

1986

## From Migrant to Millionaire: the Story of the Italian-American in New Orleans, 1880-1910 (Louisiana).

Roselyn Bologna Boneno  
*Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College*

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FROM MIGRANT TO MILLIONAIRE: THE STORY OF THE ITALIAN-  
AMERICAN IN NEW ORLEANS, 1880-1910

*The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col.*

PH.D. 1986

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FROM MIGRANT TO MILLIONAIRE:  
THE STORY OF THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN IN  
NEW ORLEANS, 1880-1910

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by  
Roselyn Bologna Boneno  
B.A., Our Lady of Holy Cross College, 1962  
M.A., St. Mary's University, 1971  
December, 1986

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To Dr. Gerald DeLuca, who committed much time and energy to the reading of this work, I express my deepest gratitude. His constant concern during the past year and his careful critiques deserve a special thank you. Also I extend appreciation to Dr. Edwin Fuchs and to my parents who never relented in either their encouragement or belief that this project would reach fruition.

To the late Eleanor Guzzo Bologna who provided the inspiration for this research, there can be no adequate words of appreciation. Like thousands of other Italians, she came to Louisiana with little save the desire for success. With a work ethic that knew no bounds, she devoted her energies to her family and her God. Although she never abandoned her native Sicily, she always gave thanks to this new land which provided her a residence to raise her family, better than average economic success, and eventually a place for her journey home.

Finally to Dr. Burl Noggle, my advisor and friend, there are no

sufficient plaudits. His reflective queries and oft repeated "Go forth and rewrite" not only facilitated refinement, but led me to realize Walt Whitman's words, ". . . [I] stood isolated . . . Ceaselessly . . . venturing . . . Till the bridge [I] need[ed] [was] form'd."

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores a history of the Italian immigrants in the New Orleans area between the years 1880-1910. It traces their reasons for coming to the United States, the difficulties faced in assimilation, along with their social, religious, intellectual, political and economic developments. First- and second-generation Italians were personally interviewed in depth, and surveys were given to approximately 186 persons of various Italian societies throughout the defined geographical area. Both the content and the source of respondents' opinions are investigated and explored to discover what correlation existed between the written and the oral explanations. In most respects, no significant differences developed.

A chronic economic problem existed in Southern Italy, prompting large numbers of people to emigrate. The state of Louisiana, in cooperation with steamship lines and important sugar cane planters, took advantage of the situation and attempted to gain the Italians as workers. Although Italians constituted the largest ethnic group to come to Louisiana during the period, the figures initially did not reflect the impact made on the economic life of the New Orleans area. Once here the immigrants accepted any menial task in an effort to better their position. Eventually some immigrants proved successful and moved into profitable businesses, such as wholesale fruit and vegetable dealerships, furniture and hotel ownerships, and real estate development.

Although not all of the Italians who landed in New Orleans remained in the city, those who did slowly developed into a large segment of the business community. Language difficulties posed some barriers,

but schools, mutual aid societies, and night school classes moved to equalize this difficulty. Initially the immigrants were not accepted by their American counterparts, but through hard work, persistence, and the ability to compromise without loss of identity, they won the respect of their fellow Americans. By 1910, the New Orleans business community realized that the Italians were a group which had moved from the lowest of socio-economic positions to one of respect, wealth, and importance.

## INTRODUCTION

"[N]oiselessly . . . patient[ly] [they] stood isolated . . ."

These words of Walt Whitman might describe the Italians who emigrated to the New Orleans area between 1880 and 1910. Until the late 1800's Italians in the United States had been conspicuous only by their absence. Nonetheless, by the 1890's their numbers totaled about 52,000 compared to the 1,016 in 1860.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this study is to investigate Italian-American immigrants to the New Orleans area between the years 1880 and 1910. Attention will be devoted to the economic, religious, and social reasons for their choosing this specific area, to the political milieu they encountered and to their adaptation from Old World to New World customs.

Until the late 1950's historiography on Italian-Americans was narrative more than analytical and concentrated on the northeastern section of the United States. This is not surprising since the vast majority of all Italians did settle in the urban areas of the East. Historians such as Robert Foerster, Bert James Lowenberg, and Oscar Handlin wrote of the Italians' attraction to the industrial northeast with Handlin emerging as the most famous among them.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States from Colonial Times to 1957 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), pp. 56-57.

<sup>2</sup>Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1951); Robert Foerster, The Italian Immigration of Our Times (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919); Bert James Lowenberg, "Efforts of the South to Encourage Immigration, 1865-1900," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXIII (October, 1934), pp. 363-385.

Handlin's thesis of folk-urban dichotomies explored abrupt changes in Old World patterns and customs. In particular, the family seemed to suffer greatest as it fell prey to New World influences. Handlin portrayed a rather dull picture of these early Italians as they made the transition from peasant villages to urban societies.

In 1960 Maldwyn A. Jones took exception to Handlin's alienation theme. For Jones, all immigrants had been uprooted from familial surroundings, all faced uncharted courses, and all adjusted. What remained the distinction was the impact each nationality had on America.<sup>3</sup>

More recently other historians have done serious studies of specific Old World cultural ways and institutions. Richard Gambino made family the organizational theme of Blood of My Blood.<sup>4</sup> Humbert S. Nelli's investigation of Italians in Chicago depicts an immigrant community based on paesani ties. These friends acted as a "beachhead" from which the Italians entered American society.<sup>5</sup> Virginia Yans-McLaughlin used Buffalo between 1880-1930 to document cultural and social influences on family continuity.<sup>6</sup> Dino Cinel analyzed the

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<sup>3</sup>Maldwyn Allen Jones, American Immigration (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Gambino, Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian American (New York: Doubleday Books, 1974), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup>Humbert S. Nelli, Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. XI; see also Luciano Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondella, The Italian Americans (New York: Twayne, 1971).

<sup>6</sup>Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 23.

experience of Italians in San Francisco as a struggle between the traditions of the past and the realities of the present.<sup>7</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia's comparison of Sicilians in Europe and the Lower East Side pictures a basic cultural change once immigrants settled in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Rudolph Vecoli, a contemporary of Nelli, wrote of the same Chicago; however, Vecoli observed that the southern Italians who emigrated sustained a cohesiveness with fellow townsmen. Family continued to be the focus of attention, but it appears Vecoli's immigrants never regarded themselves as unified Italians. Instead they appeared as "collective histories of the dozens of village groups which comprised this nationality."<sup>9</sup>

Another area of recent interest for new immigration historians is religion. Traditionally, Church history has centered on authority figures with little concern for people and conflicts. Due to the inaccessibility of records and the slow movement of the Church in recognizing the importance of ethnic studies, few in-depth works on Italian and American Catholicism exist. Research by Moses Rishin,

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<sup>7</sup>Dino Cinel, From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982).

<sup>8</sup>Donna R. Gabaccia, From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930 (Albany: University of New York Press, 1984).

<sup>9</sup>Rudolph Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago, a Critique of The Uprooted, Journal of American History, LXIX (December, 1964), pp. 418-419; "Chicago's Italians Prior to World War I: A Study of Their Social and Economic Adjustment," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1963), pp. 99-100.

David O'Brien, Edward Stibili, and Silvano M. Tomasi has initiated newer studies in the direction of Church history from the bottom up.<sup>10</sup>

Finally there is the discussion of women, which until the late 1970's held little space in Italian migration history. As one reads the literature, however, it becomes apparent that sex blindness seems to permeate both older and newer studies. Historians' studies of government census reports, educational records, literature, and labor statistics have begun to yield some portraits of this important but silent portion of the family, but much remains to be done. At present the more successful descriptions are Ann Cornelisen's Torregreca and Women of the Shadows, and Charlotte Gower Chapman's Milocca.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Moses Rishin, "The New American Catholic History," Church History, XLI (June, 1972), 225-229, called attention to all historians of the shift within the field of Catholic history; David O'Brien, "American Catholic Historiography: A Post Conciliar Evaluation," Church History, XXXVII (March, 1968), 82-94, was one of the first historians to call for American Catholic Church history emphasizing people instead of authority figures; Edward E. Stibili, "The St. Raphael Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants, 1887-1923" (Ph.D. dissertation, Notre Dame University, 1975), presents an overall explanation of a Catholic assistance agency in the cities of Boston and New York. See also Rudolph Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church," Journal of Social History, 2 (Spring, 1969), 217-268; Silvano M. Tomasi, Piety and Power: The Role of Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area, 1880-1930 (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1975), explains the Italian National parish in the Northeast.

