
Fall 9-20-2016

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Recommended Citation

Fraser Connolly, Mary Beth Ph.D. (2016) "Sister Justina Segale and Americanization: The Making of Catholic Italian Americans," *Vincentian Heritage Journal*: Vol. 33 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol33/iss2/4>

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Sister Justina Segale and Americanization: The Making of Catholic Italian Americans

MARY BETH FRASER CONNOLLY, PH.D.



[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)



From the beginning, the Santa Maria Institute and Sisters Justina and Blandina Segale sought to ensure the Catholic faith of Italians in Cincinnati, Ohio. In the process, the Segales engaged in the work of Americanization prevalent at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. At the Institute's conception, the sisters conveyed their purpose:

With capabilities inferior to none, a firm determination — which judicially guided is a great factor in the formation of good character: sensitivity and light-hearted, inclined to virtue and always drawn toward the good and the beautiful: such children properly trained make true members of Church and State. Allow the same qualities to expand without the guiding hand of religion, and indifference and crime follow.¹

For the sisters, however, the process of Americanization was not necessarily the same as the official Americanization efforts of the United States government or other social welfare reformers of the time. Justina and Blandina Segale were concerned about the condition of immigrants' souls, as well as their ability to be loyal citizens. The two, in their minds, were inextricably linked. In 1921, Sister Justina wrote in her journal:

[T]he Santa Maria was training Italians for Americanization and as the most effective means to do so as to make them loyal, we begin by making them loyal to God, faithful to their religion, for one who is a traitor to God, cannot be relied upon to be loyal to the government.²

At the beginning of their mission, the sisters understood that their objective to preserve the faith of Italians served a larger purpose: it made Italians "true members of Church and State." In 1921, Justina wrote her views on loyalty after Sister Blandina had given a speech at Cincinnati's American House in honor of George Washington's birthday. Speaking before the other representatives of this Americanization center, including an Italian Presbyterian minister whom Justina referred to as the "proselytizing minister," Blandina defined and defended Santa Maria's efforts to transform Italian immigrants into American citizens.³

1 Santa Maria Italian Educational and Industrial Institute, *First Annual Report* (Cincinnati: Santa Maria Institute, 1898), 1.

2 Justina Segale, J-8, 1920-1922, 24 February 1921, Santa Maria Institute Papers, Sisters of Charity Archives, Mount Saint Joseph, Ohio (Hereafter cited as SMI Papers). Sister Justina's journal included eleven volumes labeled as J-1 through J-11. The Santa Maria Papers also includes another series of journals entitled M-1 through M-11. This second set of journals consist of accounts of the Santa Maria Institute written by Sister Justina, but they also include other notes and newspaper clippings not exclusively in Sister Justina's hand.

3 The "proselytizing minister" at this point was Reverend Scapelleti. *Ibid.*



Sr. Blandina Segale, S.C., center, overseeing the work of students in a cooking class.

Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH



The self-proclaimed purpose of the American House was “the union of many peoples of the country into one nation.” To achieve this immigrants had to learn the “American language,” become citizens, and recognize the “privileges America bestow[ed] upon and guarantees all residents of this country.” The American House was a “secular” institution directed by an executive board that included Christian and Jewish representatives.⁴ The presence of the Italian Presbyterian minister at the celebration, however, proved to Sister Justina that their efforts to Americanize were suspect. After remarking on Sister Blandina’s speech, Justina continued:

The minister also spoke. He said he was working among the Italians, looking for those who had no religion. He did not say that they were making every effort to induce all Italians to go to their mission, invading the homes of our Catholics, inviting them, offering inducements etc. He did not mention what he said to me that he was going “to make them Protestants” also that “the Catholic Church has no religion.”⁵

Justina did not believe the words of the Presbyterian minister when he spoke at the celebration. Despite the presence of this minister among those gathered at the American House (or rather because of his presence), the sisters participated in Americanization programs which were intended to make immigrants loyal American citizens. This did not mean that the sisters shared the same perspective on Americanization as the members of the house’s executive board. Nowhere in the official statements of American House’s purpose did they speak of religion and of what Blandina referred to as “loyal[ty] to God.”⁶

4 The American House, “Souvenir Program of Americanization Meeting Celebrating ‘Patriot’s Day,’” 19 April 1918. See also The American House, “The American House: Cincinnati’s Hospitality House for Foreign-Born Americans,” 1921, CHS.

