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Autumn
**PENNSYLVANIA
FOLKLIFE**
1995

ITALIAN AMERICANS

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CONTRIBUTORS

(Inside front cover)

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COVER:

*The Iezzi family was trained in Italy in the craft trade of
plasterwork. Interior of Achille (Ike) and son Joe Iezzi's
plaster studio, 312 Grape Street, Reading, Pa., 1940s.
Notice the samples of plaster plaques, imitation fire-
places, niches, and wall panels. Giuseppe Iezzi, Achille's
father, emigrated with his family from Sanvalentino, near
Chieti, in the Abruzzi, in 1912 and had a studio with a
similar looking interior on the 700 block of Bingaman
Street in Reading in the 1920s. (Courtesy of Joe Iezzi)*

“DOMANI CI ZAPPA”: ITALIAN IMMIGRATION AND ETHNICITY IN PENNSYLVANIA

by Joan Saverino



Contemporary map of Italy with regions and large cities indicated.

Few Italian immigrants survive the last great wave of immigration to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those who do are now in their eighties and nineties. Their memories provide rich detail about daily life in Italy before emigration, the tribulations of the voyage, and arrival and settlement to a vastly different, not always welcoming land. Their legacy is the foundation upon which is built the ethnic identity of Italian Americans in Pennsylvania today.¹

Folklorists who work with immigrants to the United States study the folklore of the immigrant experience and the folklore of ethnicity. The somewhat antiquated idea of studying an ethnic group as a static entity, is replaced by viewing ethnic identity as individually expressive and innovative, emerging when people engage in social interaction. This folkloristic way of looking at ethnicity is particularly useful in the multicultural landscape of contemporary America. Many Italian Americans are third or fourth generation with a complex combination of heritages through intermarriage of previous generations with other ethnic groups. Even for those with a less diverse cultural background, ethnicity becomes an option that can be chosen to be displayed or not in a given situation depending on the individual's needs or desires. An example of this occurs when an Italian American family regularly rotates American style platter meals consisting of meat, starch, and

vegetables and Italian style one-pot pasta dishes with a tomato and meat based sauce.²

Expressions of ethnic identity can be displayed privately in the home with family or peers as described above or in public symbolic representations. When ethnic identity “goes public” it tends to be in the form of events such as festivals, parades, and ceremonies that celebrate or commemorate. These intentionally planned gatherings usually incorporate such expressive forms as music, dance, decorative arts, and cooking.³ Public occasions allow individuals to consolidate as a group, if only for the duration of the event, presenting themselves to each other and presenting key aspects of their culture to the general populace.

Whether it is the private sharing in the home of special regional dishes or such public celebrations as Columbus Day, the Italian American ethnic tradition that has evolved in the last one hundred years grew primarily from southern Italian folklife. From what had been a trickle of skilled northern Italians immigrating to the United States until the 1870s, by the 1880s the overwhelming majority of Italians arriving were from the *Mezzogiorno*, the area south of Rome including Sicily. Furthermore, most were *contadini*, a word variously translated as farmers, farm hands, or peasants. Even an expression used by Italian immigrants to indicate work the next day, “Domani ci zappa” (Tomorrow, it's work”) suggests that these immigrants formerly made a living as farm laborers or lived closely connected to the agricultural cycle. The use of the verb “zappare,” is translated literally “to hoe.”

CONDITIONS IN ITALY

In 1871, nearly 60 percent of the Italian population farmed for a living, attempting to eke out an existence from arid land that often was not their own. Systems of land division, methods of cultivation, and wages varied regionally with the worst situation existing in the South. There, by necessity, most families supplemented their income by working as day laborers (*braccianti*) or emigrated seasonally or permanently.⁴

Migration was a well-known survival strategy used by Italians, especially southerners, during the nineteenth century to cope with poverty, overpopulation, and scarcity of resources. A complex combination of worsening social, political, and economic factors in Italy and in the world at the end of the nineteenth century encouraged Italians to switch from what had been a local and European migration pattern to an international one beginning in the 1870s—first, to South America, then by 1901 to the United States.⁵

Unequivocally, the economic crises of the 1880s and 1890s were major forces in the choice of many Italians to emigrate. The “pull” factors of emigration—the wide-

spread use of the steamship, the stories of returning emigrants, advertising by transatlantic transportation companies in the villages, and the actual economic opportunities offered by the United States— contributed as much to the high rates of emigration as conditions within Italy itself. The specificity of who left, when, and exactly why and where they immigrated depended on many factors, and was regionally and even village specific.⁶

The typical emigrant was a young, unskilled man from a rural area who intended to earn enough money to return to his home village, purchase land, and comfortably live out his days there. Also, those who emigrated were not usually the poorest of the poor, for they could never manage the fare. Many were seasonal migrants (referred to as “birds of passage”) who returned to Italy several months out of the year. Between 1880 and World War I more than four million people, 80 percent of them southerners, immigrated to the United States. During these peak years of emigration, southern Italian towns became inhabited by old men, women, and children. In 1921, the United States Congress passed the first quota bill directed against southern and eastern Europeans, restricting immigration from these regions for the first time.⁷

When the immigrants first set foot in the United States, they thought of themselves as natives of the particular town or village from which they hailed, rather than Italians. Italy itself had been united only since 1861, but more importantly, the government was controlled by northerners, with whom the southerners shared few values or beliefs. Long after unification, Italy remained a country characterized by regional differences. With no sense of an Italian national identity and not yet thinking of themselves as Americans, Italian immigrants to Pennsylvania, coming from diverse regions and backgrounds, had no uniform, shared past. In a sense, they were a people without history, cut off from the villages they had left, speaking dialects so different that a Calabrian could not understand a Sicilian, and living in a new place where they often felt out of place, facing an uncertain future.⁸

ITALIAN SETTLEMENT IN PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania played a key role in the transformation of America from an agricultural to an urban industrial economy in the late nineteenth century. Foreign immigrants followed the same pattern as other Americans, moving to urban areas where most of the new manufacturing jobs existed, so that by 1910, 48 percent of Americans lived in towns and cities. By 1920, almost half of the nation’s urban population was comprised of immigrants and their American offspring.⁹

Pennsylvania industrialized rapidly with the heavy industries - coal, iron and steel, railroads, and cement and glass - leading the way. These industries hired huge numbers of the new immigrants, especially Italians and Poles, who fit the criteria of employment: mostly single men, available in large numbers, and eager to accept

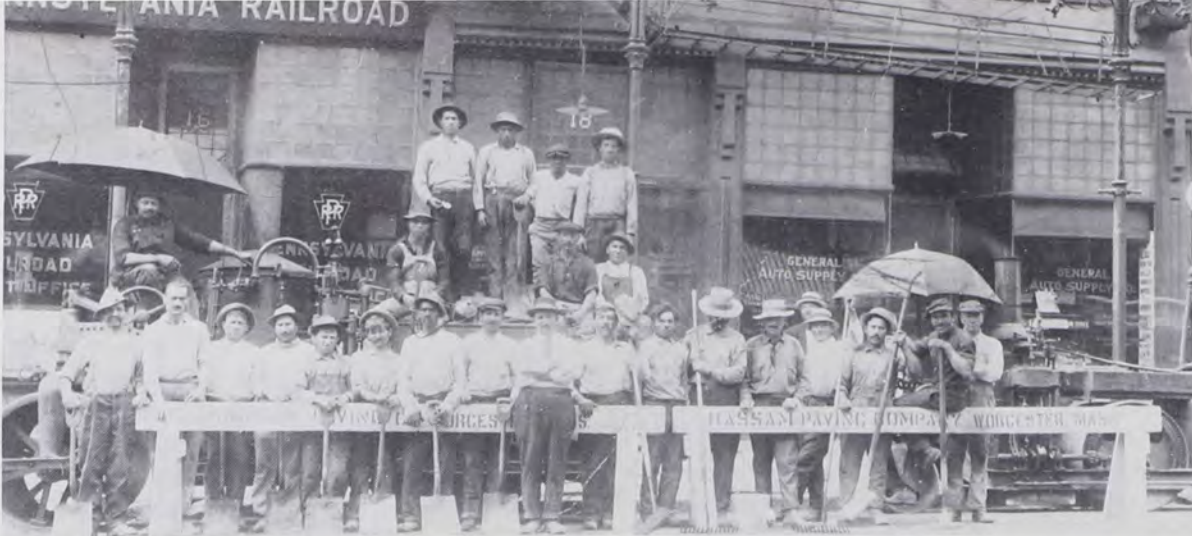
unskilled low paying jobs wherever they existed. So many Italians headed to Pennsylvania that by 1890 their population was the second highest in the United States, only surpassed by New York state. It would remain so until 1960 when the numbers of Italian immigrants in Pennsylvania dropped to third, behind New York and New Jersey.¹⁰

Although work brought Italians to Pennsylvania, which areas they found most attractive and what jobs they filled are answered by a more complicated set of demographic, economic, and cultural factors, including the aspirations and expectations of the workers themselves. Seventy-one percent of the Italians who immigrated to Pennsylvania moved to the mid-size and smaller industrial towns scattered throughout the state, rather than to the two largest cities, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. This figure may seem surprising since 90 percent of Italians settled in American cities. Most Italians entered the United States through New York and traveled to destinations in Pennsylvania by rail.¹¹ Italians settled in the soft coal fields of southwestern Pennsylvania, in towns with names like Cokeburg, as well as in the southeastern anthracite towns. They put down roots in Erie, in Allentown, in Scranton, in the mill towns near Pittsburgh, and in other industrial towns throughout the state.

Because of their size and employment needs, the coal and steel industries hired their own recruiters. These labor agents or *padroni* were a significant factor in channeling Italians to these industries. *Padroni* were important and powerful figures especially during the early years of Italian immigration before family networks took over their functions. They secured the most crucial commodity for the immigrants - a job. They sometimes also paid the fare for passage, and located suitable food or housing. Because *padroni* often extracted a fee from wages, it was difficult for the worker to save money.¹²

Padroni were active among construction and railroad workers. In the 1890s, Italians replaced the Irish as the primary railroad gang, laying and maintaining track. Railroad employment was responsible for the largest influx of Italians to Philadelphia. Italians viewed these manual labor positions as temporary until they could find something better. About 300 of the first Italians who came to Reading, Pennsylvania, during the 1890s were railroad and construction workers recruited by *padroni*.¹³ Maria Prioriello Battisti related the stories that her sister, Teresa Granieri, who immigrated to Reading around the turn of the century, told about the living conditions of these groups of single men who were moved by the railroad from place to place to work: “My sister used to say to me, the people, Italian people, Polish people, they work for the railroad, they sleep in a box car in the railroad. With little stove outside, with little pot there, they cook some beans. [Their life] was hard.”

Immigrants composed a large percentage of the work force of other smaller industries in Pennsylvania. Italians dominated the road, public works, railroad construction,



Cologero Chiarelli (front, center) with his crew from the Hassam Paving company of Worcester, Mass., on west side of North Fifth Street, Reading, Pa., c. 1914-1916. Workers are unidentified except for Peter Caramano (front, fourth from r.). Cologero permanently relocated with his family to Reading when the city asked him to

supervise the newly instituted streets department. Notice that Cologero wears middle class apparel -- a white shirt, tie, and hat. Immigrants who had achieved middle class status wore such garb daily in order to distinguish themselves from the working class. (Courtesy of Jack Chiarelli)

and certain food processing industries (canning fruits, truck farm vegetables and fish, and migrant fruit and vegetable harvesters).¹⁴

The situation differed somewhat from city to city, but in general, the *padrone* system, local political bosses, chain migration and kin systems, pre-migration skills, and personal preferences, influenced where Italians moved and worked. While new immigrants were forced to work in what they considered undesirable paid labor jobs (e.g., on the railroad, in construction, in the iron foundries), most hoped to move to more prestigious occupations in their eyes—artisan (e.g. baker, plasterer, barber, tailor) or merchant/businessman—as soon as they could.¹⁵

Not all those who became small businessmen or skilled workers had been trained in Italy, and not every Italian immigrant artisan succeeded in practicing his trade in the United States.¹⁶ Even for those who eventually did have their own business, the road to achieving it was long and success depended on the economic climate. Italians sometimes moved to several different locations and back again in search of work. One immigrant's situation illustrates several of these points.

From the age of eight, Cologero Giarrtano, worked in the sulphur mines in his home village of Serradifalco, province of Agrigento, in Sicily. Born in 1876, the eldest son of six children, Cologero's salary supported the family after his father died unexpectedly. Many people from Serradifalco were emigrating to the United States, and Cologero expressed a desire to follow them. His mother set aside money from his paychecks until she had the equivalent of fifty dollars, enough for the ship's fare. When Cologero arrived at Ellis Island, he was approached by a Bethlehem Steel agent who was recruiting men to work in the Dubois plant. Cologero accepted a job cleaning rails, but was unhappy because there were so few Italians there. Seeking more Italians, he was directed to board a



Wedding portrait of Cologero Giarrtano and Carmella Micciche who were married on April 19, 1908, in Pittston, Pa., three months after she arrived from Serradifalco, Sicily. (Courtesy of Mary Giarrtano Mistretta)



Wooden duplexes in canal area, one of two Italian neighborhoods in Birdsboro, Pa., 1920s or possibly earlier. These were "company houses" built by Birdsboro Steel Corporation where most Italians worked. (Courtesy of Bruce Hoffman)

Cologero died in 1963 from black lung he contracted as a miner.¹⁷

train for West Virginia. Cologero, however, mistakenly took one going east. He asked a passenger where he could find Italians and was told to get off at the next stop, Pittston township. As he walked the road into town from the train, a farmer offered him a job. After working on the farm for several months, he took a job in the coal mines in Pittston because he said that is the work he knew. Cologero was happy to discover that ten other families from Serradifalco had emigrated to Pittston. Along with others, he founded the Serradifalco mutual aid society. Cologero sent money back to his family every month and made three return trips to Italy, on the last of which he met his future wife, Carmella Micciche'. Carmella, accompanied by her father and a brother, arrived in January "on the bitterest winter day" in Pittston in 1908. Carmella and Cologero were married in April of that same year. By the 1920s, Cologero had improved the family situation considerably. He had purchased a house and about three acres in town on which he maintained a farm with animals, a small orchard, and grape arbors. He opened two grocery stores, managed by his wife and seven daughters (the couple also had three sons), while he continued working in the mines.

Life for immigrants in the small towns and rural areas of Pennsylvania was often significantly different from the "little Italies" in large cities. In the crowded tenements of the cities, Italian communities could exist more insularly, easily self-sufficient with their own family-owned businesses, fraternal organizations, and ethnic parishes, each with its annual religious festival. Many immigrants lived their entire lives in their immediate neighborhoods surrounded by native villagers. They were drawn together through chain migration, a system in which new immigrants depended on previously settled kin and *paesani* (fellow townspeople) to help them find jobs and housing, and to provide an instantaneous social network. Because they were less likely to have contact with the outside world, women seldom learned even rudimentary English because it was unnecessary for day-to-day existence. With few exceptions, Italians who moved to rural areas were not choosing between city life and an agricultural existence, but were moving to what were essentially "company towns," by virtue of the industries that dominated them. Italians in these places lived in the "company houses" alongside other new immigrant groups as well as Italians from other regions who were employed in the same industries. These smaller communities, perhaps consisting of only one or two streets, were scattered over the landscape in isolated areas distant from larger Italian settlements. Here Italians were even more visibly different, an awareness acutely felt by both the Italians and the dominant American population. Depending on the size and density of the Italian population in non-urban areas, it was difficult to establish fraternal associations or Italian Catholic parishes, organizations to which new immigrants could look for help. Wherever Italians settled, it was the complex interplay of traditional culture and the structural realities of the places themselves



Bolognese family portrait, c. 1918. Composite photographs such as this one were frequently made during the immigration period when families were separated. Teresa D'Alessandro Bolognese had this portrait of her with her children taken in Palmoli, Abruzzi, and sent it to her husband who was working in Reading, Pa. He took the photograph to Strunk Studios, had the picture of himself made and inserted into the original, and sent this composite back to Italy. From left: Nicolino, Teresa (mother), Regina, Rosa. The bow in Rosa's hair was a prop provided by the photographer. Giuseppe Bolognese (father) stands at right. (Courtesy of Rosa Bolognese DaDamio)



Italians originally moved to Temple, Pa., to work in the iron foundry. When the foundry closed in 1929, many turned to mushroom farming as a livelihood. Family members of Penn Mushroom Company shown with mushroom crop in harvesting baskets, in front of mushroom house, Commerce Street, c. 1937-38. From left: James Penturelli, Agnes Penturelli Amadio, Henrietta Penturelli Tranquillo, Mary Biscanti Penturelli, Alfred Tranquillo, Anthony Penturelli, Germano Amadio. (Courtesy of Bernard Penturelli)

that produced distinct immigrant communities in the United States.¹⁸

ITALIAN IMMIGRATION TO A MID-SIZE INDUSTRIAL TOWN

Maria Prioriello Battisti and Rosa Bolognese DaDamio emigrated from villages in Abruzzi-Molise to Reading, Pennsylvania, within a few years of one another - Maria in 1921 at age twenty-two and Rosa in 1920 at age ten.¹⁹

Rosa's earliest memories in the village of Palmoli are of life without her father, Giuseppe Bolognese. Her family situation was characteristic for the period. Her father had emigrated to join his brothers in Reading, Pennsylvania, as a laborer on the railroad before Rosa was old enough to remember him. "Well, I'll tell you, he left me when I was nine months old and when he came back I was nine years old. When my father came home I didn't want to have anything to do with him. Then I used to say to my mother, 'Why don't we have a father like the rest of the people?' And my mother, God bless her, she used to try to explain to me that my father was in America making money for us. That's why we had more than other people. But I couldn't understand why I didn't have a father."

Giuseppe returned to Italy in 1919 with the intention of staying. Conditions in Italy as well as the fact that his son was almost draft age prompted his decision to bring the family to Reading.

Maria Prioriello left her home town of Boiano near Campobasso, intending merely to visit two older sisters who had settled in Reading much earlier. She never returned to Italy to live, joining the minority of Italian women who emigrated without spouses or parents. Unlike the economic status of the Bolognese family which depended on monetary support sent from the United States, Maria left a solid middle-class background. Maria's father



Prioriello family portrait, rear of home, Boiano, Abruzzi-Molise, c. 1912. The clothing points to the transitions occurring in rural Italy during the early twentieth century. The maternal grandmother is dressed in traditional Boianese costume, the mother's outfit incorporates elements of both folk costume and fashionable dress, while the father and daughters wear fashionable clothing of the period. Emigration affected middle class land-owning families such as this one, too. Two children, Teresa and Cosimo, had immigrated to the United States before this photograph was taken. Two more would soon immigrate to Reading: first, Giuseppina (front, far right) and then Maria (front, far left) in 1921. (Courtesy of Lisa Staron Adams)

was a well-respected peasant landowner which enabled him to provide education and amenities for his seven children that were unattainable for most southern Italians. Maria traveled with a sister and her brother-in-law by train to Naples, where they boarded a German merchant ship, the Canopik, which landed in the port of Boston. According to Maria, the Canopik was a freighter, not really a passenger ship, a common situation that people were unaware of beforehand.

When Maria Prioriello and the Bolognese family arrived in Reading, the Italian population was already sizable with a well-established social infrastructure. Reading provides one example of the complex process of Italian American community building.

In the nineteenth century Reading, located fifty-four miles northwest of Philadelphia in Berks County, was the most Germanic of the large towns in the Pennsylvania German heartland. Attracted by the growth of the iron, steel, and railroad industries, new immigrants, primarily Italians and Poles, began to transform this least ethnically diverse city in the region around 1890.²⁰ By the turn of the century, Italians had also settled in the villages of Birdsboro, Robesonia, and Temple to work in the iron foundries. While the city of Reading was industrializing and factories were sprouting in some of the boroughs as well, the majority of the county remained agricultural.

Between 1900 and 1930 a shift occurred from a predominance of heavy to light industry, primarily garment and textile manufacturers. This is the principal reason that fewer Italians immigrated to Reading compared to the rest of the state. Unlike the heavy industries, the garment and textile companies depended more on semi-skilled or skilled

Delivery trucks in front of ATV Bakery, 36 S. Third Street, Reading, Pa., 1940s. Three bakers, Paul Albert (formerly Alberti), George Tomasi, and Leonard Vecchio joined interests in 1941 to form this successful and still functioning Italian bakery. Left, Joseph Albert; right, George Tomasi. (Courtesy of Joanne Tomasi Quaglia)



workers, and a work force primarily of women who were paid one-half to two-thirds less on a national scale than men. As heavy industry declined in Reading and the county, it became a less attractive place for new immigrants. The foreign-born population in Reading averaged less than 10 percent for any decade. No other city of comparable or larger size in Pennsylvania had such a small percentage of foreign-born in the total population. The census recorded 54 foreign-born Italians in Reading in 1890 and a high of 2,282 in 1930.²¹

The system of chain migration functioned in Reading as elsewhere in Pennsylvania's growing Italian communities. Information traveled back and forth between Italy and the United States among relatives about places to live and potential employment. Newly arrived immigrant families tended to live near their places of employment and to move together whenever possible.²² Giuseppe Bolognese, Rosa's father, chose Reading as his destination because his brothers Nunzio and Nick were already railroad workers there and could help him secure a job.

Even in towns the size of Reading, the areas where large numbers of Italians lived, such as the neighborhood south of Penn Street near Holy Rosary Church (Third and Franklin Streets), came to be known as "little Italies." In these neighborhoods, the new waves of immigrants supplanted the ethnic groups who had come before them. Even though these ethnic enclaves were not as large or as regionally divided block by block as those in large cities like New York, they did have some of the same characteristics. They were working class and often not singularly Italian, but ethnically mixed. Although a few blocks in Reading became almost entirely Italian, most blocks had a few families of eastern Europeans, Pennsylvania Germans, or Irish. In these neighborhoods the presence of some non-Italians helped the Italians to consolidate their ethnic identity even more than if they had lived in exclusively Italian enclaves. In large cities like Philadelphia, so many people came from one region and even one town that each group comprised its own colony within the larger Italian area of settlement. This clustering within clustering formed natural networks as kin settled near others who spoke their own dialect.²³

AN EARLY IMMIGRANT FAMILY IN READING

In 1903, Italian immigrant Saverio Spadafora lived with his wife, Maria Pullano, and their children in a rented flat in a former mansion located between the Schuylkill River

and the Union Canal.²⁴ This area near the river was the first home for many new Italian immigrants to Reading. Available housing often was dilapidated and located in the least desirable neighborhoods.

Originating from Sersale, Calabria, Saverio had been a petty merchant who sold chestnuts and could read and write Italian, but little else is known of his background. He came to Reading about 1895, working first as a laborer, later moving up to foreman. In 1903 he opened the first Italian bakery in the city, operating the business out of another flat he rented in the mansion. Pasquale Spadafora, age four, accompanied his father in a horse and wagon to make bread deliveries. The leftover bread dough was used to make macaroni for the family's meals. According to Pasquale, his father was forced to sell the business because he had extended too much credit.

Saverio, however, seemed determined to pursue a career as a merchant. In that same year, 1912, he purchased a two-story house on the corner of Second and Franklin Streets, in what was still primarily a Pennsylvania German neighborhood. Since he had just lost the bakery, how he was able to finance this purchase is unclear. Saverio moved his family there, and opened a grocery in the front parlor. He kept the grocery for only a short time, however, subsequently renting it to a relative. After these two ill-fated entrepreneurial endeavors, Saverio worked at Reading Steel Casting and then Glen Gery Brickyard until his death in November 1919, at the age of fifty-nine, leaving his wife and eight children.

Although ultimately unsuccessful in escaping the life of a paid laborer, before his death Saverio Spadafora had achieved certain southern Italian social ideals that would have been nearly impossible had he remained in Italy. Whether Saverio's generosity (his son Pasquale said he was "a sucker for a hand-out"), a lack of good business sense, or a combination of factors, contributed to his failure in business is unclear. Nevertheless, he was an independent

businessman for a short time and became a property owner of what would have been a middle-class house by Calabrian standards. He was well-known in the Italian community because of his position as a part-time agent (also known as importer or banker) for the White Star Line shipping line.