<sup>11</sup> Ann Cornelisen, Women of the Shadows: The Wives and Mothers of Southern Italy (New York: Grenada Publishers, 1977); Ann Cornelisen, Women and Torregreca: Life, Death, Miracles (New York: Granada Publishing, Ltd., 1969); Charlotte Gower Chapman, Milocca: A Sicilian Village (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963). See also Emiliana P. Noether, "The Silent Half: Le Contadine Del Sud Before the First World War," in Betty B. Caroli, R. Harney, Lydio F. Tomasi (eds.), The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1978), pp. 3-12.

Chronologically, both authors deal with the generation after World War II, but their description of the woman -- silent in nature and outlook -- is most appropriate for the first generation of Italian women. Because education generally ceased at the compulsory three-year elementary school, they were often illiterate. Unable to write reactions or feelings, their only records appear in the statistics of authorities.<sup>12</sup>

This writer has tried to be cognizant of these historical views in describing the Italians of New Orleans. However, in exploring the transition from agricultural immigrant to settler in the New Orleans area, there are broader questions to be deliberated. How did emigration to New Orleans affect Italian families? Did economic and family life as known in Italy survive? What effect did conditions in Louisiana have on religious practices? Were Italians a dangerous class? And what effect did politics have on the new immigrants?

The evidence presented herein seems to challenge the conventional immediate acculturation interpretation of Handlin. Cultural shock and other changes were evident in the transition to Louisiana, but the first-generation Italian family remained intact. As interviews revealed, Italians became masters at adjustment. The pressures faced in this new society presented a notable contrast to the slower moving village life of rural Italy. Discrimination, political stratification,

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<sup>12</sup>In an effort to expand research on the female segment, the Canadian and Italian Historical Associations devoted their 1977 conference to papers on the Italian woman. See Betty Boyd Caroli, Robert F. Harney, Lydio F. Tomasi (eds.), The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America: Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1978).

poverty, high infant mortality and menial employment all forced alternatives, but the adjustment did not create Italians bereft of their culture. Their uprooting from familiar surroundings simply meant new challenges. For Handlin, the transition destroyed traditional Italian family life. For this writer the focus became their ability to adjust to American housing, customs, ideas, and practices while remaining Italians. In these transplanted communities, Old World customs remained, as Italians rallied around what they knew best -- their family and culture. The diversity of America brought adaptations, but always within the confines of Italian tradition. Through family support, these first-generation Italians reacted to the mores of society, but they never abandoned their Italian identities.

To understand better individual experiences, I used in-depth interviews with first- and second-generation Italian-Americans. Additionally, daily newspapers from New Orleans and Baton Rouge supplemented by trade journals such as the Manufacturer's Record, and Minutes of the Louisiana Sugar Planters Association were consulted. This documentation reflected economic circumstances not easily discernible in personal interviews. Periodicals such as Charities, North American Review, Outlook, Journal of American History, and Journal of Sociology presented conflicting points of view on a subject which at the time produced ambivalent attitudes from native Americans.

Because primary sources such as journals, diaries, and business papers were not always available to the researcher, much emphasis was placed on the personal interviews. These have been added as Appendix A because they graphically illustrate the facts derived from this research, as well as life as it was for these newcomers. The persons



interviewed were always encouraged to speak of their early life in an unstructured style. This was necessary to cull information about their first days in Louisiana and to give them a feeling of confidence. Because suspicion and distrust of strangers are characteristics often inherent in this group, the researcher made every effort to keep the interview as informal as possible. Frequently after the tape ended, the informants continued to speak, seeming to relish the chance to tell someone -- particularly a third-generation Italian-American -- their story. When for various reasons a one-to-one interview was not possible, a general survey was used. The results of this questionnaire have been tabulated and included in Appendix B.

Finally, it is my sincere hope that from the material presented, there will emerge a better understanding of this group who came searching for a dream. Like the thousands before them, they had only the hope that America, more specifically New Orleans, would offer a better tomorrow.

## CHAPTER I

### THE LURING OF A MEDITERRANEAN PEOPLE

The Italians are a people in love with their homeland. Yet between the years 1880 and 1915 approximately four million Italians migrated to the United States.<sup>1</sup> The majority of those who emigrated came from Sicily and the densely populated areas of the Mezzogiorno.<sup>2</sup>

Periodically in literature the alleged poverty of the South Italians appears as the compelling reason for the exodus. Historians such as Robert Foerster, Denis M. Smith and Enrico C. Sartorio consistently echo the theme of economic misery.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, this writer maintains that it was not merely economic depression at home which brought the Italians to Louisiana. Rather, it was the Italian's desire to raise his economic status, to own his own land -- the true mark of wealth -- that prompted the move to Louisiana. Further

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<sup>1</sup>United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States from Colonial Times to 1957 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 56; Robert Foerster, The Italian Emigration of Our Times (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), p. 43 [hereinafter cited as Foerster, Italian Emigration]. Note: Owing to the inadequacy of the Italian village records along with the fact that even U. S. Immigration and Naturalization records do not take into account the repatriates, it is impossible to determine the exact number of migrants. Joseph Lopreato, Peasants No More, Social Class and Social Change in an Underdeveloped Society (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1967), p. 158. [Hereinafter cited as Lopreato, Peasants No More].

<sup>2</sup>"Mezzogiorno" refers to the regions of southern Italy including Sicily. For this study I will use the term southern Italy.

<sup>3</sup>Foerster, Italian Emigration; Denis Mack Smith, Italy: A Modern History (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), p. 24 [hereinafter cited as Smith, A Modern History]; Enrico C. Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians in America (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1918), p. 16 [Hereinafter cited as Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians].

substantiation of this theme evolved from both the interviews and the surveys conducted by this researcher, in which the idea of "migration to Louisiana for economic ascendancy" prevailed.

In this section the writer will attempt to show that because of the Italians' innate desire to be independent economically, they left a beloved homeland to migrate to a country different and distant from their own. Explanations of the Italian government's reaction against the tide of immigrants will be interwoven with Louisiana's effort to increase the flow. Between these two is the story of the immigrants who saw themselves holding the key to their own success.

Because the Italians possessed the tenacity and skills so necessary for economic prosperity, the United States, more especially Louisiana, seemed an attractive port of entry. Although it did not have the factories so abundant in the East, Louisiana's waterways and fertile soil offered the Italians the opportunity to recreate an agricultural heritage.

Like the early American Puritan settlers, late nineteenth century Italian immigrants to America were fleeing an undesirable condition. However, unlike the Puritans, the Italians were neither fleeing religious persecution nor seeking religious freedom. Rather, they were escaping from economic disintegration, as well as seeking economic advancement.<sup>4</sup> In their native homeland there seemed little hope for Italian peasants engaged in farming to improve their status. Agriculture, the principal occupation, had been subjected to horrendous

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<sup>4</sup>Eugene Schuyler, "Italian Immigration Into the United States," Political Science Quarterly, IV (September, 1889), 485.

weather conditions which, coupled with the lack of manpower and capital, led to a feeling of despair among the people.

During the 1870's and 1880's nature seemed to frown upon southern Italy. The peasant farmers worked against the worst which the elements had to offer. Lack of rainfall, coupled with earthquakes, brought on poor crops, soil erosion, and deforestation.<sup>5</sup>

A modern historian in writing of the period characterized the problem as one of poverty. With the exception of regions around Naples and Palermo, "The soil seemed burned up by the sun," a barren wilderness of clay and rock.<sup>6</sup>

Historically, these conditions had forced a relocation of the population. This idea was not foreign to Italians, for throughout their history seasonal migration had been for southern Italians the primary means of obtaining gainful employment. Nevertheless, by the late 1880's relocation was not enough. Italian agriculture seemed unable to compete with that in the more progressive nations. It lacked the necessary capital to initiate new and better means of farming, the methods used had grown obsolete, and the once sure markets had disappeared.<sup>7</sup> Also, the system of land ownership of

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<sup>5</sup>Foerster, Italian Immigration, p. 62; Smith, Italy: A Modern History, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>Smith, Italy: A Modern History, p. 234.

