‘Better than anywhere else’: Lebanese settlement in Queensland, 1880–1947

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‘Better than anywhere else’: Lebanese settlement in Queensland, 1880–1947

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Until the 1960s, the settlement of Lebanese migrants in Queensland was characteristically regional, with the immigrants dispersed widely throughout the state. Immigrant settlement involves a dynamic and complex interaction between the immigrants and the social, political and economic structures of the receiving society. An analysis of the settlement experience of Lebanese immigrants in Queensland from the 1880s reveals the interplay of several factors, which resulted in a distinct pattern of settlement.1 Fundamental to this experience was the influence of racially exclusive state and Commonwealth legislation and immigration policies. Additionally, Queensland’s particular geography and style of development, in conjunction with the predominance of self-employment and the segregation of Lebanese in petty commercial occupations such as hawking and shopkeeping, significantly determined the immigrants’ geographic settlement pattern. Finally, a less obvious but nonetheless important factor was the determination of the immigrants to settle permanently in Queensland. Whatever the reasons, this dispersed settlement pattern significantly shaped the lives of the immigrants and their descendants.

The impact of the White Australia Policy

The arrival of increasing numbers of Lebanese in Queensland throughout the 1890s was part of a considerable emigration from the Syria/Lebanon region.2 This mass movement was driven primarily by deteriorating economic conditions and the search for better opportunities overseas.3 Although some Lebanese are known to have arrived in Australia towards the end of the 1870s, the earliest record of a person from Syria/Lebanon residing in Queensland is 1884.4 By the end of the 1880s, at least thirty-one Lebanese, including six women, were living in Queensland.5 Mirroring the general pattern of emigration from Syria/Lebanon, more than six times as many (193) Lebanese immigrants arrived in the colony between 1890 and 1899.6 This increasing rate of arrival coincided with a period of economic decline and high unemployment, exacerbated by a severe drought.7 Also during the 1890s, the movement towards federation was strengthened, bolstered by a burgeoning Australian nationalism that called for an exclusively white and predominately British Australia.8 In these circumstances, non-Europeans were increasingly viewed as a threat and anti-Chinese legislation was extended to all Asian and coloured persons.9
Table 1. Distribution of Lebanese born in Australia, 1901–47

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1947</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>1,144</td>
<td>1,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic.</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,498</td>
<td>1,542</td>
<td>1,803</td>
<td>2,020</td>
<td>1,886</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Commonwealth Censuses 1911–47.

The implementation of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 altered the course of Lebanese immigration to Australia. In the first place, the dramatic increase in arrivals of the 1890s was effectively stalled. As Table 1 shows, the number of Lebanese immigrants in Australia was thereafter small, with New South Wales consistently seeing the majority of Lebanese immigrant settlement. Although almost one-quarter (23 per cent) of the Lebanese immigrants living in Australia were in Queensland in 1901, this percentage declined in subsequent years and did not again rise above 14 per cent. At the 1933 Census, when non-Europeans were required to state their race, 358 people in Queensland indicated that they were Syrian. Conceivably, the numerically insignificant presence of Lebanese in cities and towns throughout Queensland meant that they appeared less threatening than if their presence had been concentrated in any one location. However, in an environment that sought to protect and privilege white, Christian Australians, this dispersed settlement also intensified the already strong pressure to assimilate: a pressure borne particularly by the second and third generations.

While the Immigration Restriction Act successfully ended the unrestricted entry of Lebanese to Australia, the perception of policy-makers that they had more in common with southern Europeans than with Asians meant that Lebanese were eventually granted special exemptions from the restrictions imposed by the Act. At the discretion of consecutive ministers, limited numbers of Lebanese with well-established contacts in Australia were allowed to enter the Commonwealth on special authority. Between 1907 and 1922, for example, 259 Syrians were given special authority to enter Australia. The high number of female Lebanese immigrants partly explains why Syrians as a group were treated differently. In each decade after 1880, with the exception of the 1940s, at least a quarter of the immigrants were women (see Table 2), indicating that a significant proportion of Lebanese arrived in family groups. This migration in family groups and the birth of at least eighty-six Lebanese Queenslanders between 1887 and 1899 suggest that their intention was to be settlers rather than sojourners. In an environment characterised by a deeply rooted fear of racial mixing, the presence of women and children was important in making the Lebanese appear as less of a threat to racial purity — unlike the predominately male Indians and Chinese (see Table 3). They were also considered less of a threat economically because, unlike single males,
workers with families needed to earn enough to support their family and they were thus perceived as unlikely to work for lower wages or to export their earnings. Further, most of the early Lebanese immigrants in Queensland were Christian, and hence were considered more likely to assimilate. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the dictation test meant that only those Lebanese who were dependent on a relative already settled in Australia, or those who were able to prove former domicile, had any chance of entering the country. Therefore, after 1901, by constraint rather than design, chain migration was the only possible pattern of migration for Lebanese immigrants, and this in turn determined the predominant pattern of settlement.

