

# History of the Druze in South Australia



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# The History of the Druze in South Australia

(a social and cultural perspective)

South Australia was the first state in Australia in which Druze members migrated. South Australia still maintains the highest number of Druze members in Australia.

- Fast Facts on Early Druze Migrants
- Why they migrated to SA
- Settlement and work
- Establishment - Setting up infrastructures (organisation, cemeteries, hall)
- Supporting the community in which they live
- Prominent Druze members in South Australia highlighting a small sample of high achievers – past and present



## Fast Facts

### **First Druze Member to Migrate to Australia**

1892 - Youssef Saif-Eddin Sulman Najjar from Beit Mery arrived at Port Adelaide.

1894 – Brothers Majeed (Mick) & Salim (Sam) Hamden Rasheed arrived, followed by small groups of migrants mainly from Beit Mery in the next few years.

1897 – Druze members began migrating to Tasmania (including Halaby's from Bchamoun & Gharz-Eddin's from Bawirti, followed by the Ayache's and Hassan El Shami from Shweifaf and Najeeb Assaf.

1897 – Rouda's and Slate's migrated to Melbourne.

*(Reference: Rasheed 1993)*



## **Druze migrants that arrived in Australia in the late 1800s**

included members from the following families:

Assaf, Ayache, Basheer, Chreify, El Shami, Gharz-Eddin, Halaby, Hamood, Hamdan, Hilal, Hussan, Maksud, Monsoor, Najjar, Rasheed, Rouda, Salha, Slate, Yackthan

## **First Druze Couple to Migrate to Australia**

1921 – Khalil and Latify Hamdan

## **First Druze Children to be born in Australia**

1920s Lily and William (Dr), children of Khalil and Latify Hamdan

*(Reference: Rasheed, 1993)*



### **First Druze Sheikh to be appointed in Australia**

1929 - Wadie Minther was first Sheikh recognised by the Druze Community

1940s – Tufic Rasheed – first registered Druze Sheikh

1965 – Aref Rasheed & Adnan Basheer appointed Sheikhs

### **Longest serving Sheikh in Australia**

1969 – Shakeeb Rasheed was appointed Sheikh and has performed services in various places around Australia.

### **First Druze funeral in Australia (in Perth)**

1913 – Dr Salim Fahradine Zeitoun who fell from horseback

### **First Druze funeral in South Australia**

1929 – Majeed Hamdan Rasheed, who donated much of the funds for the Syrian Druze Association cemetery at West Terrace

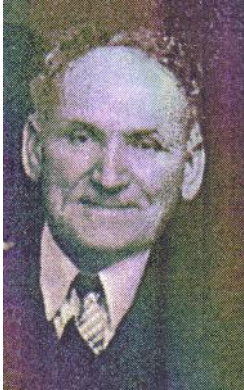
### **First Druze wedding in Australia**

1931 – Abdallah Najjar to Nabiha Hamdan Rasheed (his sister in law) officiated by Sheikh Wadie Minther

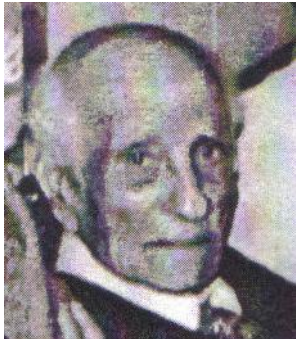
*(Reference: Rasheed, 1993)*



## Oldest Druze members in Australia



Salim Nasereddine Al Najjar died in 1974 at the age of 104.



Khalil Milham Hamden died in 1974 in his 105th year.