<sup>7</sup>Silvano M. Tomasi, "The Ethnic Church and the Integration of Italian Immigrants in the United States," in M. Engel and S. Tomasi (eds.), The Italian Experience in the U. S. (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1970), p. 163.

partible inheritance<sup>8</sup> and absentee landlords<sup>9</sup> compounded the problem. Under existing practices of peasant ownership, property could be received only through inheritance. However, among the aristocracy great estates tended to remain intact, due to the practices of marrying off only one son and bequeathing no land to daughters.<sup>10</sup>

Because of the characteristic trait of large families among peasants, the portion of land received grew smaller with each additional child.<sup>11</sup> At one time the peasant farmers had been rather prosperous, but as the families multiplied the descendants were left with barely enough land to provide a bitter existence.<sup>12</sup> This in itself had traditionally been a contributory cause of the previously cited seasonal relocation. Initially northern Italy provided the employment, but as the population continued to grow, even that section could not support the numbers.

Complicating the problem of excessive population was the system

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<sup>8</sup>Leonard W. Moss, "The Family in Southern Italy: Yesterday and Today" in Humbert S. Nelli (ed.), The United States and Italy: The First Two Hundred Years, Proceedings of the American Italian Historical Association, 1977, p. 189 [hereinafter cited as Moss, "The Family in Southern Italy"]. The system of partible inheritance will be explained in footnote 13.

<sup>9</sup>John F. Carr, "The Coming of the Italians," The Outlook, LXXXII (1906), 420. [Hereinafter cited as Carr, "The Coming of the Italians"].

<sup>10</sup>Charles W. Churchill, The Italians of Newark: A Community Study (New York: New York University Press, 1942), p. 8. [Hereinafter cited as Churchill, The Italians of Newark.]

<sup>11</sup>Moss, "The Family in Southern Italy," 189.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

of entailed estates<sup>13</sup> and absentee landlords which existed in all of southern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia.<sup>14</sup> Throughout these sections, huge areas of fertile soil supported only one shepherd or one farmer per square mile, while the remainder of the population was left with barren lands, mountainous terrain, and tracts infested with malaria.<sup>15</sup> In 1901 three-eighths of the Basilicatan, two-fifths of the Calabrian, and over two-thirds of the landowners of Sicily were absentee landlords.<sup>16</sup> Whatever margin of profit that existed went to these absent owners who cared little for modernizing farm techniques.<sup>17</sup> Since no new territory had been added to Italy and the absentee landlords would not relinquish nor modernize their tracts, the situation grew increasingly worse.

By 1881 the population was 257 persons to the square mile; twenty years later it had increased to 294 persons per square mile.<sup>18</sup> Overall

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<sup>13</sup>Entailed estates refers to the practice, begun in England by Edward I, of granting land to a tenant and to his heirs. Such land could not be disposed of as the oldest son or tenant saw fit. Instead he only had use of it and if his heirs ran out, the land reverted back to the lord. The system tended to confine ownership to a small group and at the same time to keep family estates intact.

<sup>14</sup>Carr, "The Coming of the Italians," 420.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Foerster, Italian Emigration, pp. 71-81.

<sup>17</sup>This land owning system known as lali fondo is described by historian Denis Mack Smith as "The Basic Unit of Land." Because it excluded the bulk of the population, it inevitably led to unrest. Smith, Modern History of Sicily, p. 465.

<sup>18</sup>John Horace Mariano, The Italian Contribution to American Democracy (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1921), p. 6 [Hereinafter cited as Mariano, The Italian Contribution].

the population within these twenty years had grown by some four and one half million with 350,000 more births per year than deaths.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, between the systems of partible inheritance and absentee landlords, the booming population of the "Mezzogiorno" had little alternative -- they could either move on to some other country or face starvation.

Combined with a depressed agricultural system was a fledgling industrialization program which had its beginnings when Italy became unified.<sup>20</sup> In its pursuit of industrialization the Italian government laid heavy taxes upon the people in a rather contradictory manner. The less a man had the more he would pay.<sup>21</sup> Necessities of life, such as dairy animals, were taxed while all luxuries were exempted. Included in these luxuries were odd items such as the horses of the

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<sup>19</sup>Carr, "The Coming of the Italians," 420.

<sup>20</sup>The Unification or "Risorgimento" of Italy took place between 1858 and 1870. It was begun under its prime minister, Cavour, and was both an external revolt against foreign oppression and an internal revolution designed to introduce political, economic, and civil liberties into Italy. Since Cavour was a believer in the separation of church and state, his political maneuvering made him especially despicable to Pope Pius IX, the leader of the Papal States. Nevertheless, through shrewd political and diplomatic maneuvering, Cavour contended with the reaction of nobles, bishops, and civilians in order to achieve the economic and social modernization which he desired. Prior to 1859 Italy consisted of the separate city states of Tuscany, the Papal States, the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. By 1870, through unscrupulous dealings with Napoleon III of France, and Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria, coupled with independent actions of the popular revolutionary Garibaldi, Cavour managed to unify all of Italy except Venetia and Rome. His successors followed Cavour's policy of exploiting European wars, and by 1870 had succeeded in acquiring Venetia from Austria and from France, thus completely unifying Italy under one government.

<sup>21</sup>Francis Clark, Our Italian Fellow Citizens in Their Old Homes and Their New (New York: Small Maynard and Co., 1919), p. 74 [Hereinafter cited as Clark, Our Italian Fellow Citizens].

aristocracy which were considered an exemption.<sup>22</sup> The peasants realized little return from their taxes, for administration brimmed with corruption. In an effort to realize some profits from the industrialized system, peasants began flocking to the cities.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, however, neither the southern Italian cities nor the industries were prepared for the movement, and the peasants' situation saw little improvement. Unification, with its promise of industrialization, had been achieved, but politicians had not foreseen the serious economic disorder which would benefit from the industrialization program. As the 1800's drew to a close inequality of application and ineptitude of management worked against the masses.<sup>24</sup>

Besides imposing taxation, the Italian government maintained a program of compulsory military service.<sup>25</sup> This was done to retain Italy's rank as a first class European power.<sup>26</sup> According to the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>23</sup>Italy's system closely paralleled agricultural growth in the United States. Here, just as in Italy, "as agriculture deteriorated in certain sections of the country, the morale of the rural population" fell. The relative decline of the farming population coupled with the rapid growth of cities led farmers to doubt the truth in Jefferson's words that agriculture was "the most precious part of the state." Harold U. Faulkner, Politics, Reform and Expansion (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 55.

<sup>24</sup>Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, The Italian Americans (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 39. [Hereinafter cited as Iorizzo, The Italian Americans.]

<sup>25</sup>United States Bureau of Labor, Italian, Slavic and Hungarian Unskilled Immigrant Laborers in the United States, by F. J. Sheridan, Bulletin No. 72, Vol. 15, September, 1907 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1908), p. 406.

<sup>26</sup>Carr, "The Coming of the Italians," 421.



regulations promulgated by the Italian government, persons were liable for military service once they had reached the age of nineteen.<sup>27</sup> If, however, a person wished to emigrate, he must obtain permission to do so from the commanding officers of the district.<sup>28</sup> This authorization could be refused if there was suspicion that a person was attempting to escape fulfilling his military duties.<sup>29</sup> More disconcerting was the fact that this regulation continued in effect until a man completed his thirty-second year.<sup>30</sup> Although everyone recognized the need for a strong military force, few young Italians willingly volunteered to give their lives for a nation which had done nothing but add to their miseries. The idea of moving to another country with opportunities for advancement was appealing to them and their families. Therefore, it was not surprising to hear of frequent appeals to the Italian minister of war if permission to depart was denied.

The Italian government was most reluctant to allow the youth and future of the country to leave for distant shores. In an effort to stem the flow of emigration, the Italian Parliament on December 31,

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<sup>27</sup>In an interview with Joe Bologna, first generation immigrant, he spoke of quitting school in the fourth grade and taking the place of one of his brothers in the Italian army primarily because of his brother's family responsibilities. The military system seemed, in some respects, to compare with the one set up by the Confederacy during the United States War Between the States. Both systems permitted one to use a substitute to fulfill military obligations.

<sup>28</sup>Edith Abbott, Immigration: Select Documents and Case Records (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), I, p. 60 [Hereinafter cited as Abbott, Select Documents and Case Records.]

