

# STAMiNA

ASPIRATION & CAPABILITY

Working Life, Migrant Heritage &  
the TCF Industry in Wollongong  
1940s - 1970s





Published by Migration Heritage Project Inc.  
November 2011. Supported by the RAHS Local History  
Research & Publications Grants Program 2010.

Concept, research, development & production by  
Eva Castle and Gregor Cullen.

Additional research by Julia McCammon; assistance from  
Ross Isaacs, Olga Romano and Marjorie Crawford.

This publication is copyright and all rights are reserved.  
Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968,  
no part may be reproduced or communicated to the public  
by any process without prior written permission.  
Enquiries should be directed to the publisher.

Migration Heritage Project Mini-book Series © 2011  
[www.mhpillawarra.com](http://www.mhpillawarra.com)

ISBN: 978-0-646-56688-7

ebook version February 2012



photo: Julia McCammon's children  
wearing clothing made by Cormar  
clothing company at Ross & Janette  
Isaacs' wedding 1980s.

---

#### AUTHORS' STATEMENT

This project profiles the work of the Migration Heritage Project [MHP] - a not-for-profit community organisation formed in Wollongong in 2001. This is the first title in a proposed mini-book & e-book series.

The objective of the series is to present local social history and heritage research to a wide and diverse public audience. The project team is indebted to the research undertaken for "Wollongong's Migration Heritage Places Study 2007", by Louise Thom and Meredith Walker with Glynis Cummins<sup>1</sup>. The research for this publication was started in 2009 by Eva Castle, at the NSW Migration Heritage Centre, Powerhouse Museum Sydney, through the Powerhouse Museum Regional Services Internship Program.

This publication presents a mini snapshot into the local TCF industry. The collections and themes explored in this publication require further study, enquiry and public exhibition.

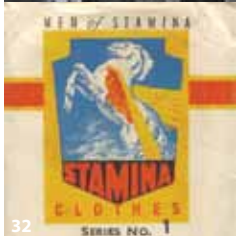
Gregor Cullen was the project team leader. He teaches Graphic Design at the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong. He is also a founding member of the Migration Heritage Project.

Eva Castle is a social history researcher, writer and curator. She is a founding member and inaugural project director of the Migration Heritage Project.

All photographs are by E. Castle except where credited.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication would not have been possible without the contributions of:  
University of Wollongong  
Faculty of Creative Arts.  
Migration Heritage Project  
committee members.  
NSW Migration Heritage  
Centre, Powerhouse Museum,  
Sydney.  
Powerhouse Museum Regional  
Services Internship Program.  
Royal Australian Historical  
Society, Local History Research  
& Publications Grants program.  
Rebecca Pinchin  
John Petersen  
Stephen Thompson  
Andrea Fernandes  
PHM curatorial staff  
Julia McCammon  
Ross Isaacs  
Coral Isaacs  
Olga Romano  
Marjorie Crawford  
June and Peter Raengel  
Larina Hansen  
Special thanks to  
Darinka Radinovic and  
Fidelia Pontarolo for assistance  
with editing and proof reading.



## CONTENTS

- 04** Authors' statement
- 06** Introduction
- 12** People, Family & Working Life:  
Coral, Geoff, Ross & Julia Isaacs
- 24** Olga Romano
- 28** Marjorie Crawford
- 30** Larissa Raengel
- 32** Men of Stamina
- 36** Significance
- 40** Footnotes

---

## INTRODUCTION

This mini-book borrows its title from the Stamina Trousers clothing label made in Wollongong, and it explores the years between the 1940s and 1970s. In this period, work opportunities were created in regional areas and supported by government subsidies. It was also a time when the Federal Government implemented population policies. They created large-scale inbound migration programs to generate and supply Australia's projected economic growth after World War 2.

The role of the female employment sector in the economic life of Wollongong, and its impact on community and families, remains largely unrecorded in the city's historical narrative. Public collections contain only a few examples of what the women produced in the TCF industry<sup>2</sup>.



---

The authors have approached this topic as a social history of some of the living participants – a mini-snapshot into the lives of employers and employees in the local garment industry. What emerges is a complex layer of business connections, family, work culture and migrant experience. The garment industry is seen through the eyes of homegrown entrepreneurs Coral and Geoff Isaacs and their family; and three women who belong to the generation of girls and women connected by friendship and skills, working in factories and at home.

The collections and people identified through the research are significant in their capacity to document women's employment and related themes at a local, regional and national level. At a local level, what emerges is a rich narrative challenging the pervasive mono-cultural industrial city tag, and its hierarchies, language and perceived future of the city. With this publication, we can see the essentially familial nature of running a business and begin to explore women's work practices and workplaces.

left: Silkknit girls, Cnr. Gladstone Avenue and Railway Square, Wollongong 1948  
(photo: Marjorie Crawford Collection)

*'Well you'd go to the factory that wanted someone. It's a shame that it's not like that now. But I don't know if the girls of today would look down on going to a factory. There was nothing when we [were young]. When you left school, you didn't think of going anywhere else... one of my sisters worked at Berlei, I worked at Silkknit, and the other one worked at Crystals and finished up at Friedelle's. We used to leave home of a morning, get on the bus, get off the bus and we'd all go our separate ways.'*

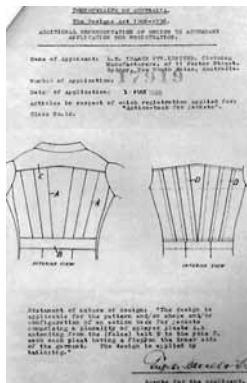
*Marjorie Crawford*

INTRODUCTION  
Cont.

