

# Stanthorpe's Rich Italian Heritage

Dr. Peter D. Matthews



*Figure 1 - Snow covered landscape, looking towards Stanthorpe from Mount Marlay. 1925.  
© Queensland State Library.*

I was angered to read the Council denigrating the Granite Belt's wonderful rich Italian heritage and culture in their Management Review of the de-amalgamation proposal.<sup>1</sup> It is disgraceful and I condemn it in the strongest language possible. Stanthorpe is unlike any other region, and its culture is one of its finest features dating back to Reverend Father Jerome Davadi and his friend Reverend Father Benedetto Scortechini who both studied theology and botany at the Sapienza Università Di Roma before arriving in Stanthorpe, although Father Davadi appeared in Stanthorpe during the gold and tin rush prior to 1868,<sup>2</sup> long before he was appointed as priest in 1874.<sup>3</sup>

The first plot of land was purchased by Reverend Father Jerome Davadi (c1840-1900) jointly with James Matthews (1837-1893) and William Power on 8 April 1868 and was held in partnership until 31 March 1887.<sup>4</sup> This was the start of the diggers (miners) in Stanthorpe turning towards agriculture, viticulture, and the beginnings of wine tourism. Reverend Father Jerome Davadi became a committee member of the Border Agricultural, Pastoral & Mining Society on 16 Dec 1880, and six years later won second prize for the best fruit in the district for his grapes,

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<sup>1</sup> SDRC (2019), SDRC Management Review of the "A New Granite Belt Council: A proposal to separate from the Southern Downs Regional Council", February 2019.

<https://www.sdrc.qld.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/686/SDRC%20Review%20of%20GBCA%20Deamalgamation%20Report.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>

<sup>2</sup> Queensland State Archives Item ID57882.

<sup>3</sup> Southern Free Times (2014), Fruit industry pioneer a priest. <https://freetimes.com.au/stories/2014-07-31/fruit-industry-pioneer-a-priest/>

<sup>4</sup> Queensland State Archives Item ID57882.

peaches, apples, plums, blackberries, quinces.<sup>5</sup> He served the community far more than just ministry.<sup>6</sup> Despite claims that Reverend Father Jerome Davadi purchased his own home at Funkers Gap Road, Stanthorpe (showgrounds area) much earlier, this did not occur until 9 June 1884, 16 years before he passed away.<sup>7</sup> Why? Because he put the people of Stanthorpe before himself. This was the start of something that David Keenan will probably never understand. What these three men did changed this region forever.

The name Stanthorpe did not come from the Latinised “tin-town” as many suggest. It came from the English county of Nottinghamshire known as “Stanthorpe” that is recognized in numerous English documents of law, wills, and chronicles dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> The proven will dated 4 May 1526 of Robert Porter of Belton, Sutton, and Stanthorpe bequeathed his substantial estate in Stanthorpe to his son George.<sup>9</sup> All that is left in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the street name Sternthorpe Close to remember its distant past as a market-town for fruit and vegetables, weaving, art, craft, and steam inventions, although I note the main street is “High Street”, sitting high above the River Trent, just like Stanthorpe in Queensland. The Tourism industry of Stanthorpe, Queensland began during the mid-Victorian period of Reverend Father Jerome Davadi so that the English would have a cool country region like Stanthorpe in England to get away from the hustle and bustle of Brisbane.

Being the CEO of the region, I would have expected Keenan would have researched Stanthorpe's rich history, but instead he quotes wrong statistics and makes false statements about the region. Keenan says tourism in Stanthorpe “*is not a strong factor that is relevant to the argument for de-amalgamation*”. In my opinion, this exhibits his lack of knowledge of what tourism on the Granite Belt was like pre and post amalgamation. I certainly do, as I owned three tourism properties in the region. He notes the demographic is 4.2% of Italian heritage in 2016, which is entirely false and misleading statistics.<sup>10</sup> The correct figure of ancestry from the Bureau of Statistics is 8.2%,<sup>11</sup> and Warwick is 0%, although the average across all of Queensland is only 2%,<sup>12</sup> therefore Keenan's assertion is based upon flawed evidence, and therefore his argument is rejected. Warwick residents are predominately Australian, English, Irish, and

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<sup>5</sup> The Brisbane Courier (1886), Stanthorpe Shore Saturday 13 February 1886.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4487844?searchTerm=jerome%20davadi%20stanthorpe&searchLimits=>

<sup>6</sup> The Queenslander (1880), Stanthorpe Saturday 18 December 1880, p776.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/20337285?searchTerm=jerome%20davadi%20stanthorpe&searchLimits=>

<sup>7</sup> Queensland State Archives Item ID1448884.

<sup>8</sup> 'Index of counties', in Lincoln Wills: Volume 1, 1271-1526, ed. C W Foster (London, 1914), pp. 233-236. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/lincoln-wills/vol1/pp233-236>.

County of Stanthorpe - 'Index of counties', in Lincoln Wills: Volume 1, 1271-1526, ed. C W Foster (London, 1914), pp. 233-236. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/lincoln-wills/vol1/pp233-236>

<sup>9</sup> 'Lincoln Wills: 1526', in Lincoln Wills: Volume 1, 1271-1526, ed. C W Foster (London, 1914), pp. 163-187. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/lincoln-wills/vol1/pp163-187>.

<sup>10</sup>SDRC (2019), SDRC Management Review of the “A New Granite Belt Council: A proposal to separate from the Southern Downs Regional Council”, February 2019, pp. 16-7.

<sup>11</sup> Ancestry, top responses Stanthorpe 8.2%, Queensland 2%. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), Census QuickStats: Stanthorpe.

[https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC32680](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC32680)

<sup>12</sup> Ancestry, top responses Stanthorpe 8.2%, Queensland 2%. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), Census QuickStats: Stanthorpe.

Scottish, with not a single Italian,<sup>13</sup> therefore we do have an entirely different culture indeed. If the Keenan is that narrow-minded towards the Granite Belt, then in my opinion Keenan is not the CEO we need for the Granite Belt.

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<sup>13</sup> Ancestry Australia 31.6%, English 30.7%, 10.9%, Scottish 8.0%.  
[https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/307031189?opendocument](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/307031189?opendocument)