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

1888, passed a law designed to offer some restrictions.<sup>31</sup> The law specified that before anyone could leave Italy, a contract had to be drawn up in triplicate.<sup>32</sup> This contract had to be signed by the agent, the sub-agent, and the emigrant or his guardian, if he was a minor.<sup>33</sup> One copy of the contract would be given to the emigrant, the other to the captain of the port, and the third to the agent.<sup>34</sup>

If any emigrant was unable to sign his name, the contract then had to be signed by the major or by an authority of public security.<sup>35</sup> Included in the contract were rules requiring a ticket to include the name of the emigrant, along with such items as the name of the boat, its age, speed, tonnage, date of departure, and duration of trip. The Italian government also stipulated that the menus and quantity of food to which a person was entitled also be included.<sup>36</sup> To further implement this law and to exercise firmer control over emigration, the Italian government formed the Board of Emigration with the institution of the Royal Emigration Department of Italy on January 31,

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<sup>31</sup>Eliot Lord, John D. Trenor, and Samuel J. Barrows, The Italian in America (New York: B. F. Buck and Co., 1905), p. 48. [Hereinafter cited as Lord, The Italians in America.]

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>36</sup>Mary C. Barnes and Lemuel C. Barnes, The New America: A Study in Immigration (New York: Fleming H. Revell, Publishers, 1913), p. 63.

1901.<sup>37</sup> This board set up detailed directives for emigrants, steamship companies, and foreign governments.<sup>38</sup>

In public announcements, the Italian government was even more critical in the matter of emigration. The supervisor of the newly created Italian Emigration Department, in commenting on the exodus to the United States, stated:

Every Italian eighteen years old had cost his country, at the very lowest, \$1,000 to bring him up to that age. At that time he begins to be a producer, but by leaving Italy, the \$1,000 invested by his country in him is lost. The human capital of fresh, strong young men is the contribution of Italy to the new land. Italy spends a thousand dollars to bring up and develop a young man, and then America reaps the profits of the investment.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time the government was reticent to say that the major cause of emigration was the economic condition of the country. Instead, statements such as the following were typical:

It is not hard conditions or starvation that now sends Italians to America; they [go] because they are eager for more money. A mason earning four lire a day in southern Italy can live there comfortably, but he has heard that he can earn six a day in America; so he emigrates, and the emigration has swelled so rapidly that the available labor supply has greatly diminished, and there is now a keen competition in parts of Italy for laborers with the inevitable increase of wages.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>38</sup>Eliot Lord, The Italians in America, p. 54.

<sup>39</sup>Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup>Eliot Lord, The Italian in America, p. 46.

By the latter part of 1905, rules and regulations concerning immigration became more stringent, both in America and in Italy. The Italian government would not permit one of its citizens to emigrate if a person fell into the category excluded by the American laws.<sup>41</sup> Italy's government also established special offices at every port of departure to enforce the laws of emigration.<sup>42</sup> Another safeguard enacted in 1903 was the requirement that all potential immigrants undergo a physical examination given by a salaried physician attached to the American Consulates in Italy.<sup>43</sup> With cooperation from the steamship companies and the Italian government, these doctors would examine the immigrants one by one to prevent those from leaving who, in the doctor's opinion, would not be allowed to land in America or would soon thereafter become undesirables.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the responsibility for screening immigrants became twofold: the Italian government protected America from those who might have been a threat to its law and order, and the American government protected America from physically unfit and undesirable immigrants.

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<sup>41</sup>G. E. DiPalma Castiglione, "Italian Immigration Into the United States, 1901-1904," American Journal of Sociology, XI (September, 1905), 191. [Hereinafter cited as Castiglione, "Italian Immigration Into the United States."] In 1882 Congress acted to exclude the Chinese. In the same year it extended the law to include such undesirables as convicts, paupers, and idiots and also placed a tax of fifty cents on every person admitted. In 1885 Congress passed a contract labor act which forbade the importation of contract laborers, but exempted professional, skilled, and domestic labor. Later legislation of the 1890's enlarged the prospective list and increased the tax. By 1906, Congress established the Bureau of Immigration to keep records and statistical data.

<sup>42</sup>Castiglione, "Italian Immigration Into the United States," 190.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 192.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

If economic circumstances drove Italians out of their country, many of them at the same time gained incentive to migrate to America from friends already there.<sup>45</sup> Once immigrants arrived in America they quickly wrote home about their experiences, work opportunities, and the overall advantages which their new country offered. These letters gave renewed hope to the Italian peasant who was battling with poor soil, malaria,<sup>46</sup> or with the "sloth and vileness of the ruling class."<sup>47</sup> However, as enticing as these letters were, few immigrants left Italy without reasonable assurance that employment of some kind awaited them. Although there is evidence to contradict this, the conservative and non-assertive nature of the southern Italians would indicate that most had some specific job, relative, or destination in mind before they left Italy.<sup>48</sup>

Fully aware of the poor economic conditions in Italy, United States government officials, as well as steamship company agents, recognized a golden opportunity. The Italian immigrants could supply

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<sup>45</sup>Abbott, Select Documents and Case Records, p. 201.

<sup>46</sup>Carr, "The Coming of the Italians," p. 420.

<sup>47</sup>Schuyler, "Italian Immigration," p. 486.

<sup>48</sup>Substantiated by interviews with Rosalie Cangelosi, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, June 21, 1977 and Peter Compagno, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 14, 1977. Both told of relatives in the New Orleans area who had encouraged their coming and had also offered living quarters until permanent arrangements could be made.

the United States with a badly needed work force in agriculture and industry, while the navigation companies there would make substantial profits in immigrant traffic. Due to the rapid growth of manufacturing and agricultural pursuits, the United States, by 1880, had begun to suffer a labor shortage.<sup>49</sup> The need for labor became acute in the South where diversified farming suffered a manpower famine because of the departure of Blacks to the North where jobs were more plentiful.<sup>50</sup>

Both the climate and the crops grown in many southern regions were very similar to those of southern Italian regions, and perhaps this is why many of the Italian immigrants chose to migrate to the American South.<sup>51</sup> However, even with the similarity of climate and availability of cheap land<sup>52</sup> it was still necessary for states to actively attract the immigrants. This was usually done through various agencies in the South, such as state governments, railroads, real estate agents, immigration societies, and industrial associa-

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<sup>49</sup> Florence Wilson, "The Work of the Schools for the Foreign Element in New Orleans" (M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1925), p. 42 [hereinafter cited as Wilson, "The Work of the Schools"]; Edward C. Kirkland, Industry Comes of Age, 1860-1867 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), *passim*.

<sup>50</sup> Letter to Henry McCall, Port Collector, New Orleans, April 17, 1905, Records of Louisiana Sugar Planters Association, Archives of Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. [Hereinafter cited as Records of Louisiana Planters.]

<sup>51</sup> Minutes of Louisiana Sugar Planters Association 1877-1891, New Orleans, Louisiana, June 9, 1881, Louisiana State University Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Walter L. Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," Political Science Quarterly, XX (June, 1905), 276-297 [Hereinafter cited as Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States"]; C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), pp. 297-299.

tions.<sup>53</sup> Through such organizations the state authorities were necessarily seeking cheap laborers as much as they were attempting to secure a class of independent farmers who would do their own work.<sup>54</sup>

One of the primary methods used by the southern states was the distribution of literature about the conditions and superior opportunities that were available to the immigrant. This literature was distributed to educate not only the immigrant but also other sections of the country about the South's desire for immigrants.<sup>55</sup> Some newspapers issued special homeseeker's editions for distribution in the same manner as used by the railroads.<sup>56</sup> Frequently these newspapers carried excerpts from speeches made by southern members of Congress welcoming immigrants to the South.<sup>57</sup> Trade magazines also joined the attempt to inform businessmen of the opportunities afforded by the underdeveloped resources of the South.<sup>58</sup> The most influential of these journals was the Manufacturers Record which had long been urging immigration as a partial solution to the continuing economic troubles

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<sup>53</sup>Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," 282; Louisiana, Bureau of Immigration, An Invitation to Immigrants: Louisiana, Its Products, Soil and Climate as Shown by Northern and Western Man Who Now Resides in This State, Extracts from the Remarks of Governor Foster to the Louisiana Immigration Convention, March 21-23, 1893 (Baton Rouge, 1894).

<sup>54</sup>Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," 282.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 284.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.; Daily Advocate, New Orleans, Louisiana, December 15, 1892.