Saverio achieved a respected social status in the community through his organizational efforts and his reputation for helping others. He was a founding member of at least one mutual aid society, and was also one of a committee of men who pushed for the establishment of an Italian Catholic parish in Reading.

After Saverio's death, his wife, who had never worked outside the home, depended on the older children to support the family. Rosina, the eldest daughter, was married and lived in a house directly behind the family home, affording mother and daughter daily interaction. All the children except the youngest left school before graduating from high school to begin working. Daughter Maria worked at A. B. Kirschbaum Company, a garment factory near their home. Son Pasquale quit school at age fourteen to begin working at the Berkshire Knitting Mills at a "school kid" job, pushing stockings through a ring and turning them right side out.

THE PRIVATE CIRCLE OF FAMILY, NEIGHBORS, AND WORK

The Spadafora family typified certain aspects of early Italian settlement and family life in Pennsylvania. Immigrants mitigated adverse factors to adjustment (such as language barriers, illiteracy, unfamiliarity with American customs, and discrimination) by forming internal support networks among kin and neighbors. Family and ethnic ties were connected to the workplace, since new arrivals often secured their first jobs through these internal networks.²⁵ Furthermore, earlier arrivals, such as Saverio Spadafora, could rise in social status in their own communities because they already knew the ropes and thus could provide assistance to immigrants who arrived later. In the first decades of Italian settlement, the growing ethnic community supported an expanding infrastructure of merchants like Spadafora's bakery; other small businessmen, like barbers, tailors, grocers, tried to engage a clientele beyond the Italian community.

Italians reduced overhead by using one property for business and residence. This pattern enabled the father to be at home, helping to supervise children if necessary. Sometimes the husband held a job away from home while the wife ran a grocery in the house; thus, she could generate a small income year round, even while tending children. Families adopted this strategy out of necessity, because full-time work for men was often sporadic. Running a grocery, while popular, was not especially lucrative, and many were in business only a few years.²⁶

When working as paid laborers, Italian men, as the newest ethnic group, were the least favored and were often hired for the dirtiest and lowest paid jobs. Delvisio Franchi

said that even as late as the 1930s most of the Italian workers at Birdsboro Steel were employed as chippers: "Nobody did that kind of work because chipping was a dirty job, and it killed them. They got dust in their lungs and they got silicosis. But they only put the Italians there."

Italian men also worked in the garment factories and hosiery mills. These jobs required semi-skilled and skilled laborers. The knitting positions at the Berkshire Knitting Mills in Reading were the most desirable because they paid the highest wages, but few Italians were ever moved into those or supervisory positions. Italians knew it was an unspoken rule that those jobs were reserved for the Germans and the Pennsylvania Germans. Joe Corea did become the head dyer at "the Berkie," but Maria Prioriello Battisti's brother-in-law, Joe Lombardo, never rose from his position as a boarder. Nevertheless, he was considered one of the lucky ones because work there was steady and he was not laid off during the Depression.²⁷

The factories in Reading varied in terms of which departments had Italian workers and whether they could move into the few supervisory positions that existed. Charles Carabello commented: "Every department had a supervisor and most of the supervisors—well now, in the pants factory [Penn Pants Factory], supervisors were always Italian. They were smart in doing that. In the hat factory [Alexander Hat Factory], they were not. The hat factory was more [a] Germanic organization. And the hatters themselves were Italians, the ones who worked the hats from the



Maria Prioriello in front of Berkshire Knitting Mills, manufacturer of full-fashioned hosiery, and employer of some Italian immigrants, Wyomissing, Pa., c. 1925. (Courtesy of Maria Prioriello Battisti)



Teresa Prioriello Granieri and Salvatore (Sam) Granieri standing in front of their successful produce store at 328 Penn Street, Reading, Pa., c. 1920. (Courtesy of Norma Battisti Staron)

ground up. There were many Italians. But upstairs...where the women put the hats together, they were not...Italian, they were, Polish, German—Pennsylvania Dutch as we call them.”

Before workers were unionized, if they were laid off, they had no recourse but to find work wherever they could at whatever rate of pay was offered them. Joe DelCollo described his father’s experience in Reading around 1910 or 1911: “My Dad was out of work, the Oley Street Mill closed up...And he was just walking around looking for a job and there was a guy having a building [built]...and he said, ‘Hey John,’—they used to call Italians all John—‘Do you want to work?’ He said sure. He worked all day. At the end of the day he said, you come to my store and I’ll pay you...and my Pop went upstairs to get paid. And he kept him waiting around, waiting around, and waiting around, ‘till finally at the end, he says, ‘Hey John, How ‘bout a nice hat?’ My Pop said, ‘I don’t need a hat, I need money for the kids.’ He didn’t get a nickel, he got a hat for his wages.”

To increase their chances of survival, members of the immigrant generation relied on one another for assistance and lived in neighborhoods with other Italians, near kin whenever possible. They depended on help, based on the southern Italian ideal of social reciprocity, from an informal network of people to secure jobs, find housing, and provide emotional sustenance. Most important in this network were the nuclear family and members of the extended family. Familial interdependence was regarded as the key for economic survival by the immigrant generation.

Next in importance in the support network were *paesani*

and neighbors. People I interviewed emphasized a way of life that centered around families and neighbors who helped each other. Joe DelCollo said: “We had family life and we had friendly life—neighbors.” Rosa Bolognese DaDamio put it this way: “There was a lot of love in the family in those days. A lot of love.”

WOMEN’S AND CHILDREN’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FAMILY ECONOMY

Many Italian women in Pennsylvania, both before marriage and for part of their lives afterward, worked out of necessity in some capacity other than homemaking. According to Maria Prioriello Battisti, born in Italy in 1899, the *ideal* life for an Italian woman was that the wife should remain at home as a full-time homemaker. Short of this possibility, the next preference was to have a business in one’s home, so that the wife could help out if needed, but would primarily care for the house and children. With men’s employment often sporadic or seasonal, women and even children’s contributions to the family economy were required.²⁸

Maria herself did not realize the Italian ideal. After emigrating to Reading in 1921, she supported herself and sent money to her family in Italy whose economic situation had deteriorated, by working at different garment factories and hosiery mills. After her marriage and the birth of her children, she worked intermittently and whenever work was available.

Maria Maccione Carabello, another immigrant to Reading, is a good example of how women often combined ways to generate income and extend the family budget.

Charles Carabello described his mother's life: "In the early days, my mother was a very busy woman. It [was] the only way they could make expenses meet and whenever a relative came to America from Italy, they would house him for maybe a dollar a month. We had a home which would house maybe one, two, three, four, maybe four or five people. And my mother would not only feed them but wash their clothing and everything else. My mother, she worked...So I'm not very much in accord with the idea that mothers [are] out working and the children are not raised right and that's why they have become impossible. I don't agree. My mother worked all day...she was only at home at night. Left in the morning early sometime before we even got up. My father, of course he did work in the home because he was a barber but nevertheless we got out and went out to do our own things such as carrying newspapers for the *Reading Eagle*, going to the market [to] carry baskets and all that...My mother worked in many factories, she worked in the old Penn Pants factory which I mentioned before is the (R.N. Palmer) candy company in West Reading. I remember going with my little wagon during the First World War picking up bundles of soldiers' pants to bring home for her [to] sew. She would do sewing on certain parts of it. The next day I would take them back and then pick up a new bundle so she could do them at home. Goodness knows what she got a day, if she made a dollar a day, I'd be surprised...I can't describe everything that she did but goodness knows, she worked and she worked very hard."²⁹ On her way home after work, Maria often stopped at Teresa and Sam (Salvatore) Granieri's grocery store on Penn Street. Teresa gave her any blemished unsalable fruit for her family's table.

Italian women's contributions to the family economy have been underestimated because they have been difficult to assess in monetary terms. Even when women engaged in paid labor, the work was often part-time, seasonal, short-term, paid by the piece, or subject to lay-offs during slow periods. Work performed in the home, especially maintaining a household, but also keeping boarders or assisting with a family business, often has been discounted because it was not wage labor. Increasingly, however, scholars have demonstrated that women's and even children's work was instrumental not only in keeping a family housed and clothed, but also in improving its economic status.³⁰

Three factors contributed to determine where Italian women worked: available work, level of skill, and cultural preferences. The concentration of garment factories in Reading that required semi-skilled laborers and skilled "hand sewers" provided ready employment for Italian women. Since most Italian women had learned hand sewing and needlework as young girls, they already possessed the skills that clothing manufacturers sought.

Certain kinds of jobs or workplaces were considered indecent for Italian women. Adalgisa (Naldi) Pichini Franchi, a second generation Italian American from Reading, said that her immigrant mother would not allow her to work at the local "5 and 10" because "it wasn't the

right kind of place, nice girls didn't work there," whereas working at a factory was permissible. This criterion of selectivity for the appropriateness of work for women suggests a transmission of Old World values concerning the protection of women's honor. Protecting unmarried daughters was difficult in an unsupervised atmosphere like a retail shop, where the potential for meeting strangers was greater. The factory milieu with its regimented workday, the likelihood of gender segregation of employees, and the probability that Italian friends worked there as well, calmed parents' fears.

Children, including girls, were seen as potential contributors to the family income and often quit school early to begin working. In 1924, Rosa Bolognese DaDamio went to work at Luden's Candy Factory at age fourteen until her marriage in 1927. As late as the 1940s, the pattern had not changed significantly for girls, although they more frequently graduated from high school and often kept at least some of their earnings. While they were still attending school, children usually took on part-time jobs. Since boys were permitted more freedom than girls at a younger age, they could find ways to make money earlier by delivering newspapers or transporting groceries for people from the farmers' markets in toy wagons. Generally, Italian children were expected to turn over wages to parents. Charles Carabello's first job was during the mid-1920s at the Penn Pants Factory: "Well, my first job was a pants factory where they made nothing but pants practically for the American soldier...And I worked on the second floor there, pressing certain bits of trousers, I was fourteen but I lied. I told them I was sixteen and I know they didn't believe me, but I got twenty-five cents an hour, twelve dollars a week. That was big money for my family...Whenever we got our salary we took the whole darn thing home, period. And if we needed anything we got it but we never spent a cent of our salary."

LEISURE TIME AND FAMILY LIFE

The limited leisure time that existed for working-class Italians also centered around family and to some extent neighbors and *paesani*. Weekday evenings after work included dinner shared as a family together and perhaps a visit with extended family or a few minutes sitting on the front porch or stoop and talking with neighbors. Men might walk to their nearby social club to socialize with male friends who congregated there to play cards or *bocce*. In the summer, families often sat in the backyard and worked in the garden.

Although some women cooked in a traditional Italian style on a daily basis, others, especially second generation women, incorporated "American" dishes. In Reading, a predominantly Pennsylvania German region, these were often what Italians call "Dutch" recipes that they learned from neighbors. For instance, Joe Borelli's family was the only Italian family in Hamburg, a farming community. He remembers that his immigrant mother, Angelina, wanted to fit in with Pennsylvania German neighbors. Joe recalled:

"She went next door to the neighbor's and said, look, I got to learn, what is this sauerkraut, what is this? And then the lady next door made it, showed her everything. My God, we had sauerkraut and pork and I didn't like it."

Sunday was the only full day of leisure. Many Italian families attended church together in the morning, returning home for the Sunday meal. It was a symbolic ritual, more important than church attendance, that idealized the centrality, unity, and authority of the family through the act of sharing the Italian foods prepared.³¹ Women usually spent the entire morning on Sundays preparing food, serving dinner about noon. Even women who Americanized their cooking during the week reserved Sundays (and holidays) for Italian fare. Pasta with some kind of tomato and meat sauce was a central dish. For most Italians, Sundays were limited to extended family gatherings and visits with *compari* (godparents). *Compari* were treated like kin and visited each other regularly.

Men spent more time away from their homes than women. They visited with friends at the Italian clubs, after work on weekdays and on Sunday afternoons. Many Italian men kept social memberships at several clubs, while they may have paid beneficial dues to only one. Local shops were also places for men to gather.

Men and women's social spheres tended to be separate. In their spare time, Italian women stayed close to home, supervising children and visiting family and Italian neighbors. Charles Carabello said of his mother: "She lived in her own little sector of people. She had three or four women friends, they sat together every day practically. Talked...Then they went home."

Conversation centered around people's personal lives, news from Italy, and political and social events. Umberto (Bert) Tucci described the news that traveled back and forth from Italian hometowns to Reading: "Another thing that was the center of the social activity was...there was a great deal of communication by letter from here to Italy. And when somebody received a letter, it was just like a newspaper. Everybody wanted to know what was going on over there and this and that. The unfortunate thing that I never liked was, of course, even the gossip got into those letters."

The relationship between husbands and wives tended to be a formal respectful one. They showed little affection in public or even within the privacy of the home. Charles Carabello remembers his parents did most of their talking after the children were in bed. "I would hear them, maybe for an hour when they would go to bed probably and talk and talk and talk."

COURTING, MARRIAGE, AND GENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Especially in the first few decades after immigration, as girls reached their teenage years, parents continued to supervise them closely. They were usually allowed to walk downtown together as a group. Some immigrant parents were more lenient as they became more Americanized

themselves. Even so, the changes in behavior worried immigrant parents, who still tried to exert control.

The second generation sometimes felt inner conflict between their private familial identity of being "Italian" and the public identity cultivated within their peer group of being "American." Some parents, aware of the difficulties of their children, attempted to help them with the identity issue, but mixed messages from other family members and the outside world contributed to the problem.

Marriage customs changed from the immigrant generation to the first of the second generation to reach marriageable age. Even though the majority of the latter married other Italians, they chose their own spouses, circumventing any attempts by elders to arrange a marriage. The immigrants, many of whom had been unhappy with their own arranged marriages, relinquished control of this aspect of their children's lives.

Courting, however, was still supervised until the couple married. If couples went out, they were accompanied by a chaperon, often an older brother of the girl. By the 1940s, inter-ethnic marriages were occurring with increasing frequency, a potential source of family conflict. Most immigrants, realizing their children lived in a different world from their own past, eventually accepted this change and the new spouse after a period of adjustment.

The second generation, having grown up in America, had no context for understanding the Italian customs of watchful surveillance to ensure chastity in women and the sexual taboos imposed by their parents. Speaking to an unmarried woman was a transgression unthinkable in Italy, a situation that would have compromised the girl's honor and brought shame to the family. Immigrant parents were distressed by the mores in American culture that they little understood, and saw them as a constant threat to the preservation of a daughter's honor. The second generation were increasingly influenced by peer group associations and popular culture rather than by the social ideals of the family. This caused misunderstandings and sometimes conflict between the generations.³²

For the most part, however, especially for the oldest members of the second generation, family wishes took priority. Charles Carabello, who was a teenager in the 1920s, commented: "We never conflicted with our parents. In other words, we were obedient, and we felt that they knew what they were doing and that we owed them the respect."

After marriage, obligations to family continued. Parents often expected all the children and their families to gather at the parents' home every Sunday, where the mother prepared an Italian meal for everyone. If both sides of the family were Italian, juggling visits without offending anyone was a challenge.

THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE

When immigrants arrived in Pennsylvania they spoke distinctive regional dialects.³³ Those who had attended school in Italy also knew standard Italian. These immigrants, speaking different dialects, were thrust together at

the same time that they entered an English speaking culture. Some significant features of language changed nationally among Italian immigrants, in part because newer forms were used by the Italian American press. Regional dialects retained many archaic forms because they were not exposed to the modernizing influences of standard Italian, and words and accents from one dialect were incorporated into another. Also, English words were adopted and Italianized. A few familiar examples: business became *bisnisse*, job became *jobba*, and pound became *pondo*. Semantic changes also occurred for words that were phonetically similar in the two languages. For instance, *fattoria*, meaning "farm" in Italian, now means "factory" in Italian American. Italian Americans used *baccausa*, probably adopted and changed from the English word "backhouse," to indicate the outhouse. Some merging of dialects also occurred as a result of interaction among immigrants who spoke different dialects.³⁴ For instance, Maria Prioriello Battisti's youngest daughter, Roma, became friendly with the Sicilian family who lived across the street in Reading. Roma soon spoke a combination of the Molisan dialect spoken at her home and the Sicilian dialect she learned from the neighbors.

Immigrants struggled to learn English. Some people took formal English classes offered by various organizations; others learned on their own through trial and error. Men often spoke English better because they interacted more in the public realm with non-Italians. Some learned or even taught themselves to read and write in English. Charles Carabello said, "My mother never learned to speak any English, more than thirty or forty English words. My father had to because he was a barber." In certain parts of Pennsylvania, immigrants also were exposed to the Pennsylvania German dialect. Joe Borelli recalled that his father, Carlo Borelli, a shoemaker in Hamburg, even learned some Pennsylvania German in order to converse with his rural customers. Many Italians did not become more fluent in English because they were ashamed of their inability to speak correctly.

Children learned to speak or at least to understand the dialect because it was spoken in the home. Older children generally spoke the dialect more fluently than younger ones and frequently did not speak any English until they went to school. If parents learned more English, both languages might be used in the home. When standard Italian was taught in a parish school, it was not the language spoken at home. The dialect used as conversational speech usually ended when the immigrants died or learned English.

THE YEARLY CALENDAR: RITUAL AND FESTIVE LIFE

In southern Italy, activities centered around the seasonal agricultural cycle and the religious calendar. Immigrants continued in the United States certain seasonal activities and celebrations that had been part of their lives in their home regions. Without the context of their home villages, however, traditions lost their original meaning. As im-

migrants adjusted to American society they continued certain customs, sometimes instilled them with new meaning, dropped some observances, and adopted some from American culture such as Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July.

In so doing, the immigrant generation adopted those American and local practices that made sense in their own worldview. One Berks County resident indicated that her mother believed in "powwowing," a Pennsylvania German magico-religious practice of curing,³⁵ similar to Italian folk beliefs about good, evil, and disease. When no Italian practitioner was available, an American "powwow doctor" could perform the same functions.

Immigrants continued activities that had been integral to their lives in Italy—gardening and winemaking. Converting backyards and unused public land into garden space was a common strategy for economic survival. In Temple and Birdsboro, families generally had bigger yards than in downtown Reading, with space to raise animals as well as vegetables for food. Similar to Italian Americans in other rural settings in Pennsylvania, Connie Napoletano Brancadoro said that Italians in Birdsboro raised their own pigs, butchering them in autumn. They made sausage and hung it on wooden poles to dry.

The emphasis placed on gardening went beyond economics, however, underscoring both the value Italians placed on having fresh cooking ingredients on hand and the pride they took in producing them themselves. Also, the transformation of gardening space into the familiar grids and terraces used in Italy gave the immigrants a feeling of security and connectedness with remembered cultural landscapes.³⁶

Most Italians converted their entire backyards into garden space except for a central path. If they had access to unused land, they took advantage of that too. Sometimes they built elaborate sheds, like those still commonly seen in Italy, in which they might store work clothes and gardening implements. Italians commonly grew standard vegetables and herbs in the southern Italian diet such as tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, beans, varieties of lettuce, swiss chard, endive, parsley, basil, chamomile, and rosemary. If space existed, they might plant one or more fruit trees. Grape arbors were ubiquitous in Italian yards. The grape harvest was not large enough for the annual production of a family's wine; instead, these small arbors served as nostalgic transformations of space, reminders of the Italian landscape.

Women might work in the backyard garden, but mainly took responsibility for processing and canning fruits and vegetables once they were harvested. Besides canning, Italian women also preserved vegetables, such as tomatoes and hot peppers, by drying and stored others in vinegar or salt brine in crocks. Joe Iezzi, whose artisan family emigrated to Reading from San Valentino near Chieti in the Abruzzi, remembered that his mother, Elizabeth, put eggplant, celery, and fennel in the same crock with tomatoes and peppers. Growing food that could be preserved



First Holy Communion portrait of Dominic Bernardo taken at his home, 111 Grape Street, Reading, Pa., c. 1923. First Holy Communion was a ritual occasion elaborately celebrated by Italian families. Although the actual ceremony took place at Holy Rosary Church, the Italian parish in Reading, the photographer often came to the home with the set of props, as shown here. (Courtesy of Dominic Bernardo)

to last through the winter was the highest priority. Listing what his father, Giovanni, grew in the garden, Charles Carabello brought this point home: "Once in a while, just for kicks, he might grow a watermelon or two, but mostly stuff he could use for canning to make his spaghetti sauce."

Although chores were usually divided according to gender, with men tending the garden and women primarily responsible for food preservation, husbands and wives cooperated too and, when circumstances demanded, women did the bulk of the work. Also, cooking was not solely a women's province; some men cooked for their families.

Immigrants found solace and revived memories in the acts of planting, growing, smelling, and eating familiar foods. In the summer of 1991, one second generation Italian in Reading proudly showed me his Italian parsley. He emphasized that this was the *same* parsley that his father had brought from Italy in 1918, because his father and now he had saved the seeds from the plants every year since then. For him, that parsley triggered memories of his father and his father's homeland.

Of all the plants that Italians grew in the United States, two perhaps became the most symbolic of Italy for them—figs and grapes. Grapes were made into wine, a staple in southern Italy where the water supply was often unsafe to drink. Even children were given diluted wine to drink. Rosa Bolognese DaDamio recalled: "My mother used to sell most of [the wine]. But we had wine at the table at every meal. Now for us, my Mom used to make [what] she called *l'aquad'* [dialect]. It was watered down. But we drank since we were three, four years old, we drank wine. She gave us water too. But she didn't want to



Sam Martorana, c. 1925, in the uniform of the Reading Italian Band, active from 1905 to about 1940. He served as the band's conductor in 1938. (Courtesy of Grace Martorana Kline)

give us the strong wine because it was too strong for us and she used to give us this watered-down wine. They believed that wine would make you strong. So she wanted to make us strong [laughs]."

The symbolic nature of wine for Italians is illustrated in proverbs such as "Un giorno senza vino e come un giorno senza sole," and "Acqua fa male, il vino fa canta [sic]."³⁷ Bert Tucci told a story illustrating how Italians revered wine as the very essence of life: "My Dad always told me the story of when I was born... 'When you were born,' he says, 'I put my finger in a glass of wine and I [gave] it to you, and that was the first piece of nourishment that you ever had.' I'll never forget that."

For winemaking itself, Berks County Italians purchased boxes of grapes that were brought in from Philadelphia. Each box cost about twenty-five cents and many Italians bought two or three hundred boxes. Giovanni Carabello, like others, purchased a combination of white, blue, and red grapes. Charles Carabello recalled his father's winemaking: "I can still remember the early days of his wine making. He had built a vat in his basement and we would put hip-boots on and go and crush the grapes with our feet...All of us, my father and the boys [would] go and smash, smash, smash! And then he'd have a little...open outlet and the juice would come out, you see, and he would put it in barrels and most [of it] came out fine. Once in a while it soured. [He] had his own barrels. You could smell that all over South Second Street and South Third Street. You could tell who was making wine as you went down those neighborhoods and boy, it smelled like a bar room."

Joe Iezzi recalled that especially during the lean years of the Depression, his father, Achille, made dandelion, elderberry, and strawberry wine because these grew wild and therefore were free for the picking. Later, wine presses became the common apparatus used for processing grapes.

Many Italians planted fig trees if they had room. No matter in what climate they settled, immigrants attempted to grow figs, pampering and covering them each fall so that they would survive harsh winters. Charles Carabello related this anecdote which evokes the almost mythical essence of figs for Italian Americans: "Mr. Penta, [his sons] tell me he had a fig tree back [of] his house and he eventually [built] a hothouse around it. And goodness knows how long it lasted. Just getting back a little...bit of old Italy, you know."