As well as restricting the entry of non-Europeans, the White Australia Policy sought to make life so uncomfortable for those already living in Australia that they would want to leave. Institutionalised discrimination imposed on non-Europeans by state and Commonwealth legislation was pervasive. The employment of non-Europeans in mining had been restricted since the nineteenth century, and the legislative discrimination in employment expanded significantly between 1901 and 1920. In Queensland, more than thirty separate Acts restricted occupational freedom. Naturalisation records (1885–1947) for Lebanese immigrants in Queensland show that the majority were self-employed traders (see Table 4). Just over half (55 per cent) were in business in the retail sector as storekeepers, drapers, mercers or general dealers. One-quarter (25 per cent) listed hawking as their sole occupation, and another nine (4 per cent) combined hawking with storekeeping or farming. With the inclusion of hawking, approximately 80 per cent of Lebanese immigrants were self-employed in a trading enterprise. Arguably, this common occupational

Table 2. Percentage of male and female Lebanese immigrants in Queensland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880–1889</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890–1899</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900–1909</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910–1919</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920–1929</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930–1939</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940–1949</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Government and other records 1880–1949.

Table 3. Full-blood Asians in Australia showing approximate masculinity of each group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>30,542</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>22,753</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>17,157</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>3,554</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>3,489</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>2,740</td>
<td>92.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>4,681</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>3,653</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>3,150</td>
<td>94.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>2,339</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>2,892</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This figure includes Cingalese
pathway was partly the result of legislative discrimination in employment, which resulted in blocked occupational opportunities. Before 1947, immigrant settlement was left entirely to relatives or to voluntary agencies, so recent arrivals were ‘mainly dependent on self-help’.24 In the case of newly arrived Lebanese immigrants, not only did they owe their entry into Australia to their sponsors, who were usually family members, they also depended on them to find employment and accommodation. Typically, established family and friends initiated the latest immigrants into the new society.25 As a result, many were introduced to the occupations in which their relatives were already established: often hawking and shopkeeping.

**Settling in Queensland**

Although the dispersed settlement of Lebanese immigrants was not unique to Queensland, it was made more significant by Queensland’s particular geography and style of development. Due to its vast area, wide dispersion of resources and
subsequent spread of economic activity and population, Queensland’s development was characterised by decentralisation and regionalism. Transport policies and strong and effective regional pressures retarded the growth of Brisbane and increased the vitality and importance of Queensland’s provincial centres. Considering the nature of Queensland’s development and the tendency of Lebanese to be self-employed traders, their dispersed settlement throughout the state is not surprising. Further, this settlement pattern was, predictably, not unique to these immigrants. By the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of Chinese in Queensland were also scattered in country towns. According to Arthur Huck, the pattern of metropolitan concentration of Chinese in Australia was similar in all areas except Queensland, where 56 per cent of the Chinese lived outside the capital. Huck attributed this difference to the fact that Queensland was an ‘exceptional’ state:

*The Atlas of Australian Resources* comments as follows: ‘Brisbane is one of the only two State capital cities in Australia which does not include more than half of its State’s population (Hobart is the other) . . . A striking feature . . . is the number of provincial cities and towns of over 25,000 people in Queensland . . . ’ The Chinese in Queensland then are not so much diverging from the common Australian pattern as following the Queensland local variation.

Using a combination of records — particularly those relating to hawking and retailing as the main occupations followed by the early Lebanese immigrants — Table 5 shows the extent of Lebanese settlement throughout Queensland by recording the total number of Queensland towns and cities in which Lebanese lived for every five-years period from 1885 to 1949. The cities and towns of Queensland have been roughly categorised into southern, central and northern regions, based on the suggestion by Glen Lewis that, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,
there were really three Queenslands: southern, central and northern. By 1890, Lebanese were in each region, and the total number of locations of residence increased steadily, reaching sixty-two in 1915, before fluctuating between fifty-six and seventy-two between 1915 and 1949. Considering that Queensland’s Lebanese population was always small, the number and spread of the locations throughout the state in which they lived demonstrate an extremely dispersed settlement pattern. While Brisbane was the only recorded settlement location in 1885, Lebanese were also in Townsville, Charters Towers, Barcaldine, Rockhampton, Maryborough and the Darling Downs region by 1890. As their numbers increased, so did their dispersal throughout Queensland. By 1895, Lebanese were located as far north as Thursday Island, in western towns such as Normanton, Croydon, Winton, Longreach and Charleville, throughout the Darling Downs, and in towns and cities along the coast. Brisbane was consistently the most significant settlement; however, in 1905 and 1915, the concentration of Lebanese in Toowoomba matched that of Brisbane. In country areas, Lebanese from the same family or village clustered in towns that were near each other, while in both Toowoomba and Brisbane, they chose to live in close proximity, in areas such as James Street in Toowoomba, and South Brisbane, Woolloongabba and West End in Brisbane.