<sup>58</sup>Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," 285; DeBow's Review, IV (October 11, 1867), 469.

suffered by the South.<sup>59</sup>

Individual states, such as Florida and Louisiana, joined in the attempt to attract immigrants for settlement. Florida sent out maps of some of the most attractive portions of the state, along with beautiful pamphlets illustrating such things as fruit and truck gardening potential, land for raising cattle, lumbering industries, fish and game reserves, and winter resorts. Louisiana likewise published free information about climate, soil resources, industries, schools and churches. State officials also sent out lists with descriptions and prices of over 6,000,000 acres of land for sale.<sup>60</sup> Louisiana's and Florida's activities were soon followed by those of other southern states that extended the campaign to the point of having representatives both in New York and in the West. The primary responsibility of these individuals was to disseminate their literature and to secure immigrants for the South.<sup>61</sup>

At the forefront of the search for immigrants, however, was Louisiana, with its recruitment heavily geared toward the Italian.<sup>62</sup> In 1905, the Political Science Quarterly specified that the South, especially Louisiana, would not tolerate the introduction of large

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 282; Charles Shanabruch, "The Louisiana Immigration Movement, 1891-1907: An Analysis of Efforts, Attitudes, and Opportunities," Louisiana History, XVIII (Spring, 1977), 208 [hereinafter cited as Shanabruch, "Louisiana Immigration Movement"].

<sup>61</sup>Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States, 253.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 291; New Orleans Democrat, June 17, 1880.



numbers of Chinese or Japanese for fear of possible race complications.<sup>63</sup> The Italians, however, were "notoriously hard working and industrious" and for that reason would undoubtedly prove to be desirable settlers for the future.<sup>64</sup> Since Louisiana had over 12,000,000 acres of vacant land,<sup>65</sup> along with its sugar cane plantations and cotton fields, it was not surprising that this state went to such lengths to attract immigrants. As early as 1876, at least one publication in the state was appealing for white immigrants:

Let the people of Louisiana appreciate the true condition of their state, understand fully her true needs; let them see that she wants tens of thousands of honest, energetic, industrious white men to immigrate to her waste places.

Let them adopt a broad, liberal and practicable scheme for encouraging such immigration; let them spread broadcasts over the more thickly settled states of this country and Europe invitations to immigrants to come to her.

Let them show to all who would come that Louisiana is abundantly able to maintain them, and a new and brighter era will have dawned for her and soon she will not only be restored to her former state of health and prosperity, but will eclipse by her future splendor all that she has been in the past.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," 291.

<sup>64</sup>Schuyler, "Italian Immigration into the United States, 494.

<sup>65</sup>Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," 278.

<sup>66</sup>Daniel Dennett, Louisiana As It Is (New Orleans: Eureka Press, 1876), p. 37.

Earlier DeBow's Review had cited Louisiana as the only southern state to pay a good salary to its immigration commissioner and provide him with two clerks and five agents.<sup>67</sup>

Along with private publications, Louisiana newspapers such as the New Orleans Democrat, the Daily Picayune, and the Baton Rouge Daily Advocate also featured articles on the need for attracting immigrants to Louisiana.<sup>68</sup> In 1884, the Daily Picayune carried an article about an immigration society located in New Orleans. Although the records on this society could not be located, there is evidence that it bore the name "The Louisiana State Immigration Society," and it probably was the forerunner of the organization which The Daily Advocate called for in 1892.<sup>69</sup>

By 1905 the Daily Picayune writers reported northern states receiving from twenty to thirty percent of the foreign-born population, while the south had only two to three percent at that time. An editorial further noted that Louisiana should attempt to attract a "goodly number of these people" since the state had an abundance of fertile soil as well as "infinite opportunities for the employment of

<sup>67</sup>DeBow's Review (February, 1868), p. 207.

<sup>68</sup>Daily Advocate, December 15, 1892, January 18, 1893; Daily Picayune, April 4, 1884, December 24, 1902, December 30, 1903, January 2, 12, 1905, January 2, 1906; New Orleans Democrat, June 17, 1880.

<sup>69</sup>Daily Advocate, December 15, 1892. In this year the newspaper added its support to the need for a state convention to discuss immigration. This convention was necessary to map out some sensible immigration program. The newspaper went so far as to propose that each parish organize its own immigration society as a preliminary step to electing delegates for a state convention to be held in March of 1893. The convention would then set up the state organization to better utilize the influx of immigrant labor.

capital and industry."<sup>70</sup>

Undoubtedly one of Louisiana's most concerted efforts toward attracting immigrants came through the state government. On March 17, 1866, the state legislature of Louisiana called for the appointment of a commissioner and agents to staff a Bureau of Immigration.<sup>71</sup> The purpose of this body was to advertise the state's many physical merits and natural resources and to assist those who wished to migrate to Louisiana.<sup>72</sup> This act was altered in March of 1869 when, under Governor Henry C. Warmouth, the Bureau of Immigrations in New Orleans increased from one commissioner to six, each having six-year terms.<sup>73</sup> In 1873 the Louisiana legislature repealed the 1869 Bureau, primarily because of ineffectiveness and lack of public support. They then set an Immigration Bureau in New Orleans stipulating that the state had neither liability nor financial responsibility for the Bureau's operation.<sup>74</sup> This marked a beginning in the state's disenchantment with immigration, although it was continued under private auspices, namely the Louisiana Sugar Planters' Association.<sup>75</sup> However, on May 23, 1880,

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<sup>70</sup>Daily Picayune, January 2, 12, 1905.

<sup>71</sup>E. Russ Williams, Jr., "Louisiana's Public and Private Immigration Endeavors: 1866-1893," Louisiana History, XV (Winter, 1974), 155 [hereinafter cited as Williams, "Louisiana's Public and Private Immigration Endeavors"].

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Records of Louisiana Sugar Planters' Association, August 14, 1905. Louisiana State University Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

the state again revamped the Immigration Bureau, combining it with the State Bureau of Agriculture and renaming it the Commission of Immigration and Agriculture.<sup>76</sup> The executive body of the Bureau consisted of the governor, the secretary of state, and a commissioner who was appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state senate. This individual managed the affairs of the commission.<sup>77</sup> The venture, however, proved neither successful nor satisfactory, and in 1884 the two departments were separated once again.<sup>78</sup> The executors of the 1884 Bureau of Immigration then became the commissioner, the governor, the presidents of the sugar and cotton exchanges, and the president of the maritime association of New Orleans.<sup>79</sup> At this point, due to other political problems, Louisiana's efforts to attract immigrants seemed to become of secondary importance and did not emerge into the public eye until 1892.

In December of that year the Baton Rouge Daily Advocate proposed that Louisiana call for a convention to determine guidelines for dealing with the immigration program.<sup>80</sup> The newspaper suggested that each parish organize its own immigration society in order to elect

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<sup>76</sup>Williams, "Louisiana's Public and Private Immigration Endeavors," 153-158.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.; Daily Picayune, April 4, 1884.

<sup>79</sup>Williams, "Louisiana's Public and Private Immigration Endeavors," 153-158.

<sup>80</sup>Daily Advocate, December 15, 1892.

delegates to a state convention which would then set up a state immigration organization. New Orleans, with its port facilities, was designated as the best location for central headquarters, though branches would be established in Lake Charles, Shreveport, Baton Rouge, and Monroe.<sup>81</sup> By 1904, thirty-seven parishes had successfully established organizations to assist in promoting and securing immigration to their localities.<sup>82</sup> In 1906, the Bureau of Agriculture and Immigration acted to assist parish endeavors by establishing a Bureau of Information at the New Orleans port of entry to show immigrants the advantages of Louisiana.<sup>83</sup>

Realizing the economic potential that immigrants offered to Louisiana, commercial and civic bodies soon began to aid state and parish immigration societies in enticing immigrants to the state.<sup>84</sup> One of these groups was the Louisiana Sugar Planters' Association which was organized in the late 1870's.<sup>85</sup> The minutes of this association between the years 1877 and 1891 contained numerous references to its attempts to secure Italian immigrant labor. A particularly successful venture was the Association's establishment of a Committee on Italian Immigration whose sole purpose was to recruit a

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., January 18, 1893.

<sup>82</sup>Quarterly Report of the Commissioner of the Louisiana State Board of Agriculture and Immigration (New Orleans, 1904), p. 22.

<sup>83</sup>Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Immigration of the State of Louisiana, 1906, p. 23.

<sup>84</sup>Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," 284.