From the turn of the 20th century four generations of the Isaacs family owned, managed and worked in the textile, clothing and footwear industry. Brand names Stamina, Elasta-Strap, Crusader Cloth, and company names such as Silknit and Cormar, Trent Nathan and Australian Woollen Mills are all connected to the Isaacs family commercial enterprise. The heart of the L.E. Isaacs story, are the recollections of Coral Isaacs, her children, Julia, Ross and Dennis and Coral's brother-in-law Barry Isaacs. Their lives were connected to L.E. Isaacs through Geoff Isaacs and his three brothers. They were carrying on from their father and uncle (Lewis Ernest Isaacs and Marcus Manly Isaacs). Lewis and Marcus had worked with their father, also Lewis Ernest Isaacs, in the Surry Hills business he started in 1907 and expanded to Wollongong in 1943 during the war.

Early in their history L.E. Isaacs Pty Ltd were registering their patents for garment construction internationally.

Olga Romano, Marjorie Crawford and Larissa Raengel worked between the 1940s and 1970s in an industry that was one of the region's major employers of women. In the 1940s hundreds of girls and women made daily journeys by bus and train to textile, clothing and footwear factories all over Wollongong. The TCF was dependant on the availability of girls and women to produce the many products made in the sector.



left: Copy of the Commonwealth of Australia Design Patent document 1936 held by L.E. Isaacs Pty Ltd. The document shows pattern, shape and configuration of the action back for men's jacket. (photo: Julia McCammon Collection)





above: Photo of Wollongong CBD Keira St Intersection of Crown and Keira Streets, Wollongong 1940-1950. (Photo Illawarra Images)

Marjorie Crawford started work at Silkknit in 1945 above Waters store on the corner of Atchison and Crown Streets (above double-decker bus in picture).

View of the main street of Wollongong around the time L.E. Isaacs moved a section of its clothing manufacturing enterprise to a factory on the corner of Ellen and Auburn Streets, several streets to the south of Crown Street.

right middle: L.E. Isaacs ball, Sydney late 1940s. (Ross Isaacs Collection)



Eric Hammil Gifford (centre), founder of the Stamina Clothing Company, Lewis Ernest Isaacs (2nd from right) who started in L.E. Isaacs with his father (also Lewis Ernest Isaacs) at the turn of the century, and three of his four sons, Barry and Lewis (left) and Richard (right).

right: L.E. Isaacs Pty Ltd purpose built factory building Gladstone Avenue at the time of its opening in 1946. (photo: Julia McCammon Collection)



---

## INTRODUCTION

### The War Years



above: Coburg, Victoria 1941-08-14  
(Photographer S. Henty)  
Source: Australian War Memorial  
Negative Number 008925  
The Commonwealth  
Government Clothing  
Factory in Coburg Victoria  
produces uniforms for the  
forces on a new system of  
assembly lines. It has greatly  
enlarged premises and  
much additional plant. Staff  
numbers have doubled in  
the eighteen months ending  
1941-06 and already exceeds  
the 724 maximum employed  
in the last war. It is expected  
one thousand workers,  
mostly women, will be  
employed here before the  
end of 1941. Women workers  
on these assembly lines or  
mass production units sew  
the pieces of cloth from the  
cutters into garments. Here  
rows of girls (women) sit at  
sewing machines <sup>4</sup>.

World War 2 was important to the success of L.E. Isaacs. It brought together Lewis Ernest Isaacs and Marcus Manly Isaacs and their father with the owner of the Stamina Company, Eric Hammil Gifford. It provided the much-needed orders. Julia McCammon recalls that L.E. Isaacs made clothing during the war years for the British Army and the Australian Air Force.

L.E. Isaacs was just one company, in addition to government factories in Australia, manufacturing for the services. With men at war, women became part of the production system in support of the war effort. Sadly after the war, many faced discrimination in the industry because men, supported by the unions, were protective of their trade. They also faced retrenchment when returning ex-servicemen, supported by the unions, were retrained and found work in the clothing manufacturing industry. "The South Australian branch secretary [of the union] David Fraser opposed the favouring of ex-servicemen, one of the few speaking on behalf of the women who were a large union constituency: during the war, 'girls' who wanted to be dressmakers had been transferred to military work and 'were now nothing more than process workers'. Should there not be a rehabilitation scheme for them?"<sup>3</sup>

At L.E. Isaacs the creation of, and demand for, different types of clothing, particularly leisure-wear that was comfortable and incorporated the patented designs of Marcus Manly Isaacs, ensured the company survived into the new era of post-war consumerism.

---

right: Melbourne, Victoria. 1941-08.  
Source: Australian War Memorial  
Negative Number 008929  
Female machinists at  
the Commonwealth  
Government Clothing  
Factory sewing uniforms  
for the forces out of Khaki Drill  
material <sup>5</sup>.

Coral Giddy (Geoff Isaacs  
future wife) worked across  
the road from L.E. Isaacs at  
Fredericks. She helped make  
uniforms for the war in the  
1940s for the Australian  
Armed Forces.



left: Berman House, Commonwealth  
Street Surry Hills Sydney  
The location of L.E Isaacs in  
the mid 1940s. During this  
period they expanded their  
operations to Wollongong.  
The buildings facade still  
displays the company  
signage of Imperial Slacks.  
The building is in the heart  
of the Surry Hills garment  
precinct.<sup>6</sup>

---

## People, Family & Working Life

Origins of the L.E Isaacs business and the lives of Coral, Geoff, Ross & Julia Isaacs.