## Early Druze migrants

### Why they migrated to SA

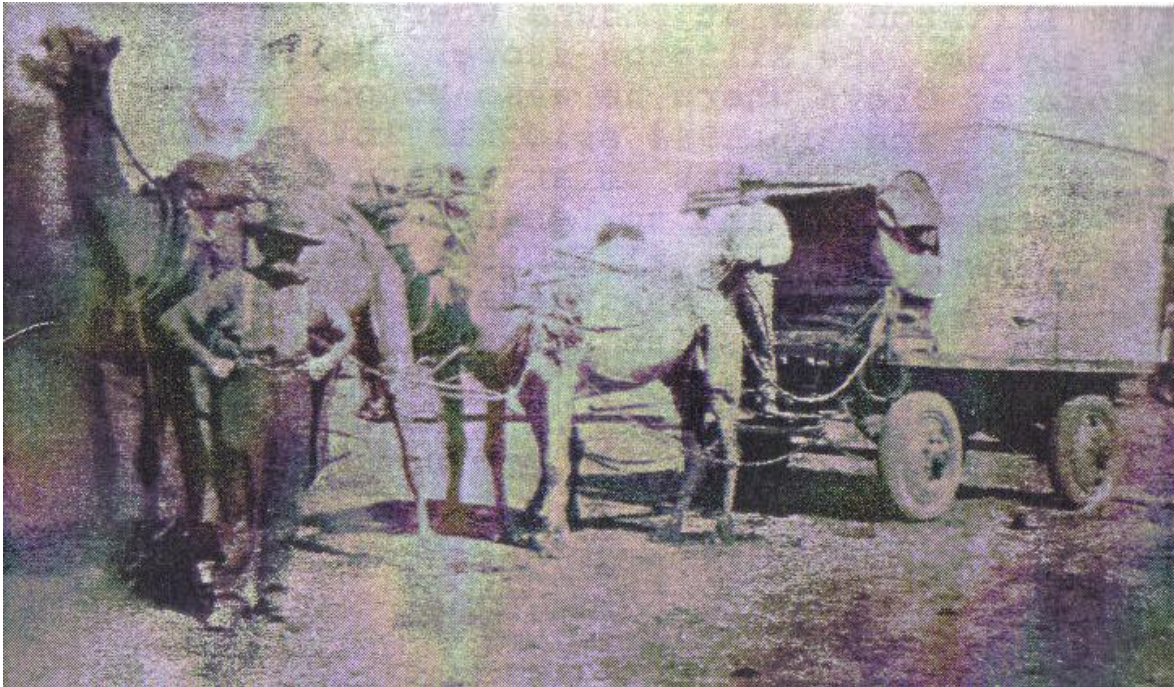
Some of the first Druze settlers left their original homeland to escape the economic and political constraints placed on Lebanon by foreign rulers (Turkey, and then France), whilst others left for adventure and to seek a better life for their future. The first few Druze migrants ventured to Australia alone, without family, friends or government assistance. Druze migration to South Australia, and indeed Australia, commenced in 1892. Arriving by ship in Port Adelaide, they headed to the Port Pirie smelters or to factories to work until they had enough funds to become hawkers or to purchase businesses (*Rasheed, 1993*).





## Hawking

Jim Basheer began hawking with a camel drawn van in the remote areas of northern South Australia.