Festival times in Italy were events in the liturgical calendar (saints' feast days, Christmas, and Easter) or rites of passage marked by the Catholic sacraments (birth, coming of age, marriage, and death) that centered around the family. In Pennsylvania, these events continued to be important, but with distinct changes. They were still primarily family affairs, but the relative wealth of the immigrants compared to what their economic status had been in Italy allowed them to celebrate much more elaborately, sometimes emulating styles customary to the landowning class in Italy for whom they had worked.³⁸

Music, dance, storytelling, drama, and games were integral to Italian social life and provided the immigrant generation with a vital link to their past. With few exceptions, these play and performance genres, so dependent on the regional context from which they emanated, often did not survive intact past the first generation. Sometimes a particular regional form was adopted. For instance, the tunes that were popular Neapolitan songs of the early twentieth century became generalized as Italian music and became part of a pan-Italian identity in the United States. More complicated changes also occurred as when old forms were given new uses and meanings; or sometimes elements from different cultures were combined.³⁹

For instance, almost every village in Italy had a predominantly brass or woodwind band that paraded in religious festivals and traveled to other towns to play. Italian immigrants organized town bands in Pennsylvania that played in parades, *feste*, funerals, and other occasions. During the World War II era, many of the ethnic town bands disappeared. Six Italian bands still perform (out of 35 that once existed) in Beaver and Lawrence Counties of Western Pennsylvania. They might incorporate instruments that were never part of bands in Italy and play a repertoire that includes music widely divergent from the traditional ancestral marches and folk tunes.⁴⁰

Many Italians played musical instruments, so neighbors and friends also often formed small string bands. Families regularly hired these informally organized groups for a small fee to play at social events, especially baptisms, weddings, and serenades for a fiancée. Some serenading



Italian groups like this one (c. 1925-26) serenaded the betrothed and played for funerals, baptisms, and weddings. Seated, Charles Carabello. Standing, l. to r.: Vincenzo (Jimmie) Benincasa, Luigi Barbagallo ("Big Louis"), Salvatore (Sam) Cuffari. (Courtesy of Charles Carabello)

still occurs in South Philadelphia.

Events marking one's passage through the life cycle (baptisms, First Holy Communion, weddings, or funerals) were both religious and secular celebrations. These rituals changed from their Italian origins to their Italian American counterparts over the span of half a century. For instance, weddings in Italy were celebrated with family, with the most important component a dowry large enough to ensure that daughters would find a suitable spouse. In the United States, the emphasis shifted from a proper dowry to staging a large impressive wedding. Families spent large sums of money on celebrations, especially weddings and funerals, which became occasions for competitive display. The more impressive the celebration staged, the higher the admiration bestowed on the family by the rest of the community. If the celebration was not up to the accepted standard, criticism could be directed at the family for their social and moral error and gossiped about for years to come.⁴¹

In all areas of life, both private and public, from the everyday to the ritual and festive, to the organizational networks they formed or joined, the immigrants confronted choices in how they would live in their newly adopted country. Although the immigrants intended to maintain the cultural and social ideals of the Old World, and they drew upon these ideals to provide answers in new situations, in practice they could not always follow them.⁴² The dilemma for immigrants was finding a comfortable zone of adjustment in their new life in the United States. They faced choosing among new cultural values and the Italian values they did not wish to lose.

Emigration started a process of social and cultural change that began with the immigrant generation and resulted in

a uniquely Italian American one. Thus, although Italian values continued to be important, new economic opportunities in the United States contributed to creating uniquely Italian American families and communities.⁴³ The immigrants changed their ways of doing things in the private arenas of life—belief systems, family and social interaction, ways of celebrating, use of space, cuisine—in the course of adjusting to the challenges of the American world and workplace they had entered. Change was neither steady nor predictable, and families varied in the ways they responded to American society. Individual choice also played a role in how people changed, but options were constrained by factors of gender, class, and age. The immigrants could conveniently resort to the social behavior and ideals of the world they left when it suited their needs, or they could merely say they were doing so while actually doing something else. At other times, they could invoke American cultural values or combine them with Italian ones to reimagine a way of life that better suited their new environment. The immigrants themselves may not have been in great conflict over these choices because they were adults constructing a new world as they went along. Their children, however, sometimes had a more difficult time adjusting. They often felt caught between the good Italians their parents wanted them to be and the Americans they wanted to become.

ITALIAN NETWORKS AND THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

Ethnic communities never fit the romantic portrayals of the “little Italies,” often written about so sentimentally. Immigrants could not have produced carbon copies of their previous lives even if they had wanted to. The migratory process was extremely disruptive to people’s lives. New settlement patterns and economic roles in America did not allow the formation of a mirror image of household arrangements and social structures as they had existed in Italy. All immigrants changed when they came to the United States, reconstructing their identity based on the new circumstances and people they encountered. Social networks were constantly shifting over time as people moved to another location, joined different social organizations, aged, and shifted alliances. The organizational aspects of community—ethnic businesses, social organizations, and churches—also shifted. Businesses closed and new ones opened; social and fraternal organizations were formed and reformed. The internal reorganization of institutions and communities was primarily in response to the rapid changes in the American economy that redistributed occupational opportunities and job availability.⁴⁴

Individuals I interviewed described “community” based on their own social network of those with whom they regularly interacted, usually people of their own social class. “Community” was tied in a material sense to the spaces occupied by homes, workplaces, organizations, churches, and the businesses where Italians met people,

socialized—in sum, where they lived their lives. When people talked about their past, memories were associated with specific places. When thought of in this way, the concept of community becomes a dynamic ongoing construction formed by the activities that bound people together and grounded in the spaces in which these activities were conducted.⁴⁵

ORGANIZATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL NETWORKS

By the turn of the century, the expanding Italian populations had developed new economic, social, and religious requirements. Since the institutions of the dominant society did not always fit the immigrants’ needs, nor were they always welcoming, Italians formed their own. The mutual aid societies were established by Italians to help one another; others, like small businesses, not only served Italians but reached out to a wider clientele.

The social and economic sub-culture was not an impermeable one in which Italians only interacted with Italians. In fact, some Italians purposely nurtured ties with non-Italians. Those who came from the middle class in Italy, or who were better educated or more Americanized than the majority of working-class Italians, often acted as middlemen or “ethnic brokers” between Italians and the dominant society.⁴⁶ Those who emerged as leaders in the ethnic community became spokespersons for the rest who had no public voice.

The social and economic map of the Italian “communities” changed in response to the local, regional, and national context during the first fifty years of Italian settlement. The changes were not always smooth, since change often involved a redistribution of power, which induced tension and conflict.

The Catholic Church was the most powerful and crucial institution with which the immigrant came into contact in terms of their everyday lives. Most Italian immigrants were Roman Catholic, but American Church officials criticized their demonstrative religiosity as virtual paganism. Their spirituality was a belief system fusing official doctrine with other supernatural beliefs and magical ritual. The magical beliefs, behaviors, and sacred objects used by Italians provided a method for negotiating life crises. Folk religion explained and gave meaning to an unpredictable world. Their devotion was firmly rooted in their villages and region of origin, in the saints and holy places connected to these sites.⁴⁷

Although Italian Protestant congregations existed in both Italy and the United States, Protestant missionary work was relatively unsuccessful in converting large numbers of Italians. Their relationship to folk religion and their distrust of the institutional church explains why more Italians were not attracted to Protestantism.⁴⁸

When the eastern and southern European Catholic immigrants arrived in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, they encountered an intolerant Irish Catholic hierarchy that did not understand them or their



Nucleus of congregation of future Italian Methodist Episcopal Church of our Savior standing in front of Hope Rescue Mission, 228 Wood Street, Reading, Pa., site of group's first meetings, c. 1906. Two of the church's founders stand in the front row of men: Frank S. Barsotti

(seventh from left), Anthony Romano (tenth from left). Mary Romano, daughter of Anthony, is seated in the front row (eighth from left). Others unidentified. (Courtesy of John Romano)

needs. The Church instituted nationality parishes, hoping to avert a resurgence of anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States, and as a gesture of accommodation to the new immigrants, who neither felt comfortable with the rigid authoritarianism of Irish Catholicism nor welcome in parishes where English speakers predominated.⁴⁹ St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, in South Philadelphia, was the first Italian national parish in the United States, established in 1853 by Bishop John Neumann.⁵⁰

In general, Italians were suspicious of the institutional Church, as they were of all institutions. Although some better-educated Italians were anti-clerical on political grounds, most were so from experience. In Italy, the Church allied itself with the landed aristocracy and remained unresponsive to the plight of the peasants. Many peasants, particularly the men, did not attend church regularly,

although everyone attended baptisms, weddings, funerals, and the village saints' festivals. Italians thought of themselves as Catholics; at the same time, they did not view regular church attendance as a requirement for being a good and faithful person.⁵¹

The immigrants' experience in the United States did not change their attitudes. Underlying the dissatisfaction with particular priests in America was anger with an American Church insensitive to their culture and religious worldview. In spite of their resentment toward the American clergy, most Italians did not abandon the Catholic Church entirely, because their religious beliefs were integral to their family-centered lives.⁵²

The immigrants continued their devotion to the same saints in the United States by recreating the religious *feste* of their villages. The Irish found the demonstrative public

In the religious festa as celebrated by the immigrants, pinning donations on banners attached to their patron saint was done as a sign of homage. Devoid of the traditional context of the religious procession, the ritual is incorporated into the annual Italian Heritage Festival held near Reading, Pa., August, 1991. (Photograph by the author)



behavior exhibited during the religious *feste*, the biggest celebration of the year for the immigrants, particularly problematic. The American Church decided to tolerate *feste* if they succeeded in drawing the Italians into church and if they could be controlled by bringing them under the jurisdiction of the clergy.⁵³ Often a tug-of-war ensued between the lay committees who organized the *feste* and the Catholic clergy who wanted ultimate control. In Italian parishes throughout the United States, including Pennsylvania, the annual *festa* became the galvanizing force that drew people and linked them emotionally with their parish even when they were at odds with the clergy. A traditional *festa* tradition was more likely to be transferred from Italy if large numbers of people from the same village emigrated to the same town in Pennsylvania. For instance, the small town of Roseto, in Northampton County, was founded by villagers from Roseto Valfortore, in Apulia. They still celebrate the *Festa del Carmine*, in honor of their patron saint in Italy, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, although older residents complain that the celebration is not the communal one it once was.⁵⁴

The immigrants also maintained personal devotions to their favorite saints to whom specific kinds of veneration were promised for favors granted in times of crises. Immigrants created iconographic displays or "home altars" consisting of an arrangement of the Holy Family with other saints who were thought to be in consanguineous (blood) relationship with the Holy Family or with one another, thus personalizing the supernatural figures. Although less commonly found today, these sacred spaces in the home as well as the display of religious pictures on interior walls were popular forms of lay devotion. They are private attestations to the power of familial relationship, the central importance of the mother, and ultimately the centrality of the family to Italian life.⁵⁵

Magic, witchcraft, fortunetelling, and divining were other common features of Italian folk belief. A belief in the *malocchio* or (evil eye) was the most prevalent. The evil eye cast a magical spell inflicting physical or other kinds of harm on a victim through the power of envy and could be given willingly or unwittingly. Vulnerable stages in life, such as pregnancy, infancy, childhood, and death, made people particularly susceptible to the evil eye. One could be exposed to the evil eye at any time without knowing it, so people take steps to protect themselves from it by repeating certain phrases, using certain signs, and both displaying in their homes and wearing protective naturalistic amulets, one of the best known being a beast's horns.⁵⁶

In any Italian community, somebody knew the "oil and water" test to determine if the evil eye had been given, and knew the charms and prayers to remove it. Charles Carabello remembered that neighbors came to his mother, Maria, who also practiced midwifery, to remove the *malocchio*: "I remember we all wore them [horns] as kids. That was supposed to keep the evil from you. The ones they wore were made of coral or gold." Many second and third generation Italians I interviewed claimed they did



Home altar display of second generation Italian American, Angie Varone Ricciardi, Lancaster, Pa., 1991. (Photograph by the author)

not believe in the evil eye, but said it also did not hurt to take precautions.

One could easily make generalities about southern Italian folk beliefs, but social and economic factors influenced how much importance individuals ascribed to magico-religious beliefs. People who had more formal schooling, and therefore had been influenced by a scientific perspective, were less likely to hold such beliefs.

From the 1920s on, the Church's efforts to Americanize Italian Catholics began to have some effect, especially with the second generation. By the 1940s, external factors worked in the Church's favor; the second generation's search for an American identity coincided with the cohesive effects of World War II in creating a real sense of being an American. The result was a feeling among Italians that they had more commonalities than differences with other American Catholics.⁵⁷ Even so, national estimates found that, after fifty years of missionary work by both Catholics and Protestants, the majority of Italian immigrants were only nominally tied to the Catholic Church or had no church with which they were affiliated.⁵⁸

While the churches tried to mold the Italians, secular institutions also took a keen interest in the immigrants' welfare. Beginning around the turn of the twentieth century, and rising to a crescendo in the post-World War I period, private and public agencies proliferated to aid and Americanize new immigrants. Some of these groups, especially patriotic societies like the Daughters of the American Revolution, operated out of fear of the immigrants, establishing agendas of forced assimilation. Other groups, like the International Institute, a branch organization of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), adopted a gentler program of acculturation based on tolerance.⁵⁹ Before World War I, Americanization had focused primarily on indoctrinating immigrants to become law-abiding citizens. After the War, the by-word for Americanization was "loyalty," which was really a demand for cultural conformity. This extended to every detail of life, including promoting certain vegetables as "American" and



Tarantella Dancers, Italian folk dancing group from the International Institute, YWCA, in front of the old School Administration Building on Eighth and Washington Streets, Reading, Pa., July, 1925. (Photo courtesy of Maria Prioriello Battisti; original photograph by Joe Ricciardi)

labeling others “foreign”! Immigrants, including the Italians, resented the organized efforts at Americanization and their responses ranged from indifference to hostility.⁶⁰

In general, Italians avoided programs that promised handouts. They were unfamiliar with and distrustful of institutionalized help since it had been uncommon in Italy. The immediate family, relatives, and the mutual aid societies were expected to help the needy.⁶¹

Similar to the pattern of Italian communities in other sections of the country, mutual aid and fraternal societies were the first and most well-organized Italian institutions in Pennsylvania. Mutual aid societies, founded on the concept of communal assistance, were of paramount importance in ethnic communities during an era when neither unions nor employers offered any safety net of benefits. Small monthly dues paid by members insured that societies could make modest payments to families if a spouse became ill, was injured, or died (life insurance policies were usually under \$1,000).⁶² Perhaps even more important than providing economic assistance, the societies helped new immigrants adjust to America and also served as centers of social life. Founders of these societies often included *prominenti*, middle class merchants, artisans, or professionals. Serving as an officer in a society became a way to achieve or heighten status in the Italian community.⁶³

Societies were often short-lived because of an inadequate number of members and poor management of funds.⁶⁴ In order to achieve more stability, small local mutual aid societies often merged with the larger and expanding national fraternal orders. In Reading, for example, the once independent San Donato Society di Auletta joined the Order Italian Sons and Daughters of America, becoming a lodge of the national association.

As local and national fraternal organizations tried to build membership, destructive competition among leaders was not uncommon. Strife within the leadership ranks of the Order Sons of Italy in Pennsylvania resulted in a break by some members to found the Order Italian Sons and Daughters of America (ISDA) in Pittsburgh in 1930. This

fraternal association quickly gained popularity, expanding its membership to eastern Pennsylvania. By 1934 Reading had eleven ISDA lodges, including several women's lodges.⁶⁵

The social and civic functions of the mutual aid and fraternal societies, such as participation in parades and American holiday commemorations, became the most enduring aspects of these organizations. Furthermore, the societies were instrumental in developing a sense of national pride in Italy, something the immigrants had never felt in their homeland. After World War I and Mussolini's subsequent rise to power, Italian national pride rose to new heights. Fund raising events to send money to support the Red Cross or victims of earthquakes in Italy were common. While mutual aid and fraternal organizations helped define a separate ethnic consciousness, an Italian American identity, they simultaneously facilitated Americanization by sponsoring such activities as citizenship classes.

Since Italians were often not welcome as members in social organizations of the majority population, their own ethnic organizations filled the gap. From the earliest years, the clubs sponsored at least one annual event for families. The local lodge meetings and the annual conventions of the national fraternal orders became social events in themselves. Most of all, the local club was a central meeting place for men. In the sanctioned atmosphere of the club, men drank together and played card games such as *briscola* or *tresette* or other Italian games like *bocce* and *morra*. Many of the fraternal societies also sponsored sports teams and this aspect of the clubs was a key to drawing in the second generation as members.

The fraternal societies reached their height of membership and power during the 1930s and 1940s, in part because the sources of income were expanded far beyond membership dues. They added social activities such as dinner-dances, incorporated bars and dance bands, and offered social memberships to anyone who paid the nominal fee. The concept of the women's auxiliary came into its own in the national fraternal orders. Although women's auxiliaries had existed in the mutual aid societies, they had never before occupied such a visible and active role.

In addition to the fraternal organizations and social clubs, by the mid-1920s, Italians formed political clubs. Rather than entirely a local initiative, these associations were part of the political parties efforts to organize Italians nationwide.⁶⁶ Local political candidates and officeholders had long recognized the potential of the Italian vote and had courted it by speaking at and attending Italian functions whenever expedient for them.



Certificates of good service, such as this one given to Giuseppe R. Battisti, were conferred to Italian Americans by the Central Committee of the Friends of Italy for work during Italy's Ethiopian campaign, 1936. (Courtesy of Norma Battisti Staron)

THE DECADES BETWEEN THE WARS AND WORLD WAR II

The social climate in the Italian communities in the decades prior to World War II was a key element in the emergence and development of an Italian American ethnic identity. After World War I, Italians in the United States expanded their concept of community and their ethnic identity from a local to a national and even international focus. This reorientation was due to a constellation of successive factors including post-World War I anti-immigrant sentiment with forced Americanization as its theme, the economic depression, involvement in labor organization, New Deal politics, the conflict between Fascist and anti-Fascist factions, and finally World War II. Italians, feeling isolated and discriminated against in the United States, turned their sights outward to their Italian homeland and the new Fascist Italy. Mussolini's propaganda campaign capitalized on this vulnerability, promoting the idea of an international colony of united Italians who could all take pride in and work for a new Italy. From 1922 to 1945, social and political conditions in the United States did not allow Italian Americans to ignore the issue of their Italian origins.⁶⁷ Italian American organizations used newspapers as well as new and expanding media such as radio, photographs, and film to sell the concept of a local, national, and international Italian ethnic identity.

During these years, the maturing second generation who had grown up in the United States, were caught between two cultural identities—their Italian ethnicity and their emergent sense of being an American. Whatever their generation, however, Italians could not escape being influenced by the contemporary rhetoric—that of a unified Italian ethnic pride.⁶⁸

From the 1920s, until the United States entered World War II, Mussolini was a popular figure among Italians in Pennsylvania and throughout the United States. Italians

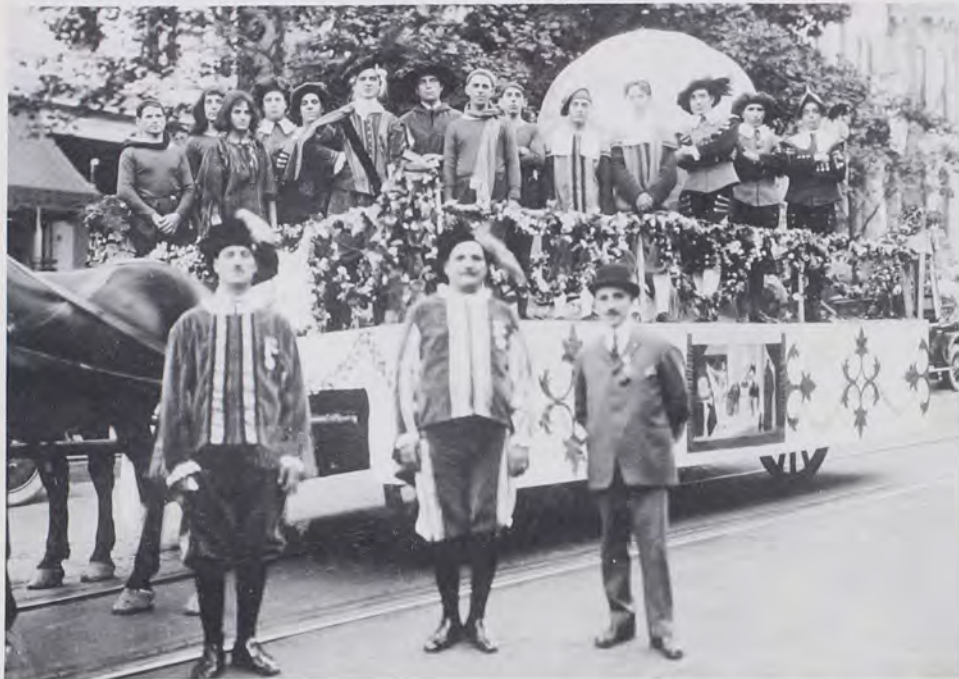
throughout the United States believed Mussolini was transforming Italy into a great nation. Fascism painted a picture of a vital, strong Italian "nation," not the factionalized Italy the immigrants had left behind. Mussolini's March on Rome in 1922 was convenient timing, allowing Fascism to latch onto the surge in nationalistic sentiment that Italian Americans felt during World War I. For Italian Americans, who often felt discriminated against and displaced in the United States, embracing this imagined Italian homeland was appealing.⁶⁹

Whether individuals truly adopted the Fascist ideology or merely sympathized with its goals, Fascist propaganda became the instrument that united the Italian diaspora in spirit and at times in action with the Italian homeland. Fascism brought Italian Americans together under a banner of pan-Italian ethnic unity. If Italian Americans were vocal in their support for Mussolini, they were only in step with American public and United States' governmental sentiments.⁷⁰

Before the Axis attack on France in June 1940, many Italian Americans were unequivocal in their support for Mussolini. From that point on, culminating with the U. S. declaration of war in December 1941, Italian Americans, spearheaded by their ethnic leaders and the press, rejected Mussolini and declared loyalty to the United States and democracy.⁷¹ Italians never wavered in uniting with other Americans in the war effort. Perhaps because of their virtual immediate rejection of Mussolini at the crucial moment, suspicion of Italian Americans was not widespread and instead Americans expressed sympathy for the plight of the Italian people during the war.⁷²

The first years of Italian settlement in Pennsylvania were formative ones. Initially, it was a time when the immigrants arrived unsure of their place in American society, slowly putting down roots as individuals, families, and *paesani*. They created larger social and economic networks, started businesses, formed local organizations, engaged in civic activities, and reached out to the larger society, hesitantly at first but with more assurance as they developed a sense of their place in American society.

The large numbers of Italians in the United States, the development of national Italian organizational networks, and the use of mass media helped to transform their self-identity as immigrants from individual *paesi* to a national one as American ethnics, as Italian Americans. In fact, from the first days of immigration, leaders in Italian American communities fostered the development of an ethnic identity distinct from the mainstream American cultural consensus. One way to do this was to stage public events incorporating symbolic imagery around which the diverse Italian population could identify and rally together as a unified group. Columbus, accepted as a hero by Americans since the late eighteenth century, is probably the best example of an image that was seized on by Italian immigrants and soon became adopted as a pan-Italian American ethnic symbol. Such symbols were spread through efforts of the ethnic press and national Italian American



Italians from Reading, Pa., built this float, an allegorical representation of Columbus's landing, for the historical and patriotic parade celebrating the 175th anniversary of Reading, October 3, 1923. Standing in front of float, l. to r.: Frank Comito ("Umbrella"), Salvatore (Sam) Granieri, Cosimo Perpetua. Standing on float: far left, Pasquale Spadafora; sixth from left Antonio Caggiano; fifth from right, Joe Marasco; all others unidentified. (Courtesy of Maria Prioriello Battisti)

organizations like the Sons of Italy in an effort to counteract the negative stereotypes of Italians so prevalent during the immigration period. In the late nineteenth century, Italian leaders in New York and Philadelphia began promoting Columbus as the perfect symbol to represent Italians in the United States. As early as 1882, Italian American organizations invited to march in the parade to celebrate William Penn's arrival in Philadelphia carried a float with a representation of Columbus.⁷³ Columbus Day Parades soon became public rituals (meaning that they were repeated year after year) for Italian Americans in communities across the United States. Only a few decades after Italians settled here, certain images such as Columbus had become pan-Italian American symbols both used by Italians to express their ethnic identity and accepted by the majority population as what constituted being Italian American.