5 Justina Segale, J-8, 1920-1922, 24 February 1921, SMI Papers.

6 *Ibid.*



Santa Maria provided for infant welfare by sponsoring a milk station.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,
Mount St. Joseph, OH*



Sisters Justina and Blandina were not typical of ‘Americanizers’ in 1921. The same can be said for their attitudes in 1897. The process of assimilation or Americanization was not their guiding purpose. The pages of the Santa Maria Journal are filled more with the day-to-day operation of the Institute, the preservation of the Catholic faith, and the material aid of immigrants than with the fears and concerns of American Catholics regarding an influx of foreigners. Sister Justina, the author of the journal, did not write of the importance of immigrants ridding themselves of their Italianness to embrace an American way of life. They did, however, encourage Italians to go to church, receive the Sacraments, know their faith, baptize their children, send them to Catholic schools, and to participate in good Catholic social clubs. By doing all these things Italian immigrants made lives for themselves in the United States, and their children grew up more as Americans than Italians. These children in turn would pass on the same lessons to their children, thus insuring Catholicism’s place in the Italian-American community.⁷

This pattern of immigration is not unique to Cincinnati or Italians in the United States. Scholars of immigration and Americanization have dealt extensively with the concept of assimilation and acculturation and the second-generation’s place within these ideas. Sisters Justina and Blandina Segale, however, are something different, or at the very least something new, to the field and the classroom. Justina’s diaries provide an opportunity to illustrate a different side of Americanization: one where the Americanizers are Catholic,

⁷ For a definition of a Catholic relevant to this period, see Gerald Shaughnessy, *Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith? A Study of Immigration and Catholic Growth in the United States, 1790-1920* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1925), 215-6. Shaughnessy attempts to determine how many Catholics were in the United States by 1920, and in so doing defines various criteria of what determines a Catholic. This was how Sister Justina and Sister Blandina defined a good American Catholic.

women religious, and would-be “Americanized” immigrants who were pulled toward their own Italianness. Justina and Blandina throughout the course of their direction of Santa Maria grew to envision an American identity through an Italian and Catholic lens.⁸

This understanding of Americanness allows for multiple ethnic identities within one civic identity. It conjures ideas of cultural pluralism or, as John Higham has articulated it, a cosmopolitan nationalism, where diversity of ethnic interests and origins coexist. In the United States religious belief, or more specifically an adherence to a particular religious denomination, must be incorporated into any understanding of an American identity. While a civic Americanism is political and without specific theological doctrines, the United States has in part based its cultural identity on a belief in God and religious freedom. American Protestantism dominated American identity throughout the nineteenth century until it was challenged by the influx of Roman and Orthodox Catholics and Reformed and Orthodox Jews. The American Catholic Church specifically pushed this civic identity by claiming for itself and its communicants a place within American political tradition, whilst striving to assimilate its diverse immigrant Church into one American Church.⁹

Sisters Justina and Blandina articulated an Americanness that stood between two assimilationist positions: American Protestant and Catholic identities. They, like many other American women religious, used education and entertainment to inculcate an American Catholic identity. They understood the importance of a proper education that balanced devotion to the Faith with citizenship. In so doing, they joined other urban social welfare reformers who worked with immigrants to mold them into productive American citizens.¹⁰