<sup>85</sup>Records of the Louisiana Planters' Association, August 14, 1905.

constant flow of Italian immigrants to the sugar plantations of southern Louisiana. Through the efforts of John Dymond, chairman of this Committee, a regular steamer was routed between New Orleans and southern Italy beginning on September 15, 1881.<sup>86</sup> The steerage passage was set at \$40 per person, which even then was too costly for some migrants. Therefore, on January 13, 1881, the Committee agreed that any funds necessary to afford passage would be raised by the planter.<sup>87</sup> To further facilitate the flow of traffic, it was arranged that there would be three steamships per month docking at New Orleans during the sugar cane season.<sup>88</sup> To manifest the Association's humanitarian as well as its economic image, accounts of monetary contributions for the relief of Italians in New Orleans suffering from yellow fever were also cited.<sup>89</sup> Steamship lines, too, showed interest in them, for they stood to gain substantial profits from a heavy flow of migration.<sup>90</sup> The lines promoted emigration through the use of thousands of steamship ticket agents and subagents operating in southern and eastern Europe.<sup>91</sup> Under the terms of the immigration laws of the United States as well as those of most European countries, such activities

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., June 8, 1891.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., August 14, 1905.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, Italy: A Modern History, p. 240.

<sup>91</sup> Abbott, Select Documents and Case Records, p. 201.

were forbidden. Nevertheless, both American and Italian steamship lines continued their promotion campaigns.<sup>92</sup> The steamship companies established a system to assure themselves that the transporting of immigrants would be profitable. This was a complex operation involving padrones, agents, and subagents which remained in effect for many years. Even after legislation against such practices became effective, the system continued. Although a detailed explanation of the padrone system will be presented later, a cursory treatment is now necessary in order to demonstrate the programs' connection with the steamship lines.

For many Italians the incentive to emigrate was clear -- they were escaping poverty. Frequently this very poverty had reduced the southern Italian to ownership of a goat or two, a donkey, and perhaps a cart.<sup>93</sup> Many times the value of these items often did not equal the immigrant's passage fee to America which ranged from \$20 to \$100 depending on the steamer he took.<sup>94</sup> Realizing this, steamship companies hired agents or solicitors to seek out potential immigrants. These agents stirred the desires of Italians for the riches America had to offer. Once this was accomplished, the immigrants would either sell their possessions, borrow the money, or do whatever was necessary

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<sup>92</sup>United States Congress, House, Report of the Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, 51st Congress, 2nd Session, Report # 3472, Vol. II, 1890-91 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), p. VI. [Hereinafter cited as Report of Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization.]

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

to purchase a ticket from the steamship line.<sup>95</sup> After reaching America, Italians were usually met by a padrone or labor boss who was frequently on the payroll of the steamship line. This individual resembled the nineteenth century "city boss" in that his primary function was to hire out the immigrants at wages he dictated and shared with his victims. From that point on, the immigrant was at the mercy of the padrone who not only took part of his wages but often induced the immigrant to buy useless articles for which the boss received a percentage.

Steamship companies were well aware of the work of both the agents and the padrone and would often be in on the groundwork of the entire system. Such was evident in a letter from two ship insurance agents to Reynold [sic] Dykers of the Louisiana Sugar Planters' Association:

We can only say we shall be happy to do anything that lies in our power to induce immigration. We represent the Anchor Line and Prince Line, both of which formerly ran steamers from Italy to this Port [New Orleans], but have recently stopped this service owing to its being unprofitable.<sup>96</sup>

Another steamship company that was involved in such activities was the Rubitini Line in Naples.<sup>97</sup> Its involvement with the padrone was disclosed in a report of the Select Committee on Immigration and

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<sup>95</sup> Report of the Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> Louisiana Sugar Planters' Association Papers, April 10, 1905.

<sup>97</sup> Report of the Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, March 12, 1890.



Naturalization of 1890.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to the use of agents and solicitors in European countries, steamship lines also designed and distributed literature about emigration which sometimes served as magnets between the immigrants and the agents themselves. The companies' eagerness to assist in the immigration business is reflected in a general communication from an agent of Cosulich Brothers Austrian Union Ship Company to Reginald Dykers of the Louisiana Sugar Planters' Association:

I beg to inform you that the steamship line which I represent would very gladly co-operate in distributing the pamphlets in the different languages for the proper territories.

In order to make the pamphlets interesting in every respect, it should also contain pictures of the different matters that may interest the laboring classes; and it occurs to me that the railroad companies extending through the territories for which immigrants are wanted, would concur in the making up of said pamphlets, as the question of the travel would interest the immigrants as well as the railroad companies . . .<sup>99</sup>

By the early 1900's, however, both the South and steamship companies began to feel the results of the enforcement of immigration laws. One port to be seriously affected by the hampering regulations was New Orleans. This is seen in a letter from the Port Collector in New Orleans:

. . . S. S. Vincenzo Florio left Palermo with 766 immigrants and is due here on or about May 5th. This is the first steamer coming from

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Records of Louisiana Planters' Association, April 12, 1905.

Italy with immigrants to this port during 1905, and we would thank you to use your influence at Washington in order to obtain a less severe examination.

. . . If the immigrants are quickly examined and released and if we can show to our company that a steamer coming to this port will not be delayed and the expenses will not be heavy we fell [sic] sure that a regular line of steamer will be put into this service and in this way we will solve in part the labor famine of the Southern States.<sup>100</sup>

Although steamship lines as well as individual associations continued to promote the immigration of Italian laborers into the Louisiana area, their efforts were not always well received. The people of Louisiana seemed to be of two minds about the Italians. Some Louisianians viewed them as bringing to the state the more attractive traits of the Latin "race" as well as the experience of "two thousand years of civilization."<sup>101</sup> The September, 1889, issue of the Political Science Quarterly declared:

Italians are . . . a frugal, temperate, and industrious race . . . they would prove extremely desirable settlers and in the second generation, good citizens, for the habit of thrift is one to be encouraged rather than discouraged in America; and fears less they might introduce a lower style of living to the detriment of this country seem . . . unfounded.<sup>102</sup>

Other native Americans expressed the notion that all ethnic groups

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., April 17, 1905.

<sup>101</sup>Schuyler, "Italian Immigration Into the United States," 495.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 494.

from other countries would eventually merge with those already here, with the best customs of each group surviving from the distillation process. Still other Americans, generally native-born ones, tended to actually welcome the younger Italian immigrants. Youth, they claimed, would be more amenable to the American way of life, would adjust more readily and willingly to the established society into which they came. An 1896 issue of the North American Review contained comments by the United States Commissioner of Immigration concerning the good which would result from the influx of young Italians:

. . . It must be admitted that Italians who come over in mature years, without education even in their own languages . . . find it exceedingly difficult to acquire even the rudiments of the national language, but such is the common experience with most other non-English speaking immigrants as well. On the other hand, we find that an Italian who has come here younger in years or who had received a good education, becomes speedily a thorough American even if his occupation brings him into contact mostly with his own countrymen . . .<sup>103</sup>

Other Americans shared the feeling that Italians would not readily become part of the American mainstream. To these Americans, the only true citizen was a White Anglo Saxon Protestant. The Italians with their foreign accent, dark peasant clothing, and Catholic faith were antithesis of this image. The Americanization movement, as it came to be called, wanted to strip the immigrant of his native culture and attachments and make him over into an American along Anglo-Saxon lines,

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<sup>103</sup>J. H. Senner, "Immigration from Italy," North American Review, 162 (May, 1896), 655.

all with great rapidity.<sup>104</sup> Since such assimilation did not occur, Italians soon realized that acceptance into American society at large would be minimal. Their institutions, language, and cultural patterns were vested in a civilization of by-gone eras and were hardly in conformity with the prevailing Anglo-American culture.<sup>105</sup>

To offset this conscious social rejection, Italians quickly realized that their primary source of security would be their "paesani" in living quarters that were predominantly, if not exclusively, Italian.<sup>106</sup> This isolation, however, led native Americans to believe that there was something to fear from a people who would not mix.<sup>107</sup> Thus what seemed to be the only chance at acceptance for Italians often led to their rejection by native Americans. It is interesting to note that none of the people interviewed or surveyed willingly spoke of any "rejection" by the Louisiana population. Joe Maselli's interview did reveal its existence in the East (see Maselli interview) but this was the closest this researcher came to any Italian admitting to discrimination problems.

Another false notion about Italians was that neighborhoods

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<sup>104</sup>Constance Cronin, The Sting of Change: Sicilians in Sicily and Australia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 2 [hereinafter cited as Cronin, The Sting of Change].