THE POST WAR ERA TO THE PRESENT

After the war, the beginnings of a scaling down of heavy industry, the trend of an exodus from city and town to suburb, the desire of adult second generation children to blend with mainstream America, and the aging of the immigrant generation, contributed to a general decline of old ethnic neighborhoods. These factors did not signal an end to ethnic identity. As the second generation aged they often became nostalgic for the sense of belonging - however stifling it felt when they were young - that they once had in Italian family systems and close-knit neighborhoods. In part in an effort to recreate what they had lost, they became interested in their own ethnic heritage. They were also buoyed by their third generation children who embraced the label of Italian American, never having felt the need to rebel against it.

As a result of renewed interest in ethnic identity, old fraternal societies sometimes gain a second life or new organizations with names like "Italian Heritage Association" are formed. Ethnic festivals, reunions, and revivals of public events long abandoned become occasions to celebrate heritage and to share and display publicly expressions of ethnicity. In Reading, present and former residents of North Eighth Street hold an annual "North Eighth Street Gang" reunion picnic. Sometimes old celebrations are rejuvenated by incorporating newer immigrant groups into the events (and sometimes give occasion for public competition and even conflict among the groups). In Conshohocken, just west of Philadelphia, the *festa* of Saints Cosmas and Damian still attracts the large crowds of previous decades. Since the mid-1980s, Haitians who have a particular devotion to the two saints, have become integral to the event. Although the Italians and Haitians



Sweatshirt and hat, contemporary expressions of Italian American ethnic pride, on sale at the Italian Heritage Festival held near Reading, Pa., August, 1991. (Photograph by the author)

do not intermingle, no resentment is apparent and parishioners wholeheartedly acknowledge the Haitians' devotion.⁷⁴

Italians continued to settle in the United States after World War II, although few in number when compared with the figures in the early part of the century. Nonetheless, these immigrants contributed to keeping old Italian neighborhoods like South Philadelphia infused with new blood and alive with language and artistic traditions that perhaps would have been forgotten.

The metamorphosis from immigrant to ethnic American was a long process. The peak of white ethnic pride in the 1960s and 1970s had a history behind it. The public and private expressions of Italian ethnicity as they exist today, began with the immigrants' roots in Italy and the communities they created after their arrival in the United States.

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ENDNOTES

¹All interview quotations or specific information about individuals in Reading, Pennsylvania, included in this article are taken from oral interviews conducted by Joan Saverino as project director of the Italian American Ethnohistory Project (1990-1993), funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs and the Historical and Museums Commission of Pennsylvania. The tape-recorded interviews and other primary research material from this project are housed in the library at the Historical Society of Berks County in Reading. For direct quotations the following transcription conventions are used: three consecutive periods indicate a deletion, an italicized word indicates emphasis by speaker, and brackets indicate word(s) inserted by author.

For a comprehensive bibliography on Italian American folklore in Pennsylvania and in the United States, see Luisa Del Giudice, ed., *Studies in Italian American Folklore* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1993). A highly readable source on Italian American folklore and folklife in the United States that includes examples from Pennsylvania, is Frances M. Malpezzi and William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore* (Little Rock, AR: August House Publishers, 1992). Below is a list of suggested sources for readers interested in learning more about the Italian experience in Pennsylvania. Carla Bianco, *The Two Rosetos* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974); John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Caroline Golab, *Immigrant Destinations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977); Richard Juliani, *The Social Organization of Immigration* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); Elizabeth Mathias, "The Game as Creator of the Group in an Italian-American Community," *Pennsylvania Folklife* 23:4(1974):22-30; —, "The Italian-American Funeral: Persistence Through Change," *Western Folklore* 33:1(1974):35-50; Dorothy Noyes, "From the Paese to the Patria: An Italian American Pilgrimage to Rome in 1929," in *Studies in Italian American Folklore*, ed. Luisa Del Giudice (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1993), 127-152; —, *Uses of Tradition: Arts of Italian Americans in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial and Philadelphia Folklore Project, 1989); Emma S. Rocco, "A History of Italian-American Bands in Western Pennsylvania," *Journal of Band Research* 26:1(1990):59-81; Joan Saverino, "The Italians of Berks County: Forging an Identity in the 1920s," *Historical Review of Berks County* 56(Fall 1991):172-197; Janet Theophano, "I Gave Him a Cake": An Interpretation of Two Italian-American Weddings," in *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life*, ed. Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1991), 44-54; "Mildred Urick, "The San Rocco Festival at Aliquippa, Pennsylv-

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²Roger D. Abrahams, "Folklore," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, 1980 ed.; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Studying Immigrant and Ethnic Folklore," in *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 39, 43; Shalom Staub, *Yemenis in New York City: The Folklore of Ethnicity* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989), 31-33, 41-42; Judith Goode, Janet Theophano, and Karen Curtis, "A Framework for the Analysis of Continuity and Change in Shared Sociocultural Rules for Food Use: The Italian-American Pattern," in *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States*, ed. Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 74-75.

³Abrahams, 377-378.

⁴Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1982* (London: Longman, 1984), 12. ⁵Ibid., 1-2; Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 371.

⁶Clark, 32-33; Donna R. Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Workers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 20-25.

⁷Humbert S. Nelli, "Italians," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, 1980 ed.; Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnicity: The Italian Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 19, 33, 42-43; Clark, 166; Glenn C. Altschuler, *Ethnicity, Race, and Class in American Social Thought 1865-1919* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1982), 70.

⁸Clark, 1-2; Eric R. Wolf in the preface to *Europe and the People Without History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), x, uses the phrase "the people without history" in reference to the common people—peasants, laborers, immigrants, minorities—who were "as much agents in the historical process as they were its victims and silent witnesses." It is used here in a different sense, to indicate Italians who were cut off from their historical past through the process of emigration.

⁹Ibid., 41; See Table 1, Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian-Americans* (NY: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971).

¹⁰Golab, 34; Nelli, "Italians".

¹¹Golab, 3-5.

¹²Golab, 35, 58-59; Joseph Lopreato, *Italian Americans* (NY: Random House, 1970), 93-95; Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants*, 114-15.

¹³Richard Juliani, "The Origin and Development of the Italian Community in Philadelphia," in *The Ethnic Experience in Philadelphia*, ed. John E. Bodnar (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973), 244; Golab, 60; Raymond L. Ford, "Germans and Other Foreign Stock: Their Part in the Evolution of Reading, Pennsylvania," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1963), 145.

¹⁴Golab, 40-41, 59-61.

¹⁵Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 62.

¹⁶Ibid., 64.

¹⁷Mary Giarrano Mistretta, personal communication, 27-28 June, 1995.

¹⁸Bodnar, *Lives of Their Own*, 6, 114.

¹⁹Since Mussolini's era, the region was divided into two separate states, Abruzzi and Molise. Juliani, *Social Organization*, 178.

²⁰James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 133; Ford, 130.

²¹Ford, 129-130, 172-174, 201; U.S. Census, Population Statistics, 1930.

²²John E. Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 57, 68.

²³Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 59.

²⁴According to Pasquale Spadafora, the mansion, built by a retired engineer named Smith, was turned into rental flats for Italian immigrants when Smith became disenchanted after the Pennsylvania railroad built a track between the mansion and the river. An Edwin S. Smith, listed as an engineer in the city directory of 1885, is probably the engineer who built the mansion.

²⁵Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 178-79.

²⁶Gabaccia, *Sicily to Elizabeth Street*, 93-94, discusses the sporadic nature of specific jobs.

²⁷My discussion of Italian men's work is based on qualitative research (primarily personal interviews) and some secondary source material. Quantitative research still needs to be conducted to determine exact work patterns and percentages in specific industries.

²⁸My assessment of the work patterns of Italian women in Reading, like that for men, gathered from qualitative research; detailed quantitative study is called for.

²⁹See Yans-McLaughlin, 173-74, 205, and Gabaccia, *Sicily to Elizabeth Street*, 80-81, for discussion of the commonality of taking in boarders and frequency of kin as boarders.

It should be noted, too, that Charles Carabello also remembered that his mother often stopped at Theresa and Sam Salvatore Granieri's grocery store on Penn Street on her way home from work. Teresa gave her blemished fruit which could not be sold for her family's table.

³⁰Yans-McLaughlin, 164-67; Gabaccia, *Sicily to Elizabeth Street*, 91-95.

³¹Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 173.

³²Gabaccia, *Sicily to Elizabeth Street*, 102.

³³The issue of whether regional dialects are true languages is controversial. Regarding Sicilian, for instance, Olga M. Ragus, chair of the Italian department at Columbia University said, "Sicilian can be considered a language in that it has a distinct structure and a written literature, which goes back to the 13th century and continues to be produced. On the other hand, it can be considered a dialect together with the many other varieties of spoken Italian in existence." Marvin Howe, "Poets' Group Preserves Link To Sicily," *New York Times*, 30 Nov 1984, sec. B, p. 2(F). Anna Laura Lepschy and Giulio Lepschy, *The Italian Language Today* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1977) is a good resource in English for an historical overview of the language, the present linguistic situation, and a discussion of the dialects.

³⁴Bianco, 70-74; Malpezzi and Clements, 45.

³⁵Don Yoder, "Folk Medicine," in *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 202-203.

³⁶The Italian emphasis on fresh ingredients and organization of garden space is noted in Richard Raspa, "Exotic Foods Among Italian-Americans in Mormon Utah," in *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States*, ed. Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 189, and in Philip F. Notarianni, "Places of Origin: Calabresi in Carbon County, Utah," in *Old Ties, New Attachments: Italian-American Folklife in the West*, ed. David A. Taylor and John Alexander Williams (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1992), 71-74. Raspa also discusses the transformation of the landscape by Italians in rural Utah into familiar peasant farmsteads in "The Italian Community of Helper, Utah: Its Historic and Folkloric Past and Present," in *The Family and Community Life of Italian Americans: Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Italian American Historical Association held in Chicago, Illinois, October 24 and 25, 1980*, ed. Richard N. Juliani (Staten Island, NY: American Italian Historical Association, 1983), 23-34.

³⁷Malpezzi and Clements, 235. Translation of proverbs: A day without wine is like a day without the sun; water makes one ill, wine makes one sing. For the Italian, the correct grammar should read "Acqua fa male, il vino fa cantare."

³⁸Mathias, "Funeral," 35, makes this point about Italian funerals in South Philadelphia.

³⁹Malpezzi and Clements, 218; Abrahams, 374.

⁴⁰Rocco, 59, 65, 81.

⁴¹Mathias, "Funeral," 40, makes this point about Italian funerals in South Philadelphia, but from my research in Berks County I have found that it also applied to other significant celebrations, especially weddings.

⁴²Gabaccia, *Sicily To Elizabeth Street*, 10, 51-52.

⁴³Ibid., 100. I have drawn on Gabaccia's interpretation of Sicilian family and community life which disagrees with some authors who argue that while socially immigrants became Americans, culturally they remained the Italians they had been before emigration.

⁴⁴Micaela di Leonardo, *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender Among California Italian-Americans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 134-35.

⁴⁵My interpretation here is informed by Henry Glassie's discussion of community in *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 11-34.

⁴⁶di Leonardo, 156.

⁴⁷Bianco, 84-90; Introduction in Orsi, *Madonna*; Orsi, "The Center Out There, In Here, and Everywhere Else: The Nature of Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Saint Jude, 1929-1965," *Journal of Social History* 25(1991):216; Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church," *Journal of Social History* 2(1969):228; Vecoli, "Cult and Occult in Italian-American Culture: The Persistence of a Religious Heritage." In *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America*, ed. Randall M. Miller and Thomas D. Marzik (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977); reprint St. Paul: Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, 25-30, (page references are to reprint edition).

⁴⁸Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants," 267-68.

⁴⁹James S. Olson, *Catholic Immigrants in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1987), 102.

⁵⁰Juliani, *Social Organization*, 91.

⁵¹Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants," 229, 235-36; Orsi, *Madonna*, xvi-xvii.

⁵²Orsi, *Madonna*, 220.

⁵³Ibid., 55.

⁵⁴Bianco, 120; Angie Silvestro, personal communication.

⁵⁵Joseph Sciorra, "Yard Shrines and Sidewalk Altars of New York's Italian-Americans," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, vol. III*, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 185-198.

⁵⁶Bianco, 84, 94-95; Phyllis Williams, *South Italian Folkways in Europe and America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1938), 142-43. The word for evil eye varies according to the regional dialect.

⁵⁷Orsi, "Center Out There," 218.

⁵⁸Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants," 268.

⁵⁹John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925. 2nd ed.* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 212-13, 235-37.

⁶⁰John F. McClymer, "Gender and the 'American Way of Life': Women in the Americanization Movement," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10(Spring, 1991):3-7, 11-12.

⁶¹StYans-McLaughlin, 133-36.

⁶²John Bodnar, "Ethnic Fraternal Benefit Associations: Their Historical Development, Character and Significance," in *Records of Ethnic Fraternal Benefit Associations in the United States: Essays and Inventories*, ed. Susan H. Shreve and Rudolph J. Vecoli (St. Paul: Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, 1981), 7.

⁶³Bodnar, "Ethnic Fraternal Benefit Associations," 7 and Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 124-25 discusses the role of the *prominenti* in the societies.

⁶⁴Humbert S. Nelli, *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 173.

⁶⁵Bodnar, *Transplanted*, 125; "The Birth of the Order," *Order Italian Sons & Daughters of America*, 1964.

⁶⁶For more information, see Philip Cannistraro, "Generoso Pope and the Rise of Italian-American Politics, 1925-1936," in *Italian-Americans: New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity*, ed. Lydio F. Tomasi (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1985), 264-88.

⁶⁷Philip Cannistraro, "Fascism and Italian Americans," in *Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity: Proceedings of the Symposium Held at Casa Italiana, Columbia University, May 21-23, 1976*, ed. Silvano M. Tomasi (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1977), 52.

⁶⁸Orsi, "Center Out There," 218.

⁶⁹The concept that nations are "constructed" and "imaginary" rather than natural outgrowths of historical processes has been discussed by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

⁷⁰Gaetano Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States*, ed. and introduction by Philip V. Cannistraro (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1977), 167-68.

⁷¹On Italian American reaction once the United States declared war, see John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View From America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 349-50; Cannistraro in Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities*, xxxvi.

⁷²Diggins, 351.

⁷³John Noble Wilford, *The Mysterious History of Columbus: An Exploration of the Man, the Myth, the Legacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 247-265; Claudia L. Bushman, *America Discovers Columbus: How an Italian Explorer Became an American Hero* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), 22, 81; David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 22-23.

⁷⁴Noyes, *Uses of Tradition*, 56-57.

A STUDY OF THE SAN CATALDESI WHO EMIGRATED TO DUNMORE, PENNSYLVANIA

by Joseph Bentivegna



Gaetano and Mary Giorgio Cali were part of the initial wave of immigrants who came to Dunmore from San Cataldo in the early 1900s. Their descendants are prominent members of the community today. (Courtesy of Sam Cali)

Dunmore, a town located in Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania, shares a large part of its geographic border with Scranton, the county seat. In the period between 1890 and 1910, United States Census figures show that Dunmore experienced a substantial increase in population, with 8,315 residents at the beginning of the last decade of the 19th century and 17,615, in 1910.¹ This increase was due mostly to an influx of immigrants seeking work in the coal mines. In the years between 1900 and 1920, more than three thousand employees a year were hired to work in Dunmore's mines, and many were from San Cataldo (Sicily), Italy.

These immigrants were a unique group of Italians in that they had some mining experience, for by 1900 a large part of the economy of San Cataldo relied upon deep mining. (In contrast, Italian immigrants from Calabria, Naples, Abruzzi, Calatri, and Avellino had no contact with the mining industry until they came to the United States.) They were distinguished, too, by the fact that most intended to remain permanently in their new country, unlike many of their fellow countrymen who planned to retire in Italy.

In the following study, these immigrants—and their American descendants—will be referred to as the San Cataldesi, a collective noun which comes directly from the

Italian language and which means “the people from San Cataldo.” It is a work prompted by the writer's intent to contribute to the documentation of the experiences of one group of Italian immigrants, within which are his parents, relatives, and boyhood friends. Their experiences may be viewed as a microcosm of the full and rich Italian American experience which is only now receiving its due recognition by writers, scholars, and young ethnics.

Some of the motivation for this study comes too from the writer's conviction that many Italian Americans believe that their forefathers have not received their due recognition for their productivity, courage, and sacrifices in developing the resources of our country; that the role of the immigrants, regardless of national origin, must be incorporated as an essential part of our nation's heritage and history; that the Italian immigrant was the victim of discrimination and injustices both because of his national origin and his religious practices; that most ethnic groups did not benefit from adequate educational services designed to preserve and promote their culture and heritage; and that current efforts of ethnic groups to perpetuate their heritages should receive strong community support.

The Italian immigrant left behind him a neophyte nation suffering from serious growing pains. Forced to nationalize under the aegis of Garibaldi, the country had a tenuous political structure resulting from a devastating war, understood by few but painful to many. The government and church competed for a position of supremacy in the life of the average citizen. Violence, disorder, revolutionary land reforms, disastrous economic conditions, political repression, resistance to self-government, international isolation, and massive illiteracy took their toll on the nation frequently referred to as the "cradle of Western Civilization." The Italian had then, and probably has today, a basic distrust for centralized government. Expediency trained him to focus his primary loyalties upon his family.

In the southern part of Italy two factors made life virtually subhuman: rural isolation and the depleted, exhausted, and infertile soil. The invitations coming from American employers were irresistible, but not all emigrated to the United States. Some went to South America, some to North Africa, and some to Australia. Families were divided for life. Only a few reunions were possible. The Italian immigrant who came to America had one single aspiration—to get a job; any job. With a job he could survive; with a job he could buy clothes, pay rent and doctor bills, and send some money back to Italy. He spent very little on recreation. He had a strong ambition to own a house and land, something only the elite could do in the home country. For many the objective was to earn money in America and then return home to retire.

SICILY

Senza Italia, Sicilia si nni scanta

Senza Sicilia, Italia picca cunta.

Without Italy, Sicily is weak

Without Sicily, Italy has little value.

This proverb, written in the Sicilian dialect, gives some insight into the reasons for Sicily's status as a Commonwealth and its semi-autonomous governmental structure. The law and culture of this island state, also known as Trinacria, contain remnants of those numerous nations which occupied it over a period which exceeds three thousand years.² A simple chronology will depict the diversity in its history: 1,000 B.C. to A.D. 300, occupied by Sican, Phoenician, Greek, and Roman governors; 300 to 800, ruled by Byzantine emperors and clergy; 827 to 1060, governed by Arabs; 1130, Sicily created the world's first parliamentary government; 1060 to 1194, occupied by Normans; 1194 to 1266, controlled by Swabian dynasty of the Holy Roman Empire, Palermo established as the imperial capitol; 1266 to 1412, subjected to the French House of Anjou; 1282, Sicilian Vespers took place; 1412 to 1713, governed by Spanish Kings of Aragon; 1735, Charles III begins the reign of the Bourbons; 1860, Garibaldi conquers Sicily—his last major resistance ended with his

military court's execution of Baron Francesco Bentivegna, military leader for the monarchists; 1861, Cavour called first Italian national parliament, Victor Emmanuel II proclaimed king; 1922, Mussolini appointed prime minister of Italy.

Cicero described Sicilians in a manner which some find applicable today. "Sicilians are an intelligent people but suspicious; they have a sense of order, frugality, and economy; they love to work, they have perseverance in their pursuits, they are not lazy or spoiled, they are very pleasant; even if something goes wrong for them they are always able to shrug it off with an apt remark, they are also a patient people"

The Sicilian, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, in his world acclaimed novel *The Leopard (Il Gattopardo)* gave this description of his people: "This violence of the landscape, the cruelty of the climate; the continual tension in everything, even those monuments of the past, not built by us and which surround us like beautiful mute phantoms; all these governments landed here from who knows where, immediately served, soon detested and never understood, who expressed themselves only with works of art that for us were enigmatic; with tax collectors who were very real . . . all these things formed our character, which thus remains conditioned by extraneous fatalities, as well as by our own terrifying insularity."

THE CITY OF SAN CATALDO, SICILY

Neither church nor secular scholars have been able to conclusively identify the date or place of birth of St. Cataldo, for whom the Sicilian city is named, so the record showing the date and place of ordination is usually where his life story begins. It is agreed that he was ordained in Ireland, but one scholar gives the date as approximately 640,³ while another, who considers St. Cataldo a contemporary of St. Patrick, gives the date as 432.⁴ The implication is that both men were part of the massive Roman migration to the British Isles. These early centuries saw volatile cultural and military movements between the Romans (both Christians and pagans) and various tribes, local and foreign (Nordsmen). Eventually Christianity was to predominate and Ireland became a bastion of the Catholic faith. Strong ties were established and sustained with the Papacy. Irish monks brought Catholicism to many pagan tribes on the European mainland.

The life of St. Cataldo can be divided into three parts: his life and missionary work in Ireland; his pilgrimages to Rome and the Holy Land; and his great achievements in converting to Christianity that large part of southeastern Italy contained by the Adriatic Sea and the Gulf of Taranto which is now called Puglia (Apulia) and where his work is well-documented. The city of Taranto (pop. 224,000) elected him as its patron saint more than three hundred years ago, and to this day St. Cataldo is venerated by many in the regions of Puglia and Basilicata. Miracles are frequently attributed to him by individuals known to have

been crippled, blind, or epileptic, and his followers sometimes refer to him as Il Grande Santo Taumaturgo (The Great Miracle Worker). His body is at rest in the Cathedral of Taranto and his miter and vestments are placed on public display every May 10, when his feast day is celebrated by large processions.⁵

The reasons for naming the Sicilian city after St. Cataldo could not be determined through the resources available at the time of this writing. (One source stated simply that the city was named after the holy bishop of Taranto.) Greek and Roman ruins are to be seen in the region, and the city's origins can be traced back to the period 600-500 B.C. The present city was founded in 1621 by Vincent Galletti and received its official designation in 1865.

Today the city of San Cataldo has more than 25,000 inhabitants. It is 625 meters above sea level and located in the province of Caltanissetta, in central Sicily between the Platani and Saldo Rivers. The economy reflects a combination of agricultural and small-business industries. Of special significance to this study is the presence of an underground mining industry, in existence for more than one hundred years. The Montecatine-Edison Company is the largest producer of mined products, namely bituminous coal and sulphur. This part of Sicily is known too for its production of grains, olives, figs, nuts, and vegetables. In recent years there has also been an increase in the number of farms and ranches raising cows, hogs, and sheep.⁶

The religious life of those who emigrated centered around the church of St. Joseph. Many of the Dunmore immigrants were from this parish where the devotion to San Cataldo is especially strong. While visiting San Cataldo in 1953, the writer was told that during World War II the people of San Cataldo were more fortunate than those in Caltanissetta where the German army was more destructive. When asked for an explanation, an old lady said that the people of Caltanissetta "pray to St. Michael and those of San Cataldo pray to San Cataldo, but St. Cataldo was a better saint."

The San Cataldesi have always had a special veneration for St. Blaise (Biagio in Italian, Vilasi in Sicilian) as well. His feast day is celebrated on February 3, at which time the faithful have their throats blessed, for tradition teaches that a miracle was attributed to the Saint when, through his intervention, a baby was freed from a serious obstruction which had lodged in its throat. On his feast day those in San Cataldo who have received favors through his intervention carry *li cuddureddi*—simple pastries of flour and sugar—to the church of St. Rosario which has a painting of St. Blaise. After the pastries are blessed they are distributed to parishioners who recite the prayer of St. Blaise before eating them.

A custom continued by the San Cataldesi immigrants is that of distributing *puppi di zuccheri*—three-to-six-inch tall sugar dolls in the shape of angels. Intended to perpetuate the memories of grandparents and to serve as rewards to children who were obedient and respectful,

these dolls were placed under the beds of sleeping children as gifts from departed grandparents on the eve of All Souls Day, November 2. During the Holy Day the family was expected to attend Mass and to eat nothing but *cucci*, a bland combination of cooked wheat, olive oil, and salt water.

DUNMORE, PENNSYLVANIA

The present site of Dunmore was originally part of Old Providence Township. The first flow of traffic was over the Connecticut-Cobb Road which roughly coincides with present-day Drinker Street. The major intersection on this road was called the Corners or Bucktown, names still used today. In 1783 a Connecticut shoemaker, William Allsworth, settled in this area, and in the years between 1820 and 1826 the Philadelphia and Great Bend Turnpike was built, a project promoted by Henry Drinker who opened the first store and tavern at the Corners. The first public school was built in 1825; a post office was opened in 1849; and the borough government was officially established in 1862.