In the case of the Santa Maria Institute and the Segale sisters the goal is evident in their emphasis on education, the creation of social clubs, providing entertainment for children, and a myriad of other efforts benefitting Italian immigrants. The successes they had occurred because culturally they met the Italian community somewhere between American and Italian nationalism. By the end of her life, Sister Justina Segale was singing the praises of Benito Mussolini, who rescued the Pope from his imprisonment in the Vatican and returned Catholicism to its rightful place of respect within Italy. While many Italians living in the United States echoed this praise of Mussolini, American Catholics, deeply concerned with the condition of the Holy Father, joined them in their admiration

8 For Justina and Blandina Americanization for Italians could not occur without Roman Catholicism. One could be both American and Catholic and retain elements of their Italian heritage. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4-5, 126; and for acculturation or accommodation, see Timothy J. Meagher, *Inventing Irish America: Generation, Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880-1928* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 11.

9 John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Antheneum, 1963), 20-1; Dorothy Dohen, *Nationalism and American Catholicism* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 3-7. American Catholics claimed a place in American history by identifying “great Catholics” who participated in the origin of the United States, namely Christopher Columbus and Charles Carroll. See Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, N.Y.: Images Books, 1985), 96-7.

10 Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 235-237, *passim*; Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 136.



A mother's club at Santa Maria.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,
Mount St. Joseph, OH*



of the Fascist leader of Italy.¹¹ The Santa Maria Institute grew and expanded alongside this immigrant community. By the 1920s many Italians of Cincinnati, particularly those loyal to Santa Maria, found a balance between the two cultures and nations. Education offered at Santa Maria and area parochial schools contributed to them finding this equilibrium.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century Santa Maria developed and expanded numerous social clubs for children and adults. The purpose, of course, was to offer an alternative to secular or Protestant offerings that the sisters believed would lead Italians away from Catholicism. By April of 1917 the Santa Maria Institute had its own Boy Scout troop that drew thirty-two members initially. A second troop of fifteen boys, however, developed in May of 1917 under the direction of Joseph Nardini, an Italian. According to Justina's account of the establishment of this second troop, the first group of Boy Scouts consisted of boys of various nationalities. While Justina suggested Nardini's troop not limit their admissions, they wanted only Italians. Nardini's Boy Scouts rejected a multi-ethnic organization that would, in theory, promote an American identity versus an Italian one.

This account of the Italian Boy Scout Troop is an interesting example of how Justina Segale's journal might illustrate a larger point of Americanization. The Boy Scouts, arguably an organization dedicated to American patriotism, was being used as a means of preserving Italianness. Santa Maria, by providing space to a group such as this, rejected a "melting pot" understanding of an American identity in favor of preserving Italian identity. That Sister Justina suggested other nationalities join the second troop, though, indicates she believed in Americanization. Yet, she praised the boys of Nardini's troop for establishing the group. It would promote "the uplift of the Italian youth" and would prevent these boys, if only fifteen of them, from joining Protestant organizations.¹²

Another troop developed at the Walnut Hills Santa Maria Welfare Center in 1919 after the subject of the Boy Scouts was raised at a mothers' club.¹³ Sister Justina believed that the Scouts offered young boys "useful, healthful and pleasant occupation, and high ideas, lofty principles calculated to make a brave honorable man out of every boy who takes

11 Peter D'Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 158-93, passim.

12 Justina Segale, J-5, 1916-1918, 11 April 1917, and 25 May 1917, SMI Papers.

13 The Santa Maria Welfare Center in Walnut Hills became the Kenton Street Welfare Center.

the scout training.” More than this, it protected boys from Protestant evangelizers and fostered devotion to the Catholic Church. In 1920, Nardini’s Boy Scouts joined sixty other boys from Santa Maria clubs to receive Holy Communion. The scouts wore their uniforms and accompanied Nardini at Mass. Here, as with the girls’ organizations, the Sisters of Charity’s main purpose was to create moral social activities while promoting devotion to Catholicism. Young men and women who received the sacraments and studied their Catholic faith assumed American Catholic identities, even as they maintained elements of their Italian identity.¹⁴