**The central role of the Lebanese family strengthened**

By causing a pattern of chain migration and neglecting to provide services for new arrivals, government immigration and settlement policy contributed to this dispersed settlement, in turn reinforcing the central role of the Lebanese family and entrenching hawking and shopkeeping as the common occupational pathway. While the specific reasons for the original immigrants’ choice to settle in particular places are generally unknown, for later immigrants the choice was often predetermined by the location of relatives or friends from their home village. For example, almost all the Lebanese who settled in Toowoomba and the Darling Downs region came from KfarsGhab or Zahle. The pattern of one or two members of a family — usually the original immigrants — settling in a particular place, and then bringing other siblings or relatives from Lebanon and settling them in the same district, is well illustrated by the following example.

Abraham Selim Mellick and his brother, Habib, were still teenagers when they arrived in Sydney in 1899, where one of their relatives, Stanton Mellick, had a warehouse in Elizabeth Street, Redfern. After a period of hawking in New South Wales, the brothers moved to Townsville, attracted by the warmer climate and having other relatives in that location. Other Mellicks, also from their village, Bturrum, had been in Queensland for at least a decade. Their locations — Maryborough, Rockhampton and Townsville — reflect the significance of Queensland’s coastal ports in this period. In 1891, five Mellicks were registered as hawkers in Maryborough. Records also show that several Mellicks were working as registered hawkers in the Townsville district between 1892 and 1895. The Mellick Brothers drapery store was established in Rockhampton by 1895. By 1900, Mellicks were operating drapery stores in Townsville, Longreach, Blackall and Rockhampton. After hawking in the Townsville district, Abraham established a store in Innisfail (then Geraldton) in 1902. By the 1940s, Abraham had brought his
six brothers and two of his three sisters to Australia, and they were operating as drapers or mercers in Innisfail, Townsville, Mossman, Tully and Cairns. As Abraham had assisted the new arrivals with their education and then settled them on the land or in business, it is not surprising that seven out of the eight siblings also settled in North Queensland. While their common occupational choice made it difficult for them to live in the one town, their settlement in towns close to each other indicates their wish to remain as close as possible to their siblings. For the children of these immigrants, this meant that they experienced regular contact with their extended family, which, taking into account differences in geography and social organisation, mimicked what would have occurred in Lebanon:

So was there a lot of family contact then, when you were growing up?

Yes. We were not just us — we were the only ones in Innisfail — but there was a family in Babinda, and there were four or five in Cairns and there was one in Tully, and at one stage, one of the uncles was in Mossman. But Dad either put them into business or put them on the land, because he had farms then. And so they were all around us and we grew up literally with all our first cousins.

For these young people, the experience of being ‘Lebanese’ was limited to extended family, a situation typical for many of the second generation growing up in towns throughout Queensland.

This settlement pattern was constantly repeated, with the result that Lebanese settlement in Queensland was characterised by the clustered settlement of family and friends within a geographic region. In 1891, Michael, Frank and George Malouf were all registered as hawkers in the Townsville district. After a period of moving around the region, the brothers settled in relative proximity to each other. By 1903, Frank and George were in business together in Croydon, and from 1905 to about 1935, the three brothers continued working as hawkers and storekeepers in Croydon, Georgetown, Kidston, Einasleigh and Forsayth. In 1920, members of the Lisha family, the first of whom had arrived in Queensland from Bscherre in the early 1890s, were operating businesses in Cairns, Atherton, Yungaburra, Herberton and Stannary Hills. At the same time, businesses established by brothers Joseph and Richard Arida and their relatives, all of whom were also from Bscherre, were operating in Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Hughenden and Selwyn. Originally domiciled in New South Wales when they arrived in Australia in 1928, by 1935 brothers Wadih and George Wigan had opened drapery stores in Charleville and Cunnamulla. Over the next fifteen years, these brothers successfully encouraged relatives from their home village of Batroun to join them in Western Queensland. According to the QPO Directories for 1947 and 1949, Wigan Brothers drapery stores were operating in Blackall, Charleville, Clermont, Cunnamulla and Longreach.