The first recorded Mass in Dunmore was conducted by Fr. James Cullen in 1852, and the Church of St. Simon was founded in 1855; its name was later (1890-5) changed to St. Mary of Mt. Carmel. The needs of Dunmore's Italian immigrants concerned the Catholic bishop as early as 1890, and priests from St. Mary's Church were assigned the duty to minister to them. There is no record of San Cataldesi being part of Dunmore's original Italian colony; they first appear in the church records for 1904.

In 1894 the Italian immigrants built St. Anthony's Church at the intersection of Smith and Cooney Streets on land donated by the Spencer Coal Company. The first pastorate (1894-97) seems to have been shared by Frs. Rosario Nosca and Pietro Biondi. They were followed by Fr. Dominic Landro (1897-1900); Fr. Giuseppe Angeletti; Fr. Giovanni Sbrocca; Fr. Giuseppe Del Monte; Msgr. Francis Valverdi (1906-28); Msgr. William Crotti (1928-72); and the present pastor, Fr. A. Tito. In any discussion of St. Anthony's, due recognition must be given to Msgr. Crotti,⁷ who was held in high esteem by the San Cataldesi. His many years of experience with immigrants and first-generation Americans were marked by genuine interest, sincere concern, and insightful leadership. Very few churchmen acquired his level of expertise in serving the immigrants and their descendants. In 1951 St. Anthony's Parish had a triple celebration: the dedication of a new church; the opening of a new parochial school; and the twenty-fifth anniversary of Msgr. Crotti's ordination. Members of the San Cataldesi community were instrumental in organizing the celebration.

THE ORIGINAL SAN CATALDESI IMMIGRANTS

As already noted, the arrival of large numbers of immigrants looking for work in the coal mines greatly increased Dunmore's population in the years between 1890 and 1910. In 1910 the total of Italian nationals (1,807) and children of both parents foreign born (1,275) was 3,082;



Taken in 1944 in preparation for San Cataldo Solemn High Mass., this picture shows former pastor Msgr. William Crotti and the altar boys, all sons of Teresa (Graci) and Angelo Bentivegna. Standing, left to right: Rev. Salvatore, Dr. Joseph, Michael (d.), Anthony (d.), and Dr. Angelo (d.).

the writer estimates that one-fourth of these—approximately 770—were San Cataldesi.⁸ Their number peaked in 1920, when it is estimated that the San Cataldesi of Dunmore numbered slightly less than two thousand. Between 1900 and 1920 there was very little travel to Sicily by these immigrants. Those who returned to their native land did so in order to marry or to assist family members to immigrate. In contrast to other Italian immigrants, the San Cataldesi learned early that the move to America would be permanent.

But in the first two decades of this century there were shifts in population among the San Cataldesi in the United States. For some, Dunmore was not the first place of American residency, nor was it the last. There was a flow of relatives and friends between New York City (Mulberry and Rivington Streets), and between Rochester, Rome, and Messina, all located in the state of New York. Locally, there were many residential changes with Pittston (only a thirty-minute drive today) which may have as many San Cataldesi as Dunmore. These moves were largely the result of job seeking, for these immigrants took advantage of every opportunity to find a job, especially if it meant a chance to get out of the mines.

With their mining experience, it is not surprising that between 1900 and 1920 the vast majority of the workers in the study group were employed in the local anthracite coal industry as miners. They were classified as laborers whose primary function it was to dig and load coal by hand at the actual face location. Some were also employed in other jobs connected to mining, caring for mules, cutting timber supports, laying track, and doing stone masonry work. Known as courageous, industrious, imaginative, and reliable workers, it was during periods of unemployment

due to strikes, layoffs, shut downs, accidents, and other causes that they sought employment out of the mines, in different industries. Very few succeeded unless they moved to other parts of the state or country.

Detailed information about the occupations of the early San Cataldesi is rather limited since occupational information was not routinely listed in school, church, tax, or health records. (Some church records do give the occupation of the spouse or dead person, and sometimes it was noted that the cause of death was a mine accident.) Concerning the occupations of their descendants,⁹ since the level of education achieved can be a reliable indicator of career pursuits, a study was made of a random selection of Dunmore High School graduation programs from the 1930s.¹⁰ It showed that of the 505 graduates listed, 146 were Italian, but only fifteen were San Cataldesi. Such a disproportionately small representation suggests that education and the more skilled vocations were not given a high priority.

In order to identify the members of the original group of San Cataldesi who lived in Dunmore between 1900 and 1920, three primary sources—the records of St. Anthony's Parish, a picture of members of the San Cataldo Club, 1928, and the records of the Societa San Cataldo di Mutuo, Dunmore—were consulted, along with newspapers, obituary notices, tax documents, cemetery-lot maps, school files, and military records. The last named showed the following San Cataldesi as inductees for World War I: Michael Azzarelli, Foli Angelo, Salvatore Bentivegna, Biagio Bentivegna, Sera Cologero, Salvatore Polizzi, Angelo Riggi, and Pasquale Saracino. The final list of family names from all sources (see Appendix) totals 176, although there may be some misspellings and some duplications.¹¹

Members of the Societa San Cataldo di Mutuo Socorso, Dunmore, Pa., c. 1928.



There is reason to believe that almost all San Cataldesi were members of St. Anthony's Parish, and its birth, marriage, and death records proved of special value in making this compilation. The marriage records gave the names of both parties, place of birth, the date of the marriage, and the names of the couple's parents:

Giuseppe Alu, Carmella Prizzi, San Cataldo
6 Dic 1917
Salvatore Alu, Crocefissa Costa
Antonio Prizzi, Maria Vasta

Any name showing the birth place as San Cataldo was added to the master list.¹²

The 1928 picture listed as the second primary source consulted hangs on the wall in the social hall still used by members of the San Cataldo Club; it is located in the neighborhood where most San Cataldesi resided. There are ninety-six members shown in this large picture, and all but eight have been identified. Assisting with the identifications were Joseph Occulto, the only known survivor of those pictured; San Naro, a retired barber and custodian of the San Cataldo Club; and Teresa Bentivegna, mother of the writer.

They pointed out that several of those shown may not have resided in Dunmore when the picture was taken, but

were in town on business or were visiting friends and relatives. It was noted, too, that several individuals in the picture were not from San Cataldo but rather from Serradifalco, a town nearby. The family names mentioned were Lombardo, Aronica, D'Angelo, and Miccicche. The discussions which took place during the identification process evoked many memories about the old structure of the community. Repeated were recollections about how the old people managed to survive and be happy, how they succeeded in maintaining close family relationships, how they collaborated for certain festivities, and how they cooperated with each other, especially in times of need.

The minutes, financial records, and membership files of the Societa San Cataldo di Mutuo, Dunmore (also known as "the club"), were also most helpful for the compilation of the final list of family names produced by this study. The Society was incorporated on July 23, 1906, ". . . for beneficial purposes to its members in case of sickness, accident or death, from funds collected therein."¹³ The petition for incorporation was signed by Rosario Bentivegna, Giuseppe Azzarelli, Rosario Guarniere, Salvatore Bentivegna, Salvatore Cravatta, Salvatore Occhipinti, Michele Occhipinti, and Francesco Messina.

In 1938 the Societa San Cataldesi Femilne was organized by Marie Cancellare, Biagia Graci, Grazie Occulto,



Typical mine scene, c. 1920.



The statue of San Cataldo acquired for St. Anthony's Church in 1943 and later removed from the sanctuary when it was renovated to comply with Vatican II edicts.

Serafine Felice, and Josephine Marchese. Their function was to serve as a women's auxiliary for the San Cataldo Club. Many of their activities centered around the preparations for the annual celebration of the San Cataldo Feast Day, usually held on the last Sunday in May. In 1941 this auxiliary undertook a fund-raising campaign for the acquisition of a new statue of San Cataldo for St. Anthony's Church. The campaign was especially successful because of the personal efforts and contribution of Michelangelo Polizzi, and in 1943 an exceptionally beautiful wooden image of the patron saint was added to the sanctuary of the parish church during the dedication on the feast day. Of superior artistic quality, this statue was carried during processions on a special platform which rested on the shoulders of eight to ten men. The processions included a band of thirty-two musicians under the direction of Professor Dell Aria, a member of the San Cataldesi community. The statue was carried through all the streets in the San Cataldesi sector of the town at a time when this feast was the center of all the social activities of the San Cataldesi. At predetermined intervals the procession would stop at a house where participants would rest, eat, and drink. Neighbors pinned their financial donations to a ribbon hung on the statue. These processions, as focal points of ethnic pride, never received the full understanding or encouragement of diocesan officials, and eventually the pastor and parish leaders conceded not only to the cessation of the festivity in honor of San Cataldo, but to all others as well.

When the sanctuary in the parish church was renovated to comply with Vatican II edicts, the statue of San Cataldo acquired by the Societa San Cataldese Feminile was re-

moved and placed in the parish school. This decision proved to be unpopular among some of the San Cataldesi, who recalled well its exceptional beauty and the sacrifices of those who made the acquisition possible. Sometime later the statue disappeared, presumably with the authorization of parish officials; efforts to locate it proved fruitless. A smaller and less attractive statue of San Cataldo was placed in the redesigned sanctuary, however, probably in recognition of the size and solidarity of this parish subgroup.

SOME GENERALITIES ABOUT THE SAN CATALDESI

Limited in scope, this study is intended to encourage more in-depth efforts to understand the contributions of Italian Americans to the development of the United States. Toward that end, certain comments and observations which were made in almost all the discussions with the twenty-three San Cataldesi who spoke with the writer when materials were being sought, are presented here simply as generalities and as possible areas of research for those interested in Italian ethnic studies.

Concerning the immigrants: A very high number were illiterate and only encouraged their children to pursue an education if the family finances were not jeopardized; in contrast with other Italian immigrant groups, the San Cataldesi intended to remain permanently in their new country; some were required to abandon their Roman Catholic faith and to participate in Protestant services if they wished to retain their jobs in the coal mines; the San Cataldesi encountered resistance from Catholic church officials for some of their religious practices, but conflict—which centered around practices labeled superstitious and pagan (faith healing, venerating the aged, dead or alive, and religious processions)—was minimal in contrast to some other Italian groups; the "old people," who perceived their God as powerful, kind, understanding, and merciful, were uncomfortable with the bureaucratic (financial, administrative, theological) structure of the American-Irish church, and were unable to accept a tenet describing God as seeking out sinners in order to implement a mysterious code of justice.

Concerning their descendants: They identify more with Italianismo rather than Sicilianismo in their ethnic behavior; they hold no nationalistic or patriotic sentiments for Italy or Sicily; there are no apparent commercial bonds with the "old country"; there appears to be no viable mechanism in the San Cataldesi community which seeks to preserve and promote their heritage—most are uninformed about their ethnicity, with some feeling that their social status and patriotism would be questioned if they identified with their heritage; the level of assimilation is most apparent with the San Cataldo Club, today primarily a social organization whose membership roll shows the names of Irish, Polish, and other ethnic groups; under the leadership of the older members of the Nicosia and Naro families, a small group of San Cataldesi attend a special

Mass on the last Sunday of May in honor of their patron saint.

* * *

Seneca said: "We are members of one great body. Nature planted in us a mutual love, and fitted us for a social life. We must consider that we are born for the good of the whole." If we are drawn to the good of the whole, how much stronger, then, is our attraction to our family and ethnic group?

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The writer also wishes to acknowledge the dedicated assistance of Susan Amata, who compiled a substantial portion of the data recorded.

ENDNOTES

¹Report of the U. S. Census Bureau, Vol. III, p. 590, Washington, D. C., 1913.

²Some Sicilian historical vignettes: Plato taught philosophy in the Sicilian port of Siracusa; Archimedes, greatest mathematician of antiquity, laid the foundation for physics while teaching in various Sicilian learning centers; Emperor Frederick III (1194-1250) at the Palermo Court authorized and founded the first official Italian language, decades before the birth of Dante; the fifteenth century painter, Antonello da Messina, first developed the technique of the Venetian painting school; Pietro Novelli, a seventeenth century painter, was an arch rival of Van Dyck; Filippo Arena, eighteenth century scientist, founded modern biology; Giacomo Serpotta (1657-1732) perfected the baroque art forms; Vincenzo Bellini (1810-1835) opera composer famous for his masterpiece *Norma*; Stanislao Cannizzaro first revealed the true structure of the atom; Ettore Majorana propheticized nuclear fission; Marchese Florio constructed the first Italian automobile in 1897; Francesco Crispit (1819-1901) statesman who promoted the world-government movement; Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (1860-1952) World War I statesman; Luigi Sturzo, founded Italy's Christian Democratic Party; Giovanni Verga (1840-1936) acclaimed as one of the leading novelists of the century; Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) dramatist and novelist who received the Nobel Prize in 1934; Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) poet who received the Nobel Prize in 1959.

³Arcarese, Salvatore, *San Cataldo E Sancataldesi*, San Cataldo (Italy), Litografia Editrice Nocera, 1980.

⁴Berzano, Fillippo, *Il Taumaturgo Di Taranto*, Roma (Italy). Pia Societa S. Paolo, 1941.

⁵There is no reference to St. Cataldo in D. P. Conyngham's *Lives of the Irish Saints* (Boston: Sadler & Co., 1870), or in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: R. Appleton Co., 1908). However, in Butler's *Lives of the Saints* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1956) a St. Catald (the "o" is omitted) is included in a listing of saints with a feast day of May 10.

⁶"Le Regioni D' Italia" Vol. 17 Sicilia: Torino (Italy) Edizioni Utet 1968.

⁷In Thomas Murphy's *Jubilee History of Lackawanna County* (Hist. Publishing Co.: Topeka, Ind., 1928) biographies of a number of prominent citizens are given, including one for Fr. William Crotti, who was not originally from Dunmore. A review of the names reveals that no Dunmore Italians or San Cataldesi were included. The Italian names identified by the writer in this 1928 edition are: Arigoni, James; Bartecchi, Ferdiand A.; Benore, George, J.; Bisignani, Gene M.; Capellini, Renaldo; Cerra, Angelo; Crotti, William (Rev.); D'Andrea, Canio L.; Danque, D.; Deantonio, Emilio (M.D.); Fabretti, Fred; Favini, John J.; Figliomeni,

Joseph R.; Giaconi, Elizabeth; Graziano, Jacob; Memolo, John; Memolo, Martin; Molinari, Umberto; Russoniello, Vincent; Sandone, Charles.

⁸Based on the U. S. Census Bureau report listed in endnote 1, the ethnic population of Dunmore, Pa., in 1910 was 10,456 with 4,956 of those foreign born and 5,500 with both parents foreign born. In the following list the first number is foreign born; the second, both parents foreign born; the third, the total of the first two: Austria, 807, 758, 1,565; Belgium, 01, 01, 01; Canada, 19, 04, 23; Denmark, 02, 03, 05; England, 377, 316, 693; France, 19, 05, 24; Germany, 286, 456, 742; Greece, 01, 00, 01; Hungary, 254, 100, 354; Ireland, 841, 1,937, 2,778; Italy, 1,807, 1,275, 3,082; Russia, 297, 85, 382; Scotland, 132, 112, 244; Sweden, 07, 04, 11; Switzerland, 24, 20, 44; Turkey, 05, 00, 05; Wales, 72, 74, 146; Others, 05, 351, 356.

⁹To identify the types of jobs held by the descendants of the original immigrants, the names appearing in the Appendix were matched with similar names found in the 1982 *Polk Directory* (Lackawanna County, Pa.) R. L. Polk & Co., Malden, Mass. This method facilitated the compilation which follows, but interpretations, inferences, and conclusions should take into consideration the following limitations: 1) Some of the San Cataldesi names are common to other groups of Italian Americans. For example, the name Marino can be found in families whose origin goes back to the immigrants from Palermo, Naples and Milan. Thus the number of Marinos in the comparison group may represent some non-San Cataldesi. 2) Descendants who pursued vocations in certain professional, skilled or unskilled fields do not reside within the study area limited by the Polk Directory. 3) Distinctions between second, third, and fourth generations of descendants are not made. Generalities about one generation may not be true of another one. It might be assumed that more recent generations will appear in greater frequencies in those occupations which require more education and higher skills. 4) Vocational choices relate closely to the types of jobs found in the local industries at a given time. For instance, glass blowers and clay workers do not appear in the list of occupations pursued because related industries were not part of the local economy.

Occupations of descendants of the San Cataldesi: accountants (4); administrative aide; administrator (assistant, health agency); agent (purchasing, insurance); analyst, anesthesiologist; anesthetist; architect, 2; assembler, 2; assistant (president, manager, 4, legal); assorter; barber; bartender; beautician, 2; blacktopper; boiler maker; bookbinder, 4; book-keeper, 5; bricklayer; butcher, 2; dental assistant, 2; dentist; cabinet maker, cafeteria worker; carpenter, 4; carrier; caseworker, 2; chef; chemist; cleaning woman; clerk (accounting, admissions, city, disbursement, file, insurance, mail, office, 30, print shop, records, sales, store); computer operator, 2; cook, 2; construction worker, 4; counterman, 3; court reporter; custodian; controller; designer, 2; dietitian; director (economic developer, public works, finance); distribution technician; dockman; draftsman, 3; driver (bus, 2) truck, 12, aide); dyer; electrician, 3; electronics worker; employment service coordinator; engineer, 3; equipment operator, 2; examiner, 2; factory worker, 8; filler; firefighter, 6; fitter; floorwoman; food service worker; foreman, 6; forklift operator; fountain attendant; fund raiser; gas station attendant, 3; guidance counselor; helper, 2; hemmer; income maintenance worker; inspector, 3; iron worker; janitor; junk dealer, 2; kitchen aide; laborer, 9; landscape gardner; lawyer, 2; machine operator, 15; machinist, 3; maid, 5; maintenanceman, 4; manager (branch, general, 7, grocery, hotel, income, institutional, meat, office, plant, 2; sales); mason, 5; mason instructor; meat wrapper; mechanic, 9; military (sergeant); mimeographer; mover, 3; nurse, 16 (licensed practical, 2, aide); office worker, 7; oiler; orderly; owner (auto repair shop, beauty parlor, black top co., coal co., contractor, 4, dress corp., dress shop, 2, excavating co., food store, garage, gas station, 2, importing co., insurance co. 11, landscaping co., painting contr., repair shop, restaurant, small business, 45, store, 2, supermarket, trucking co.); packer, 7; painter, 5; physician, 5; pianist; plant worker; plumber, 2; president, co., 5; printer; press operator; pressor, 5; professor, 4; produce worker, 2; proofreader; psychologist, school; psychological aide; receptionist; redrawer; repairman, 2; representative (admissions, customer, service, 2); roofer; salesman, 15; salesperson, 15; seamstress; secretary, 21; security guard, 2; service man; shipper, shop worker; singer; speech therapist; spooler; sprayer; spreader; storage specialist; superintendent, 2; supervisor, 2; teacher, 27; telephone operator; tool maker; torch worker; trainer in operations; vice president, 2; waitress, 5; warehouseman, 5; welder; x-ray technician.

¹⁰These were made available by Joseph P. McDonald, principal. From them the writer was able to compile the following information: Jan. 1932, 63 graduates—19 Italians, 2 San Cataldesi; June 1932, 88 graduates—18 Italians, 2 San Cataldesi; Jan. 1934, 56 graduates, 14 Italians, no San

Cataldesi; June, 1934, 109 graduates—29 Italians, 2 San Cataldesi; Jan. 1936, 69 graduates, 18 Italians, 3 San Cataldesi; June, 1936, 120 graduates, 48 Italians, 6 San Cataldesi.

¹¹Some examples of spelling variations found in the sources are: Anzelone—Anzellone, Angelone, Angelo; Amorebello—Morebello, Morebell; Bentivegna—Bentinnencia, Benty; Codaro—Cadaro, Cadoro; Dall 'Aria—Dellario; D'—De. Di; Di Fazio—Fazio; Guarnieri—Guarneri, Warner; Martorana—Mortaranna; Polizzi—Polizi; Rogato—Rogatto; Rosato—Rosatto; Serrenti—Sorenti; Salome—Solami; Sollami—Sallame; Strazzeri—Strazieri; Trubia—Trubbia.

Some examples of common first names and their English versions (names in parentheses are Sicilian versions; names appear in this list spelled in Italian): Addelina; Angelo, a.—Ang, Angie; Angelina; Antonina; Antonio—Anthony, Tony; Biagio, a (Valaso, a)—Bessie; Calogero, a.—Chas, Charles; Carmelo, a.—Carm; Cataldo, a.—Cux, Carl; Concetta—Connie; Cristine; Crocefissa—Chris, Crosy; Francesco, a.—Frank, Francis, Frances; Gaetano, a; Giuseppe—Joseph, Joe, Giuse, Peppy; Giusepina—Josephine; Grazia (e)—Grace; Liborio; Michele—Michael, Mike; Michelina—Maggie; Pasquale—Pat, Patsy, Patrick; Rosario, a.—Ross; Salvatore (Tureddu)—Sal, Sam; Salvatrice (e); Santina; Santo, a; Sebastiano, a.—Sebastian, Saby; Tommaso, a (Taneddu)—Thomas, Tom; Vincenzo, a.—Vincent, Vinnie, Vince.

¹²Marriage records to February, 1922: May 8, 1906, Giuseppe Perri & Pasqualina Rosato; Sept 28, 1907, Salvatore Bentivegna & Rosina Occhipinti; Dec 21, 1908, Arcangelo Letizia & Maria Renso; Feb 13, 1909, Gaspare Guarneri & Teresina Guarniari; July 17, 1909, Francesco Lussetta & Margherita Napolitano; Aug 30, 1909, Luigi Pelato & Lucia Occhipinti; Aug 17, 1909, Carmelo Graci & Lucia Marciano; Jan 8, 1909, Giuseppe Graci & Maria Gentile; Apr 21, 1911, Giuseppe Occulto & Rosaria Cerranto; Feb 8, 1912, Salvatore Bio & Vita Avellino; May 6, Angelo Mortoranna & Grazia Fazio; Sept 22, 1917, Antonio Giannone & Maria Cali; Dec 6, 1917, Giuseppe Alù & Carmela Prizzi; Sept 11, 1919, Alfonso Guarneri & Freda Mathias; July 9, 1921, Salvatore Bentivegna & Angelina Rosato; Oct 15, 1921, Angelo Bentivegna & Teresa Graci; Feb 25, 1922, Salvatore LaMonaco & Giovannina Giannone.

Death Records of the San Cataldesi, Dunmore, 1923–78:

Age	Name	Date	Witness
	Giarratana, Rosaria	21 Jun 23	Occulto, Giuseppe, husband
	De Nobile, Grazie	19 Nov 23	Arcangelo, father
45	Lo Monaco, Stefano	26 Dec 24	Bentivegna, Giuseppina, wife
	Vincenzi, Domenica	8 Jul 25	Gitto, Nunziato, husband
	Bentivegna, Michele	3 Jan 26	Lupo, Grazia, wife
68	Guarnieri, Isidoro	2 Aug 27	Cologera, wife
1	Bentivegna, Caterina	1 Apr 29	Bentivegna, Biagio, father
48	Graci, Antonio	1 Feb 30	Biagia, wife
56	Rogato, Michael	10 Jun 32	Angelina, wife
48	Bentivegna, Francesca	4 Aug 34	
70	Bio, Salvatore	24 May 36	Salvatore, son
56	Bentivegna, Carmella	4 Jan 37	Rosario, husband
9m	Vullo, Salvatore	28 Dec 38	Salvatore, father
65c	Gaetano, Salvatore	21 Oct 39	Rose, wife
18	Feletch, Angelina	24 Nov 40	Cataldo, father
17	LaMagna, Joseph	13 Mar 44	Gaetano, father
69	Sibio, Rosaria	5 Oct 44	Joseph
88	Bentivegna, Grazia	27 May 46	Angelo, son
22	Bentivegna, Anthony	22 Sep 47	Angelo, father
87	Rizzo, Grace	14 Feb 48	Cologero, son
52	Prizzi, Rosaria	23 Jul 49	Santo
70	Morisola, Cataldo	17 Jun 51	Grace, sister
58	Polizzi, Cataldo	9 Feb 52	Santina
68	Graci, Bessie	1 Feb 53	Charles, son
84	Alu, Rosaria	5 Jun 55	Michael, husband
58	Gagliardi	3 Sep 57	Cataldo, son
69	Bentivegna, Frances	31 Aug 69	Michael, husband
75	Carubba, Michelina	6 Mar 61	Gaetana, daughter
80	Acculto, Grace	2 Jan 62	Michelina, daughter
91	Bentivegna, Michael	27 Nov 66	Catherine, daughter
78	Bio, Salvatore	18 Jul 68	Carmela, daughter
76	Dellario, Angelo	26 May 69	Elena, wife
78	Bentivegna, Angelo	4 Jun 71	Theresa, wife
70	Bentivegna, Salvatore	11 May 78	Rose, wife

¹³Statuto e Regolamento della Società San Cataldo di Mutuo Soccorso Con Residenza in Dunmore, Pa. The Swartz Printer, Dunmore, Pa. 1936.