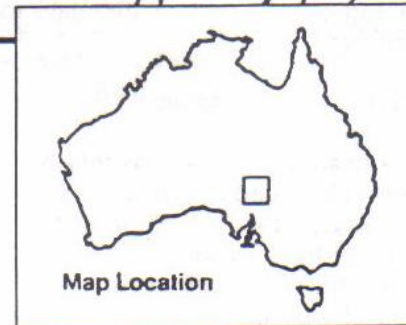
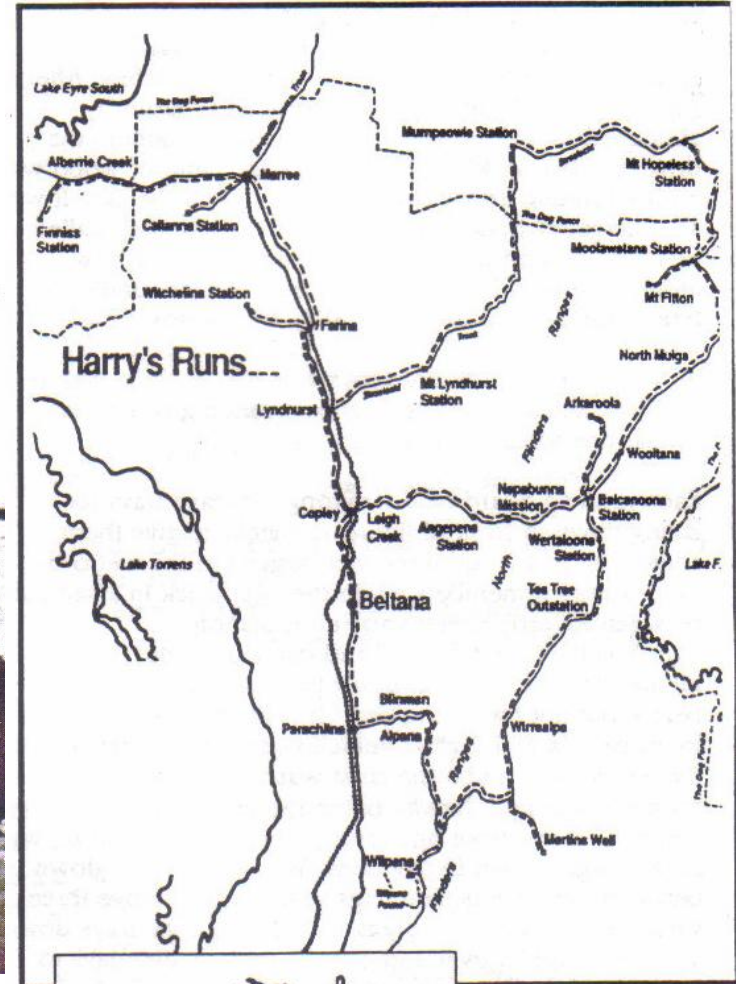
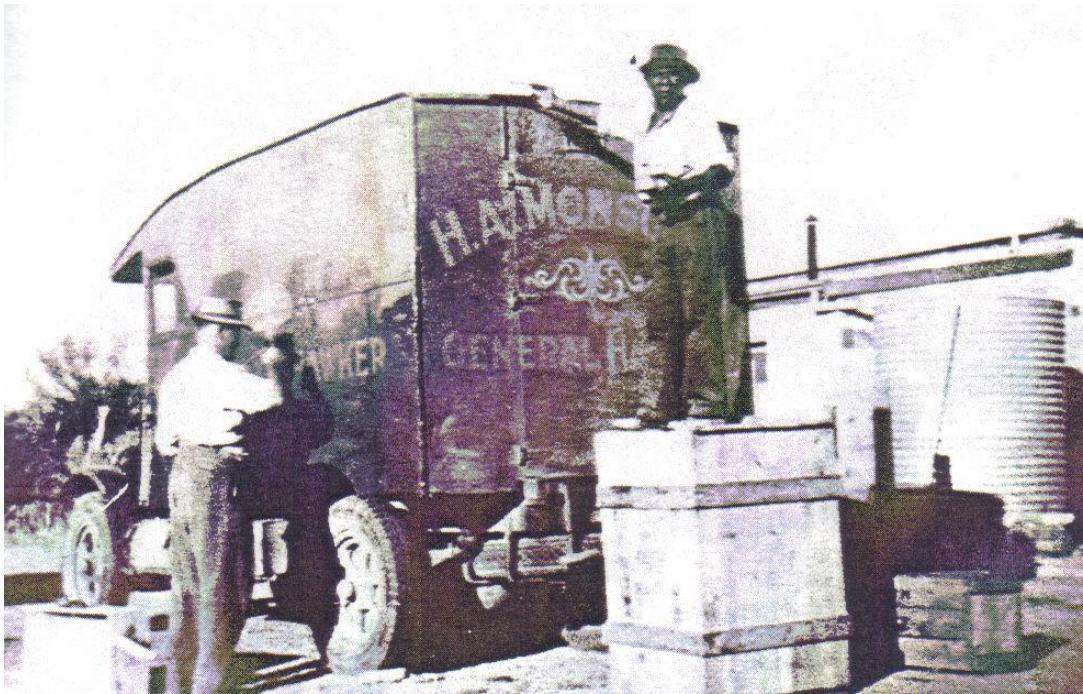


# The History of the Druze in South Australia . . .



## Hussein (Harry) Monsoor

(Reference: *Australian Classic Car Magazine*)





## Harry Monsoor





## **Mrs Yasser Wehbe**

contributed to the revival of traditional Lebanese and Druze culture. In particular, she was one of the first Druze in South Australia to start the Ashur Al-Eid (10 nights of prayer) and in 1949 held her first Eid El Adha celebration in her home at Paradise.