An occupational pathway reinforced

This enduring pattern also included initiating newcomers into hawking and shopkeeping, demonstrating that the early immigrants had found an occupational niche that they, and subsequent Lebanese immigrants, were able to develop. After arriving in Australia in 1914, Helene Mellick stayed with her brother in Ayr for seven years before establishing her own business in Townsville. When the teenage brothers
Lebanese settlement in Queensland, 1880–1947

Wadih and Youssef Monsour arrived in Queensland in 1926, they worked with relatives who were already established while they learned some English and became familiar with their new environment. By 1935, they and members of the extended Monsour family were operating a variety of retail stores in Maryborough, Kingaroy, Biggenden, Bundaberg and Childers, and by 1940, in Maryborough, Gayndah, Booyal, Biggenden, Gympie and Nambour. In another example, Kenneth Jabour Coorey, who arrived in Australia as a sixteen-year-old in 1931, lived in Charleville for three years learning the drapery trade from his uncle, Charles Coorey, and taking English lessons at night school before setting up his own business in Mitchell in 1934. In 1931, his older brother, Anthony, opened a store nearby in Augathella. Similarly, in 1939, the new arrivals Norman and Lavina Hanna stayed with Norm’s brother in Goondiwindi for six months, finding out about business and learning English before they moved to Toowoomba and began hawking fruit and vegetables.

Here to stay

Their preparedness to settle in regional Queensland enabled Lebanese immigrants to establish enduring businesses that met local needs and facilitated their active participation in their adopted communities. The Innisfail store started by Abraham Saleem Mellick celebrated its 100th year in 2002, only closing in 2004 when Mellick’s daughter, Thelma, retired. The Georges have been trading in the Rockhampton district since 1899. The Nowham Massoud family’s close connection with Noosa began in 1908: they still own the original shop, built in 1927, and Massoud Park and Massoud Jetty acknowledge the family’s contribution to the area. For thirty-eight years, Norm Hanna hawked a 60–100 kilometre radius around Toowoomba:

The Hanna Mobile Drapery was an eagerly awaited and welcome interlude for the farmers for Norman not only provided clothes and drapery lines, but also cases of fruit and a variety of tinned food, and always had a pocket of lifesavers or some small gift for the children. He allowed credit, sometimes for very long periods, if farmers were having a rough trot.

In 1956, Norm also opened a drapery store in Ruthven Street, Toowoomba, now Hannas Department Store, which still operates as a family business. Russia Lutvey established his first shop in Gayndah in 1898, and by the time of his death in 1948, ‘his business empire’ ‘consisted of 13 shops in the main street of Gayndah, the Burnett Hotel, grazing lands, several houses and flats’. The All Nations Warehouse founded by Joseph and Richard Arida in Charters Towers in 1886 operated successfully for 103 years.

Many Lebanese businesses were established and maintained through the combined efforts of family members. Peter John (P. J.) Mellick’s store, established in Ayr in 1905, became P. J. Mellick and Sons and operated until the 1960s. Peter, his wife, Nefley, and their six children were all involved in the business. Nefley ran a branch shop in Home Hill for many years and the children worked in the shop after school and on weekends. For many women like Nefley Mellick, migration to regional Queensland provided the pathway to becoming an independent business operator. Indeed, from the early days of migration, Lebanese women worked in
public occupations such as hawking and storekeeping, and even operated businesses independently. Surviving licence registers show a significant proportion of Lebanese hawkers in Queensland to have been women. In Bundaberg, women held one-third (five out of fifteen) of the licences granted between 1904 and 1908, while in Mackay, three of the eight licences granted to Lebanese between 1908 and 1910 were given to women.64 Annie Keyatta is continuously listed as a storekeeper and then a draper from 1902 to 1940.65 A newspaper article in 1930 makes it clear that she was responsible for developing and operating the business.66 Julia Mellick is listed as a fruiterer in Rockhampton in 1919 and 1920, and then as a grocer from 1929 to 1935.67 In Einasleigh in North-West Queensland, Julia Malouf worked full-time operating two shops — a drapery and a grocery — and had a domestic servant to help with the housework and the four children.68 In 1927, Helene Mellick had been a self-employed storekeeper in Townsville for approximately three years.69 Rosie Aboud, who was a dressmaker when she married in 1901, conducted a store in Zahley near Toowoomba from 1910 to 1926.70 A fruiterer in Charters Towers in 1900, Mary Tooma, is then listed as a draper from 1909 to 1916.71 Susanne Khoury, who arrived in Australia in June 1938, opened her own hat and frock shop in Warwick in 1940; it was still operating nine years later.72