Coral's husband, Geoff was one of four brothers; all involved in the family clothing design and manufacture business, L.E. Isaacs. Their textile story began in Sydney in 1907 with Lewis Ernest Isaacs (Snr.) later joined by his sons (Lewis Ernest Isaacs & Marcus Manly Isaacs). By the 1920s L.E. Isaacs occupied buildings in Surry Hills (Murdoch, Commonwealth, Foster and Reservoir Streets) and in Willoughby. After the 1930s when cloth supply and orders were affected by the Depression, orders to supply the Armed Services helped L.E. Isaacs' business survive.

In the 1940s with Government subsidies the company expanded their manufacturing operation to Wollongong. By the 1950s L.E. Isaacs was manufacturing ladies Chalet brand trousers and still produced 20,000 Defence Force trousers. Under an Army contract 15,000 trousers dress uniforms were made at Wollongong including Stamina school clothes, trousers, sports coats and school tunics.



above: The site of the L.E. Isaacs factory in Unanderra in Third Avenue (1953-1956). The building façade is all that is recognisable of this 'satellite' to the main Gladstone Avenue business.

The Isaacs family textile story began in 1907 in Sydney. The move to Illawarra in September 1943 took advantage of the Federal Government funded decentralisation policy. As in Surry Hills in Sydney, there were several clothing manufacturers close to each other in Wollongong's Central Business District. Coral recalls: "... there was Berlei, Crystal's were on

Ellen Street [where Isaacs first factory was located], and Friedelle was in Auburn Street, across the road from where Coral & Geoff rented a factory space for their small start-up business Cormar.



left: Coral Giddy and Geoff Isaacs leaving the L.E. Isaacs/Stamina New Year's Eve ball in the mid-1940s. Coral wearing fox fur and silver lamé dress.

below: Berman House 1948  
Commonwealth Street, Surry Hills  
Sydney. L.E. Isaacs occupied the fourth  
floor after a fire in their Foster Street  
factory.



left: Silknet (Wollongong) Pty Ltd  
building in Railway Square in 1950-  
1959. Source: Unpublished inventory  
database created by L. Thom in 2007.  
New building erected 1947  
employing approximately  
100 girls making women's  
and children's lingerie, night  
apparel and some men's  
underwear.<sup>7</sup>

Coral did not work in the TCF after she married, for many years, as she took on the role of a mother to their three children. Geoff Isaacs was a Sydney TAFE trained tailor and cutter who worked in the family business. He moved to Unanderra in 1953, where a small building was leased and staff employed to manufacture coats for L.E. Isaacs.

A year after Geoff came to Wollongong to run the factory, Coral and the children came down and moved temporarily into a house next to the factory in Third Avenue.

L.E. Isaacs continued to expand as a clothing manufacturer and employer in Wollongong. In 1956 the Unanderra factory was closed and Geoff went to work in the Wollongong Gladstone Avenue factory. He eventually replaced Lew Isaacs (his brother) as the manager, and supervised the purchase and expansion into the next-door building owned by Silkknit. *Coral: "Geoff could work all the machines and could do anything in the factory. He knew the business backwards."* Beginning in the 1960s L.E. Isaacs was taken over by other companies. Lewis Ernest Isaacs and then his sons, left the board and company employ. By the late 1970s Geoff left what had started as a family company and subsequently owned by Hooper & Harrison (formerly Australian Woollen Mills).



left: Geoff and Coral Isaacs' daughter Julia Isaacs aged 16 (1966). Her debut took place at the Wollongong Masonic Hall (photo: Julia McCammon Collection)



top: Coral Isaacs and son Ross Isaacs,  
Wollongong 2009.

left: The new purpose built L.E. Isaacs  
factory in Gladstone Avenue the day it  
opened. Standing is Lewis Ernest Isaacs  
(Geoff's father). Seated are Geoff's wife  
Coral (centre) and Shirley (Coral's sister-  
in-law, wife of Lewis Isaacs).  
(photo: Julia McCammon Collection)

---

Piecework refers to one of three methods of payment, which existed from 1860 onwards. Piece system described rates of pay for each item and task [in NSW] – not times or whole garments.<sup>8</sup>

With the demise of L.E. Isaacs in the 1970s, and the diminishing stakeholder status of the family, Geoff and Coral started a small manufacturing company. They went into partnership with Fred Munday who was the time and motion engineer from L.E. Isaacs and his wife Mary. Coral supervised, Geoff did the cutting and a forewoman was employed. Coral: *“The first Cormar site was near Coniston School – a leased property in Auburn Street. The second one was on the hill [in] Auburn Street ... an old house and we built the factory onto the back of the house. It operated for 20 years, employing 20-30 mostly Portuguese women. They were new migrants and had large families. They couldn’t speak much English, and could speak broken English. As they went on they could understand more. One lady couldn’t speak any English at all – the other Portuguese lady translated for her. Cormar had a few out workers – young women who had children. Laura Moore was the floor lady – she used to work the machines and gave the jobs out. When Geoff retired she cried and cried.”*

Coral and Geoff’s children have recollections of the family business. Julia: *“Dad came down to run another factory [Unanderra] with a circular roof – the family lived next door for a period of time in a fibro house [no longer standing]. Then the company bought the factory building that Silkknit had been in. It was next door [to Isaacs in Gladstone Avenue]”. Julia and her younger brother Ross, remember going to the factory after school and doing odd jobs in the school holidays. Julia helped calculate the bonuses for the pieceworkers at Gladstone Avenue and Cormar.*



above: This dress was worn by one of Julia’s daughters at her christening. It is known as the “Little Queen Dress” and was made by Cormar for the Queen Company.





above: L.E. Isaacs Gladstone Avenue factory Wollongong circa 1960. Signage on top of the building - 'Ask for Stamina Trousers' (photo: Ross Isaacs Collection).



left: Cormar premises Auburn Street, Coniston. Factory at rear of the house, location of the second Cormar factory. The Cormar business was named after Coral & Mary.

