

From an Alien to a subject: Assyrian naturalisation in Australia

The scanned images listed in this brief article are from the National Archives of Australia, Melbourne office collection. These documents are from the B741/3 series that contain some 11956 items.

This series was under the control of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch (CIB) who investigated matters such as application for naturalisation for resident aliens, tracing the whereabouts of aliens/or foreigners, arrivals and departures of aliens and the registration of alien immigrants.

The focus of this piece will be on two Assyrians – George Saleeba and Rosie Soma – both of whom arrived in Melbourne in the colony of Victoria in 1892 and 1894. Prior to 1901 Australia consisted of 6 self-governing colonies each responsible for their own internal affairs and who ceded some of their powers to the newly established Federal Government. As an “ independent” nation, the Australian Federal Government was responsible for internal affairs covering immigration, defence, and the issuing of currency whereas foreign and strategic policy was the responsibility of Great Britain.

George Saleeba and Rosie Soma applied to become naturalised British subjects and the Investigation Branch was required to conduct background checks on the applicants to ensure their suitability as British subjects. Documents 1 and 5 show Precis of Form 40 (Statutory Declaration) which required the candidates application to be certified by three persons who knew them. This form also listed current and previous addresses in Australia, occupation, date of birth and parent’s nationality and marital status of the applicant.

Once this information was collected from Form40, the Investigation Branch then prepared a “Report on Application for Naturalisation ” which permitted them to complete their background checks on the applicant in question. In the general remarks section of the “Report on Application for Naturalisation ” document, the investigating officer would recommend to the Department of Home and Territories that the applicant was either suitable or unsuitable in becoming a British Subject. (Documents 2 and 6).

In George Saleeba’s “Report on Application for Naturalisation ” form, question 16 states that “ [he] has become almost entirely Australian in outlook and sentiment. He married an Australian lady and his family all born here ” and general remarks section “ This applicant is a business man of long standing in Melbourne and is well known in Flinders Lane (see Document 2)

Rosie Soma’s “Report on Application for Naturalisation ” form indicates that she was “ a very respectable lady.” She wanted to apply “ for an old age pension.” Such positive statements would have greatly enhanced Saleeba’s and Soma’s application for naturalisation. (Document 6).

Both were granted British naturalisation on October 9, 1925 and February 18, 1927 respectively. (Documents 7 and 8)

During the First World War all aliens residing in Australia were required to register under the War Precautions Regulations of 1916. This document was known as “

Form A The War Precautions (Aliens Registration) regulation 1916. Form of Application for Registration” which required aliens to register with Australian authorities. Failure to register was regarded as a breach of the regulations meaning that the alien could be fined and imprisoned. It should be noted that Saleeba’s wife, though English by birth, was required to register under wartime regulations because she was married an alien. (Documents 3 and 4)

In Rosie Soma’s file, Form A was not included but her Report on Application for Naturalisation shows that she registered as an alien possibly in 1916. It is more than likely that her Form A might be located in some other file in the National Archives of Australia. (See Document 6, Question.9)

Another wartime document not included in Saleeba’s and Soma’s file was “ War Precautions (Alien registration) regulation 1916 Form E notice of change of Abode” document. This meant whenever an alien changed their address, they were required to report to the nearest police station by completing a new Form E. Furthermore if an alien wished to visit a friend or relative outside of Melbourne, they required the permission of the local police.

Such measures allowed Australian authorities to keep aliens under close surveillance who were domiciled in Australia during the 1914-1918 war. Again failure to notify the police was regarded as a breach of the wartime regulations meaning that the alien could be fined and imprisoned. The war precaution regulations were discontinued in 1922.

In conclusion, this article has outlined the procedures that Assyrians were required to undertake in order to become naturalised British subjects. The documents also show that the term Syrian and Assyrian are used interchangeably.

(Source National Archives of Australia, Melbourne Office Documents 1-4, B741/3 V/1507; Documents 5-6, B741/3 V/3193)

Stavros T.Stavridis (M.A) History

SALIBA, 59 Harold St., Thornbury, Syrian, Manufacturer, 43,
5/9, dark hair, brown eyes.

- References by 1. E.S. VEITH, 80 Canning St., Carlton, 7 yrs.
2. G.A. JOHNSON, 2 Helen St., Northcote, 2 yrs.
3. G.F. BARSON, J.P., 6 Helen St., do.

Own business at Fitzroy for 4 yrs.

Born 5.5.1883 at Raehia, Syria, father, Essa, and mother Syrian.

Arr. Melbourne 1892 per ---

Res. Melbourne 15 yrs., Cellingwood 8 yrs., W. Fitzroy 4 yrs., Thorn-
bury 6 yrs.

Married - Elsie, born Newport, aged 35, 5 children.

Reg. Melbourne, Cert. ----

Application for Naturalization by **George SALEEBI**

THORNBURY

Address of Applicant

Yes

Yes

- 1. Have you seen the applicant? 1A. Has he a permanent address and occupation?
- 2. Does his description correspond with that given by him; if not, in what respect is it incorrect?