Exclusion and marginalisation

The implementation of legislative discrimination was personal and intrusive. It reminded Lebanese immigrants that their presence in Queensland and Australia was not welcome and that their acceptance was tenuous.73 Exclusion from naturalisation made this most obvious. It was difficult, although not impossible, for certain Asiatic aliens in colonial Queensland to become British subjects; however, from 1904 to 1920, Lebanese immigrants experienced total exclusion from naturalisation based on their racial classification.74 Archival records show that these immigrants were persistent in their attempts to become naturalised, particularly because they had decided to stay and wanted to buy land.75 For example, Massoud Nowham, who was initially refused naturalisation in colonial Queensland, became a British subject in 1921, eighteen years after his original application.76 Negotiating within the dominant discourse of race, Lebanese sought to position themselves on the white/Christian side of the colour line, arguing that they had been incorrectly excluded, as they were white, European and Christian.77 When, as a single Asiatic male, Charters Towers merchant Richard Arida was refused naturalisation, he argued he was European.78 Joseph Abdullah of Rockhampton, who was also refused naturalisation in Queensland because he was a single, Asiatic male, disputed the correctness of this classification in Queensland because he was a single, Asiatic male, disputed the correctness of this classification on the basis of his religion: ‘Although I am termed an Asiatic Alien, I would respectfully point out that I am of the Christian Religion, the same as the rest of the people of Australia’.79 As a long-term resident who professed loyalty to his adopted country, Abdullah believed his request for naturalisation was reasonable and concluded with the following petition: ‘my living as a hawker depends on my being naturalised so that I shall be compelled to leave the country unless my prayer is granted, and this Sir, would be a very hard thing to one who has lived here so long and who wishes for no better country to live in’.80

As ‘undesirable’ immigrants subject to discriminatory legislation and also as enemy aliens during World War I, Lebanese in Queensland were under constant
Police reports, fundamental to the naturalisation process, assessed an applicant’s character and suitability as well as the accurateness of their statements; records show that police inquiries were comprehensive. The majority of their reports were positive, generally describing Lebanese men as sober, hardworking and respectable. The following extract is representative of the tone and content of these reports:

Chaker Abood has been a resident of Charleville for the last six years during which time he has kept a drapers shop, with the exception of about four months that he was absent about the district carrying on the business of a Licensed Hawker. The applicant who has a wife and four children is a sober industrious hard working intelligent man he appears to do a fair amount of business and appears to be in fair financial circumstances his conduct has been respectable in every way for the past six years he takes an interest in local affairs and is conversant with the current topics of the day, he can speak English fairly well, and has all the necessary qualifications of being a respectable citizen.

However, three extremely negative reports written by the Warwick police in 1902 suggest that the favourable nature of the majority of police reports was related to the fact that in most places Lebanese did not settle in large numbers. The refusal of some magistrates in New South Wales to grant hawking licences to Asians had resulted in a highly visible concentration of Syrian hawkers in the Warwick district. The police reported that these Syrians lived ‘in a filthy, dirty state’, had ‘dirty, lazy habits’ and were ‘a very undesirable race of people’. With Warwick being a hub for Syrian hawkers, ‘the business people of Warwick’ feared the effect on their trade, and the Warwick Traders’ Association persistently lobbied the Home Secretary to stop issuing hawkers’ licences to Asians.