Cormar made children's clothes for Sydney based companies like Friedelle and high-end clothing for Trent Nathan towards the end of the Cormar operations in the 1980s. *Julia: "We were 'maker-uppers' working mainly for Sydney companies...they couldn't get girls to work. Coral was there every day and examined the clothes before they went out. Cormar also made 'French Knit' – the first car seat covers".* Coral says they used to make 'extras' from fabric provided by the Sydney company, and sell them in their own shop. The house at the front of the factory was leased, but a small room at the back of it was turned into a small factory shop.

Julia and Ross are now researching and creating a collection and archive from Cormar and L.E. Isaacs objects and paper records, and Geoff Isaacs photograph collection. Coral and their Uncle Barry who worked in the Sydney factory until the late 1950s is also helping to record the company history. *Julia: "The Isaacs philosophy towards their employees was to have a happy and contented workforce; this was achieved by talking with union representatives once a week and having good work conditions".*

Julia McCammon. Melbourne 2011





above: Geoff Isaacs tailor's scissor's & measuring tape.  
(photo: Ross Isaacs Collection)

right: Cormar haberdashery accessories including Mervex ribbon and nylon lace trim. (photo: Julia Isaacs Collection)

top right: Geoff Isaacs tailor's cutting knife. (photo: Ross Isaacs Collection)

U.S. ADVERT, January 1st, 1955



### *Following in Father's Footsteps*

This is what is happening all over Australia. A lad's first pair of long trousers is important, and, with most boys, they must be like Dad's — Stamina!

The phenomenal demand for Stamina trousers from the youth of Australia underlines the fact that Stamina trousers are what Australians want.

For men and their sons, there is nothing better. Craftsmen-sewn from the finest, pure-wool Crusader Cloth, Stamina trousers retain their neat newness.

Not only do they last longer and look smarter, they cost *less*. And remember... Stamina trousers, by helping you to look your best, help you to *do* your best.

ASK FOR

**Stamina** SELF-SUPPORTING **Trousers**  
**FOR MEN AND YOUTHS**

TAILORED FROM A SPECIAL CRUSADER CLOTH

Wholly set up and printed in Australia by Brown, Prior, Anderson Pty. Ltd., (Printers) Room, 432 Little Bourke Street, Melbourne, C.I.  
for Australian National Travel Association, Echby Building, Flinders Street, Melbourne, C.I.

The advertisement [left] Stamina Trousers “for men and youths”, published in the 1955 January 1st edition of “Walkabout” an Australian travel magazine, illustrates the theme “like father like son” - stylish masculinity for the new modern Australian male. Targeted to capture the boom in the domestic market for men and boys leisure and work clothes. Eric Hammil Gifford's company trademark was the flying horse [Pegasus]. Proud and athletic symbolism ensuring brand loyalty and masculinity went hand in hand. The self-supporting trouser was designed and created by Marcus Manly Isaacs, made with Crusader Cloth produced by Australian Woollen Mills, which also had a factory in Unanderra. The Stamina Trousers label is representative of the nation's aspiring modernity and sophistication.

Stamina Advertising  
(Julia McCammon Collection)

Stamina is best  
 Stamina is best  
 Stamina is best

*"For me and Dad"*

ALL Stamina self-supporting Treasures  
 ALL Stamina Sports Coats  
 ALL Stamina Suits  
 ALL Stamina Youth's Wear  
 ALL Stamina Boys' Wear

are pre-tailored from specially selected  
 Pure Wool Creaser Cloths.  
 They are designed for your comfort and  
 pleasure by experts and fashioned by  
 skilled craftsmen into clothes any man  
 would be proud and happy to wear.  
 There is no better value in men's and  
 boys' wear anywhere.



ASK FOR **Stamina**  
 Clothes

THE CLOTHES THAT ARE IDEAL FOR EVERY WEAR — EVERYWHERE



above: Tony Romeril Sings Jetline.  
 (Julia McCammon Collection)

45 single record for Hooper & Harrison (formerly Australian Woollen Mills). It includes a track, "how to succeed in menswear retailing without really trying" Tony Romeril was the lead band member of the Australian band, Autumn.<sup>9</sup>

ASK FOR **Stamina**  
 Clothes

THE CLOTHES THAT ARE IDEAL FOR EVERY WEAR — EVERYWHERE

---

## People, Family & Working Life

Olga Romano (née Filippi), Marjorie Crawford (née Felgate) & Larissa Raengel (née Kostjurin)  
recollections of their working lives in the Textile Clothing and Footwear Industry.

right: Silkknit girls at tea break 1948.  
(photo: Marjorie Crawford Collection)

The girls would have a tea and lunch break. They had a lunchroom but we liked to be outside. We were happy! Marjorie is second from the left, front row.