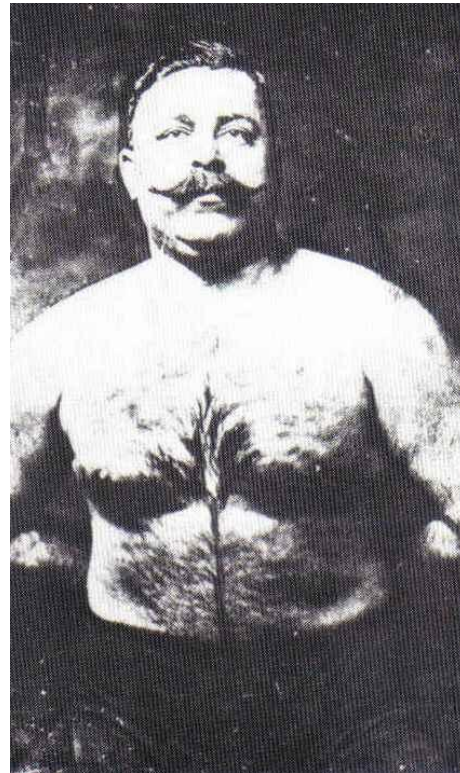


## Prominent Druze Members in South Australia

In addition to those already mentioned, there have been a number of early Druze migrants that have made great achievements in their fields.

### **Nageeb Assef – Wrestler & Actor of the 1920s**

Nageeb Assef from Ras Beirut was a professional wrestler and a champion in his class in Australia and Brazil for approximately 27 years.





## Nageeb Assef

In 1921 he appeared in scores of motion pictures for the Famous Players, Fox and other large movie organisations, appearing with Richard Dix in “Too Many Kisses”, with Harold Lloyd in “Speedy”, and the “Desert Calls”, doing his best work before the camera. He also appeared in the cast of numerous stage productions in New York, including the “Merchant of Venice”.

*Reference: American Druze Society Yearbook 1997*





## Establishment of Druze Society

The Druze in South Australia have undergone name changes in their community which reflected the state of affairs at the time. Although initially some Druze people joined people from other denominations in the Ottoman Association of South Australia founded in the early 1900s, and a subsequent unofficial Lebanese organisation founded in 1903, they eventually formed their own Druze association in 1925.

1903 – a group of Druze members, including Majeed Rasheed, assisted new migrants to Australia. This group grew into the official Druze society.

1925 – The Syrian Lebanese Druze Society was formed (first President was Mohamed Zane-Eddin Rasheed).

1928 – The founding of the Syrian Druses Association Cemetery on West Terrace, Adelaide.

1954 – Australian Lebanese Druze Association (This name was reflected on the Foundation Stone of the Druze Hall at Glynde in 1963).

1964 – Australian Druze Community.



## Establishment of Infrastructure in South Australia

1929 – Druze allotment at West Terrace Cemetery was purchased.

Since this time, Druze cemeteries were also purchased at Centennial Park, Enfield and Berri.

1947 – First piece of land purchased for a Druze establishment

1949 – Druze House in Barton Terrace, North Adelaide, set up

1963 – Druze Hall at Glynde opened



## Supporting the community in which they live



Mohamed & Zane Rasheed

### Zane Rasheed

– a great contributor to the Druze community, hosting many social gatherings at their Gorge Road property, with delicious food and entertainment. Zane was a foundation member of the Druze Ladies Association.



## Supporting the community in which they live Contribution of Druze members to Australian Society

### Australian Armed Services

Druze members that represented the Australian Army and the Australian Air Force during World War I and World War II included members from the following families: El-Warhania (from Alay), Hamoods, Rasheeds, Andarys. Those who weren't in the armed services were in the civil defence services (supporting local internal defence).