**Becoming Australian**

The extent of police surveillance had important implications for the process of adjustment experienced by Lebanese immigrants in Queensland. To be granted equal status, it was evidently not enough for these immigrants to be law-abiding; they also had to be judged fit persons by the police and by ‘respectable’ citizens in their local communities. In effect, this meant that all aspects of their everyday lives were under scrutiny. The need to be ‘acceptable’ to gain citizenship rights created compelling pressures to conform. In this environment, Lebanese immigrants understood that their acceptance was conditional, and so they worked hard to become Australian, enthusiastically learning English and actively participating in their local communities. Indeed, involvement in the local community is a common feature of Lebanese settlement in regional Queensland. As local business owners, they supported community groups such as the Returned Services League (RSL), and the Ambulance and Show Societies. As parents, they became involved in school activities, including Parents and Citizens Associations, and they and their children also joined local sporting and cultural clubs. As Christians, active engagement in their church parishes also provided a way for the immigrant families to move into the wider society. While it was due partly to their involvement in business and a desire to be accepted into the community, as the following examples illustrate, this participation also resulted from the immigrants’ decision to embrace life in Australia.
Abraham Selim Mellick was so attracted to Innisfail, where ‘the lush green was such a contrast to his arid homeland’, that he lived there from 1902 until his death in 1982. He was a foundation member of several local clubs and cultural organisations, and he was also a founding member of the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce and its president for eleven years. Abraham advocated on such issues as protecting the town’s public spaces, for a general hospital and for the development of a harbour. Similarly, Richard D. Arida was a member of the Charters Towers Traders Association, an elected member and treasurer of the School of Arts committee, a member of the Charters Towers District Hospital committee and a serving member of the Townsville Harbour Board for twenty-five years. He was involved in the Water and Fire Brigade Boards, the Charters Towers Electricity Supply Company, the local Patriotic and Repatriation Committee and the Charters Towers Civic Club. Arida also supported the labour movement as a trustee for the Australian Workers’ Union, and in his will he made generous ‘bequests to local schools, churches, the hospital, charitable institutions, the City Council and his staff. In 1986, eighty-one-year-old Abraham Charles Mellick was named Mulgrave Shire’s Citizen of the Year. The award acknowledged Mellick’s ‘community activity as a businessman in Babinda since 1927’, especially ‘his work with the Babinda Chamber of Commerce since 1929, his foundation membership of the Babinda Bowls Club and his charter membership of the Babinda Rotary Club’. Also noted were his membership of the Babinda Show Committee, his donation of the Mellick Shield for the Babinda Cricket Association and many other sporting and philanthropic involvements. His contribution to his adopted country was further acknowledged when he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1990.

**Living in a white Australia**

Through legislative discrimination that targeted non-Europeans, the White Australia Policy aimed to cement Australia’s character as a white, Christian society: only total assimilation was tolerated. Yet, despite adopting English and assimilating into mainstream Christian churches, Lebanese continued to be identified as foreigners because of their physical appearance. While the first generation enthusiastically embraced life in regional Queensland, their children had no choice but to negotiate life in the new society, and many reported feeling continually challenged throughout their lives by their in-between status. In an interview with Hazel, she recalled: ‘If you weren’t of Anglo-Celtic background you were foreign. I was very fair but I was foreign, and in a cosmopolitan community [Innisfail] they didn’t differentiate; you were all foreign, the Chinese, the Greeks and Italians.’ The daughter of Lebanese immigrants living in Toowoomba remembered trying desperately not to be identified as other than English, and feeling that her background was somehow inferior:

You were kind of looked down on because you weren’t English. Yet you were never game to mention the fact; you kept quiet about the fact of what you were; and I regret now that I never learned to read or write [Arabic] ... And we were terrified ... when any of our school friends came, if mum started to talk in Arabic we nearly used to die ... and now I could kick myself because I’m old enough now to know ... we were just as good as all those other people.
Growing up in Queensland country towns, the children of Lebanese immigrants were keenly aware that it was better to disguise rather than highlight their difference. Two sisters who grew up in Cairns were embarrassed when their father played Arabic music:

We lived in a very high house ... sound would carry ... Dad would play these Arabic records and we would go around closing all the windows. There were millions of windows. We’d be all night long closing windows so no one would hear.\(^{102}\)

However, as Tofe observed, physical appearance could not be hidden:

[T]hey’ve got Lebanese traits but they try to hide them. Their Lebanese traits are there but they won’t accept that they’re there ... I always had a resentment about it [being Lebanese] because it was always a burden to carry when I was a child ... it was a burden. It sort of set you apart before anything else ... you had no one else to associate with.\(^{103}\)

Despite the best efforts of their parents to become part of their local communities, throughout their lives, these Lebanese Queenslanders were reminded they were outsiders. Adele recounted how, during World War II, the words ‘Go back to where you came from. We don’t want you’ were written on the family store in Oakey.\(^{104}\) Ironically, at the time she was operating the drapery store because her brother was serving in the Australian Imperial Forces. Monica talked about her brother’s experiences as a Catholic priest in Queensland. Born in Bundaberg in 1904, he was the first Lebanese Australian priest ordained in Australia.\(^{105}\) His sister recalled that as a curate in his first position:

He came down to hear confessions one Saturday and somebody had written ‘dago priest’ on his confessional. Then he got his first parish and he got an anonymous letter ... to say they didn’t want black priests ... he never told us. I only heard that after he retired. His housekeeper told me.\(^{106}\)

Malcolm’s reflection highlights the pervasiveness of outsider status in Queensland country towns:

We were the only Lebanese family in Clermont and there was one Greek family ... We were the Lebanese, they were the Greek and because of that we ... almost felt as if we were buddies and everyone else was the rest. The rest were Australian and we were a bit different ...\(^{107}\)

Fared articulated a common response by the second generation to their outsider status: ‘we were singled out and the only way you could gain their respect was to prove yourself, and you were on your mettle all the time to be that bit better than the other person’.\(^{108}\)

Despite these experiences, as the following examples show, many of the second generation developed an enduring attachment to the places where their parents had chosen to build new lives. Aged eighty-five, Abraham Selim Mellick’s daughter, Thelma, a lifelong resident of Innisfail, was the 2013 Cassowary Coast Regional Council’s Citizen of the Year.\(^{109}\) Previously, Thelma’s community spirit was recognised when she was awarded a British Empire Medal for services to Music and the Arts in North Queensland in 1984, a Johnstone Shire Council Cultural Award in 2000 and a ‘Paul Harris’ Fellowship from the Innisfail/Fitzgerald Rotary Club.
in 2003. Thelma is a life member of the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce and the Innisfail Choral and Orchestral Society. The three sons of Joseph Bakhash, who opened the Parisian Cafe in Cloncurry in 1914, remained in their birthplace, established businesses, served on organisations such as the Shire Council and the Fire Brigade Board and participated in the town’s sporting activities. In his maiden speech to the House of Representatives in 1993, the Honourable Robert Katter Jnr, MHR, the Member for Kennedy and grandson of Lebanese immigrant Carl Katter, who settled in Cloncurry, said of his father, the Honourable Bob Katter Snr, MHR: ‘You could not take North-West Queensland out of Bob Katter, but you could also not take Bob Katter out of North-West Queensland, which he loved and where he lived and died.’ All six of Russia and Eva Lutvey’s sons spent their lives in Gayndah, where their father had established a general store in 1898. Throughout their lives, the Lutvey brothers were active in many of Gayndah’s business, service, social and sporting organisations. Both Anthony and Michael served as shire chairman and Gayndah’s Tony Lutvey Avenue and Mick Lutvey Street commemorate their contribution. Russia Lutvey chose this Queensland town as his adopted home and, like their father, his sons ‘had no desire to live or die in any place other than Gayndah’.

**Conclusion**

Despite the serious obstacles they faced, the early Lebanese immigrants were determined to stay and to make Queensland their new home. The *Immigration Restriction Act* ensured that their numbers were small, and their common occupational choice of hawking and/or shopkeeping, together with the decentralised character of Queensland’s development, led to the dispersal of Lebanese throughout the state. The implementation of racially discriminatory legislation meant that they understood the key to acceptability was being acknowledged as white, European, Christian and English-speaking. Scattered throughout Queensland, the immigrants and their children faced intense pressure to assimilate. Knowing this, they worked hard, became active participants in their local communities, sought not to draw attention to their Lebanese origins and encouraged their children to become Australian. Despite the discrimination they experienced, these immigrants continued to believe that Australia offered opportunities not available in their homeland. As Eddie Deeb put it: ‘Australia is the best country in the world and no matter how bad it gets, it’s still better than anywhere else.’

**Endnotes**


2 The early immigrants were from the Ottoman region of Greater Syria, so in Australia they were identified as Syrians, and until the Ottoman defeat in World War I were classified as Turkish subjects. Despite the creation of Greater Lebanon under French mandate in 1920, in Australia the replacement of the term ‘Syrian’ by ‘Lebanese’ occurred gradually and was only officially enforced from the 1940s. In this article, ‘Syrian’ refers to these immigrants who, in the main, came from the modern state of Lebanon.

4 National Archives of Australia (NAA): A1, 1904/2368, David Tomi, Naturalisation application.

5 Monsour, *Not quite white*, p. 17.


15 Yarwood, *Asian migration to Australia*, p. 149.


17 Yarwood, *Asian migration to Australia*, p. 78.


19 Yarwood, *Asian migration to Australia*, p. 144; Table from Appendix II, p. 163.

20 Yarwood, *Asian migration to Australia*, p. 144.


22 NAA: A1194, 15.20/5615, Disabilities of aliens and coloured persons within the Commonwealth and its territories, 1920, Prime Minister’s department; Queensland State Archives Item ID 339564, List showing restrictions or disabilities in Queensland applicable to aliens, 1943.