She says, "I love the machines. I loved working on the machines, yes; making sure everything was exactly right. I've always been a doer with my hands."  
Marjorie Crawford



Olga, Marjorie and Larissa are representative of the young girls and women who worked in the TCF on leaving school, or after arriving in Australia. Olga was born in Wangaratta to Italian migrant parents and started work soon after she turned 15 at L.E. Isaacs. Marjorie was born in Russell Vale (Wollongong), and left school at 14 to work at Silkknit (above Waters). Larissa (with Russian origins) worked at Silkknit. She was a young mother and wife arriving in Australia from Estonia after a series of transportations. The women and small proportion of men in the TCF worked in factories, small workshops, or at home. They produced goods as varied as Dunlop Volleys, gloves, raincoats, school shirts, men's and boy's shorts and jackets, pyjamas and nighties, surfing board-shorts, high-end children's and babies wear, lingerie, knitted garments, after five wear and work wear.



above: Silkknit workers Wollongong.  
(photo: Peter Raengel Collection)



Larissa Raengel is 5th from  
the left front row. Larissa  
and Marjorie both worked at  
Silkknit at the same time.

left: The Silkknit factory in Railway Square.  
(Photo: Marjorie Crawford Collection)  
'Mr Young (seated) was the  
manager and 'he used to cut  
out all the material...and  
the one (standing) was the  
mechanic.'  
Marjorie Crawford



Olga Romano, Fairy Meadow 2011

**Olga Romano** left school at 14 and worked for a short time as a tea lady for a local priest at St John Vianney in Fairy Meadow. She wasn't successful in getting work at a local pickle factory (Locketts) and although she would have liked to work in a cake shop, she went to work for L.E. Isaacs in Gladstone Avenue. In her early life the family moved between Fairy Meadow and parts of Queensland and northern NSW as they followed her father in his search for work. In Queensland, her mother and other Italian women had farmed the tobacco crops for two years while their husbands were interned during the war. When they settled in Wollongong, Olga went to work, helping to provide income when her father was put into hospital with pneumonia.

Olga worked at L.E. Isaacs from 1951 to 1959 (from 15 until 22 years of age) when she had her first child. She had briefly (4 days) worked at King Gee in Corrimal just before she married Freddie Romano in December 1957, thinking she could make more money. She returned to L.E. Isaacs where she found the workplace much more amenable. For two years she stayed at home, and during this time she took on outwork for a local company. She found it very stressful and her doctor urged her to find other work or to stop working. She returned to L.E. Isaacs in 1962 when she was 25 for two years. She stopped working when her second child was born.

Olga's story, like those of the other women, is interwoven with shared objects, practicalities of family life, earning a living that would support her and her husband as they started life together. She expresses a love for many aspects of her life, despite hardships. She has fond memories of her mother, Arduina, who did not drive and relied on her husband, to bring and deliver her knitting orders and finished items to Sandra's, Waltons or Anthony Horden.





On the day this photo was taken Olga's hair which had been waist length, had been cut by one of the women in the photo. Olga is wearing a dress she modified from one she already had.

The photo was taken when "Lew Isaacs was still managing the factory, before Geoff took over. In the back row, second from the left is Don Shippley. In the back row to the right, are Colin, Dennis and Ron. Betty (somewhere in this photo) later married

*Dennis. Connie, also in this photo married Ron. Ron's dad had a wrought iron place in Fairy Meadow and Connie had a curtain shop in Corrimal over the road from the Police Station." Olga Romano*

above: Olga (far left) aged 17 with some of L.E. Isaacs staff 1955. (Olga Romano Collection)

below: One of several tea cups sets Olga received on her birthday from friends at L.E. Isaacs





above: Arduina Filippi on the deck of the Romolo bound for Australia 1936.  
(photo: Olga Romano Collection)

top: Wooden egg given to Arduina by her mother in Italy for her journey and life in Australia.  
(photo: Olga Romano Collection).

Olga's mother Arduina Filippi was given a wooden egg from her mother in Italy when she left for Australia. *"It's from Italy... 1936. She gave mum that if she needed to sew or mend anything."* Arduina was born in Valli del Pasubio and had worked in a wool factory in Italy. She gave Olga her last knitting machine (she had four in total). *"I made myself a jumper it had a pattern, it was blue, real aqua – my mother was so pleased with me that I had made it."*

She made quite a few garments. The machines Arduina used were bought for her by the manager at Sandra's who took her to Sydney to choose and buy it for her. Olga has the manual, and parts of the machine, wool, order notebooks, and garments made by her mother.

When Olga went to work at L.E. Isaacs, her school uniform was modified to become a skirt and with her white school blouse, she had a new work outfit. Olga caught the bus from Fairy Meadow with the other girls... *...some of them were working at Silkknit, Crystals or [other places]. We'd all catch the bus together. There used to be girls from way up at Coalcliff."* She remembers her first day at Isaacs – 'Bands on'. She worked with women of all different ages and did all the different jobs in the factory, except 'running through'. *"Doesn't matter where they put me, I enjoyed every minute of it. Because I could do it I suppose"*. Olga did many different jobs at Isaacs – bands on, fronts, (fly, buttonholes, fob pocket, pleats, side pockets), and cuffs. She used the ordinary sewing machines, as well as the buttonhole, over locker, and button machine and one for cuffs.

Sometimes she did special orders – for unusual sized garments, or repairs. *"If trousers had been worn and something was wrong – maybe a pocket needed changing, or the zipper used to break, they used to get me to do it"*. There was a flat wage, not a bonus system.

---

*"Every six months they'd raise your pay. And you had to be there three years before you got a full wage". When she left to get married in 1957, Olga was earning 'seven pounds and a few shillings. It was like fourteen dollars.'*

*Recently, Olga says "I found a recipe – the old fashioned recipes – its got the cream roll and everything. Mum used to – especially when we were up in Queensland – she used to cook, because there was nothing. You were 27 miles from any shop...no transport. She learnt how to bake, she had a cookbook – she had an Italian one, and she had an Australian one – she used the Australian one all the time. I've got one here – it cost three shillings and sixpence and I often look at that. She used to make jam roll – there was no cream...".* Necessity and frugality was always present in Arduina's life. Arduina would cost the knitted garments she made for clients depending on the amount of wool she used. Olga said her mother made just enough for herself if she wanted to buy something.



above: Olga standing in front of Windmill Fashions in Fairy Meadow. It was owned by a Dutch lady...  
(photo: Olga Romano Collection)

right: Fob pockets from L.E. Isaacs.  
The only item Olga has of her working life at L.E. Isaacs.