Yes

- 3. Are the particulars stated regarding his wife and children correct?

Yes

- 4. Can the applicant read and write the English language?

Yes

- 5. If not, can he speak it and understand it when spoken?

- 6. What evidence does applicant produce as to his birthplace and nationality? **No documents at all; but satisfied by answers to questions**

- 7. What evidence does applicant adduce as to the period of his residence in Australia or in any other British Dominion? **Satisfied that he has lived in Australia for many years as a boy, but cannot remember the exact years. He came as a member of a family of six persons**

Yes; Syrian;

- 8. Do other persons belonging to the nationality he claims recognize him as a fellow countryman?

Collingwood; 23.10.16/ Cert. 36

- 9. Was he registered as an alien; if so, of what nationality and at what place?

*Inspector
R.S.
17/7/25*

- 10. If not registered, state fully applicant's explanation

Yes

- 11. Is the applicant of good character?

Not seen; they are all employees of applicant and have been connected with him for some yrs. They are regarded as persons of repute and suitable as referees

12. Have you seen the persons who have certified to his character and are they of good repute?

- 13. Is he really well known to them?

Yes

- 14. Have you any record as to his conduct during the war? **He did not come under adverse notice in any way**

- 15. Is there any evidence that the applicant has shown himself by act or speech to be disaffected or disloyal to His Majesty the King? **No**

- 16. What are his reasons for applying for naturalization? **Has become almost entirely Australian in outlook and sentiment. He married an Australian lady and his family all born here; has no business interests outside Aus., and now desires the rights and privileges of a natural born British subject**

- 17. Are you aware of any facts that would make it undesirable that he should be naturalized? **No**

- 17A. Has applicant been naturalized or made application for naturalization in Australia previously? **No**

- 18. Has applicant been convicted of any offence? **Applicant contemplates**

- 19. Has applicant any intention of leaving the Commonwealth in the near future? **a holiday abroad when state of business (now somewhat adverse) enables him to do so. No definite plans have been made.**

GENERAL REMARKS

This applicant is a business man of long standing in Melbourne and is well known in Flinders Lane. He is worth some thousands of pounds and is regarded as a good citizen. The application is one which can be recommended

Signature

R.S.

(Description of Officer making report.)

Date **17.7.25**

THE WAR PRECAUTIONS (ALIENS REGISTRATION) REGULATIONS 1916.

Form of Application for Registration.

This form is to be filled up in duplicate, and the Alien is to attend in person, with the duplicate forms, before the member of the Police Force in charge of the Police Station nearest to his usual place of abode.

Name (in full) Elsie Saleeba
 Nationality English (Assyrian by marriage) Sex Female
 Birthplace Newport Vic Date of birth 1889
 Place of residence* 1324 Smith St C'wood
 Place of business (if any) Home Duties
 Occupation Home Duties
 Date of entry to Commonwealth _____

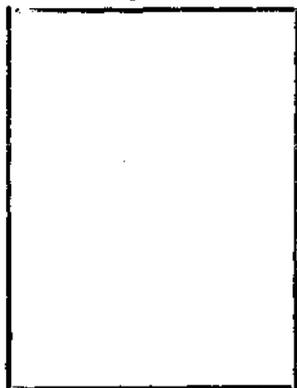
*If a member of a ship's crew, state here name of ship, port at which voyage commenced, and port to which bound.

Personal Description.

Height 5 ft 5 Colour of eyes Blue
 Colour of hair Fair Notable marks _____
 Remarks— My Husband is Syrian

Left thumb print if unable to write (Impression to be made in presence of Aliens Registration Officer).

Date of application 23.10.16



Signature of Alien Elsie Saleeba

(THIS SPACE FOR OFFICE USE ONLY.)

Certificate No. 37 Issued on 23-10-16

Remarks— _____

Signature of Aliens Registration Officer [Signature] No. 32254

V/1507

FORM A.

THE WAR PRECAUTIONS (ALIENS REGISTRATION) REGULATIONS 1916.

Form of Application for Registration.

This form is to be filled up in duplicate, and the Alien is to attend in person, with the duplicate forms, before the member of the Police Force in charge of the Police Station nearest to his usual place of abode.

Name (in full) George Saluba
 Nationality Arab Egyptian Sex Male
 Birthplace Luxor Date of birth 1883
 Place of residence* 324 Smith St Coltingwood
 Place of business (if any) 324 Smith St Coltingwood
 Occupation Drapery
 Date of entry to Commonwealth 1890

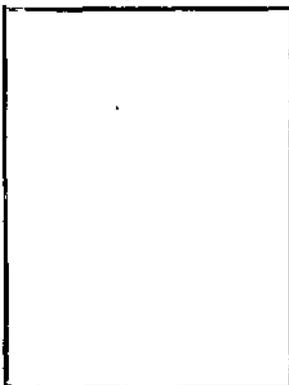
*If a member of a ship's crew, state here name of ship, port at which voyage commenced, and port to which bound.

Personal Description.