On the surface, here the Boy Scouts do not appear to be an instrument of Americanization but rather a tool to preserve the Catholic faith. While deeper analysis indicates they were indeed agents of Americanization, the sisters took more direct measures to usher Italians into American life and prepare them for citizenship. By the start of World War I, the sisters had to deal with a new breed of “Americanizers”: non-sectarian institutions or Christian organizations like the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), and the American House operated by the Americanization Executive Committee sponsored by Cincinnati’s Chamber of Commerce. These new institutions posed a threat to Italian Catholics because, in Justina’s mind, they often mixed Protestantism with citizenship. If these centers contributed to the destruction of Italians’ Catholic faith (conversion to a Protestant denomination, or simply ceasing religious observance) then the sisters’ would have failed in their primary mission to make immigrants responsible citizens. Simply put, if Italians lost their faith they became “traitor[s] to God,” and could not “be relied upon to be loyal to the government.”¹⁵

A look at Americanization and citizenship efforts in Cincinnati at the time reveals various programs whose main purpose was controlling the immigrant population, promoting American patriotism, and preventing radicalism from developing in the city. In most cases, Cincinnati Americanizers put public pressure upon resident aliens to become citizens. Many did not resort to out-right force, although once the United States entered the war the pressure intensified as newspapers asked what immigrants had done to become American. Specifically they wanted to know what Italians and other groups were doing to support the war effort and, in the case of young men, to join the US Army. Before 1917 Americanizers still hoped to persuade rather than coerce. In 1915 a new “Citizenship School” developed from a Night School offered at Sherman School on West Eighth Street and was housed in the YMCA. This operation was developed by the same Americanization Executive Committee that directed the American House located on the west side of Cincinnati at Central Avenue and Bank Street. The citizenship school stemmed from the failure of many immigrants to pass the examination required to gain naturalization papers.¹⁶

14 Justina Segale, J-7, 1918-1920, 3 December 1919, SMI Papers.

15 This quote is an excerpt from Sister Blandina’s speech at the American House in 1921. A discussion of this speech opens the chapter. See, J-8, 1920-1922, 24 February 1921, *Ibid.*

16 “Seventy-five Men Will Receive Diplomas at First Graduations of Unique ‘Citizenship School,’” *The Cincinnati Times-Star*, 11 June 1915.

By 1917 the situation in Cincinnati had changed, particularly for those immigrants considered “enemy aliens:” Germans, Hungarians, Austrians, and Bulgarians. These enemy aliens were prohibited from living within a half-mile of a “military fort, station, camp or factory munitions.” Those living in these areas, such as people residing in Carthage near the Pollack plant, had to move by June 1 of that year or be subject to arrest. This along with increasing measures pressuring Germans and others to become citizens and swear loyalty to the United States contributed to an atmosphere of heightened patriotism and concern over the state of immigrants in the city. In March of 1917 an article appeared in the Cincinnati Enquirer stating that immigrants working for the American Tool Works Company who had not yet sought American citizenship were forcefully encouraged to do so by their employers. The company even gave permission to file necessary paperwork during business hours. Accordingly, twenty-five of the thirty-one non-resident employees complied with the request.¹⁷

Pressure on Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians increased elsewhere as well. Germans were warned that “evil acts” as enemy aliens would result in “stern reprisals.” German teachers in public schools who were not yet naturalized and who reportedly had no declared intention of doing so were pressured to resign in April 1917; those who did not were later fired in September. Immigrants throughout the city faced growing calls to become citizens. The papers were full of notices and articles that ranged from friendly reminders to “stern” pronouncements. A minister from Columbia Baptist Church, P.L. Vernon, reminded readers that the “Importance of Citizenship must be Impressed Upon Aliens.” In another article, Germans were told that they would be shown “toleration” if they declared their intent to become citizens. Even reports intended to celebrate immigrants who filed papers contributed to this overwhelming pressure to comply with Americanization policies.¹⁸