*"...and no one took anything from the factory".*  
Olga Romano





Any girl that started was given a pair of these clippers and you cut cottons off, and nothing left the factory if it had even a little tiny bit of cotton and every young girl that started, that's where they started, on that table ...It's Silknit. That's 59 years ago. We had to buy them. Marjorie.

**Marjorie Crawford** started work at Silknit in mid-1945 after leaving the Domestic Science School on the corner of Smith and Church Streets, at 14 and 8 months. She was one of five girls and two boys who had to supplement the family income and prepare for what was inevitably a married life. She lived with her family in a Water Board house. She would resume working in 1970 at Bonds in a small tin shed in Fourth Avenue in Unanderra, aged 38. She became the family breadwinner, supporting her injured husband and two children to finish high school.

Marjorie has fond memories of her working life at Silknit – the early years were the best. In 2009 when an impromptu gathering of women took place at her home, she said “...it was lovely that day – you know there was one lady who came - I hadn't seen her for fifty years. And there were two others that I hadn't seen for about thirty years...everybody was talking over the top of everybody. It was absolutely beautiful...”

One of Marjorie's sisters worked at Berlei and another sister worked at Berlei and then Friedelle and one of Marjorie's friends worked at Isaacs. Marjorie's friends wrote down the names of factories they remembered and what they made.

opposite: Marjorie and Dorothy [front]. Dorothy is putting the elastic in, because it was all in a big bundle, the elastic machine. She is probably about 20 (in the photograph) and now in her mid 80s (photo: Marjorie Crawford Collection)

---

*"...one girl worked the zig-zag machine putting medallions on the front of the petticoats and straps. There was Friedelle's Children's Wear, Silkknit, Bulli Spinners, Duncans, White Wear, Hardies Rubber, King Gees, Bonds, Berlei's, Isaacs, Midford, Crystals; and this one was interesting – Sports d'Jour in Bulli – a small factory at Bulli made satin elastic bathers and lovely gowns. I didn't know about that one; and Brailey's Baby Wear – only a few [girls and machines] in the back – and Jack and Jill Baby Shop – both of them were about where the Commonwealth Bank is in Crown Street. Jack and Jill had about five or seven girls working. They made clothes to sell in the shop – if you were making your own clothes and wanted any hemstitching done you could take it in and they would do it for you. And there was Marjor Bridal Wear in Crown Street, opposite Globe Lane where the chemist is now; they had girls in the back too, making dresses and after five wear".*

When she started working at Silkknit, they were a small group of 25 or 28 women and girls.

"We were on top of the Waters building on the corner of Atchison and Crown Street...starting 'at seven ...we used to catch the bus from Mount Ousley down to Keira Street and then walk. Bus-loads of us because we were going to Berlei's, Silkknit, Crystals – everybody that left school ...went to the factories ... or you did housework ... about three bus loads of us ... used to get off down where the picture theatre is (Regent Cinema) and walk up and they'd go around to Berlei's; some would go down to Crystals and we'd go to Silkknit. And then Isaacs opened up next to Silkknit".



right: Marjorie & Olive outside the main entrance to Silkknit factory, Gladstone Avenue Wollongong.  
(photo: Marjorie Crawford Collection)





above: Larissa Raengel [right] with Daphne Young, the forewomen at Silkknit 1950-1957.  
(photo: Peter Raengel)

right & below: Larissa at Silkknit factory.  
(photo: Peter Raengel)

Larissa Raengel worked at Silkknit between 1950 and 1957 to support the cost of building a family home. Several photographs remain showing her at work at Silkknit, as a presser and packer. In the photo above Larissa is wearing her trademark traditional Estonian hair style. Accompanied by Daphne Young, who was the forewoman at Silkknit factory. Daphne's husband was Chinese. Their son attended the same the same school as Larissa's son Peter, Wollongong Primary School, in Church Street.

**Larissa Raengel**, whose family included a Russian aristocrat, was born in Porkhov and went to University. She was married and had a son, when world events overtook her. With her husband's parents and her husband and son, she fled the advancing Russian army, to Estonia then Austria, and finally to Australia, arriving in 1949. Larissa worked at Silkknit between 1950 and 1957 to support the cost of building a family home. She and her mother-in-law worked in the kitchen at Breadalbane, the Kembla Street guest house where they lived and at Silkknit she worked as a presser. Her story was recorded by her daughter-in-law June Raengel. Silkknit made women's and children's lingerie, night apparel and some men's underwear.<sup>10</sup>



opposite page: Marjorie Crawford and the "Rounders Team" in front of Silkknit [Wollongong] Pty Ltd.  
(photo: Marjorie Crawford Collection)



---

## Men of Stamina

The Stamina Trousers brand and the enduring relationship between men, national identity and the industry of leisure

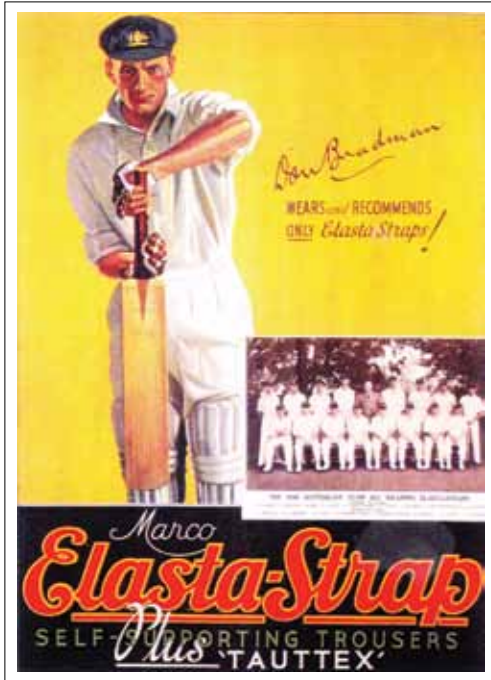


above: Stamina Trousers merchandising.  
(Julia McCammon Collection)

The Stamina merchandise appealed to children as collectibles, pins and card series. The Stamina horse, historical events & heroic figures were common imagery, symbols and subject matter in their marketing and merchandising.

