



Miners, Milkers & Merchants: From the Swiss-Italian Alps to the Golden Hills of Australia and California

Marilyn L. Geary

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The family biography Miners, Milkers & Merchants follows three immigrants' tales and is filled with hope, fear, and loneliness.

Marilyn L. Geary's *Miners, Milkers & Merchants* is the biography of a Swiss-Italian family whose lives were changed by immigration.

The Rotanzi family's immigrant story began in the mid-1800s, when their eldest son, Francesco, left Peccia, a tiny mountain village, for Australia in search of gold; his younger brothers, Virgilio and Alessandro, followed suit years later, though they headed for California, having witnessed their brother come up short in Australia's gold rush. None of the brothers ever returned home, despite their father Luigi's constant entreaties for them to do so. Further, none achieved their dreams of wealth. Instead, they experienced vicissitudes of fortune and struggles as immigrants.

The book draws from family letters; each chapter begins with a quote from these exchanges, often addressed to the father from his sons. But only a portion of their correspondence was preserved, and so Geary works to fill in gaps in the record, turning to other, contemporaneous sources, including local newspapers, surveys, and brochures and pamphlets for immigrants. References to other books and case studies bolster this work, while maps and photographs are included as a complement.

With nuanced ideas about what life was like in the three countries where the Rotanzis lived, the book gleans inferences from the bare facts. It also shows how people of other nationalities were treated as they, too, arrived in the United States and in Australia. Indeed, the epilogue is devoted to those mentioned beyond the Rotanzi family, reconciling their stories to its history.

This is often emotionally nuanced work, in which the emotions underlying the sections varies: the brothers' letters show their initial optimism and confidence, imparting joy; but they also show their growing dissatisfaction and hopelessness as their dreams of wealth failed to come to fruition. The sections devoted to Luigi are particularly poignant, conveying his fear for his sons' safety; his grief when, one by one, they all passed away far from home; and his determined faith in the face of this enduring sorrow.

The manuscript does an excellent job at capturing the three Rotanzi brothers as distinct people, despite the relative scarcity of information aside from the letters. Their experiences, although similar in some crucial ways (such as the low-paying jobs they were forced to take as new immigrants who didn't speak their new country's language, or their initial loneliness), are by no means identical. The result is an evocative, striking portrait of migration in the nineteenth century.

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CAROLINA CIUCCI (July 28, 2021)

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