Italians and other immigrants, meanwhile, were criticized for their alleged reluctance to join the army. Non-residents were chastised in the press for claiming exemptions from military service. An editorial in the Commercial Tribune argued that, to be fair, immigrants

17 “Fealty to Uncle Sam Pledge by Seventy Aliens Who Seek American Citizenship,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 21 March 1917; “Restriction Upon Enemies: To Affect Several Thousand Residents of Cincinnati,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 19 April 1917; “Aliens Must Move Out of Barred Districts by June 9 or be Arrested,” *The Commercial Tribune*, 31 May 1917; and “Tool Company’s Aliens Directed to Become Citizens Under ‘Intimidation’ ‘Tis Said,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 29 March 1917.

18 “German Teachers to Quit,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 April 1917; “Toleration to Be Shown Aliens Who Declare Their Intention to Become citizens,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 5 April 1917; “Evil Acts of Alien Enemies In Cincinnati Are to Find Stern Reprisals,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 20 April 1917; “Importance of Citizenship Must be Impressed Upon Aliens Says Rev. P.L. Vernon,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 30 April 1917; and “Teachers Lose Jobs,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 27 June 1917.

WOMEN DRESSED IN GARB OF SISTERS OF CHARITY

Visited Keeper of Resort, and Charged Her With
Causing Moral Destruction of Young Girls—De-
tective Detailed to Investigate Queer Story.

Alice Mason, keeper of a resort on George street, told the police a remarkable story Friday. She said that several days ago two women, dressed in the garb of sisters of charity, had called at her place and informed her that they had information that she was responsible for the moral destruction of several young girls. They told her that they had been at pains to discover evidence against her which, they said, they would produce at the proper time. The Mason woman says that she made an investigation on her own account, which caused her to entertain a suspicion as to the real identity of the women who had called on her. She communicated with Detective Wuebben, and it was arranged to have the two women call again at the resort Friday. The Mason woman alleges that they made a demand upon her for money, and it was arranged to have Detective Wuebben overhear the conversation, when they repeated their visit Friday. It is expected that there may be sensational developments in the case.

An example of newspaper coverage and rampant suspicions of the era.

Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,
Mount St. Joseph, OH



must be drafted alongside U.S. citizens. If immigrant men had remained in their countries their governments would have called them to duty. Some immigrant men, however, were exempted from military service if they were nondeclarants (aliens who had not filed citizenship papers), diplomats, or if they were “enemy aliens.” Compulsory conscription was a consequence of citizenship regardless of nation, particularly in times of war. Italians were singled out as “dodg[ing] war service” because, according to the Draft Board, many had lived in Cincinnati for five to ten years without filing citizenship papers. Consequently, efforts were made to compel them and other immigrants to enter the service. Situated next to these columns condemning Italians, Greeks, and others for not fulfilling their duties were “Rolls of Honor,” listing men who had volunteered to serve their country. The names were conspicuously not Italian nor Eastern and Southern European.¹⁹

By 1918 notices and articles in the newspapers became increasingly strident as the war continued and the threat of radicalism surged. In February 1918, an article in the *Enquirer* detailed the “nationwide dragnet... to locate enemy aliens who through ignorance of the law, or malicious intent, fail[ed] to make report of their property holdings.”²⁰ To combat these attacks on their character and their sense of duty to America, some immigrants, including Italians, responded publicly by embracing Americanization. In 1917 a group of Italians, Germans, Turks, and others established a club at their former Citizenship School, Sherman School, called the Eiler Citizenship Club. Despite coming from nations at war with each other (only Italians were not enemy aliens), the new group, a product of the Executive Committee’s citizenship school, had united and proved their worthiness to become citizens. They proved their loyalty to their new homeland, the United States. Others joined the ranks of published names of naturalized citizens or those who filed

19 “Draft the Alien,” *The Commercial Tribune*, 3 July 1917; “Italians Dodge War Service,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 25 September 1917; Christopher M. Sterba, *Good Americans: Italian and Jewish Immigrants During the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 56-8; and “Aliens Not to Be Exempted,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 26 September 1917.