#### **Fred Hamood**

Served in the Royal Australian Air Force  
during World War II (1945)



## Supporting Charities

Australian Druze members supported local charities and hospitals. Although they were part of the Australian community they also supported the Druze orphanage in Lebanon (beit el yateem) and families in Lebanon.

**Fundraising** – great importance was placed on fundraising by Druze members for various charities and for the establishment and maintenance of infrastructure for the Druze community in South Australia. Fundraising activities, especially by ladies groups, included cake and produce street stalls, raffles, morning teas, evenings, and parties.

## International

It is interesting to note the great contributions of Druze members all over the world to the communities in which they live. On perusing the International Newsletter it was revealed that in Venezuela 5 out of the 165 deputies in Venezuelan congress (National Assembly) are Druze, and of the 23 governors, one is Druze. This is quite an accomplishment in a country that is dominantly Catholic. *(Reference: Al-Fajer, Druze International Newsletter, Oct 2007)*

This information demonstrates that the Druze adapt to and support the community in which they live.



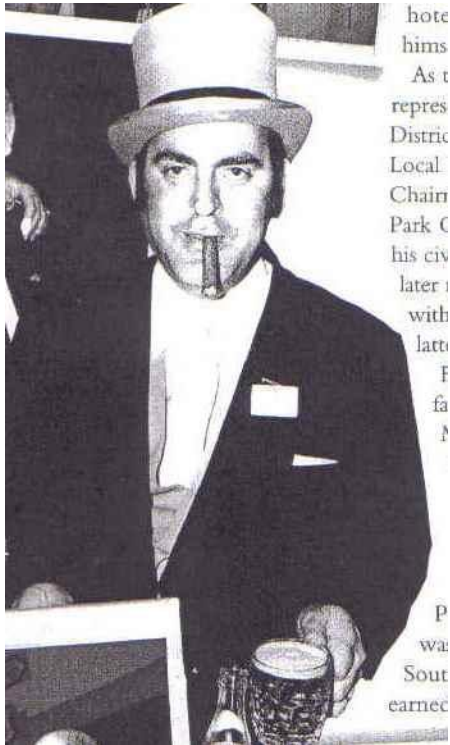
**Majeed Rasheed** – well known business man, pastoralist, and sportsman, worked together with his brother, Saleem. Mick and Sam (as they were known) were said to have had the world's largest horse-trading business at the time, buying remounts for the British Army in India and later for the Australian cavalry during World War 1 (*Robinson, 1971*). They supported local communities by donating large amounts of money to hospitals and various charitable institutions and continued to send money to support family still in Lebanon.



Majeed (Mick) Rasheed



Saleem (Sam) Rasheed



## Fred Basheer OAM (1931-2006)

Fred Basheer was a legend in Australia's hotel industry.

Major achievements:

- Overseeing the establishment of the Australian Hotel Association's National Office in Canberra
- Founded the gaming industry in this state
- SA & National AHA Life Member
- First SA to be appointed to National Tourism Organisation
- Made significant contributions & held pivotal positions in a number of sporting and community organisations
- Awarded an Order of Australia Medal for services to the Tourism & Hospitality Industries

*(Reference: Australian Hotel Association Magazine, 2007)*



## Current Prominent Druze People in South Australia

David Andary OBE



David Andary OBE was appointed an officer in the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Order in 1978 for his outstanding service to the fruit industry.

He held significant positions in a number of fruit, canning, cooperative, packing and marketing societies, a Fellow of the Institute of Management and the Australian Institute of Export.

David is also a past president of the South Australian Druze Community.

*(Reference, Rasheed, 1993)*



## Current Prominent Druze People in South Australia

### Max Basheer AM



Max Basheer AM is a prominent Adelaide lawyer and former president of the South Australian National Football League.