L.E. Isaacs was one of many locally decentralised TCF manufactures providing Australians with outerwear, undergarments and accessories. In this story men and leisure form an enduring marketing relationship. The Stamina brand and advertising designed by the acclaimed Illustrator Walter Jardine permeated popular culture.<sup>11</sup> L. E. Isaacs manufactured Eric Hammil Gifford's Stamina Clothing label, including cricket whites promoted by Donald Bradman and the 1938 Australian Cricket Team. L. E. Isaacs Pty Ltd designed and manufactured their own brand of clothing, including 'Speedway' – white overalls worn on car racetracks. The Speedway trademark appears on a L.E. Isaacs company letterhead dated 1948. The L.E. Isaacs company was instrumental in bringing to life Gifford's dream of creating a company to 'produce high-quality product within the comfortable reach of the average wage earner...embracing the manufacturing principles of Henry Ford'.<sup>12</sup> L.E. Isaacs was a successful family business reaching its peak in the 1960s. From the 1960s onwards the company was gradually taken over by other stakeholders.





above: Poster, Don Bradman and Australian Cricket Team (1938). Designed and illustrated by Walter Jardine, Walter Jardine Advertising Service (later Jardine, Paterson & Co.) (Julia McCammon Collection)



Advertising in the Australian magazine, Practical Motorist and Motorcyclist, January 1958. The text reads "Your appearance is important. These handsome, distinguished looking slacks and smart shorts are masterfully tailored in luxurious pure wool cloth that sheds wrinkles like magic..."

Marcus Manly Isaacs developed and patented many garment designs including "Elastra -Strap" trousers in 1931 for L.E. Isaacs Pty Ltd.



left: Geoff Isaacs late 1930s or early 1940s. Car enthusiast and member of the Chrysler Car Club.  
(photo: Julia McCammon Collection)



---

"Golf teams were from Australian Woollen Mills, L.E. Isaacs Pty Ltd, and Stamina. It was held each year at a country golf club. I do remember as a very little girl going to one day with dad. I have no idea what I did all day while dad played golf!"  
Julia McCammon.

left opposite page: Stamina Cup Day at Kirkham October 1947.  
(photo: Coral Isaacs Collection)  
Kirkham is a golf club near Camden, N.S.W.  
Lewis Ernest Isaacs (centre with cap) holding the trophy, Barry Isaacs kneeling in front of him; next to him is Darryl Stafford an employee. Geoff Isaacs (white shirt) is far right; Lewis Isaacs is on the far left. The man standing between Lewis and his grandfather is unknown.

right: Lewis, Geoff and Richard Isaacs holding trophy and an employee [right] at the Stamina Golf Day.  
(photo: Julia McCammon Collection)

below: The men involved in the making of Stamina trousers and shorts, enjoying a friendly game of golf. Left to right: Warrick Jones (employee), Barry Isaacs with hat in hand, Geoff Isaacs without hat, Lewis Isaacs with hat on.  
(photo: date unknown)



---

## SIGNIFICANCE

Eva Castle & Gregor Cullen

Since the 1980s there has been an emphasis on documenting and collecting contextual information ranging from the ordinary to the extraordinary. This reflects the diversity of individuals and their items, practices, beliefs and ways of life.

The 'collections' associated with this publication are about a subject not identified or documented in Wollongong. The collection and the larger body of research created during this project, are relevant and significant to our understanding of individual histories, culture and the city's heritage. It provides a context for asking questions about topics such as manufacturing, fashion, modernity, design and craft, women's history, health, labour and business history, places of significance, and impact of migration.

The images and content of interviews in this publication are representative of a larger collection, identified during the research internship at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney 2009. New material has been identified during the preparation of this publication and will continue to be sourced by the Isaacs and McCammon families. Some items that have been identified in this study will be lost as there is no plan to house them in public collections.

The buildings associated with the textile industry ranging from sheds, home-based businesses and outworker sites, to purpose-built modern factories form a discrete subject on their own, extending the heritage documentation of principle sites in the MHP publication, Wollongong Migration Heritage Places Study 2007.

The marketing collateral of the clothes manufactured by L.E. Isaacs and then Stamina Clothing Company and Hooper & Harrison, has generated a body of illustrative, textual and audio-visual material that documents the emergence of a middle-class sensibility of men's style and the history of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Australian Graphic Design.

---

A selection of Stamina merchandising and advertising from the Isaacs family collection. Now sought after by collectors.



---

SIGNIFICANCE  
cont.

Olga Romano's mother Arduina, worked at home making knitted basques on a commercial knitting machine, to order for Sandra's, Anthony Horden and Waltons. She also made whole garments for individual clients. Arduina's mother had given her a wooden egg containing sewing needles and thread, when she left Italy for Australia. Olga has kept the egg, and two of her mother's machines – a treadle sewing machine ordered from Brisbane in 1946, and one of her mother's four commercial knitting machines. She also has a collection of knitted garments Arduina made for family, and notebooks recording her orders and patterns she created. Olga has kept two pieces of white fabric – lining of a fob pocket – the only evidence of her working life at Isaacs, apart from a few photographs and the cup and saucer sets she received on her birthdays, from her friends when she worked at Isaacs. She says, they were the best years of her life and she enjoyed every day of it.