29 Choi, *Chinese migration and settlement*, p. 34.
31 Huck, *The Chinese in Australia*.
37 Queensland State Archives Item ID 5759, Register — licence fees, Maryborough, 16 April 1886–14 February 1910.
38 Queensland State Archives Item ID 6547, Register — licence fees, Townsville, January 1890–July 1895.
40 *QPO Directory*, 1900.
41 *Cairns Post*, 3 September 1982; *QPO Directories*, 1940–49.
42 H. Francis, interview with Anne Monsour, Brisbane, 1995.
43 Queensland State Archives Item ID 6547, Register — licence fees, Townsville, January 1890–July 1895.
44 Queensland State Archives Item ID 6833, Batch file, Michael Malouf, naturalisation application, January 1903; *QPO Directories*, 1905–1935; Queensland State Archives Item ID 4962, Register — licence fees, Georgetown, August 1881–February 1907; Queensland State Archives Item ID4963, Register — licence fees, Georgetown, 3 March 1908–25 November 1911.
45 *QPO Directory*, 1919–20; Queensland State Archives Item ID 841184, Register — naturalisations, register of aliens to whom oaths of allegiance were administered; Queensland State Archives Item ID 882631, Papers — naturalisation, applications for copies of records of naturalisation, and related correspondence.
48 NAA: J25, 1947/1427, Application to bring Stephen Wigan to Australia; NAA: J25, 1949/11695, Application to bring G. Haddad to Australia; *QPO Directories*, 1935–49.
49 *QPO Directories*, 1935–49.
50 NAA: A1, 1927/19373, Helena Mellick, naturalisation application.


64 Queensland State Archives Item ID 4443, Register — licences, Bundaberg, 1904 to 1907; Queensland State Archives Item ID 5642, ‘Register — licence fees, Mackay, 1908 to 1910.


68 Queensland State Archives Item ID 349430, Inquest file.

69 NAA: A1, 1927/19373, Helena Mellick, naturalization application.

70 Queensland State Archives Item ID 6833, Batch file, Assad Aboud, naturalisation application, marriage certificate, 31 January 1901; *QPO Directories*, 1890–1949.


72 NAA: BP 25/1, Alien registrations, Queensland, Lebanese box 261; *QPO Directories*, 1949.

73 Monsour, ‘Negotiating a place in a white Australia’; Monsour, *Not quite white*.

74 Queensland, *Aliens Act of 1867, 31 Vic.*, no. 28, ss. 6–12; Commonwealth of Australia, *Naturalization Act*, no. 11 of 1903, s. 5.


76 Queensland State Archives Item ID 6833, Batch file, Massoud Nowham naturalization application, letter to Home Secretary’s office, Brisbane, 03487, 9 March 1904; NAA: A1, 1921/24130, Massoud Nowham, naturalisation application.


78 Queensland State Archives Item ID 847567, Correspondence—inwards, Richard Arida naturalisation application, Marsland, Jarvis & Co. to G. H. Ryder, Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, 08813, 6 June 1900.
Queensland State Archives Item ID 6833, Batch file, Joseph Abdullah to Home Secretary, 7760, 9 June 1903.

Queensland State Archives Item ID 6833, Batch file, Joseph Abdullah to Home Secretary, 7760, 9 June 1903.


Queensland State Archives Item ID 6832, Batch file, Chaker Abood naturalisation application, Acting Sergeant, A. Benzies to Inspector of Police, Charleville, 2426/1902, 6 February 1902.

Queensland State Archives Item ID 6832, Batch file, Joseph Michael naturalisation application, Acting Sergeant, George Dillon, Warwick to Sub Inspector Dillon, Toowoomba, 7051, 27 November 1902.

Queensland State Archives Item ID 6832, Batch file, Anthony Michael naturalisation application, Senior Sergeant, J. Taylor Warwick to Sub Inspector Dillon, Toowoomba, 18234/1902, 18 November 1902.

Western Star and Roma Advertiser, 22 June 1904, 2; Queensland State Archives Item ID 663469, Register — correspondence, inwards, letters to the Home Secretary, 19233M, 22 November 1902.


Monsour, *Raw kibbeh; Monsour, Here to stay*.


Townsville Daily Bulletin, 8 September 1944, 2.


Monsour, ‘Charles Abraham Mellick’, p. 16.

Monsour, ‘Charles Abraham Mellick’, p. 16.

Monsour, ‘Charles Abraham Mellick’, p. 16.

100 H. Francis, interview with Anne Monsour, Brisbane, 1994.


104 A. Shear and J. Shear, interview with Anne Monsour, Toowoomba, 1993.

105 A. Simpson, ‘A history of migration from Kfars Sghab and Zahle and settlement in Toowoomba, Australia, of four families: their adaptation to Australia’ (unpublished, 1982).


110 Monsour, ‘Thelma Mellick’.


115 King, *A new beginning*, p. 55