

Information Sheet No. 27



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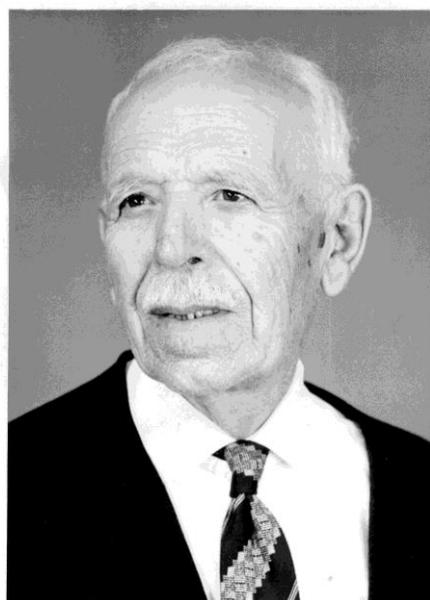
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FRANCESCO (FRANK) MIRAGLIOTTA – Crayfishing

- 1889** - Born in Capo d'Orlando, Sicily, Italy.
- 1902** - Migrated to Western Australia.
- c1907** - Moved to Geraldton.
- 1917** - Married Loretta Johnson.
- 1945** - Retired from fishing.
- 1983, May 22** - Died in Geraldton, WA.

Born in Capo d'Orlando, Sicily, Francesco (Frank) Miragliotta migrated to Western Australia in 1902 at the age of thirteen. At that time many Sicilian fishermen worked along the coast of Western Australia and they often brought sons and nephews with them as soon as the boys were old enough to be useful. Frank arrived in WA with his uncle, Steve Minuta, and they started the Safety Bay Fishing Company in Rockingham. The competition for fishing grounds was fierce and after three years Frank and his uncle decided to try their luck in Geraldton.

They began fishing at the Abrolhos with five other Italian fishermen using one mother boat, the Niobe, and two sixteen-foot sailing dorys. The fishing was done, under sail, from the dinghies and the mother boat was used to transport their catch to Geraldton. Based on Rat Island in a primitive hut constructed of corrugated iron and stone dug up by the guano diggers, Frank actually spent a period of two years out at the Abrolhos without returning to the mainland at all in that time. Crayfish were only a sideline at the time and mostly Frank and his companions line-fished for schnapper, dhufish and cod.



Frank Miragliotta. Photograph courtesy of the Miragliotta family.

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In 1909, aged twenty, Frank bought his first boat, a thirty-foot plank sailing boat called the Swansea. The fish Frank and his crew caught were railed to Perth to market as there was only a small local market, including the Winterbrand and Geraldton Iceworks who often bought a load to freeze in their iceworks. The frozen fish was then transported to Perth and the Goldfields. Once the fish was packed in big boxes full of broken ice it was put onto the train on a Tuesday or Friday evening, arriving in Perth the following morning for sale at the metropolitan fish markets.

In 1917 Frank married Loretta Johnson of Geraldton and they had four children, sons Felice (Phil), Orizia (Rincie) and Joe and a daughter Anita. As his family grew, Frank gave up fishing the Abrolhos, instead working local waters.

About 1935 Frank gave away wet-lining and, in his new boat the Thelma, began catching crayfish which he sold to passing passenger ships of the Blue Funnel Line and the State Ships on their way to Darwin. These boats often bought fifty to sixty dozen crays per boat at three shillings a dozen. This led to an export opportunity when Frank was approached by Singapore Cold Stores, via the Blue Funnel Line, to supply cooked crayfish to Singapore.

The Second World War put an end to this market as Frank's nationality meant he was not permitted to put out to sea. Frank made sails, mended nets, did odd jobs and spent part of the war helping his brother-in-law in his boot making shop.

Plagued by rheumatics for years, back trouble prevented him from returning to fishing after the war. When his wife died in 1945, Frank continued to live in his Holland St home cared for by his widowed sister Maria. When Frank died on 22 May 1983, aged 93, he was grandfather to twelve, and great-grandfather to eighteen. He is buried at Utakarra Cemetery in Geraldton.

References

*Text taken from **Geraldton: 150 Years, 150 Lives**, Local Studies Department, Geraldton Regional Library, 2001, p. 118.*

Copies are available from the Library, 37 Marine Terrace, Geraldton (PO Box 101, Geraldton, WA, 6531) for \$27.50 (plus \$6.50 postage and handling).