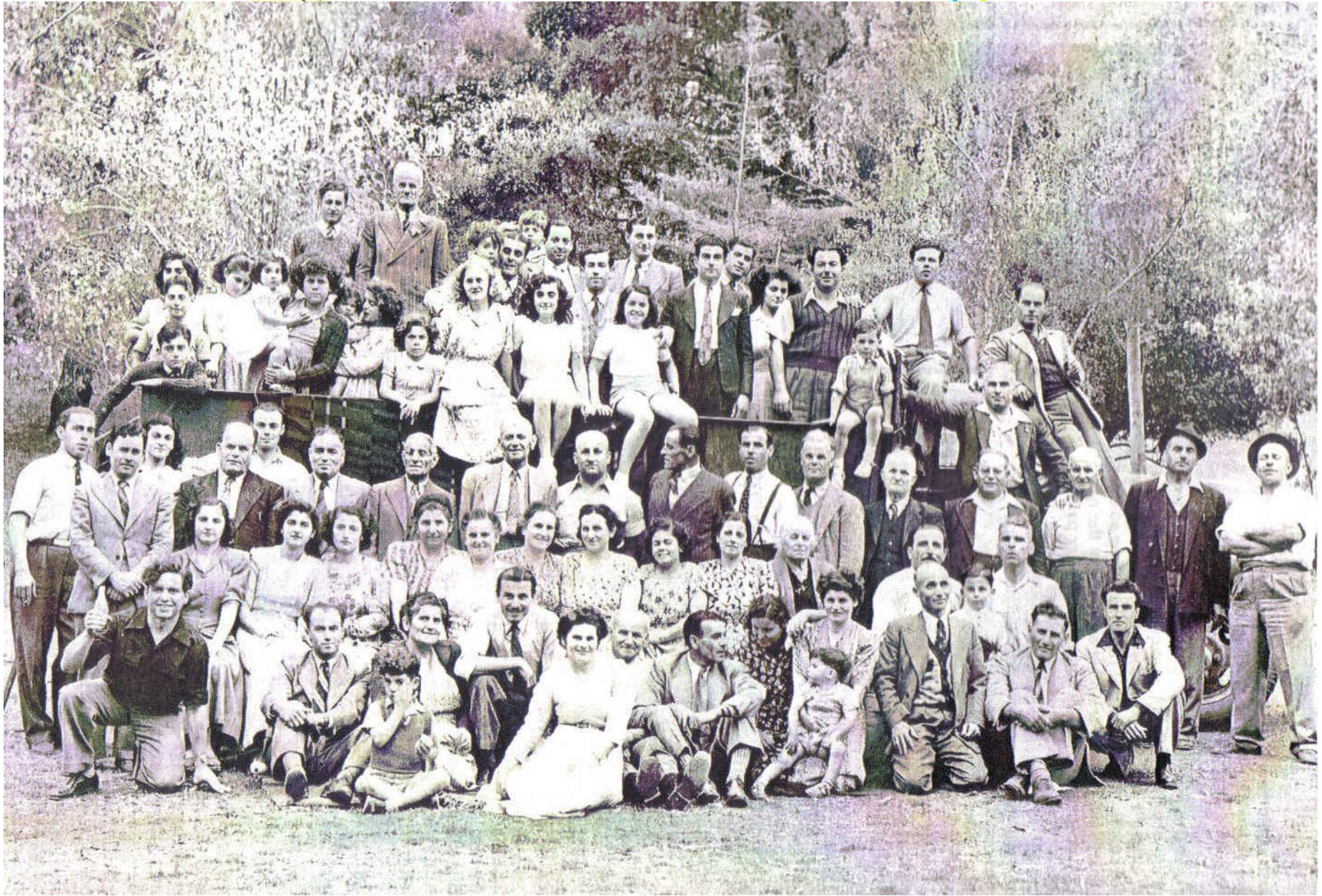
Max was awarded membership to the General Division (AM) in the Australia Day Honours List of 1988 for his services to Australian Football.

*(Reference: Rasheed, 1993)*



## Professional Druze Members

There are currently a number of professional Druze members (both male and female) who successfully practice in professions such as: law, medicine, medical radiation, engineering, architecture, high profile sports coaches, and international sports commentating, just to name a few. Special praise must be given to the many Druze women who undertook studies to enhance their professional career whilst also undertaking marriage and family commitments.



Druze community picnic, 1950s