

Greek Cypriot community in the Northern Territory

History of the settlement of the Greek Cypriot community in the Northern Territory

Greek Cypriot migration to Australia began in the 1850s during the gold rushes in Victoria. Years later, in 1921, the official census showed that there were seven Cypriots living in Darwin. These migrants were employed by Vestey's Meatworks and the Pine Creek railway. Following this, Darwin was about to experience an influx of Cypriots due to an unusual event.

With the political instability following the end of World War II, coinciding with the Australian Government's call for migrants from Europe, in 1948 sixty Cypriots left the island bound for Melbourne for a better life. Victoria at that time had an increasingly significant Cypriot migrant population and was therefore the popular destination for these migrants. As the plane made a transit stop in Darwin on its way to Melbourne, all the passengers disembarked to rest and refresh themselves after a long journey.

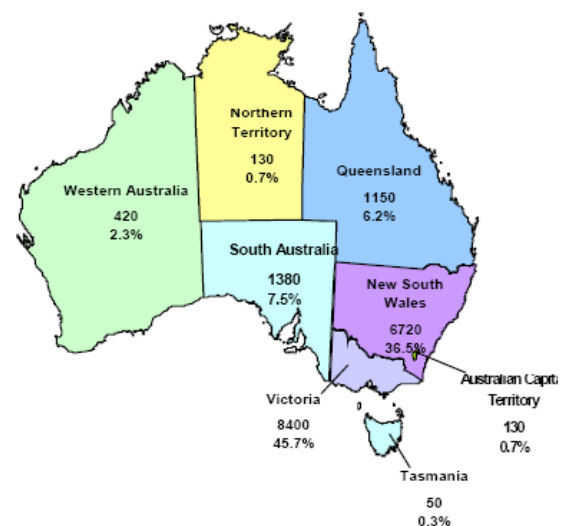
However, due to a misunderstanding, a few of the passengers were not allowed back on the plane, despite strong protests. They were not pleased as Melbourne was to be their final destination. However, as they did not have sufficient money to get back on the plane, their journey ended in Darwin.

After this "accidental" arrival in Darwin, the men found employment and, not long after, they accepted Darwin and arranged for their families to be reunited with them. Thus began the influx of Greek Cypriots to the Northern Territory (NT).

In 1952, Greek Cypriots were the largest group of Greek Australians in Darwin.

Following an informal gathering of Cypriots at a meeting place on the Smith Street Mall, approximately where the Galleria stands today, "Socrates", the first organisation representing the Cypriot Community of the NT was formed. Socrates played an important role in uniting the local Greek Cypriots and preserving their culture by organising events as well as assisting new arrivals to settle into life in the NT.

In 1974 "Socrates" decided to host Darwin's first and only food and wine



Map courtesy of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship

festival which over time has grown to be a popular event, attracting five thousand people last year.

According to the 2006 Census, there were 18 380 Cyprus-born people in Australia, with 130 in the NT. It is estimated that there are about 400 members of the Cypriot community in the NT, predominantly of Greek origin.

Language

The Cypriot language is essentially the Greek language spoken with different pronunciations and the occasional use of Arabic words. The Cypriot community attends the Greek Orthodox Church and Greek language classes are held for the younger members of the community. The majority of Greek Cypriots belong to the Greek Orthodox (also referred to as the Eastern Orthodox) religion.

Religion/Practices/Traditions

Major religious events celebrated by the Cyprus Community of the NT are:

- Christmas and Easter
- Celebration on 25th March, when the archangel delivered the news to the Virgin Mary that she was pregnant
- Celebrations on 15th of August for Virgin Mary's Day and St Andrews Day (patron saint of Cyprus).



Cypriots at the laying of the foundation stone of the Greek Orthodox Church. Courtesy of the Cyprus Community of the NT

These events are celebrated at the Greek Orthodox Church of St Nicholas.

The close religious and language links have enabled strong cooperation with the Greek Orthodox Community of the NT which runs the St Nicholas Church on Cavenagh Street and the Nightcliff Greek School. These facilities are co-shared by the Cypriots for their religious and educational needs.

Main Community events celebrated in the NT

Cultural events and anniversaries celebrated by the Cypriot community in the Northern Territory are:

- The Cyprus Wine Festival (formerly known as the Cypriot *Glenti*) is a major event held in early September, showcasing Cypriot dancing and cultural displays as well as a rich selection of traditional Cypriot food and wine.
- The day a united Greece and Cyprus refused to surrender to the Nazis and Italians during WWII. When a telegram arrived asking for the Greeks to surrender, the reply was "NO". This day is commemorated on the 28th October.
- The day the Greeks and Cypriots rose up against the Ottoman Occupation which had lasted 400 years on 25th of March 1821.
- New Years Eve: The Cyprus Community celebrates New Year's Eve with a party at the Cypriot Community Centre on the 31st of December every year.
- Memorial Day to commemorate the fallen heroes against the war with Turkey, leading to the occupation of the island, is held every year on the Sunday closest to 20 July with a wreath laying ceremony and gathering for refreshments.

All the above events are held at the Cypriot Community Hall at Batten Road, Marrara.

Other community Information

It is important for the Cyprus Community to preserve and promote its culture, music, dance, language and history in the NT. One way in which this is done is through the weekly Cypriot dance classes which are free and open to the general community. The Cyprus Community of the NT is also a member of the Multilingual Broadcasting Council of the NT and maintains a Cypriot program on radio.



Cypriot Dancers at Cyprus Wine Festival
Courtesy of the Cyprus Community of the NT



Opening of the Cyprus Community Hall
Courtesy of the Cyprus Community of the NT



First function at the Cyprus Community Hall in 1984
Courtesy of the Cyprus Community of the NT

In 1984, the Cypriot Community Centre in Marrara was opened and is maintained by the Cyprus Community of the NT with many unique Cypriot facilities, such as:

- A 32-spit roasting facility which can cook up to 100 kg of lamb or chicken cooked in the traditional Cypriot *Souvla* style, the Cypriot national dish.
- Three wood fired ovens for cooking traditional *Kleftiko* lamb, or one of the many traditional Cypriot pastries.
- A collection of photographs and articles tracing back the history of the Cypriot Community in the NT.

The community is currently working on a project to house and create a permanent display of all archival material and a range of Cypriot publications.



Preparation for a function at the Community Hall



Cooking facility at the Cypriot Community Centre

Contacts in the community in the NT

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<http://www.cypruscommunitynt.org.au/>

Sources of information and acknowledgments

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Ms Helen Gordon, Cyprus Community Committee

<http://www.cypruscommunitynt.org.au/>

http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/_pdf/cyprus.pdf