school holidays.’

Those who were children at Scheyville have many fond memories of the place. The large area and isolation of Scheyville provided freedom and security to play and enjoy life in their new home as never before. Scheyville children report memories of bushwalking, hiking, learning to swim in the creek, exploring, Santa, presents and cordial at Christmas, first communions, preschool and school, singing, dancing and playing music, toys, spying on the staff, playing sport and countless friends with whom to play.

‘There (were) so many different varieties of … nationalities and that sort of thing. We met some wonderful people… But it was heartbreaking hearing some of their stories especially people that were here because they came from the concentration camps’

The Department of Immigration ran all of the accommodation centres. At each of the immigration centres senior management staff were appointed. They were responsible for hiring and firing other staff, sourced from both Australians and migrants. For Australians working at Scheyville, it was an opportunity to do something to help people whose lives had been destroyed by the war. Many of the Australian staff recall being told stories too horrendous for the newspapers to report. They also saw their work as an opportunity to meet and learn more about parts of the world they had never seen.

For the migrants, living at Scheyville required flexibility. In many instances the Australian government did not recognise international qualifications, and many migrants were required to retrain in Australian institutions. In the meantime, employment was found in unskilled industries. However, there were some migrants who were able to find employment in their trade within the centre or were able to adapt other skills they possessed such as interpreting.

Administration staff had their own staff mess at the far end of the quadrangle. Adjoining this was a staff games room with a drinks bar manned by rostered staff. This was the site of many staff parties. The single staff were accommodated in the dormitories at the sides of the quadrangle and others were located throughout the camp and sometimes in separate housing within the camp. In the early days there was a fully functioning hospital on site inclusive of a separate maternity wing.

Since 1945 almost six million people have migrated to Australia and later become Australian citizens. Citizenship is conferred upon people in naturalisation ceremonies during which the candidate renounces their allegiance to their previous nationality in favour of Australian citizenry. Scheyville hosted many of these ceremonies, usually conducted by the Mayor of Windsor. Candidates were presented with a Bible on behalf of Windsor Council, and the women were presented with a bouquet prepared by the members of the Country Women's Association which also provided some choral entertainment.

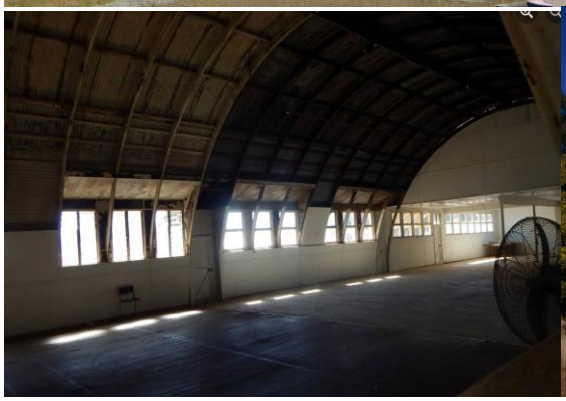
The 1950s policy of assimilation meant that immigrants were expected to abandon the cultural heritage and customs of their former countries. The migrants at Scheyville were subjected to both sides of the spectrum, as they were urged to both give up, and retain and celebrate, the cultural heritage of their homelands. The Mayor of Windsor was typical in claiming that Scheyville showed that 'our great social experiment, in bringing migrants to our country on a large scale, has a soul'. He also encouraged new citizens to:

'Speak English at all times – even in your own homes – for you are now British subjects'.

By 1964 European refugees were a minority of new migrants and the Department of Immigration decided to close the Scheyville Centre by the year’s end. About 300 people were still living at Scheyville. Meanwhile, conscription of young men into the army created a need for training facilities. In 1965 the Scheyville site was converted into the Officer Training Unit Scheyville, which operated until 1973, the end of conscription and Australian involvement in the Vietnam War.

https://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/fieldsofmemories/index-2.html

http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/scheyville-national-park/migrant-heritage-walk/walking



https://www.destinationaustralia.gov.au/

https://www.iom.int/photo-stories/new-beginnings

Hungarians arriving October 1956

Scheyville Hostel. The first group of refugees to come to Australia following the 1956 Hungarian uprising arrive in Sydney by Qantas Constellation on 3 December, 1956