

Italian Memorial Walk



1 **Mariano Gargiulo** generously donated these entrance pillars to the Cemetery which were installed in 1917. He came from Massa Lubrense, in Southern Italy and became a naturalised New Zealander in June 1901. He was at the forefront of a chain of migration to Nelson. He became a very successful tomato grower in an area known as The Wood. This memorial **2** is a combined one with his grandson **Joseph Monopoli**. Rosa Gargiulo married Frank Monopoli and Joseph their eldest son was 24 when he died. He became unwell after being hit near his kidney by a cricket ball. The memorial plot was purchased in 1915 after his grandfather Mariano died in March 1914 and Joseph's name was added after his death in 1938.

3 Little **Giacomo Persico**, buried here, was only 15 months old when he died in 1912. His mother was heartbroken and she and her husband left Nelson and returned to live in Italy. Giacomo was named after his paternal grandfather as this is the custom with the first born male child. Giacomo Persico, who came to Nelson from the fishing village of Massa Lubrense in 1904, is regarded as being one of Nelson's first Italian tomato growers.

4 **Father Garin's Crypt** was built with money raised by public subscriptions in 1890 after his death in 1889. In 1850 he became the first Catholic parish priest in Nelson. The Roman Catholic Church was very important to the Italian community and the immigrants' children attended local Catholic schools, like St Mary's and St Joseph's. Their names appear regularly in school prize giving reports.

5 **Antonio Bagnato's** burial site is not marked with a stone. Cemetery records show three adjoining plots were purchased and he, his wife and a child are buried here. He was born in 1837, in Tropea, Southern Italy. He came to Nelson in 1866 from the West Coast possibly via the Australian goldfields. One of the earliest Italian residents, he became a naturalised New Zealander in 1890 and became also known as Antonio Wett (Bagnato in Italian, is wet in English). He worked as a fisherman around the Nelson area. A good swimmer, he would always represent the duck in the "Hunt the Duck" event at the Regatta Day held on Boxing Day. He would stay under water for long periods while other swimmers would try to catch him. He died in 1910.

6 Catholic Church records credit **Pasquale Fiatarone** with being the first Italian to reside in Nelson. Born in Viggiano, Italy in 1867 he arrived in Nelson in 1894. His wife Maria Vincenza and their son Francesco followed Pasquale to New Zealand nine years later in 1903. The family levelled and cleared land and grew tomatoes.

Maria was 67 when she died in 1932, and Pasquale was buried next to her when he died at the ripe old age of 80 in 1947.

7 and **8** **Guiseppe (Joseph) Vitetta** was 14 and his brother **Vincenzo** (Vincent) was seven when they came to New Zealand from Grumento Nova, Southern Italy in 1889. Their widowed mother, **Maria Rosa** and younger brother Giovanni (John), arrived 1903. The brothers worked as professional musicians accompanying silent movies. Guiseppe played the violin, Vincenzo played the flute and Giovanni played the harp or piano. They moved to Nelson in 1915 and continued to earn a living performing. In 1927 the brothers started tomato growing in glasshouses. Joseph was the first grower to use a sterilization plant in his hothouse. He worked with scientists from the Cawthron Institute with this new method of soil disinfection. The brothers employed lots of relatives and extended family members who were new immigrants. John was the first choirmaster at St Mary's Catholic Church, Nelson and Vincent was the first president of the Club Italia which opened in 1931.

9 **Joseph Girardi** died in July 1931 aged 27 years while working in the Rai Valley timber mills and was buried here by friends and workmates. Milling started in this valley from 1898. By the 1920s the timber industry was in decline. Worker safety was not a priority during the 1930s depression but employees were pleased to have a job. Accidents were common on steep inclines where tractors came down a bush tramway.

Frank Monopoli was one of a family of ten children born in Sorrento in the Bay of Naples settling here permanently in 1918 in Grove Street. He is buried here **10** with wife Rosa. Their second son Mariano was the only New Zealand born Italian from Nelson who fought for New Zealand in World War 2 and did not return. He was a prisoner of war who died towards the end of the war.

Antonietta or Netta Dalmonte was born in Faenza, near Bologna, in Italy in 1923. During the fierce bombing in World War 2 of their city, Netta fled the city with her mother, and met Arthur Gladstone in 1944. They fell in love and married in 1945 coming to New Zealand in 1946, and finally Nelson in 1952. They brought up their ten children in their homes in Alton Street and Bronte Street. Arthur was very active in the community with the Nelson Rugby Union and swimming at Riverside Pool, whilst Netta was busy with the children, aided by her mother Lucia who came to NZ in 1949 to live with them. Antonietta died in 2003, buried here **11** near her mother.



Italian Memorial Walk

This memorial walk is set in historic Wakapuaka Cemetery visiting the graves of some early Italian immigrants who made Nelson their home. Nelson has the second largest Italian community in New Zealand after Wellington. Information in this guide comes from stories published on the PROW website and in newspapers, and interviews with members of the Nelson/Italian community. The terrain is hilly providing impressive views of Nelson Haven, and suitable walking shoes are recommended.

For more information on Wakapuaka cemetery go to www.nelsoncitycouncil.co.nz where a cemetery database, maps and more heritage walks can be found.