APPENDIX

Family Names of San Cataldesi, Dunmore, Pa. 1900-20

Acculto	Fazio	Messineo
Alessi	Feletch	Micciche
Alù	Ferrara	Milazzo
Amibole	Ferrario	Miraglia
Amico	Ferrese	Monaco
Amorebello	Felice	Naro
Angelo	Gaetano	Nicosia
Annico	Gagliardi	Nobile
Anzelone	Galenti	Occhipinti
Aquilino	Gambacorto	Palermo
Arnone	Gambo	Palmeri
Aronica	Garofalo	Pane
Azzarelli	Gasparini	Panella
Balena	Gentile	Pantano
Bannò	Genuario	Panzica
Baresse	Geraci	Pelletieri
Belgio	Germano	Passarella
Bellanca	Giambrone	Percelli
Belvedere	Giamporcaro	Perri
Bentivegna	Giannone	Petitto
Bianco	Giarratana	Piconi
Bio	Giordano	Pignato
Bucheri	Giorgio	Pilato
Butera	Gitto	Pinto
Calà	Giuliano	Pizzuto
Calabrese	Giumento	Polizzi
Cali	Giunta	Prizzi
Calogero	Graci	Provenzano
Cancellari	Gruttadauria	Quaranta
Capizzi	Guarnieri	Quattro
Caramanno	Incavido	Raimondo
Cardilichio	La Boda	Renzo
Cario	La Magna	Riggi
Carletta	La Pergola	Rizzo
Carubba	La Pia	Rogato
Caruso	Letizia	Rosato
Celano	Lo Giudice	Rosina
Celeste	Lo Monica	Russo
Cerranto	Lombardo	Salomè
Cigna	Luecano	Saracino
Codaro	Lungo	Sardo
Corbo	Lupo	Scalzo
Cosentino	Lussetta	Scinta
Cravotta	Luzzio	Scarantino
Cuncio	Macaluso	Serrenti
Curatolo	Magri	Sibio
Dell' Aria	Maira	Silliti
D' Angelo	Mancino	Sollami
Dellario	Marcella	Sparacino
Del Vecchio	Marceno	Strazzeri
De Marco	Marchese	Talluto
De Primo	Marciano	Toscano
Di Domenico	Marino	Trubia
Di Fazio	Marsala	Urso
Di Forte	Martorana	Valenza
Di Francesco	Maruzzelli	Vasta
Di Lorenzo	Merisola	Vincenzi
Fabrizio	Messina	Viola
Falzone		Vullo

A LOOK AT THE EARLY YEARS OF PHILADELPHIA'S "LITTLE ITALY"

by Nicholas V. DeLeo



Nicholas V. DeLeo (right) and his brother, Caesar, with their father, Dr. Cesare D. DeLeo in 1930.



Mother Esther Faina DeLeo, of the Perugia nobility, was born and raised in Torino in northern Italy; she attended top-notch schools and became a teacher.

From 1880 to 1924 about four million Italian immigrants—most from Southern Italy—came to the United States. In the minds of some this influx constituted the “Italian problem,” just as the immigration of Orientals was oftentimes seen as the “yellow peril”; it prompted Congress to pass restrictive legislation (quotas) in 1921 and 1924. Unlike today, when prejudice and bigotry are usually well-camouflaged and subtle, in the early part of the century discrimination was open and often vicious—Italians were lynched in the United States as late as 1915.

Just as the so-called “old immigrants”—the English, the Welsh, the Irish, and the Germans—came to the New World in search of a better life, so did the Italians. My mother, Esther Ophelia Faina, arrived in Philadelphia in 1911, the same year my father, Cesare D. DeLeo, arrived at Ellis Island. He had been born and raised in the town of Torre di Ruggiero in the Province of Catanzaro, and had trained as a physician at the University of Naples. My father, who practiced medicine for fifty years at our home at 1333 Ellsworth Street in Philadelphia, was deeply scarred

by the existing prejudice. I was born in Philadelphia in 1912 and still carry deep scars from events that occurred in my lifetime, and so does my son, a second-generation Italian American.

As a result of this bitter and ugly atmosphere, Italians tended to settle near each other, creating in the cities the neighborhoods known as “Little Italies.” In Philadelphia we had a very nice Little Italy, composed mostly of Southern Italians with a sprinkling of Northerners from Piemonte, Friuli, Venice, Trieste, and so forth. It extended from Bainbridge Street south to Oregon Avenue and from the Delaware River west to about 18th Street. The area was also home to many other ethnic groups; in fact, about seventy-five percent of the students at South Philadelphia High School were Jewish. The heart of Little Italy was its famous Italian Market which today officially stretches from Federal Street north to Catherine Street, although one will find stores and stands above and below those north and south boundaries and along side streets as well. The market area was especially picturesque at Christmas and



The family home (with "For Sale" sign and lamp) at 1333 Ellsworth Street in Philadelphia in 1964.

Easter time. Then, the food, the decorations, the folk music, and the people—warm, friendly, and generous—created an atmosphere of true joy and happiness even if one had problems.

The Italian Market began in the mid-1880s as a gathering of pushcarts. Vendors wheeled their carts down to the docks along the Delaware River to purchase produce and dry goods coming into the city by ship, then headed west to Ninth Street to sell their wares. The pushcarts led to outdoor stands and eventually storefronts lined the streets. At one time it was a most interesting and fascinating experience to walk through the market; I can vividly recall the abundance of everything imaginable and possible in the line of food, clothing, and furnishings. Ninth Street was always jammed and the trolley car in the center of the street had to proceed at a snail's pace, its bell clanging constantly. In the winter wood and coal were burned in large metal containers in an effort to keep the vendors at least somewhat warm. These vendors worked very hard in order to become financially independent and to be able to educate their children, many of whom became prominent in the professional, political, or business world.

Referred to by many as "La Colonia Italiana"—the Italian Colony—Little Italy was pretty much independent in a certain sense. In addition to its extensive market, it had its own churches, hospitals and doctors, pharmacies, undertaking establishments, banks, newspapers, businesses of all kinds, and numerous mutual aid societies, many named after the town of origin of its members. For example, the Societa' Italiana di Mutuo Soccorso San Biago was incorporated in Philadelphia in 1897. In addition to retaining their own physicians on a yearly salary and helping members financially in case of illness or death, these societies often helped the victims of such disasters as the earthquakes in Calabria and San Francisco.

Little Italy boasted of having a number of "banks," many of which were actually steamship agencies, employment agencies, or businesses which existed to send money back to Italy. The first Italian bank in Philadelphia was the Banca d'Ambrosio (1886). D'Ambrosio also founded the first Italo-American Building and Loan Association; it later became the Aetna Savings and Loan Association, an important financial institution in the city. In 1887 the Frank Di Bernardino Bank was founded (it was managed by a very good friend of ours, Mr. Castaldi), and there were a number

of others as well: Banco di Genova (1895; later called Banca d'Italia); Banca dell'Acqui (1888); Banca Italiana Americana (1896); and in later years Banca Commerciale Italiana and Sontitaly Bank. Then, too, there was a period when many entrepreneurial immigrants opened small banks; a time when, as the saying goes, "everyone became a *banchista*." Many of these small banks did not last long, and the poor, naive immigrants who dealt with them not only lost their hard-earned savings, but money sent to their families in Italy as well.

Little Italy also had a number of Italian-language newspapers: *Il Risorgimento* (1886) and *Il Vesuvio* (1895), both weeklies; *La Voce della Colonia* (1895-1900); the daily *L'Opinione* (a penny a copy) founded by C. C. A. Baldi in 1906; *La Liberta*; *La Voce del Popolo* (later, *La Libera Parola*) by Giuseppe Di Silvestro; the bilingual Protestant weekly, *La Verita*; and *La Vampa*, a virulent, antifascist weekly edited and published by my father, Dr. Cesare D. DeLeo, who also published the yearly *XX Settembre*. Popular too, was the famous *IL Progresso Italo-Americano* published in New York by Generoso Pope and in existence until 1988 at which time, following a long strike, it was taken over by management and employees, resuming publication as *Oggi*.

THE CHURCH

Most of the Italians who came to this country practiced their Catholicism in their own, superstitious way and most were anticlerical and justly so (I know from personal experience). But after arriving in a strange country most developed fear and uncertainty to the point that they thought they should attend services in the Catholic Church, dominated at that time by the Irish. Considering Italians "inferiors," they discriminated against them; the situation became so bad the Pope had to send Italian missionaries to establish very modest houses of worship for their compatriots.

The first Italian Roman Catholic church in the United States, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, was built in the Little Italy area of Philadelphia at 712 Montrose Street in 1852. Bishop John Neuman, born in Czechoslovakia, felt that the spiritual life of the immigrants was being neglected and entrusted Father Della Nave and Father Folchi with the spiritual care of all the Italians in the city. The original St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi's Church was started with the purchase of a Methodist chapel on the south side of



St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi Church in South Philadelphia; the first Italian national parish in the United States, it was established by Bishop John Neumann in 1853.

Montrose (then Marriot) Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets; Holy Mass was celebrated there for the first time on October 23, 1853. As time went on and the number of parishioners increased, more space was needed; and so, on May 14, 1854, Bishop Neumann laid the cornerstone of a new and larger church. Its new pastor was the Reverend Gaetano Mariani who died in 1866; between that time and 1870, four different priests pastored the church.

In October, 1870, the Reverend Monsignor Antonio Isoleri from Villanova, near Genova, became pastor of St. Mary Magdalen. Truly an extraordinary man, he expanded the church properties and established a school. Above all, he created good will with his neighbors, most of whom were Irish or of Irish descent. (So grateful was Fr. Isoleri for their love and cooperation that he gave the church a statue of St. Patrick as a personal gift.) After the turn of the century, with the city's Italian population growing by leaps and bounds, the Archbishop of Philadelphia, the Most Reverend Patrick Ryan, established St. Rita's Church on the west side of South Broad Street between Ellsworth and Federal Streets; the cornerstone-laying ceremony took place on October 27, 1907.

Little Italy also had two non-Catholic Italian churches, one Evangelical and one Presbyterian. With Italian immigrants facing discrimination in Irish Catholic churches, non-Catholics made considerable inroads, inasmuch as they tried to educate entire families and help them materially in every way. The Wanamaker family was prominent in this work, and it was the famous merchant and philanthropist himself, along with another John (John H. Converse of the Baldwin Locomotive Works) who established and financed the Prima Chiesa Presbiteriana Italiana di Philadelphia in 1902. In addition to the church there was also a kindergarten, an elementary school, and a dispensary. The Italian Evangelical Church was founded in 1889 on Catherine Street by Dr. Teofilo D. Malan; of Waldesian origin, he was a graduate of the University of Paris.

HOSPITALS AND PHARMACIES

Since Italian physicians were boycotted by Philadelphia hospitals they started their own. The first in Little Italy



The first Italian hospital in Philadelphia established by Dr. Giuseppe Fabiani in 1904 at the northeast corner of Tenth & Christian Streets.

was the Fabiani Italian Hospital, established in 1904 at the corner of Tenth and Christian Streets; the second was opened on October 2, 1924, at 1037 South Broad Street. Founded by the Mother Cabrini Sisters and created by joining three red-brick houses, it was called Columbus Hospital; it was razed in 1964. The Fabiani Hospital, too, had been created from three red-brick houses and it had a pharmacy on the corner of the first floor. In later years the hospital was moved to a building at the southwest corner of Tenth and Carpenter Streets that had previously been a clinic.

The state-approved Fabiani Hospital was a great success. Its founder, Dr. Giuseppe Fabiani, was born in Catanzaro Province in 1864 and received his medical degree from the University of Naples in 1889. Following graduation he attended the Officers Medical School in Firenze and then practiced for a short while in Naples. He decided to emigrate in 1902 and became licensed in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. A very hard worker with terrific drive and energy, Dr. Fabiani was a stimulating man who helped many of his colleagues. In fact, he was a tremendous help to my father (whom he apparently knew as a student) when he arrived in Philadelphia. My father would later be vice president of the Fabiani Hospital and Corporation.

In Little Italy's early days some physicians would conduct examinations in the backroom of a pharmacy or they would simply meet there to gossip or have a card game. The first Italian pharmacy in Philadelphia opened in 1878 at the southeast corner of Eighth and Fitzwater Streets; it was owned by Dr. Pignatelli, who led a successful fight to abolish the treacherous *padrone* system. A young man by the name of Vittorio Michelotti, born in Pisa in 1860, arrived in the city the year the pharmacy opened and obtained a job there. He worked very hard, studied, and became a pharmacist. After Dr. Pignatelli sold the business to a Mr. Hickman, Michelotti continued his hard work and eventually was made a partner; when Hickman retired Michelotti bought out his interest; he was the first Italian pharmacist in Philadelphia.

The second Italian pharmacy, owned and operated by



The Tito Manlio Pharmacy at 938 South Eighth Street decorated for Armistice Day after World War I.

Gennaro Tito Manlio, was opened in 1890 at 938 South Eighth Street. Tito Manlio was born in Avellino Province in 1866 and graduated as a pharmacist in 1888. He had a pharmacy in his hometown of Montefalcione and was doing well, but decided to seek his fortune in the United States; his son Ferdinand took over the business when Gennaro Tito Manlio died. The next pharmacy to open was the one located in the Fabiani Italian Hospital; it was managed by one of the most intelligent, fearless, and extraordinary men in Little Italy—Francesco Bartone, universally called “Don Ciccio.” Born in Vibo Valencia in Catanzaro Province, he emigrated to the United States in 1902, settling as a pharmacist at the hospital. When I first met him, Don Ciccio was a stout, imposing man with dark-rimmed glasses and a fine moustache.

After a number of years Don Ciccio returned to Italy, but his son John remained at the Fabiani Italian Hospital; it was understood that he would attend pharmacy school. However, apparently something serious happened between Dr. Giuseppe Fabiani and John, because John was ousted. My father intervened but without success, in spite of the close ties he had with both parties. Feeling that his son had been mistreated, Don Ciccio immediately returned to Philadelphia to even the score; this desire for revenge is an innate characteristic of the Calabresi. He did so by opening his own pharmacy, La Rinascente, on the northeast corner of Ninth and Christian Streets soon after his return. In the rear of the store he also practiced a little minor medicine. His son John did become a pharmacist and Don Ciccio purchased a business for him in a small town near Naples. Don Ciccio himself returned to Italy where he died in his hometown.

* * *

Next to La Rinascente, on the north side of Christian Street, was the famous Matarazzo Pastry Shop, headquarters of the so-called “Underworld” of the times. The secret in those days was to mind your own business and never ask or accept favors from anyone involved in it, especially if you were a physician. Rather, always maintain the position



Gennaro Tito Manlio and his wife and children stand in the pharmacy's doorway.

that they were obligated to you. When my father, carrying his black emergency bag, made house calls during the night and was waiting on the corner for the trolley car, many of these “gentlemen” would ask if they might escort him home. He never accepted. These individuals had the highest respect for two persons—the doctor and the priest. Indeed, they were absolute gentlemen, generous and respectful, provided one did not interfere in anyway whatsoever with their business.

Although they administered their own “justice,” Philadelphia in those days was absolutely safe and one could roam around day and night—as I did. I do not recall anyone ever being caught in a cross fire. It was Prohibition, and these members of the Underworld, in collusion with the highest political and law enforcement authorities, controlled all of the illegal trade in alcohol. It was a very remunerative business, and in consequence there were wars between factions because of territorial disputes; most, however, were carried out outside the city. I remember a number of individuals who were killed and I must say they were fine young men, but it was “a dirty and dangerous business.” I remember a number of them visiting our home and they were very kind and respectful toward my mother who often would lecture to them to leave the racket. But, as they always told her, once you are in you cannot leave.

THE BALDI FAMILY

Carmine Carlo A. Baldi, a man with a limited education, created an empire in Philadelphia that took care of the Italian immigrant from the cradle to the grave. Born in Castelnuovo, Cilento (Salerno) in 1862, he emigrated to the United States with his father, Vito, and his brother Virgilio in 1877. The three started out as fruit hucksters in Philadelphia, but when Vito returned to Italy in 1880 the two young men moved to Atlantic City. When their business failed they too went back to Italy, only to return to Philadelphia and the fruit-selling business some six months later. In the following years Carlo and Virgilio would be joined by their brothers Guerrino, Fiorvanti, and Alphonso.



The Baldi brothers established the first anthracite coal business in Philadelphia. It was located in the 1300 block of Washington Avenue, one block from the DeLeo home.



The Baldi real estate office on South Eighth Street.



Carmine Carlo A. Baldi; he created an empire in Philadelphia that took care of the Italian immigrant from the cradle to the grave.

In 1883 Carlo Baldi was hired by the Schuylkill Valley Railroad in Pottsville as an interpreter. He later sent for his brothers and they were given the job of “exploiter” of a stone quarry. This in turn led them into the coal business, and they arranged to receive deliveries via the railroad to their depot in the city. Theirs was the first anthracite coal business in Philadelphia and it was located in the 1300 block of Washington Avenue (one block from my Ellsworth Street home). The Baldi brothers developed the business with great success, especially after they were the first to receive coal from the anthracite region (where C. C. A. Baldi was a part owner of some of the mines) after the famous strike was settled in 1902.

As time went on the Baldi brothers created a powerful empire. Carlo, Virgilio and Fiorvanti Baldi, along with Lewis, Frank, and Emilio Roma, established the Italian Exchange Bank with Carlo Baldi as president. The bank represented the Banca Commerciale Italiana and the Cunard Line; it was also an employment office and sold railroad and steamship tickets here and abroad. Carlo Baldi was also president of the above-mentioned Societa’ Italiano di Mutuo Soccorso San Biago, and the family owned and published Philadelphia’s first Italian-language daily newspaper, *L’Opinione*, and were editors and publishers of the extensively illustrated *La Colonia Italiana di Filadelfia*, printed for the Milan Exposition in 1906. In addition they owned and operated a travel agency, a real estate business, a mortgage and loan business, an insurance company (fire, life, accident) and one of the city’s most prosperous undertaking establishments. Unquestionably, the family wielded great financial, political, and social power, and C. C. A. Baldi and his brothers were well-respected by the wealthy and powerful of the time.

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

Fiorvanti Baldi, who had attended school to become an undertaker, was in charge of the Baldi funeral business. Francesco Travascio was another prominent and well-respected funeral director—the owner of impressive buildings, carriages, and horses, all indicative of the fact that in those days funerals were taken very seriously. At first, the viewing was held in the home; then, with a band playing a funeral march, the funeral procession made its



The Baldi funeral business on South Eighth Street.

way along the wide sidewalks or through the streets to the church. I can remember very distinctly the funerals that went by our house on Ellsworth Street: At the head of the procession was the funeral director wearing a long black coat with tails and a high, black stovepipe hat; in his right hand he carried a baton to direct the march to the church. Following him was the band, the men bearing the coffin, and the mourners.

As time passed funeral directors began using horse-drawn hearses and carriages—white for infants and young people and black for adults. The Baldi establishment had dozens of luxurious carriages (also used for weddings, baptisms, and so forth) and many, many, drivers and ushers. And, I believe that in spite of the fact that viewings were customarily held in the home, the Baldi brothers initiated a viewing parlor with stained glass windows. As I said, funerals were taken seriously and everything connected with them—and, indeed, with death—was somber. Mourning lasted for years; widows always dressed in black and some also wore a black veil. Men usually wore black ties and a wide black band on their left arm. The funeral ceremony itself conveyed a very important message about the significance of a tight-knit family.

THE HOME AND FAMILY

A hard-working, thrifty, and family-oriented people, by 1900 two of every three Italians in Philadelphia owned their own home. In those days Italians were accustomed to having a *cantina*, which was actually the basement of their red-brick house. In the *cantina* they had all their home-preserved foodstuffs: homemade wine (we made about ten whiskey barrelsful a year); tuna fish preserved in olive oil; all kinds of tomato sauces; roasted peeled peppers; cheeses; eggplants immersed in vinegar; and many others. That was one of the characteristics of the Italians—they felt cozy when they knew their *cantina* was well-stocked,

especially during the winter months.

They were also a generous, hospitable people who shared among themselves a good deal. I remember a great many interesting people dropping by our house on Ellsworth Street. Don Ciccio Bartone, for example, often came by on Sunday to discuss politics and sip a cup of espresso. And in those days police officers walked the beat and one in particular became a close friend of the family. Ralph Rizzo was attached to the Seventh and Carpenter Street Precinct and would often stop in to see us. The grandson of one of those who fought with Garibaldi for Italian independence, he was born in Catanzaro Province and emigrated to the United States in 1908. (His eldest son, Frank, the future mayor of Philadelphia, was born in 1920.) It should be mentioned here, too, that in addition to the Rizzo family, the Bartone family, the Fabiani family, and my family, the DeLeos, were all Calabresi, originating in small mountainous towns in the Province of Catanzaro.

Another extraordinary and colorful individual who stopped at our house many times was Professor Emilio Grosso. Born in Genova in 1878, he arrived in New York in 1905 with \$25 in his pocket and no other possessions. A man of great learning and culture but forced at first to take a menial job, he moved to Philadelphia a year later and became editor of *L'Opinione*. He then taught Italian at the Berlitz School where he made many friends who later became his private students. During the First World War he became the most prosperous teacher of Italian in the city, and after the war he was employed by the government to help Italians who wanted to be repatriated. Gradually he engaged in the importation of Florentine crafts and eventually opened his famous Florentine Shop which catered to the wealthiest people in the country.

Professor Grosso had taught my father English in preparation for his state medical board examinations, so they had known each other a long time. When he came to visit us he would sit in his favorite chair in my father's office discussing Italy, the political situation, world affairs, and various other topics. Of course he would sip a glass of homemade wine or a cup of espresso while my father, as usual, would be smoking his long "peace pipe" filled with aromatic Prince Albert tobacco. Certainly there were many, many more prominent and colorful individuals in Philadelphia's Little Italy too, many of whom I knew personally and others I had heard about; far too many to describe here.

* * *

In Italy there is a famous phrase used to describe Southerners: "*Scarpe grosse, cervello fine*"; literally, "heavy shoes and a fine-tuned brain"; it may help to explain their eventual success in their new country. For poor and often illiterate as many undoubtedly were, they prospered in their new surroundings. Consequently, the great number of Italian Americans who became highly educated and cultured through the sacrifices of their hardworking parents, now feel justly proud of their ethnic and family background.

"AN AURA OF TOUGHNESS, TOO": ITALIAN IMMIGRATION TO PITTSBURGH AND VICINITY

by Catherine Cerrone



Recently widowed Carmela Giarrusso with her five children in Pittsburgh's Hill District, 1923. The family hailed from Campolieto, Italy, in the region of Abruzzo. Her perseverance gave credence to the Italian proverb, "If the father should die, the family would suffer; if the mother should die, the family would cease to exist."

Following the larger pattern of Italian immigration to the United States, Pittsburgh and the surrounding region did not experience any significant influx of Italian immigrants until the 1880s. A part of the "new immigration," those arriving in the United States from the 1880s until the 1930s were from Southern and Eastern Europe. For the most part, the Italian immigrants came from small, rural villages or *paesi*. While their main economy was agricultural, these Italians were more than farmers. Most possessed skills and know-how—from bricklaying to shoe repair—that would eventually serve them well in the American marketplace, although initially they had very few options. Clustering along the banks of the Ohio River and its tributaries, the Monongahela and the Allegheny, and in the mineral-rich hills and valleys surrounding them, these new immigrants would pour and pound steel, mine coal, dig sewer lines, lay railroad ties, and pave roads. In order to survive they would have to tolerate filthy living con-



Little girls paraded through the Larimer Avenue section of East Liberty during the Feast of the Assumption, c. 1940. (All photographs from the Italian American Collection, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania)

ditions, separation from family, low wages, prejudice, and dangerous working conditions.

Eastern European, Syrian, and Greek immigration to the Pittsburgh region dried up before World War II, but Italians kept coming; their numbers surged after the war and they continued arriving well into the 1970s. In the 1980s they were by far the largest immigrant group in Pittsburgh, with 20,000 reported.¹ Today there are more than 200,000 Italian Americans—foreign and native-born combined—living in the city and the surrounding seven-county (Allegheny, Beaver, Fayette, Greene, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland) region.² The following look at this extended community includes a brief survey of the Downtown-Lower Hill district and East Liberty, the two earliest—and perhaps, in their heyday the most colorful—Italian settlements in Pittsburgh; it also touches on several other significant Italian communities inside and outside the city.

DOWNTOWN AND THE LOWER HILL DISTRICT

In the 1880s the first sizable "colony" of Italians, some several hundred, settled in the downtown area of Pittsburgh bounded by Fifth and Sixth Avenues and Smithfield and Grant Streets. The center of this community was Virgin Alley (now Oliver Avenue). This was a narrow street at the time with multiple family tenements and poor sanitation. As Virginia Cerminara, now ninety-one, remembers it, "Virgin Alley had a pump in the middle. There were houses on one side and houses on the other and it had a pump in the center. No grass, it was cement, and who'd ever get up first in the morning to wash clothes, they all tried to pump the water."⁴ Initially the downtown area was a practical place for Italians to settle, as they worked in labor gangs on jobs they could walk to, digging sewer lines, paving downtown streets, and working on the railroads. Stefano Gallati, who emigrated to Pittsburgh in 1909 when he was sixteen, lived for some time in a boxcar with fellow laborers. Now one hundred years old, he still remembers what it was like: ". . . four on one side, four the other side. Life was not like today. That's why the Italian people, we don't wanna stay here, we just work two, three years, make a little money and go back."⁵ At this particular time Stefano Gallati was digging streets downtown, but he moved around depending on where he could find work.

In 1890 the total foreign-born population of Pittsburgh was about 80,000, with 36,000 of these German and 26,000 Irish; only 2,035 were Italian, but that number grew steadily as the city slowly made a name for itself among them. In fact, by 1900 the number of Italians in Pittsburgh had risen to 6,495—6.7% of the city's foreign-born population. Although this ranked Pittsburgh's Italian community eighth in the nation at the time, it was greatly outnumbered by second-ranked Philadelphia's 17,830. By 1910 the number of Italians in Pittsburgh had more than doubled to 14,158, with nearly 27,000 more residing in Allegheny County.

By 1910, when living space downtown became constricted due to expanding businesses and an increasing number of immigrants, many of its residents started making their way to the bordering Lower Hill district. At this time the second and third wards of the Downtown-Lower Hill district had 3,662 Italian residents; nearly half of their foreign-born population.⁶ With Webster Avenue—a broad thoroughfare considered the main artery of the Italian settlement—running through it, the Lower Hill was Pittsburgh's own version of New York City's lower East Side. It was the destination of Eastern Europeans, Asians, and African Americans as well as Italians. Housing conditions were considered slum-like, and for those accustomed to Pittsburgh's green, open spaces it was a true example of urban squalor.

With only 234 acres, the third ward was the smallest in the city; it had a gross density of nearly one hundred persons per acre. As is the case with many ghettos,

however, it was a tight-knit community. People who spoke different languages and whose backgrounds, cultures, and values differed in the extreme, lived together in close quarters, coexisting relatively peacefully, as former residents attest. A social worker described the neighborhood in 1921: "There are also communities of foreigners which may justly be called melting pots. Logan Street, a marketing place, is an example. Above the bakeries, butcher shops, groceries and other small stores, families dwell, Italians next to Russians, Poles next to Syrians." Interviewed for a Historical Society project, early Italian residents of the area remember the Jewish shops they patronized on Logan Street, where poultry was selected and butchered on the spot and where clothes were sold off outdoor racks. They remember, too, *l'arabiano*, the Syrian who peddled rags, pots, and pans from house to house; and *l'arrotino*, the scissors grinder who rang his bell as he made his way up and down the steep streets of the Hill, his grinder on his back.

The Lower Hill district was the financial and cultural center of Italian life in the early 1900s. The three Italian state banks of Pittsburgh were located there: Napoleon Bank on Wylie Avenue near Fifth Avenue; De Luca V. and Company, at 801 Webster Avenue; and Bernardini Bank on Sixth Avenue near Grant. The city's Italian newspaper, *La Trinacria*, and Italian printing company, Frediani, were also housed in this quarter. Here, too, were congregated the majority of doctors' and lawyers' offices,⁹ providing an entrée into the small but definable class of Pittsburgh's Italian elite: Dr. F. Sunseri, who hailed from Sicily and who had established a successful medical practice in the city by the turn of the century; B. Piccardo, who owned one of the largest macaroni factories in the Strip district; Salvatore Catanzaro, who ran one of the city's wholesale fruit auction houses; V. De Luca, who owned one of Pittsburgh's Italian state banks and who was considered by the local newspaper to be "the richest Italian who does business in this city, starting some years ago as a poor young man whose line was employing men for contractors";¹⁰ A. Panarello, president of a residential contracting business; and Mario Cancellere, an attorney and publisher of *La Trinacria*.

In addition to being a financial and cultural center, the Downtown-Lower Hill district was a hub of religious life; the first Italian Catholic parish in Pittsburgh was established here with worship services initially held in a makeshift building on Forbes Avenue. In 1919, after enough money had been raised, St. Peter's Church was erected on Fernando Street. It was the pride of Italians in the Lower Hill district, for they had never felt welcome at Epiphany, the neighborhood's Irish Catholic Church. In 1944 an Italian stonemason, a master craftsman, was commissioned to build a large grotto in the courtyard next to St. Peter's. Modeled after Lourdes Shrine in France, the grotto was described as "a refuge for Hill families seeking escape from the oppressive confines of the slums."



The Balestreire family poses with their produce wagon on Penn Avenue, in Pittsburgh's Strip District. Many Italian immigrants, especially Sicilians, prospered in Pittsburgh's produce industry.



Labriola's grocery store, on East Liberty's Larimer Avenue, c. 1920. The family-owned grocery store became a symbol of Italian entrepreneurship.



A banquet for the Spigno Saturnia Club, c. 1950. Pittsburgh's Italian American community maintained strong ties to Italy beyond World War II, when many new immigrants poured into the region due to the devastation suffered in southern Italy during the war.

St. Peter's Church, its grotto, and the Lower Hill district itself are but a memory today. All were victims of an urban renewal project in the 1950s, when the Urban Redevelopment Authority razed the area in order to build the Civic Arena. Italians who were forced out of the district were lifelong residents, although by now the area was predominately African American and had been since the 1940s. Many rural southern Blacks migrated north between the World Wars, and by the late 1940s there were nearly nine thousand living in the third ward—it was a thriving area for night clubs and jazz singers—as compared to slightly more than one thousand Italians. Having saved enough money by this time to be able to buy property, many Italians had moved from the Lower Hill to an area off the Upper Hill called the Bluff; it looked down over the Monongahela River. Houses here were considered to be of better stock than the crowded tenements of the Lower Hill, and there was space as well for small backyard garden plots, always an attraction for land-loving Italians.

EAST LIBERTY

Living in their separate communities, Italians were often class conscious and territorial, conditions exemplified by

the feelings of many Italians from East Liberty (in the city's east end) who looked down on their compatriots from the Lower Hill. One lifelong resident of the East End claimed that "the people in the Hill District . . . were not as talented or intelligent as the people from Larimer Avenue and East Liberty."¹² Another remembered that "there was an aura of pride, an aura of dignity coming from Larimer Avenue. There was an aura of toughness, too."¹³

These sentiments had their roots in the history of Italian settlement in East Liberty, where a growing professional class began settling on Larimer Avenue in the 1880s. The Reverend Anthony De Stasi, the pastor of the first and only Presbyterian Church for Italians in East Liberty, described the community as "the mecca of Italian artisans. Stone cutters, marble setters, cabinet makers, gardeners, road builders, interior decorators, and skilled workers of all kinds were among the best to be found anywhere. The unskilled laborers were there, too. So were the future giants of the building industry."¹⁴ A 1928 tally of Italian contractors lists thirty-eight building contractors, fourteen cement contractors, twenty-two concrete construction contractors, and six marble-cutting businesses there.¹⁵

The focal point of the East Liberty community was Larimer Avenue, where family-owned businesses and shops



The Kingsley House, a privately funded settlement house, came to East Liberty in 1918 to serve the Italian immigrants. The Kingsley Association described the community as one where "times were hard, but where the people had courage and inspiration."

thrived; it was Pittsburgh's "Little Italy." United States Census Reports show more Italians than Germans or Irish in Allegheny County for the first time in 1920. At that time there were slightly more than 15,000 Italians in Pittsburgh and 7,000 of them lived in East Liberty's 12th ward—the highest number in any one neighborhood. By 1930 Larimer Avenue had 9,000 Italian residents; 70% of the total population.¹⁶ Regarded by outsiders as a rough part of town where numbers writing and street life flourished, Larimer Avenue was beloved by those who lived there. As one former resident says, it was "the best place in the world to be raised. Nothing like it. No neighborhood in the world. Hey *commare!* Hey *compare!* You'd be hugging and kissing."¹⁷ The Avenue, as residents called it, was dotted with grocery, drug, and shoe stores; butcher and barber shops; and bakeries—all small, family-owned businesses. In addition, there were twenty-four Italian organizations documented in the Larimer area in the 1930s, ranging from fraternal clubs to women's sodalities.

The Latimer area was also home to the privately funded Kingsley Settlement House, an outreach of Pittsburgh's social welfare movement. It was established in East Liberty in 1919 to serve a community where—in its words—"conditions were hard, but where the people had courage and inspiration"¹⁸ Here Italians, as well as other racial and ethnic groups, could take English classes, music lessons, and arts and crafts courses, as well as participate in swimming and sports programs. There was also a Mother's Club and a Grandma's Club, and in the summer children and their mothers were bused to the Lillian Taylor summer camp, where for several weeks they could benefit from sunshine and fresh air in a wilderness setting. The Kingsley Settlement House was Pittsburgh's best example of how "civic cohesiveness could be attained in a context of religious, class, ethnic, and racial heterogeneity."¹⁹ Unfortunately, it would not last.



Wedding of Frank and Pircilla Veranese, Pittsburgh, c. 1930. Typical wedding of that era.

By the 1960s East Liberty was changing, largely due to the Urban Redevelopment Authority which had begun an "urban beautification" program there. Resolving to cut a swath through the dense, grid-like street system so friendly to the pedestrian lifestyle, they built the Penn Circle bypass, a labyrinth of concrete which rerouted traffic away from the central business district and cut merchants off from their customers. A former resident of East Liberty, forced in 1990 to close the grocery store on Latimer Avenue founded by his father in 1909, said: "Mellon Bank and [the] East Liberty Chamber of Commerce . . . destroyed East Liberty by putting a circle around it. [They thought] people were going to park on the outside of the circle and walk in. . . it was a concept that would never work."²⁰

Neighborhood change was accelerated, too, by the Urban Redevelopment Authority's destruction of the Lower Hill district. When urban renewal work there displaced a large part of its African American population, many relocated to East Liberty. Indeed, the percentage of African Americans in the Larimer Avenue section of East Liberty increased dramatically, from 13.7% of the population in 1950 to 54% in 1960;²¹ by 1970 there were 14,000 living there—almost 68% of the total population. Fewer than 1,000 Italians remained.

Since Italians and Blacks had always lived together in East Liberty (most contend peacefully), this drastic decrease in the Italian presence demands a closer look. In 1970 one observer offered his own—rather disturbing—perspective on conditions there: ". . . Blacks and Italians



First Holy Communion of Maria Olmizzi, ca. 1930, near Pittsburgh. Most Italian Americans began their formal instruction as Roman Catholics with this sacrament.



Participants in the feast of San Aniello pose on the steps of Our Lady Help of Christians church. The church was erected by the Italian immigrant community in 1898. This particular festa was celebrated by East Liberty's Neopolitan community.

lived together in a kind of unholy matrimony. Familiarity did not engender respect. At one level the Italians despised the Blacks for their supposed biological inferiority and inadequate lifestyles. At another level they respected them. This, because it had been demonstrated through 'racial incidents' and pitched battles over time that there was a great deal of pent up anger in the Black portion of the community and that it would not take too much by way of overt aspersion to trigger off riots. The Blacks for their part feared the Italians. They were well-aware of the activities of those in gangland and, in particular, were afraid of the Mafia whom they saw as being, potentially, the protector of any Larimer Avenue resident."²³

The issue of East Liberty's decline, then, is a sensitive and complex one. Italian Americans had prospered in East Liberty, to be sure, but by the 1960s the age of the automobile and suburbanism had arrived, not only in Pittsburgh, but all across the United States. First- and second-generation Italians could show off their successes by embracing these status symbols of the times and did so: The majority of Italians from East Liberty moved to the suburbs of Penn Hills and Plum Borough. Census figures show nearly 5,000 of them—about 20% of Pittsburgh's entire Italian population—living in Penn Hills in 1970.²⁴ Leaving, they took away much of the neighborhood's economic base, and property values plummeted as the community lost its draw. This began a downward economic spiral that brought the area to the decayed state it is in today.

MORNINGSIDE, OAKLAND, AND BLOOMFIELD

Not all Italians succumbed to the lure of the suburbs; some did remain in the city, moving to a neighborhood northwest of East Liberty called Morningside. In fact, after World War II, many Italians from the town of Maierato in Calabria emigrated to Pittsburgh, found jobs in the

building trades, and settled in Morningside, the youngest of the Italian communities in the city and perhaps the strongest. Here a group started the Calabria Club of Pittsburgh three years ago; today it has about five hundred members. These club members are not the old-timers, but a fresh, younger force who are the leaders and organizers of Italian American civic events such as the Columbus Day parade, and community events such as La Festa di San Rocco, held every August in Morningside. The old-timers, now scattered across the city and suburbs but nostalgic for the strong feeling of family that existed in the old neighborhood, formed the Latimer Avenue Social Club in 1985. Its four hundred members meet once a month for dinner and dancing; its newsletter, *La Famiglia*, chronicles its members' current activities and runs features about the old days.

Another significant, although smaller, Italian settlement in Pittsburgh was in Oakland, where the immigrants clustered in a ravine leading to a bluff called Panther Hollow. By 1920 there were two thousand Italians living in Oakland, many of them from the village of Gamberale, in the Abruzzi region. In the early 1900s these villagers organized a fraternal club in Oakland for Gamberale's patron saint, San Lorenzo, and established a celebration, La Festa di San Lorenzo, held every August. When the parade is held nowadays, the statue of the saint is carried on a pickup truck, a good indication of the shrinking number of able-bodied participants in the Oakland Italian community.

In the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Bloomfield, just west of East Liberty, Italians from the town of Ateleta, also in the Abruzzi region, proliferated. (Atelese say there are more of them in Pittsburgh today than lived in their native community in its entire 155-year history as a town.) Bloomfield, which had a population of nearly 6,000 Italians in 1920, is still a cohesive, relatively healthy Italian community today. Italian restaurants and grocery stores line

its main street, Liberty Avenue, off of which are tucked modest, single-family dwellings. For casual observers of the Italian-American experience in Pittsburgh, Bloomfield is perhaps the first neighborhood that comes to mind, since it has the distinction of being the only one which has endured; the only one which has always had an Italian majority within its borders. The Italian vice-consul of Pittsburgh maintains that this was the result of a fresh influx of immigrants, mainly from the Abruzzo-Molise region, after World War II. Chain migration into Bloomfield over the years has perhaps been the key to its longevity, along with the fact that its infrastructure has not been tampered with.

ITALIAN COMMUNITIES OUTSIDE OF PITTSBURGH

Outside of Pittsburgh, Italian communities sprang up in areas where the growth of industry created a need for unskilled labor. With its limestone quarries and huge tin plate mill, New Castle and the surrounding region was one such place; according to United States Census figures, in 1980 the region had one of the highest per capita concentrations of Italians in the country. Today, those of Italian birth or descent comprise 64% of New Castle's population. Of course, New Castle, like Pittsburgh, is urban, but even though Italians made their mark in America largely as urban dwellers, they also have a history in rural Western Pennsylvania.

It was the abundance of coal in its hills that brought many immigrants to the region, and those immigrants often had little choice but to dig coal in order to make a living. But for the most part Italians were not content in the mines and left if they could find other work. Many had been advised against working in the mines even before they emigrated to the United States; they were told it was dangerous, backbreaking work with low pay, little room for real advancement, and poor job security. Those from Northern Italy, where there was a mining industry, were said to tolerate work in the mines better than their southern counterparts. Salvatore Migliore, an Italian Presbyterian minister who conducted research on the Italians in Pittsburgh in the 1920s, stated: "My experience tells me that the actual number of Northerners in Pittsburgh is large. In proportion to the rest, they make up probably twenty percent of the total. . . . Northern Italians have been attracted here because of their attitude for work in the iron mines, as well as for commerce."

If the history of Avella, a coal town about forty miles west of Pittsburgh, is at all representative of the mining experience of Italians in Western Pennsylvania, that may well be true. Avella had a large Northern Italian population, the majority of which came from the Piedmont region. Many of these Northerners had been enlisted by recruiting agents in Italy, and their first job in Avella was building the Wabash Railroad, needed to transport coal to Pittsburgh. The men worked in gangs, moving from one site to another. Most were single or had wives and children

who remained behind in Italy; they sent any money they could save back home.

When the mines opened they were a relatively steady source of employment, and this allowed the immigrants to send for their families. One who remembers that time is ninety-eight-year-old Louise Fieroni. She had been living with her aunt near Belluno in Northern Italy when her parents sent for her in 1908. Twelve years old, she arrived in Avella on the train: "Mother always praised the United States so much, 'Come on to America, you'll see how nice it is.' So when we wake up in the morning, I told my sister, 'Let's look over America and see what it looks like.' So we put back the drape and looked out on Highland Avenue, and all we see is a pile of mud. I didn't like it."²⁵

* * *

Although the seven coal patches surrounding the town of Avella petered out in the 1930s, many Avellans remained there. Many are now retired; those who still work commute to their jobs. Research in Avella is now being conducted with a focus on the rural experience of Italian Americans in Western Pennsylvania, which, at least for Avella, is a fast-fading experience.

ENDNOTES

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EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE, ACTS OF LABOR: WOMEN'S WORK IN AN ITALIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

by Janet Theophano



Fried meatballs in a dish on the stove ready to be put on the table.



Macaroni and "gravy"; the gravy meats are separated from the sauce before serving. Bread, butter, Parmesan cheese and wine are also on the table.



Antipasto -- a salad of lettuces, tomatoes, beets, tuna, anchovies, hard-boiled eggs, olives, Italian sausage, lunch meats, and cheeses; it is dressed with oil and vinegar. This dish is served first and separately as its own course.

Food is love. It is power. If giving food is about nurturing, it is also about exerting influence and taking control. It is about the responsibility of adulthood, specifically women's adulthood. The work that women do in the preparation and orchestration of food events, so long neglected and so often trivialized, is finally receiving some well-deserved attention. What interest there had been in this domain was often unexamined. Researchers have assumed the nature of the relationship that exists between

women and food in domestic life.¹ Nowhere has that relationship been emphasized more than among women of various ethnic and immigrant groups. It has, in some cases, led to the creation of stereotypes which do not reflect the reality and the variability of women's lives. In recent years, however, the effort to write women into the historical record and to attend to women's artistic expression has generated an interest in—and an appreciation of—domestic life, with startling consequences. Ideas and assumptions about women's work have been reexamined in light of these new feminist approaches to and understandings of social and cultural life.²

Along with women, the home has also been viewed as a conservative and stable place untouched by the larger society. The newer view suggests that women and their homes are as often the sites of social change, either through the inadvertent or deliberate interventions of others or by their own design. Magazines, newspapers, cookery books, assorted forms of domestic literature and other media which enter the home are all sources of new ideas and information which women in conjunction with their peers explore or resist as they wish.³

Because food is a subject often talked about by men and women together and by women alone, it is also a code for other kinds of concerns. It is a way of talking about what is happening to and between families and to the individuals in those families. Conversation about food is also talk about life and how it should be lived, and about how others should and should not be treated. Sometimes it traces disagreements which are never directly confronted, and at other times it ameliorates conflicts which are known. It is the physical embodiment of the past in the present; it is a sensory path to the future.

This is a story about the relationships that several women—part of an Italian American network in the small southeastern Pennsylvania town of Maryton—have with each other and with each other's families through food. I shall describe briefly two women at different stages of the domestic cycle, discussing their relationship to one another and to the larger female network of which they are, or are not, a part. I deliberately avoid any categorization which denies these women their individuality and idiosyncratic behaviors, while at the same time identifying those areas which they hold in common. By that I mean the ways in which food is used by the women and their friends and family, and the expressive as well as very real work that is accomplished by them in its use and exchange.

Although the data for this paper was collected primarily between 1979 and 1981, we⁴ continue to benefit from our friendship with the women we worked with and learned from. Indeed, during the past nearly twenty years we have kept up the relationship, continuing to learn about their lives and about changes which have affected the community. (That might be, I suppose, one of the benefits of doing field study close to home.) The results of this research have been written about elsewhere, in published and unpublished works.⁵

THE WORK OF FEEDING

Food exchange and reciprocity is one way of acknowledging relationship and of maintaining it. Beyond its semiotic function, it is an important resource in times of economic stress. While signaling ties, commemorating the past, and nourishing bodies within and among households are clearly among the most salient aspects of the work that women do through food,⁶ to that must be added another. For, along with food exchange, women plan and orchestrate, both formally and informally, the rituals and events which bind not only families, but communities together. Through these rituals in and outside of the home, children are enculturated and socialized⁷ and members of the community are reminded of their shared pasts and values. In the case at hand the community is Italian, but the processes through which these women represent this particular culture—that is through repetitive patterns of food use and alterations to those patterns—are not unlike the processes women in different communities and in other historical periods have engaged in for similar purposes.

Decision-making and the push and pull of that process reveals the shifting and complicated set of relationships in this network and community; relationships which are constituted and maintained through some of these occasions. In these planning discussions new hierarchies are established and old ones dismantled. The situations and constraints of domestic economies, time, and the ability to exploit other resources and services reveal the particular niches and the statuses of the women in the network; the power that women wield in the domestic sphere and in the larger community. Accordingly, the rituals and their continuity are often the means by which women control aspects of an apparently male-dominated culture.⁸ It is, after all, women's expertise in these affairs which is required if they are to happen.

It is not only an enactment of the past which occurs in the ritual scenes, however, but cultural innovation as well. Relationships which cross cultural borders are sources of inspiration and allow for the introduction of fresh ideas. They may be the wellspring of originality. They are opportunities for opening the cultural repertoire to the outsider, and for receiving from the other both in literal and figurative ways. The boundaries of the home are permeable; those living within do extend their sphere of influence, reaching out and bringing in people and ideas from the larger society.

Finally, recipes and menus, both innovative and conservative, encode family and community histories; they are another way of telling the stories people live, underscoring what people already know or revealing what is not known. In this group of women these communal memories are discussed in the contexts of food selection, preparation, and consumption. Seldom do they write down a recipe or record on paper the details of an event. Rather, every event at which food is cooked or eaten is an occasion for potential remembrance and commemoration.⁹ Women play a major

role in defining the ritual, in establishing the ways in which it will be enacted, and in recalling for the community similarities and differences between it and other events like it in the past.