---

Marjorie has kept her two clippers – one from her Silkknit days in the 1940s and one from her Bonds days in the 1970s. She keeps the blue one (from Bonds) and uses it because she is still 'crafty and doing things with her hands'. She says, "you put it on in the morning, and you didn't take it off all day". She also has a copy of the South Coast Industrial Progress – describing the new Silkknit factory in Wollongong, and wonderful photographs with girls and some staff she worked with at Silkknit.

June, Larissa's daughter-in-law recounted Larissa's story. Larissa appears only in several photographs and in the memory of her family.

The Isaacs Family Collection comprises photographs and negatives, objects, textiles, haberdashery, merchandise, advertising, patent records and personal objects. The collection is being catalogued and items continue to be identified among the various family collections. Julia McCammon has conducted research at the state and national archives in Australia and the Patent Office in the United States. Her research which includes interviews with family members has substantially increased the significance of the collection.



A selection of knitted garments designed and made by Arduina Filippi for family and private clients. They are representative of Olga Romano's collection of objects and photographs documenting her mother Arduina's commercial home based business. (photo: E.Castle & G.Cullen)

---

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wollongong's Migration Heritage Places Study 2007 was commissioned by the Migration Heritage Project and co-funded by the NSW Department of Planning Heritage Office, the NSW Migration Heritage Centre, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney and the Wollongong City Council.

<sup>2</sup> A search of the The Illawarra Museum collection identified a locally owned Stamina boy's jacket and pair of shorts, a locally owned Crystal nightie and day coat, and collection of Berlei undergarments donated to the museum by the Powerhouse Museum.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to this, women had received different rates of pay to their male counterparts. Ellem, Bradon 1989. In *Women's Hands: A History of the Clothing Trades Unionism in Australia*, NSWUP, p.222

<sup>4-5</sup> See the Australian War Memorial Collection online using term "uniform factories" <http://www.awm.gov.au>

<sup>6</sup> Multi-disciplinary contemporary research into the garment trades in Sydney is being conducted at University of Technology, Sydney. In August 2010 one of the authors attended a one-day invited symposium – *A Tale of Two Cities: Production and Consumption in the Sydney Clothing Trades c1900-1990*. Coming out of the Surry Hills Project, its aim was "to connect the academy, the museum and leading researchers to an emerging field [of Fashion Studies]...to



---

bring together research that is often conducted in isolation from each other." It was convened by Professor Peter McNeill, School of Design, UTS. The author attended at the invitation of Dr Sally Gray, Australian Postdoctoral Fellow UNSW COFA.

<sup>7</sup> See inventory number 5012, in Louise Thom's research on women's work places, 'The Places Migrant Women found Work in Wollongong 1943 – 1990' in, Wollongong's Migration Heritage Places Study 2007. Silkkit was "Established in Wollongong soon after L.E. Isaacs in 1943 [and] moved into Gladstone Ave [Railway Square] into a newly erected building in 1947. The building exists today and has recently been renovated and converted to use by a Christian organisation."

<sup>8</sup> Ellem, Bardon, 1989. In *Women's Hands: A History of Clothing Trades Unionism in Australia*, NSWUP, pp. 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> The Australian band Autumn, produced songs such as *Yellow River*, *Looking Through the Eyes of a Beautiful Girl*, and *She Works in a Woman's Way*. The record was produced by Eric Porter Productions. Eric Porter created Bertie the Aeroplane for the *Aeroplane Jelly Jingle*, producing the animated cinema advertising film in 1942, and another in 1954 (*Bertie the Jet*).

<sup>10</sup> Thom, L. 'The Places Migrant Women found Work in Wollongong 1943 – 1990', in *Wollongong's Migration Heritage Places Study 2007*, p. 20.

---

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>11</sup> Examples of this include: a) the band ACDC wearing L.E. Isaacs prison pyjamas in their performance in the 2001 documentary film, *Long Way to the Top: stories of Australian rock & roll* by James Cockington. (unpublished interview with Ross Isaacs 3 July 2009); b) see also a 2002 poem by Australian Paul Hardacre, writing about Australian culture in 'the shower-curtain you' (self-supporting trousers with Tauttex' like Bradman' Tauttex was an elasticised waistband in men's trousers and c) The 2011 stage show *The Peter Allen Story* includes a line about Stamina trousers, and a boy actor wore a pair of these shorts on stage.

<sup>12</sup> See the National Archives of Australia database, *Mapping our Anzacs* for a picture of Eric Hammil Gifford in 1917, his enlistment papers from 1918 and a more detailed biography. Eric joined the Marrickville office of Australian Woollen Mills in 1930 as an Advertising Manager, after which he founded the Stamina Clothing Company.

opposite page : Knitted cardigan made  
by Arduina Filippi 1966. (Olga Romano  
Collection)  
(photo: G. Cullen)





**Berlei**

Denison Street

Crown Street

Burrelli Street

Gladstone Avenue

Wollongong  
Railway Station

Railway Square

Atchison Street

**Silknit**

**L.E. Isaacs Pty Ltd**

**L.E. Isaacs Pty Ltd**

Auburn Street

Ellen Street

Kenny Street

**Crystals**

Rowland Avenue

Swan Street

**Cormar  
Coniston**

**Friedelle**

Coniston  
Railway Station

Miller Street

Bridge Street

*"a rich local historical narrative  
challenges the pervasive  
mono-cultural industrial city tag ....."*