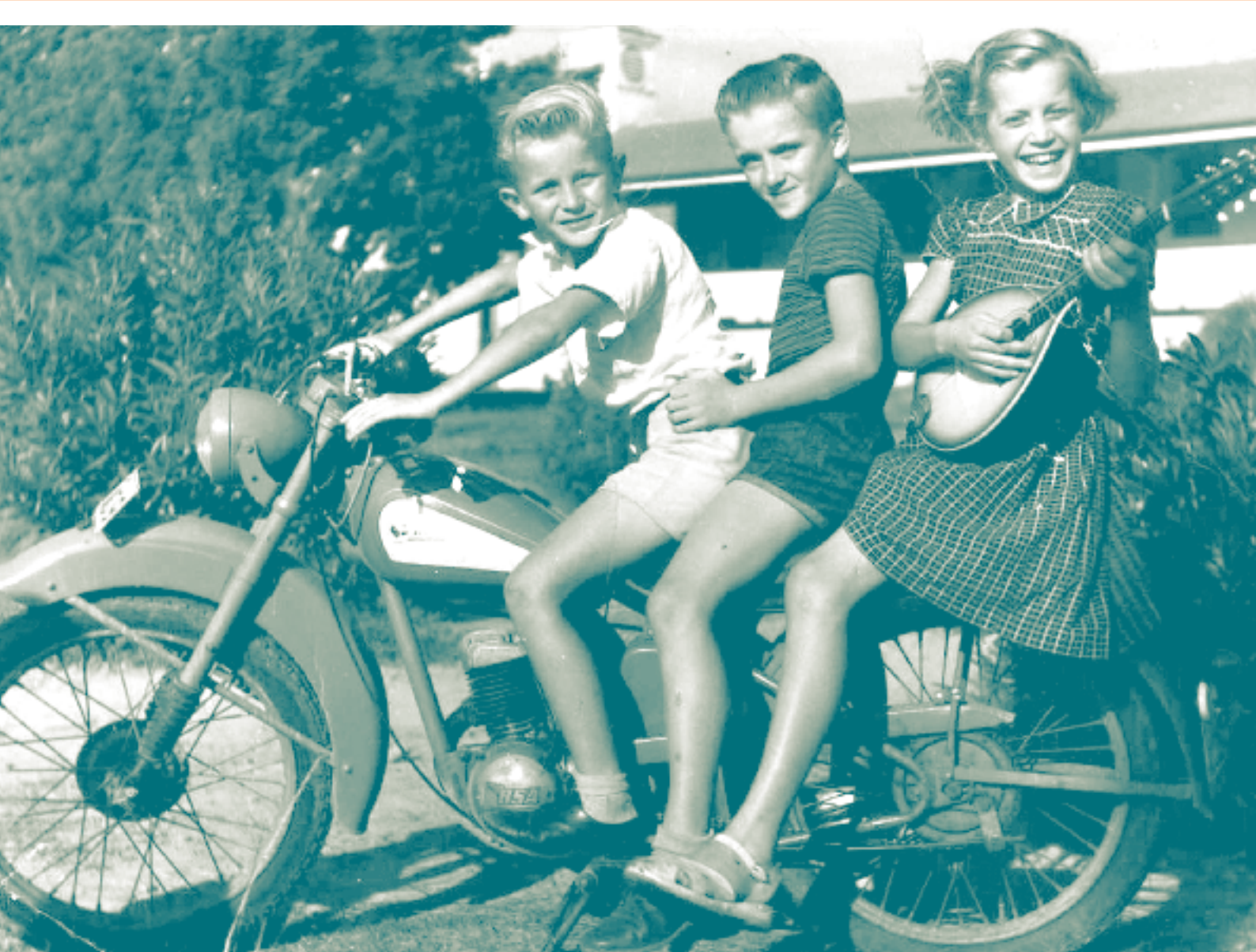


Scheyville Migrant Hostel

A HAWKESBURY REGIONAL MUSEUM FACTSHEET



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as it was the scene of
many adventures*

At the end of World War II, Australia embarked on a greatly expanded immigration program, to alleviate the nation's labour shortages and enable the government to maintain essential services like power, transport, schools and hospitals. This coincided with large numbers of so-called 'displaced persons' fleeing post-war Europe.

Scheyville became the first home in Australia for many of these people. In 1949 it was converted from a farm into a migrant accommodation centre, and by the end of the year there were 600 people in residence. They came from all over Eastern and Western Europe.



The hostel comprised barracks-style accommodation and a small hospital. Two large Nissan huts were built as a kitchen and communal dining room, school and recreation hall. There were also a post office, convent, churches, and a recreation centre.

Cheap materials such as fibro-cement sheeting and sisal were used, particularly in the accommodation buildings, and this contributed to the rapid decay of the buildings.

Initially the men and women were housed separately, but after many complaints they were allowed to live

in family groups. Residents lived in small rooms that have been described as ‘cramped’ and ‘spartan’, but many who were children at Scheyville have fond memories of bushwalking, hiking, learning to swim in the creek, playing music and sport, and having lots of friends from many countries to play with. There were also choral, theatrical, instrumental, social, cultural and religious groups.

The men were helped to find jobs but could be sent almost anywhere in the state, which placed great strain on family life. Many men were qualified

professionals, but were expected to find work as labourers.

Great emphasis was placed on assimilation. The Mayor of Windsor urged new citizens to ‘Speak English at all times – even in your own homes – for you are now British subjects’. He went on to claim that Scheyville showed that ‘our great social experiment, in bringing migrants to our country on a large scale, has a soul’. (Windsor & Richmond Gazette, 19 December 1956).

Generally, the migrant children remember Scheyville fondly as it was the scene of many adventures and new experiences for them. The adult migrants remember the confusion, insecurity and difficulties experienced in adjusting to a new country.

By 1964 European refugees were a minority of new migrants and the Department of Immigration decided to close the Scheyville Centre. In 1965 the site was converted into the Officer Training Unit Scheyville, operating until 1973, which saw the end of conscription and Australian involvement in the Vietnam War.