20 “Excuses Will Not be Accepted for Failure to Report Holdings of Enemy Property. Loyal Citizens Called on to Aid in Uncovering Violators of the Law,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 15 February 1918.

papers. By 1920, 34% of the Italians sampled for this study were naturalized residents, a significant increase from 1910 wherein only 16.4% had become citizens.²¹

The climate of Americanization caused many within the public school system, the Chamber of Commerce, and others concerned with the situation of immigration to push for increased education to speed the assimilation process. A League for the Americanization of Foreigners consisting of the superintendent of schools, Randall J. Condon, James N. Gamble of Proctor and Gamble and a financial supporter of the Elizabeth Gamble Deaconess Home, and others, called for “prominent businessmen, accompanied by interpreters, to visit the shops and factories where immigrants [were] employed and persuade them to enroll as members of the classes in citizenship... opened in the public night schools.” The goal behind this league was to Americanize immigrants and “convert them into useful citizens” who spoke English.²²

These kinds of Americanizers caused Sister Justina and Sister Blandina to worry about the souls of Italians. The American House established in 1918 was also suspect, despite the sisters’ participation in its mission. It was at this American House that Sister Blandina reportedly told the crowd of social workers gathered that “one who is a traitor to God, cannot be relied upon to be loyal to the government.”²³

By 1918 the climate of Americanization and the creation of leagues and houses promoting it had pushed the sisters to enter into the public dialogue concerning immigrants’ loyalties, particularly those of Italians. In January 1919, U.S. agents from Washington, D.C., proposed creating an Italian-Americanization center and offered the operation of it to the Sisters of the Santa Maria Institute. Once again Sister Justina’s journals provide new insight into the Americanization process. The first mention of this Americanization center did not inspire Sister Justina to preach Americanization or rejoice at the opportunity presented to Santa Maria. Rather, she approached it like any other new opportunity for her welfare center, as one that would enable the Sisters of Charity to save Italian souls. Sister Justina contextualized the government’s Americanization effort, commenting in her diary: “If the work succeeds, after the Government gives up the work of Americanization, we can continue it as Italian Mission work.” This entry in the journal is part of a lengthy passage with news of the sisters’ work and their plans for future welfare activity. Americanization was just one of many tools. This does not mean that Justina and Blandina Segale did not recognize the importance of adapting to life in the United States; it was just that preserving the faith took precedence.²⁴

In the 1920s the official component to Americanization slightly altered the tone of

21 “Newly Made Citizens Show their Loyalty by Formation of Club,” *The Commercial Tribune*, 3 July 1917; and Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population*. The percentages on naturalized citizens came from three databases based upon the 1900, 1910, and 1920 Census. The samples consist of: 1,858 (1900); 3,695 (1910); and 5,379 (1920) Italians, Italian Americans, and their families.

22 “Remolding of Foreign Residents into Lovers of Cincinnati Is Planned by League,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 21 September 1917.

23 Justina Segale, J-8, 1920-1922, 24 February 1921, SMI Papers; and “Americanization House is Turned Over to Foreigners,” *The Commercial Tribune*, 29 November 1918.

24 Justina Segale, J-7, 1917-1918, 9 January 1919, SMI Papers.



An Americanization class at Santa Maria.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,
Mount St. Joseph, OH*



Santa Maria, but not extensively. The sisters did speak of “Americanizing” immigrants, where they had not done so before in their work. Americanization work continued to bring the sisters into contact with representatives from the American House on Bank Street and Central Avenue. Talk of immigration restrictions tangled efforts on Santa Maria’s part to promote citizenship. When the Johnson Immigration Bill passed in 1924, Sister Justina wrote that “[i]t will work great damage to the Italians. It seems to have been framed on purpose to exclude them especially. And an Italian discovered America and gave it to the world!”²⁵ However, despite this, the overwhelming amount of material recorded in the diary dealt with building up the two welfare centers in Walnut Hills and Fairmount, not to mention the events of the Santa Maria Institute on West Eighth Street. The journal illustrates that Americanization was just one of many activities the sisters engaged in to help immigrants.

