

On the 11th of January 1923 Vincenzo Sinagra and his brother Basilio, landed in Australia aboard the liner Orsova and so began the story of the Sinagra family in Western Australia.

Family tradition has it that Vincenzo left the village of Sinagra in Sicily after a disagreement over land within the family. He had been living with an aunt and had expected to acquire some of the family land. This however went to one of his other cousins and so Vincenzo decided that his future lay elsewhere.

He arrived in Australia with very little, but at the time of his death owned land in Wanneroo, Bullsbrook, Gingin, Chittering and Tuart Hill. On his arrival in Australia he first worked at Spearwood for about 12 months before coming to Wanneroo and working for Mr Antonio Crisafulli. Not long after that he formed a partnership with Antonio and after a further 12 months he was able to send back to Sicily for his wife Mariana and two children, Salvatore (Sam) and Vincenzo Jr (Jim), who arrived in Australia on 8th March 1925 on board the Citta Di Genova.

There is currently a time gap in our family records at this point. How long Vincenzo, Mariana and the two boys remained with the Crisafulli family is unclear. Land titles do show that on 5th August, 1930, he acquired Swan Location 2928 in Pinjar, from Albert Joseph Thomas, who in turn, had acquired the land from the Government as a lease in 1925. This block contained a "stone" house built by Thomas, and the family moved in to it from two corrugated iron homes that Vincenzo had built on adjacent Swan Locations 1640 and 1979 (known as the garden block).

These two locations were also owned by A. J. Thomas and as Vincenzo was already working a garden on these properties it is assumed that he leased them from Thomas and lived there, prior to his purchase of Location 2928. From anecdotal evidence it appears that the family continued to lease the garden blocks until Vincenzo purchased them from Thomas in 1931. The first Sinagra born in Australia, Giuseppe (Joe) was born on 18th of April 1926 and recalls that he went to school from the stone house. This would put the year of the move at circa 1931. It seems reasonable also, to assume that this was the first purchase of land by Vincenzo and hence, the beginning of our family's foothold in Australia.

To purchase this land, Vincenzo had borrowed money from Mr Charles Kirkby, the owner of Kirkby & Son, a company that sold fertilizer to the market gardeners in the area. After paying off the mortgage he continued to re-mortgage the property and pay off the loan several times, to purchase and lease other land in the area.

The family lived in the stone house until the last of Vincenzo and Mariana's eleven children were born. There were 8 or 9 of the children still at home and the boys slept five to a bed while the three girls had a bed in the other bedroom. The family then moved in 1946 on to 279 acres of land made up of Swan Locations 3074, 2711 and 2712 on Pinjar Road, Wanneroo, but still retained ownership of the stone house and garden blocks.

The corrugated iron from the two shacks on the garden block was eventually recycled into the home of Mr and Mrs Antonio Ariti on Pinjar Road and into the new Sinagra house on Pinjar Road in Wanneroo. This last home where Vincenzo was to live until his death in 1968 was too small to hold all the children and so Joe, Jim and Ross (Sam had moved to live near his work in a saw mill) stayed in the stone house in Pinjar and worked the garden there until they were married or moved for work.

The stone house sadly, was destroyed by a bushfire in January of 2015.

A note on purchase of land in the early years. The Transfer of Land Act of 1893 and The Land Act 1933 set out procedures for purchase of government land, which were not as straight forward as purchasing a block of land from a private individual. The conditions as laid out made it almost impossible for immigrant market gardeners to purchase crown land or to lease land directly from the government. As large areas of the land in Wanneroo were Government owned in the early part of the 20th century, early Italian market gardeners leased land from Australians who owned the land or leased it from the government. While a block may have been locally called Sinagra's block or Seragusana's block, the reality was that the land had not passed on by way of a registered title for many years after occupation. Italians were also discriminated against when purchasing land as they were classed as enemy aliens, even after being naturalised. This meant that local landowners could block their purchase of property by registering a veto with the local police or military. Vincenzo must have impressed A. J. Thomas though, as he transferred his leases to private land holdings and almost immediately sold them to Vincenzo. Other Italian market gardeners in other areas of Wanneroo were not so lucky and moved from land they were leasing because the owners of the lease would not sell the land to them.