Height 5 feet 5 inches Colour of eyes brown
 Colour of hair black Notable marks _____
 Remarks— _____

Left thumb print if unable to write (impression to be made in presence of Aliens Registration Officer).

Date of application 23-10-16



Signature of Alien George Saluba

(THIS SPACE FOR OFFICE USE ONLY.)

Certificate No. 36 Issued on 23-10-16

Remarks— _____

[Handwritten marks]

much work
11/10/1893

W/ 31/3

26/10/1893

Mrs. Rosie SOMA, 15, Fleet St., Fitzroy, Home duties, Syrian, 61, 5/2,
black hair, brown eyes

Cert. to by 1. V.M.ELLIOTT, 18 Fleet St., Fitzroy, 30 yrs.

2. A.WEINBERG, 17 do. do. ----

3. D.WEINBERG, S.S. Teacher, do.

Born 20.1.1865 at Beyrout, parents Assyrian; widow of Richard Joseph,
born Mt. Lebanon 15.6.1850; 4 children

Arr. Melbourne 29.8.1892 per German s.s.

Res. Melbourne except for Launceston 7 yrs.

Reg. Fitzroy, Cert. 157.

Nationality Act 1920-1922.

Report on Application for Naturalization by Rosie SOMA.

Address of Applicant 15 Fleet Street, FITZROY, Victoria.

- 1. Have you seen the applicant? ^{Yes.} ~~her~~ ^{she} 1A. Has ~~he~~ ^{she} a permanent address and occupation? ^{Yes.}
- 2. Does ~~his~~ description correspond with that given by ~~him~~ ^{her}; if not, in what respect is it incorrect?
Yes, generally.
- 3. Are the particulars stated regarding ~~his~~ ^{her} children correct? ^{Yes.}
- 4. Can the applicant read and write the English language? ^{Cannot read or write.}
- 5. If not, can ~~he~~ ^{she} speak it and understand it when spoken? ^{Yes.}
- 6. What evidence does applicant produce as to ~~his~~ ^{her} birthplace and nationality? ^{Passport when she arrived in the State in 1894, issued at Port Said & further satisfies by answers to questions.}
- 7. What evidence does applicant adduce as to the period of ~~his~~ ^{her} residence in Australia or in any other British Dominion? ^{Permit & other documents.}
- 8. Do other persons belonging to the nationality he claims recognize ~~him~~ ^{her} as a fellow country ~~man~~ ^{woman}? ^{Yes.}
- 9. Was ~~he~~ ^{she} registered as an alien; if so, of what nationality and at what place? ^{Yes, Syrian, Fitzroy.}
- 10. If not registered, state fully applicant's explanation
- 11. Is the applicant of good character? ^{Yes, as far as is known.}
- 12. Have you seen the persons who have certified to ~~his~~ ^{her} character, and are they of good repute? ^{"B" seen, and speaks well of applicant.}
- 13. Is ~~he~~ ^{she} really well known to them? ^{Yes.}
- 14. Have you any record as to ~~his~~ ^{her} conduct during the war? ^{Nothing known against.}
- 15. Is there any evidence that the applicant has shown ~~himself~~ ^{herself} by act or speech to be disaffected or disloyal to His Majesty the King? ^{No.}
- 16. What are ~~his~~ ^{her} reasons for applying for naturalization? ^{Desires full rights of citizenship, in order to be eligible to apply for old age pension.}
- 17. Are you aware of any facts that would make it undesirable that ~~he~~ ^{she} should be naturalized? ^{No.}
- 17A. Has applicant been naturalized or made application for naturalization in Australia previously? ^{No.}
- 18. Has applicant been convicted of any offence? ^{No.}
- 19. Has applicant any intention of leaving the Commonwealth in the near future? ^{No.}

GENERAL REMARKS— The applicant appears to be a very respectable lady. At present her health is failing badly & she is desirous of applying for an old age pension.

Handwritten initials 'RR'

Handwritten signature and date

Name *George Salaba* Date *2 July 1925*

Office Record - Nationality *By person.*

I.S.G.S. *See card*
Gender
Passport *George Salaba 1915/3/353*
Registration
Other *nil*

Police Action *Naturalization Granted 9.10.25*
Date to Police..... Police Report recd. on..... *CB*

Office Action -
Written to and asked to call..... *14/7/25*
Interviewed by.....
Report to Director for Signature.....

W7d
2000/10/25
1000/2/25
1-1-25
By add
11/2/25

V/..... 2793

H & T. No. 26/20992

Serial No. 760

VICTORIAN NATURALISATIONS.

26/10/1255.

Name (Mr) Rosie Soma

Date 8 DEC 1924

Office Records.

Nationality Syrian

I. 90038 *all*
Censor.
Passport.
Registration.
Other. *all*

Date to Police.....

Police Report received.....

Written to & asked to call... (by convenient)

Interviewed by.....

Report to Director for signature.....

*b7d
all records re Rosie Soma*

W. Brown

all records re Rosie Soma

Granted 18. 2. 27