Yet the goals of Americanization were continually present in their work. The Americanization Center opened in 1920 and operated into the late 1920s. By 1925 the center was offering night classes for men and young boys as well as “Americanization Classes” intended to prepare Italians for citizenship.²⁶ Meanwhile, Santa Maria continued to provide material and spiritual aid to Italians, as well as clubs and other entertainments. Furthermore, the 1920s ushered in a new period of pride in the Segales’ Italian heritage. In the early years of Santa Maria, Sister Justina wrote to the Italian monarchy for financial support and periodically the Institute would receive a letter of gratitude in return. During this period a growing number of representatives from the Italian government visited the United States, and stopped to see the Santa Maria Institute. Sister Justina grew increasingly pleased with the arrival of these representatives, and also appreciative of Premier Benito Mussolini.²⁷

The Mussolini regime, from Sister Justina’s perspective, appeared to bring only good

25 J-10, 1922-1925, 22 April 1924, *Ibid.*

26 See J-11, 1925-1929, *Ibid.*

27 See J-11, 1925-1929, *Ibid.*



The Roma Club provided a venue for Italian men to gather and share their interests.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,
Mount St. Joseph, OH*



things for Santa Maria, Italians, and the Catholic Church in Italy (including the Pope). As a series of Italian nationalists began visiting in the 1920s, they brought the blessings of Mussolini and potential financial support. Then, in January 1925, an Italian Willing Worker, Arrigo Gasperini, was appointed the Italian Consul in Kansas City. Gasperini was a teacher at Santa Maria and his wife directed the Girls' Club. Justina believed that Mussolini named Gasperini Consul because he had served Italy as a soldier in WWI. Furthermore, Justina also thought that his appointment indicated Mussolini's interest in Italian religious matters and the preservation of the Catholic faith among Italians at home and abroad. Gasperini had been a valuable volunteer at the Institute, as had his wife. Sister Justina remarked with pride that when Gasperini went to visit his new post, he first traveled to the Italian church to speak with the pastor. Sister Justina wrote: "It is noticeable the influence the Mussolini Government exerts over its subjects concerning religion. Previous to Premier Mussolini's coming into power, religious matters were ignored; now religious subjects take the first place as they deserve."²⁸

This growing pride in Italian identity went hand-in-hand with efforts to Americanize Italians. The Americanization Center continued at the new Santa Maria location on Thirteenth and Republic. It was known as the Alessandro Manzoni club, and it organized a celebration of Italian Constitution Day and the Silver Jubilee of the Coronation of King Victor III in July 1925. The gala provided musical entertainment and took place at the Cincinnati Zoological Gardens; it featured an Italian speaker from New York City, Pasquale Biasi, editor of *Il Corriere d'America*. Nowhere did the mixture of Italian and American loyalty manifest itself more plainly than in the pages of *Veritas*, the journal of the Santa Maria Institute. First published in February 1926, the journal was the culmination of all

²⁸ J-10, 15 April 1923, 22 May 1923, *Ibid*. Sister Justina writes of a Mrs. Pallottelli who claimed to be an intimate friend of Mussolini in 1924. She promised to bring word of Santa Maria back to the Italian Premier. See, J-10, 9 January 1924; J-10, 13 August 1923, and 25 January 1924, *Ibid*.