Through the medium of food, then, past events are remembered, reenacted, and discussed; secrets are told and commonplaces are dramatized. In these culinary contrasts, subtleties, and nuances, stories unfold, but to understand them one must know the cultural code. That code consists of some common food patterns¹⁰ and cyclical events¹¹ that, if and when they happen, will engender an occasion the members of the Italian American community are likely to read as a text. This then is what they share—not rigid adherence to rules and rituals or to an agreed upon interpretation of the situation—but an understanding that *when* an event occurs it is an opportunity for speculation and discussion. However, just as the roles of the participants in these discussions will differ according to age, sex, and relationships, so too will the stories that emerge from them differ. Each participant will bring her own perspective to the occasion and will take away that—or another version—of the story which is being told. Having said that, the stories which follow are my rendering of events witnessed while doing fieldwork with these families. The women involved will agree with some aspects of my telling, but differ on others.

THE WOMEN

The women whose lives and relationships are portrayed here do not typify or represent all Italian American women. In a discussion of daily life and of food and women there is the danger of creating and maintaining stereotypes. To describe the domain of women and food can lead to generalizations about the way women, in general, and Italian-American women in particular, act in relation to these tasks. Both of the women that I describe use various strategies (some similar and some different) for dealing with household tasks and with all of the work necessary to prepare, cook, and serve food. As is true of others in their community, one of the women loves cooking and all that is involved with it, while the other sees it as a necessary evil. What is common to them is that both see cooking as part of the duties, responsibilities, and obligations assumed by women in their stage of life in their community.

Each woman, then, should be seen as a unique individual in a group who share the same world and inhabit the same neighborhood. In different stages of the domestic cycle, they are known to one another with varying degrees of intimacy, their lives touching or overlapping in small but significant ways. Like many of us they have often worked outside of the home as well as within it, in different occupations and with varying degrees of commitment. And, like all of us, they have had to cope with the accelerated changes of the 20th century, facing profound shifts in marriage and family life, experiencing economic instability,

and dealing with the extension and loss of family and friends.

MARCELLA

Marcella Fiore is the centerpiece of this discussion. Her pivotal role in the community and her knowledge of Italian traditional cooking have made her the hub of an extensive network of family and friends, while her job staffing a county information office has enabled her to reach far beyond that network. A generous, gregarious woman, she knows everyone in Maryton from the mayor to the man who cleans her office. While we were doing fieldwork in Maryton, Marcella and her husband of thirty years separated and divorced. Marcella and the couple's three daughters struggled through a painful period of adjustment that lasted several years, and while the timing of our stay with the family was happenstance, it provided us with insights we might otherwise have missed.

While initially a sad and difficult time for Marcella, it was also the year of one daughter's engagement and another's marriage. Undaunted, she celebrated these occasions with bittersweet reminiscences of her own marriage and with the joy of maternal pride. All of her children are now grown and two are married and living in their own homes. I have written about her daughters' weddings elsewhere,¹² but will point out here the importance of marriage in the life of an Italian American woman in this community. Indeed, for a young woman who is a part of it, marriage (and the acquisition of her own home and kitchen) is a rite of passage surpassed only by the birth of a child. It is these two criteria, above all, which entitle a woman to full adult status, although that status does not necessarily mean that she has learned how to cook. In fact, she probably has not. As a girl growing up in her mother's house she may have been assigned certain marginal tasks such as setting and clearing the table and washing the dishes; tasks meant to prepare her for her role as wife and mother. And, while she may even enjoy baking holiday cakes and cookies with her mother and female kin, it is unusual for a young woman in this community to assume primary responsibility for preparing an entire family meal.¹³

A young woman may, however, signal an interest in a man by preparing a meal for him with her mother's guidance. This significant marker of a young woman's interest is also an indication of the seriousness of their relationship. Such was the case with Marcella's middle daughter, sixteen-year-old Andrea, who cooked a sumptuous dinner for her future fiancé. Although the details were much discussed and worried over by mother and daughter, the cooking was in Andrea's hands; it was her night to take credit for success or suffer ignominy for failure. In fact, she made lasagna which was so tasty that it became the dish for which she was considered the expert. In the future, it was to be her contribution to family occasions.

Young women learn in earnest how to cook from their mothers-in-law, as well as from others, once they are married. Since the importance of the marital relationship

and a wife's duty to her husband is cued repetitively through meals, dinner becomes an arena in which women symbolically demonstrate deference and commitment to their men. Although women learn recipes from their new families, they will often combine cooking styles and bring together at least two different culinary traditions. This attempt to fuse families through food is a source of cultural innovation, and in this, too, Marcella seems to have been exceptional. Unlike other Italian American women I met, she claims to have learned to cook from her father and mother. In this way she enlarged her repertoire to include both parents' heritages.

In fact, in Marcella's case, combining the Abruzzese and Calabrese regional and village specialities of her parents led her to develop the creolized and masterful traditional forms of cookery for which she is known. For example, she boasts that she combined aspects of each parent's recipe for Easter bread to create a unique version which is hers alone. And, when she married, she embraced her husband's family traditions as well, although the task of incorporating his mother's cooking style was relatively easy since it was also Calabrese. Beyond the experimentation with her family's forms of cookery, Marcella's inventive and inquisitive cosmopolitan spirit has led her to explore the cuisines of other cultures as well. Even if she does not cook them in her own home—for mostly she does rely on dishes her family is willing and eager to eat—she always enjoys learning about and tasting foods from different culinary traditions.

In addition to marking relationships, women's exchange of foods is a way of introducing new foods or new versions of familiar foods. During one Easter holiday, for example, several women exchanged versions of Easter bread: some had flavored theirs with anise, some used vanilla; there was even one with candied citron. This opportunity to sample the cooking of others might prompt a woman to make changes in her own recipe, although this was not often the case. Obviously women cook not for themselves alone, but for others as well, and it is those others whom they are trying to please and who must also approve any new recipes. As a result, if family members do not like a dish, it is doubtful it will be made again.

In Marcella Fiore's household, one such failed experiment was the result of a lunch-time visit she made to a bakery where a close friend works. There she encountered a new dish—chicken paprikash—being served and eaten by the bakery staff; it had been made by one of the employees, a Hungarian. Marcella tasted it and, delighted by the flavor, asked how to make it; later in the week she prepared it for her family. Upon seeing the grayish color of the sauce (the result of the addition of sour cream to the chicken broth), only sparsely covered by flecks of red paprika, Marcella's youngest daughter said, "That's disgusting looking. I'm not eating that." So saying, she walked away from the table. Needless to say, Marcella did not attempt to serve that dish again.

MARCELLA'S GRAVY

(For a family of 6)

- 1 lb. pork sausage
- 1 lb. country spareribs
- olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1/2 of an onion, chopped or simply a medium-sized onion cut in half*
- 1/4 cup parsley
- 3 cans of tomato puree (28 oz. each)
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- salt and pepper to taste

In a small amount of olive oil, brown the sausage and the spareribs. Add the cloves of garlic and saute until golden. You may add the onion now and brown it or wait until later and add it to the sauce. Add the parsley and the oregano. Saute briefly. Add the tomato puree and stir altogether. Rinse out the cans with a small amount of water and add to the pot. Add 1 tablespoon of sugar. If you wish to add the onion at this point, do so. It gives a sweeter flavor to the sauce. (For additional flavor, add four or five of the meatballs [see below] to the gravy while it is cooking.)

Cook for several hours or until all of the flavors are "married." Gravy is even better if left to stand refrigerated for another day.

* Marcella most often adds the half of an onion after the tomato puree has been mixed with the other ingredients. Leaving the onion in its natural state imparts the sweet flavor to the sauce her family enjoys.

MARCELLA'S MEATBALLS

- 3 pounds ground beef and pork, mixed
- 3-4 large Italian hoagie rolls with crusts removed soaked well in a bowl of water and excess water squeezed out
- 1/4 cup fresh Italian parsley, chopped
- 1/2 grated Parmesan cheese
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped

Mix all ingredients together. Wet hands and shape into oval or round balls. Fry them in vegetable oil and drain on paper towels.

Just as they must negotiate what to cook for their own families and when, so women who are part of a social network must engage in collaborative decision-making with their peers when a social event is being planned. At family gatherings one learns about the tacit hierarchy of women based on the criteria of age, marital status, motherhood, knowledge, and experience. These factors determine the amount of "cultural capital" a woman has, and this in turn determines her power to orchestrate events and make

decisions. Women, no less than men, develop status based on their own relevant and often different set of criteria.

Competence arising from experience is a respected characteristic in women. Young women, if they are interested in domesticity at all, will defer to the experience and knowledge of older women in the community, particularly in the area of expertise for which an individual is known.¹⁴ Many times women cultivate a skill which sets them apart. For example, as Marcella and her sisters were growing up, each began to develop interests and skills in different areas of housekeeping. Marcella developed her culinary skills; Sissy became known for her fastidious housekeeping; Nina was proud of her ironing skills. Both of Marcella's siblings left the kitchen and cooking to their talented sister, concentrating instead on skills in which they excelled and in which she showed no interest. Though all managed their households with competence, each was careful to delineate a different area of expertise, thus making their relationship a cooperative—rather than a competitive—one. In the same way, at the many dinners the family holds jointly, each woman contributes the dish for which she is known: Sissy's lasagna, Nina's macaroni and cheese, and Marcella's fried meatballs are standard fare at each occasion. The sisters do not and would not prepare one another's specialities; to do so might signal a conflict in the family or create one.

An occasion on which conflict was only narrowly averted involved Marcella and her life-long friend, Ann. Their families, already intertwined for two generations, would soon have another connection: among Ann's family was Jerry, Marcella's future son-in-law. Marcella hosted a dinner at her house for the two families and a few friends; a dinner prepared jointly with Ann. Both made the same dishes, using their own recipes which of course embodied the preferences and traditions of their own family. The women argued amiably, but with an undercurrent of tension and competitiveness, about their recipes as they did the cooking. Marcella's recipes are generously laced with pork, garlic, and onions; Ann's cooking tends to be less spicy. Their resulting "gravies" (red, tomato-based sauce) were therefore different in color and taste. Indeed, no two families' gravies are identical; each woman develops her own recipe based on traditions she has learned or transformed in one way or another. Family members easily recognize by smell and taste their own version of gravy.

Interestingly, when the service of the meal was being planned, Ann deferred entirely to Marcella's directives. Here territoriality (it was, after all, Marcella's kitchen) plays an important role in determining who is in charge. During the actual serving of the meal I noticed that family members were asking for the dishes—bracciole, manicotti—prepared by their mother; without being rude they refused to eat the food made by the other woman. The only one forced, in a sense, to eat food prepared by both was Jerry. He was after all, soon to be a member of both families and his food choices reflected this imminent change in his status.

There were other indications of his change in status as well. In deference to one of her guests, a recently divorced male friend named Martin, Marcella had prepared a special meal within a meal. Martin claimed his health was not good and said that spicy tomato sauce was not the best food for him. Thus, in order to please him and be a good host, she cooked a steak, a large portion of which he was unable to eat. Marcella then turned to the other male guests present—Jerry and his brother Tom—and offered them the choice piece of meat. This gesture cued both their maleness and their status. After Marcella's husband left the family, various guests, male or female depending on the occasion, were given the place of honor at the head of the table. On this occasion Jerry found himself there and assumed that role, in part by accepting the meat that Marcella offered. (Tom declined.) His acceptance of her offer was indicative of the relationship which would emerge after his marriage to her daughter. Mindful of his relationship with both matriarchs, he displayed his loyalty by eating food made by both; no one else present (with the exception of the researchers) did so.

Women exert influence and accrue power by offering hospitality; by indebting friends, men and women can claim a favor in return, either immediately or sometime in the future. When Marcella separated from her husband she found her meager salary inadequate for meeting the bills when emergencies occurred. Thus, when her toilet and sink needed repair she invited the plumber, a friend named Joe, to dinner. As payment for his services she prepared an outstanding traditional meal of calamari in red sauce, tossed salad, substantial Italian bread and butter, and a dessert of homemade taralles.¹⁵

Not only is Marcella an excellent cook, she is a creative and economical one. Adding and transforming ingredients, she is able to squeeze several meals from one as if by magic, and this makes it possible for her to entertain friends and family several times a week; indeed, she is rarely without a guest at her table. If she cannot afford to buy the ingredients for a meal she will accept them from her sisters and friends, knowing they value her knowledge and skill. With their gifts she will prepare another delicious meal to share with them.

I remember one Christmas with Marcella; it was a lean one financially and sadly the first Christmas following her husband's departure. Characteristically, Marcella had invited her family for New Year's Day dinner even though she had very little extra money for "entertaining." But, after receiving the leftover turkey carcass from Nina's Christmas dinner and a donation of sausage from Sissy, Marcella bought a head of cabbage and made kielbasa and cabbage, the family's traditional New Year's Day meal. In point of fact, this dish was most likely a Polish addition to the family's repertoire, learned by the previous generation of Marcella's family from the wives of Polish coal miners in a nearby town.

One of Marcella's specialities is baking, and she turns out cookies, cakes, pies, and breads. Her output includes

everything from the commonplace to seasonally appropriate specialities: biscotti, chocolate pepper cookies, crustallis, pitacina and pitalatte, and taralles.¹⁶ One Good Friday evening while she and her sisters were baking the traditional Easter breads—pitacina and pitalatte, sweet ricotta pie, and meat pies for Easter Sunday—husbands and children sat around the kitchen table watching and commenting on the craft. This gave the men, also bearers of culinary tradition, a chance to tell of their memories of their own mothers' and grandmothers' cooking and baking. "It should taste and smell like this" said Nina's husband, Henry. "And it feels sticky when you add water," remarked Sissy's husband, Victor. Each comment resurrected a moment from the past and a corresponding anecdote about the family. Through these rituals of repetition, children hear and learn about people they may never have known or do not remember. Families form a bond through the shared history and men safely demonstrate their connectedness to, and interest in, women's traditions and work. For it is yet another sign of their commitment to family and their own domesticity.

BERNADETTE

In another Italian American household—that of Bernadette and Thomas—the domestic arena was sometimes the site of a covert but ongoing routine between husband and wife. In this family, clearly one that is dominated by a strong, albeit welcoming and friendly, male presence, gender roles although clearly defined are not without some dispute. Neither Bernadette nor Thomas was born or raised in Maryton: both are considered outsiders despite the fact that they are Italian American. As outsiders they have never developed the extensive network of friends which comprises Marcella's social world. In fact, it is one of the salient differences between the two women: Marcella has lived her entire life in the community with all that implies; Bernadette's parents and other relatives live in a neighboring community and it is there, or with her husband's family, that she can most often be found.

Bernadette and Thomas have three children: daughters Jane, sixteen, and Dette, fourteen; and son Thomas Jr., thirteen. Bernadette gave up her career as a nurse to stay home and raise her family; Thomas, a mechanic, works at the garage he owns, close to the family home. If he could not come home for lunch Bernadette would take it to him. Although she did not do this every day, she did it often enough for it to be considered a ritual. Actually, it was a treat they both enjoyed. So, Thomas went to work each morning in his role as provider, while Bernadette stayed at home caring for the children, cooking and cleaning, and fulfilling the myriad other expectations of women in this community. This has been called "kin work,"¹⁷ and it consists of everything from taking care of sick friends and members of the extended family to sending greeting cards. In short, with children at home and with no outside job, Bernadette enacted the role of traditional Italian wife and mother. She did this with few explicit complaints but

with a few covert strategies for contesting her roles.

One of these strategies concerned cooking: On the days when Bernadette prepared her tomato gravy a small but potentially explosive routine occurred repeatedly. It seemed to serve as a safety valve for releasing the pressures of the strong gender roles within the family, but just how aware each spouse was of the knowledge of the other remains a mystery to me. Concerning her gravy, Bernadette, when *talking* about it, insisted that she used no onions or garlic in its preparation. This, she said, was because Thomas *loathed* onions and garlic and would not eat them. Thomas himself said the same on many occasions, boasting that his wife would not use them in her cooking.

That is what both *said*; it is not what happened. As Thomas got ready for work, Bernadette began making her gravy, adding the tomato sauce to meat—pork sausage and beef. As soon as her husband was out of sight Bernadette, despite her promise to honor his wishes, added garlic and onions to the already cooking sauce which was allowed to simmer on the stove all day. Shortly before Thomas was expected home, Bernadette removed the garlic and onions and disposed of them or pulverized them beyond recognition. Thomas would come into the kitchen and say, "I smell onions and garlic. You didn't add them to the gravy did you?" Bernadette would laugh good naturedly and say innocently that of course she would not use those ingredients; or she might just laugh and say nothing.

As already mentioned, making gravy is a tradition which differs from family to family, and each sauce reflects the tastes and traditions of the family as refracted through the mind and hands of the preparer. In nearly every case, the woman who makes it defers to the preferences of her family (both young and old) and particularly to those of her husband. In Bernadette and Thomas's household, this routine centering around gravy-making happened weekly with neither spouse going beyond the question-and-answer ritual. In this safe arena Thomas, despite his alleged strong taste preferences, bowed to the subversive strategy Bernadette used to signal her power, her strength within the home, and her occasional dissatisfaction with the gendered roles of status and power in the household. This routine became a way for Bernadette to contest the sex roles within the family; something she felt uncomfortable confronting directly.

Thomas also avoided conflict, literally and figuratively swallowing this insult and so deferring to his wife in spite of the cultural emphasis on male dominance. In this Thomas, too, saved face, for he enjoyed the mutual companionship he shared with Bernadette and so was willing to sacrifice the cultural exaggeration of patriarchy for a more equal sharing of roles. He was not yet willing to do this openly; it was a covert gesture and one that bore repeating each week for both partners. Its ritualized repetition offered the couple an arena for renegotiating their power relations and was an affectionate expression of trust as well. In his silent acquiescence, Thomas acknowledged the idea, if not the reality of social change.

At most times and in most ways, Bernadette's relationship to food is a comfortable one. Like many women, though, there are days when she is tired and thus unimaginative about what to prepare for her family. On those days she may resort to the familiar and expected, which in many Italian homes is the gravy meal. Not infrequently Bernadette will experiment with new recipes, always keeping in mind the ingredients her family likes and dislikes. Young Thomas will eat only three kinds of vegetables; when she prepares one of these it is once again a cue to the cultural emphasis on male domination; Bernadette is grooming him for his adult role. Yet it is clear that women also find ways to circumvent, resist, or subvert their men's control. They find as well that they build strength and power in their cohorts and social networks, the domain comprised of women and one without which men could not as easily exist.

Such are the invisible but tangible webs that women create as they link family and friends through the giving of food. Redundant meals in the form of dinners (among others) envelop individual families, demonstrating in both subtle and not so subtle ways appropriate age and gender roles; the conflicts and alliances which individual family members are engaged in; and the relationship of the family to a larger circle of family and friends and the world in which they live. Women orchestrate the occasions and the props which dramatize these changeable and stable relationships, aspects of which have been called folklore and tradition. Some have labeled the enduring elements of a culture ethnicity. If, in fact, such a phenomenon exists it is due, in part, to the work that women do; for in the creation of these domestic rituals women affirm in material culture aspects of the past in the midst of change.¹⁸ The redundancy of the meal provides the frame for constituting the present and remembering the past.

The surfaces of women's lives, in acts of cooking and the acceptance of domesticity, belie the many ways in which women resist and alter their daily round while still accepting the responsibilities of adulthood. While doing so, they transform the people, the places, and the world around them.

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ENDNOTES

¹So taken for granted was the relationship between women and food and its meaning that even in the pioneering sociological and historical studies of housework by such scholars as Ann Oakley and Susan Strasser, it receives only scant attention. Since the scope of each is a broad understanding and appreciation for what women do they are excellent studies despite this. See Susan Strasser, *Never Done, A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), and Ann Oakley, *Woman's Work, The Housewife, Past and Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

²Joan Newlon Radnor, *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 1-36; Susan S. Lanser, "Burning Dinners: Feminist Subversions of Domesticity" pp. 31-53 in *Feminist Messages*; Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing and M. Jane Young, *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) pp. 9-28; Rayna Green, "'It's Okay Once You Get It Past the Teeth' and Other Feminist Paradigms for Folklore Studies" pp. 1-8 in *Feminist Theory*; See also a pioneering volume: Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik, *Women's Folklore Women's Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Marjorie DeVault, *Feeding the Family, The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

³Susan L. Braunstein and Jenna Weissman Joselit with contributions by Jenna Weissman Joselit, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Irving Howe. *Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1880-1950* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1990).

⁴Fieldwork was done collaboratively by Karen Curtis and Janet Theophano. Judith Goode was Principal Investigator on the research project.

⁵Judith Goode, Janet Theophano and Karen Curtis, "A Framework for the Analysis of Continuity and Change in Shared Sociocultural Rules for Food Use: The Italian-American Pattern" in Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell, *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States; The Performance of Group Identity* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984) pp. 66-90; Judith Goode, Karen Curtis and Janet Theophano, "Meal Formats, Meal Cycles, and Menu Negotiation in the Maintenance of an Italian-American Community" in *Food in the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984) pp. 143-218. Janet Theophano, "It's Really Tomato Sauce But We Call It Gravy": A Study of Food and Women's Work in an Italian-American Community (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1982).

⁶Janet Theophano and Karen Curtis, "Sisters, Mothers and Daughters: Food Exchange and Reciprocity in an Italian-American Community" in Anne Sharman, Janet Theophano, Karen Curtis and Ellen Messer, *Diet and Domestic Life in Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 147-172.

⁷Jeffrey Shultz and Janet Theophano, "Locating Learning in Family Interaction: An Examination of Dinner Time in Italian-American Homes" (unpublished paper).

⁸Kay Turner and Suzanne Seriff, "'Giving an Altar to St. Joseph': A Feminist Perspective on a Patronal Feast" in *Feminist Theory*, pp. 89-118.

⁹Lewis A. Coser, *Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) pp. 23-24 and pp. 54-83; Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁰A common terminology of meals and menu offerings consists of 'gravy' and 'platter' alternately during the week. Platters represent the Anglo component of the meal system often a broiled meat, starch and vegetable presented in a tripartite and segregated fashion.

¹¹A hierarchically arranged set of meal types or celebratory formats from buffets to sit-down dinners which are used to mark various life cycle and calendrical events.

¹²Janet Theophano, "'I Gave Him a Cake': An Interpretation of Two Italian-American Weddings" in Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala, *Creative Ethnicity, Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1991).

¹³If a young woman assumes cooking responsibilities in her mother's home it may mean that the matriarch has obligations outside of the home either to a job or because of the illness of a family member.

¹⁴Not all women choose to become experts in the domestic sphere. Where they choose careers outside of the home tensions may arise if expectations of family members are not met.

¹⁵This is a round, sweet and dry cookie dipped in a sugar frosting.

¹⁶Pitacina is a meat and cheese pie often prepared for the Easter holiday as is pitalatte, an anise flavored bread. Biscotti are also anise flavored 'slanty' cookies ubiquitous in this community. Crustallis are deep fried pretzel shaped pieces of dough filled with a walnut and honey topping. These are most often served at Christmas.

¹⁷Micaela di Leonardo, "The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship" (*Signs* 12 (3), 1987) pp. 440-53.

¹⁸Karen Curtis, "I Never Go Anywhere Empty-Handed" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Temple University, 1983).

47th Annual

Pennsylvania Dutch
KUTZTOWN

BETWEEN ALLENTOWN & HARRISBURG, PA

**FOLK
FESTIVAL**

June 29-30 - July
1-2-3-4-5-6-7, 1996

DAYTIME GATHERINGS
10:00 AM to 8:00 PM

The Festival and its Sponsorship

The 47th Annual Kutztown Folk Festival is brought to you through the efforts of Festival Associates, Ursinus College and the Foundation for Agricultural Resource Management (FARM). A non-profit organization which is the proud owner of the new festival grounds, Schuylkill County Fairgrounds, FARM receives a portion of the proceeds to maintain and update the new grounds. Festival Associates is our new management team that will present an authentic and theatrical reenactment of 18th and 19th century Pennsylvania German life for the public to enjoy. Ursinus College of Collegeville, Pa., supervises all cultural aspects of the festival. The college uses its portion of the proceeds for scholarships and general educational purposes.

FOR THE FOLK FESTIVAL BROCHURE WRITE TO:

Pennsylvania Folklife Society

461 Vine Lane, Kutztown, Pa. 19530