A parade passes in front of the San Antonio Welfare Center in South Fairmont.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,
Mount St. Joseph, OH*



Sister Justina's efforts to create a reputable Italian-American newspaper to combat the anti-Catholic ones circulating in the city.²⁹

When Sisters Justina and Blandina, with the help of other Sisters of Charity and laity, built the Santa Maria Institute and went about the business of saving Italians' souls, they constructed an Italian American understanding of a good American Catholic. The sisters, concerned with saving Italians' Catholic faith, created a complete social and educational environment in the form of an Italian Home that provided space for Italians to find a place in American civic life. The sisters initially looked down upon the Italian immigrants (particularly Southern Italian immigrants) they hoped to "save." Over the course of their work, Blandina and Justina shed some of their condescension and expressed pride in those whom they served. They spoke more towards the end of their lives of their association with Santa Maria and of their pride in being Italian. This may have been a means of persuading Italian immigrants to trust them and of securing these immigrants' Catholic faith. While this was a part of that story, it is also possible that these Italian-born Sisters of Charity had always felt pride in their heritage. Working closely with Italians, seeing their struggles within the United States to maintain culture, language, and traditions while navigating the new American society, led Sisters Blandina and Justina to articulate a new Catholic identity that was both Italian and American.

I have spent the last ten years of my life with the Segale sisters. I poured through Sister Justina's diaries for my dissertation. After conducting a research project on Italian immigrants in a city that is known for its German and Irish immigrants, I came to the conclusion that Justina Segale's diaries were not only the best resource for the history of Santa Maria, social work, and women's history, but one of the few extensive resources documenting Italian immigrants in Cincinnati. After combing libraries and archives

²⁹ For the celebration of Italian Constitution Day and King Victor III's jubilee, see Justina Segale, J-11, 1925-1929, 24 July 1925 and 27 July 1925, *Ibid.* *Il Corriere dell'Ohio* was the paper that first appeared in the early 1900s in Cincinnati. Justina believed it to be anti-Catholic. Only one issue of the paper has surfaced from 1913. At various times in the paper's history it was operated by Protestant Italians and those without religious affiliation. The copy from 1913 is too brief to determine the extent of its possible anti-Catholic position (it is not a complete issue). The last mention of the paper in Justina's diary indicates that she approved of this editor as he seemed more agreeable to Catholicism. Michael Di Girolamo and another man attempted to purchase it to establish an Italian paper. J-3, 1909-1912, 7 November 1909; and J-8, 1920-1922, 11 April 1922, *Ibid.*

for personal papers, Italian organizations' documents, and records pertaining to Italian immigrants, of the few I found none compared to the depth and breadth that Sister Justina Segale's diaries offer.

Justina Segale's diaries are unique in that they run from 1897 to just before her death in 1929 (with lulls during the summer months). They represent the voice of the Americanizer, the social worker, and the Italian immigrant, as well as the Catholic woman religious. The journals, accompanied with supporting secondary literature, thereby provide a fresh perspective and an excellent teaching tool in the classroom.





Sr. Blandina Segale, S.C., center, overseeing the work of students in a cooking class.

Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH





Santa Maria provided for infant welfare by sponsoring a milk station.

Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH





A mother's club at Santa Maria.

Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH



WOMEN DRESSED IN GARB OF SISTERS OF CHARITY

Visited Keeper of Resort, and Charged Her With
Causing Moral Destruction of Young Girls—De-
tective Detailed to Investigate Queer Story.

Alice Mason, keeper of a resort on George street, told the police a remarkable story Friday. She said that several days ago two women, dressed in the garb of sisters of charity, had called at her place and informed her that they had information that she was responsible for the moral destruction of several young girls. They told her that they had been at pains to discover evidence against her which, they said, they would produce at the proper time. The Mason woman says that she made an investigation on her

own account, which caused her to entertain a suspicion as to the real identity of the women who had called on her. She communicated with Detective Wuebben, and it was arranged to have the two women call again at the resort Friday. The Mason woman alleges that they made a demand upon her for money, and it was arranged to have Detective Wuebben overhear the conversation, when they repeated their visit Friday. It is expected that there may be sensational developments in the case.

An example of newspaper coverage and rampant suspicions of the era.

Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH





An Americanization class at Santa Maria.

Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH





The Roma Club provided a venue for Italian men to gather and share their interests.

Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH





A parade passes in front of the San Antonio Welfare Center in South Fairmont.

Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH