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>106</sup>Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians, p. 18.

<sup>107</sup>Francis A. J. Ianni, "Familialism in the South of Italy and in the United States," in Humbert S. Nelli (ed.), The United States and Italy: The First Two Hundred Years (Staten Island: American Italian Historical Association, 1977), p. 195. [Hereinafter cited as Ianni, "Familialism in the South of Italy".]

primarily inhabited by them would continue being so for generations. The reality was that Italian neighborhoods were constantly increasing in size and would remain in flux depending on the social or financial gains of the individual.<sup>108</sup> In the survey administered by this researcher, over seventy per cent of those polled stated that they re-located three or four times after arriving in the New Orleans area.<sup>109</sup> From other studies it was found that at least half of the residents of Italian communities changed their dwelling each year.<sup>110</sup> Continuing the pattern set by their predecessors, the immigrants moved away from the colony as soon as they obtained the financial means. Thus the charge that Italians were content to remain in the same area and economic position into which they first came appears unfounded. Also, there is contradictory evidence regarding the ill effects of the Italian ethnic dominated neighbors. Although some researchers conclude that the concentration of Italians in certain areas led to havens where crime and poverty became a blight on the American scene,<sup>111</sup> evidence seems to support the thesis that exclusivity was merely an act of expediency. The so-called "exclusiveness" bought them time needed to get established.<sup>112</sup> In Italy, as a laborer the Italian was

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<sup>108</sup>Humbert S. Nelli, "Italians in Urban America: A Study in Ethnic Adjustment," The International Migration Review, I (Summer, 1967), 40.

<sup>109</sup>See Appendix B for survey results.

<sup>110</sup>Nelli, "Italians in Urban America," 81.

<sup>111</sup>Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians, p. 49. See also Chapter V.

<sup>112</sup>Schuyler, "Italian Immigration Into the United States," 200.

able to employ century-old skills when tilling the land and mastering viniculture, as well as in raising other fruits and vegetables.<sup>113</sup>

In urban America, the Italian laborer was equated with brute physical force. Therefore, wherever labor was needed employment was assured.

A 1905 issue of the American Journal of Sociology succinctly describes the Italian laborer as he appeared to the White Anglo on the American scene:

. . . The Italian immigrant as a laborer, alternating only between stone-breaking and ditching, remains an alien to the country. The immigrant, to whatever nationality he may belong, does not feel himself a part of the collectivity as long as no ties first economic, then moral, are formed to attach him to the new soil. The laborer cannot form these ties while he remains a machine . . . furnishing only brute force, and no special interest can be felt in the work he accomplishes, thus the Italian immigrant, thrust into the large cities, surrendered and outclassed by those who do not understand, shuts himself in with his fellow-countrymen and remains indifferent to all that happens outside of the quarters inhabited by them. Although renouncing the idea of repatriation, because he knows the economic conditions in his own country forbid this, and becoming an American citizen,<sup>114</sup> he remains always a stranger to the new country.

The Italian who had so successfully been influenced to seek his opportunities in America now seemed to meet obstacles totally unforeseen. Italy, with its backward economy, poor soil, and heavy taxes, had provided no satisfaction for a booming population. America, with its prospects of unlimited mobility, offered a possible solution.

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

Once here, however, the immigrant faced a population which was not always anxious to accept new ethnic groups with their ancient customs and practices. In some instances the immigrant chose to bury himself among a small group of fellow countrymen working out a living in any way possible. In many cases this resulted in acute conflicts between the American cultural milieu and the cultural traditions of the Southern Italian because of the vast dissimilarities between the two. The smells, sounds, food, dress, and religion were all differences which faced the bewildered Italian. Even language, once the primary means of communication, now posed a problem.<sup>115</sup> This fact received substantiation from a study conducted on Italian-American school children. The consensus of this report showed incentive rather than ability as a reason for the slow progress in learning the language.<sup>116</sup> A typical attitude found expression in the following remark of an immigrant in 1906:

Before I sailed to America our local priest attempted to scare us by telling us about the difficulty of learning English. But we knew better; we knew that there would be no need to torture oneself with a strange language . . .

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<sup>115</sup>There are differences of opinion on the language issue. E. Infield, who studies the problem stated that a lack of comprehension may have been self imposed for the better results it would have achieved. E. Infield, "The Aged in the Process of Ethnic Assimilation," Sociometry, 3 (1940), 355.

<sup>116</sup>Leonard Covello, "The Influence of Southern Italian Family Mores Upon the School Situation in America," in F. Cordasco (ed.), The Social Backgrounds of the Italo-American School Child: A Study of the Southern Italian Family Mores and Their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 277. [Hereinafter cited as Corvello, "The Influence of Southern Italian Family Mores."]

When I arrived in New York I went to live with my 'paesani.' I did not see any reason for learning English. I didn't need it for everywhere I lived, or worked, or fooled around there were only Italians. I don't speak much English but that never bothered me.<sup>117</sup>

Thus it appears that location of initial settlement, not ability, often determined language response. When thrown together in the so-called "little Italies,"<sup>118</sup> Italians often remained as they came -- foreigners residing in the United States speaking only Italian. Nevertheless, in the Louisiana settlement the group experience, when present, seemed more a means toward assimilation. Sharing with fellow countrymen, Italians recreated blocks of the provinces from which they came. In some cases this offered a haven from the racial prejudice which faced most white foreign laborers, but more especially to Italians.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, New Orleans with its polyglot population now became host to thousands of southern Italians who found in this urban area a niche for their unskilled labor. For the first time Italians were able to unite as Italians, a process unknown in Italy where regions and farms separated people by great distances.

From this unity there seemed to emerge an Italian aware of his native land, yet capable of accepting the "differences" in American life. Fraught with experiences of a decaying agricultural system, the Italian seemed primed to put forth the effort, physical and social, so necessary to become part of this country. Socially few gains would

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>This topic will be explored in more detail in Chapter III.



be realized by those of the first generation, but culturally and economically the period from 1880 to 1910 marked the beginning of this ethnic minority's merging into the Louisiana mainstream.

Both Louisiana and the United States government had encouraged the Italians' presence and Louisiana seemed willing to help in the adjustment. For some Italians there was fear, for cultural inheritance was a gift not to be lost. This fear proved unfounded for in the majority of cases, qualities and characteristics which made them uniquely Italian remained.<sup>120</sup> Their desire for improvement and economic ascendancy had made their native Italy undesirable. In contrast, Louisiana with its apparent unlimited opportunities provided the enticement not to be left unchallenged.

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<sup>120</sup>Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, Introduction to the Science of Sociology (Reprint ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 736.

## CHAPTER II

### A COMPROMISE OF VARIATION

In analyzing the history of any ethnic group it is vital to study its religious composition. Beliefs and practices passed down from the preceding generation seemingly affect almost every aspect of life of those who follow. Since most Italian immigrants who entered the port of New Orleans continued to practice the Catholicism of their homeland, some discussion of their European religious history is in order.<sup>1</sup>

From the breakup of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church in Italy gradually extended its power into political realms in western Europe. However, in the eighteenth century, with the rise of the national states, clericalism lost some of its strength, and the Catholic Church became increasingly limited in temporal power. Left only with Italy, the Church intensified its control in this area, becoming the center of both religious and civil authority. With the completion of Italian unification in 1870, the Church faced both internal and external problems: increasingly secular state coveting Church lands; a growing Socialist party desirous of ending Church authority over agricultural and industrial workers; and reformers within the Church

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<sup>1</sup>This researcher will refer primarily to Catholicism since all persons interviewed were Catholic. Moreover, Protestant proselytizing among Italians in the United States seemed to have met with little success. See F. Aurelio Palmieri, "Italian Protestantism in the United States," Catholic World, CVII (May, 1918), 177; see also United States Bureau of the Census, Religious Bodies: 1916, 2 parts (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 727.

itself seeking to upgrade the sacred rituals to modern needs.<sup>2</sup> With the tenuous situation between Church and State, division formed on the degree of power each should have. Proponents of equality between the two argued that a possible lessening of Church domination might lead to a complete loss of temporal power.<sup>3</sup> Unrest within the Church was not unnoticed by the general populace who regarded an all powerful Church as a possible inhibitor to whatever unclaimed land remained in Italy. Because the United States, more especially Louisiana, afforded Italians an opportunity to rid themselves of the Church-State conflict, and still obtain property, many looked forward to immigration.

In describing the Italians who emigrated during the period between 1880 and 1910, Enrico C. Sartorio in Social and Religious Life of Italians in America stated that one could divide Italians into three classes:

1. The devout Roman Catholic, the majority of whom consist[ed] of peasants, largely illiterate [who] simply believe[ed] in the external miracles and mysteries of the Church without having any understanding either of its moral aspect or its political ambition . . .
2. A smaller number of agnostics, materialists, freethinkers, and atheists, who [were for

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<sup>2</sup>Charles E. Churchill, The Italians of Newark: A Community Study (New York: New York University, 1942), p. 91. [Hereinafter cited as Churchill, The Italians of Newark.]

<sup>3</sup>Francis A. J. Ianni, "Familialism," p. 193.

the most part working men in large cities or professionals such as doctors, lawyers and teachers].

3. Millions of all classes who [seemed] to go through life without religious feeling or spiritual experience [and who] allow[ed] their children to be baptized in the Roman Catholic Church because 'it [was] the traditional thing to do' and for the same reason [were] married in the Church, [although beyond this] all outward religious manifestation [ceased].<sup>4</sup>

The majority of Italians who emigrated to America, and particularly those to Louisiana, seemingly belonged to either the first or third class.<sup>5</sup> In view of this, the hierarchy of the Church set out on a program of revitalized education for both its ministers and its people.

Pope Leo XIII, ruler of the Catholic Church between 1878 and 1913, was always concerned with his fellow Italians leaving their homeland.

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<sup>4</sup>Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians, pp. 82, 83. The researcher's New Orleans surveys and interviews indicated that this group consisted primarily of first and second generation females. Of those who responded, over fifty per cent attended Sunday Mass and also believed in Saints and miracles with little or no understanding of the rites. It should be noted that prior to Vatican II almost all Catholics would have fit the definition of having little or no understanding while yet believing. Vatican II, the Ecumenical meeting of the Church of Rome from 1962 to 1965, addressed problems arising from a changed intellectual and social milieu in which the Church found itself. B. L. Marthaler, "Vatican Councils," in Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion, Volume 3, edited by Paul Meagher, Thomas C. O'Brien and Sister Consuela Maria Aherne (Washington: Corpus Publications, 1979), pp. 3642-3644.

<sup>5</sup>From surveys and interviews, it appears that professionals, doctors, lawyers, and teachers generally remained in Italy where life was more palatable to them as opposed to their less educated friends. See Results of Survey, Appendix B.

He realized they faced not only the hardships of a dangerous voyage, but also exploitation and meager living in their hoped-for land of milk and honey. However, the Pope's primary concern was that these immigrants, once in America, would maintain their Catholic faith and not pledge their allegiance to the Protestant Church. It appears that the Catholic Church may have been affected by the anti-Catholic prejudice which was so strong through the early years of United States history.<sup>6</sup>

Being aware of the less than strong religious background of many members, the Church in 1887 organized the Apostolic College of Priests in the diocese of Piacenza in Italy. It was the Pope's hope that many youths, particularly the sons of Italian immigrants, would enter here to study for the priesthood.<sup>7</sup> The seminary would train men for the specific purpose of emigrating or returning to America to serve the Italian communities established there. In 1888 Bishop Giovanni Scalabrini<sup>8</sup> established the Congregation of St. Charles Borromeo

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<sup>6</sup>Mary P. Thompson, "Anti-Catholic Laws in New Hampshire," Catholic World, LI (April-May, 1890), 193-197; John Gilmary Shea, History of the Catholic Church in the United States, 1886-1892, Vol. I (Philadelphia: McVey Publishers, 1919), pp. 365-366.

<sup>7</sup>Henry J. Browne, "The Italian Problem in the Catholic Church of the United States, 1880-1910," in Historical Records and Studies, XXXV (New York: The United States Catholic Historical Society, 1946), p. 63; "The Training of Italian Youths for the American Missions," The Pastor, VI (January, 1888), 82.

<sup>8</sup>Giovanni Battista Scalabrini was the Bishop of Piacenza, Italy and one of the key figures in Italian mass immigration. It was Scalabrini who wrote the pamphlet "L'Emigrazione Italiana in America" ("Italian Immigration in America") which aimed at sensitizing both church and public officials to the question of emigration. Due to the strong anti-clerical mood of the Italian government, the pamphlet proved

for the purpose of working among Italians in America.<sup>9, 10</sup> Prior to that time there seems to have been no religious group of men founded specifically for the purpose of providing for the needs of Italian immigrants.

In addition to Scalabrini's efforts, Pope Leo XIII issued a circular letter on the Italian problem. Among his recommendations were those requiring permission from the Ordinary<sup>11</sup> as well as from the Congregation of the Council for any priest wishing to emigrate.<sup>12</sup> If a cleric obtained consent, he then had to select a specific destination and receive acceptance from the United States Diocesan Bishop. Because the Pope feared for the morals of young clerics, his regulations were tedious and seemed to limit the number of Italian priests desiring to emigrate. Many who considered the option feared they might not be able to return to Italy primarily because of the lengthy process involved. Ultimately, these restrictions could not assure

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ineffective. It was not until 1901 that Italy's government passed an effective law aimed at protecting immigrants from agents at home and abroad. Edward E. Stibili, "The Interest of Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini of Piacenza in the Italian Problem," in Silvano M. Tomasi (ed.), The Religious Experience of Italian Americans (New York: American Italian Historical Association, 1975), pp. 13-30. [Hereinafter cited as Stibili, "Bishop Giovanni Scalabrini."]

<sup>9</sup>In the Catholic Church a congregation would consist of either men or women united under a common rule and dedicated to a common purpose.

<sup>10</sup>Browne, "The Italian Problem," p. 63; Stibili, "Bishop Giovanni Scalabrini," p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>Bishops of a defined geographical area.

<sup>12</sup>Browne, "The Italian Problem," p. 68.

the Church that the migrating priests would be imbued with the zeal of morality and sanctity. Although this researcher could find no specific cases in the Louisiana area in which an economically successful life seemingly tempted the ordained minister from his designated mission, the tone of the regulations indicates that a problem may have existed.<sup>13</sup>

As Italian immigration increased, evangelical work by Protestant groups began both in Italy and in the United States.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding the existence of conflicting evidence as to Protestant success in proselytizing, there is no denying the disorganization of the Catholic Church in this regard. Among nationalities such as the Germans, Irish, and Poles, there seemed to be no lack of priests; however, this was not so for the Italians. Italian priests, faced with the previously cited restrictions, were often reluctant to leave the country which served as the center of their church and as home. To forsake a homeland in which the state supported the Church and choose an unknown place devoid of this sustenance and filled with anti-

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 68. It is important to note that this general disinterest toward anything not Catholic, as well as the hierarchical attitude, was prevalent in much of the Catholic literature prior to Pope John XXIII and Vatican II.

<sup>14</sup>Palmieri, "Italian Protestantism," p. 178. It appears that the Presbyterians alone had over one hundred churches or missions for the Italians, the Methodists about sixty, and the Northern Convention of Baptists about eighty-two. One of the most prolific writers of the Protestant efforts at evangelism was Antonio Mangano. Reverend Mangano was Professor of Italian at Colgate Theological Seminary. He wrote numerous articles and books dealing with the religious work among Italians. See Silvano M. Tomasi and Edward C. Stibili, Italian-Americans and Religion: An Annotated Bibliography (Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies, 1978), pp. 130-131.

Catholic elements was something few Italians found attractive. From the correspondence of various Catholic bishops of the period, it appears that everyone recognized the need for Italian priests to minister to Italian immigrants; but due to conflicting opinions on the importance of the issue, compromise was needed on a remedy.<sup>15</sup>

Initial efforts included American priests learning Italian in addition to their religious studies. However, this process was short lived as it failed to consider the psychological makeup of Italians along with an understanding of their traditions and values. By the early 1890's young American priests of Italian heritage would receive training in American seminaries and then be sent to the Apostolic College in Piacenza for more instruction. They would then return to America to serve their people with greater understanding of both the Italian and the American perspectives in life.<sup>16</sup> But this would take years and there remained the immediate problem of how to deal with the Italians already in the New Orleans area.

Since the majority of those emigrating were devout but illiterate Roman Catholics, or those who simply accepted the public ceremonies, one of the major issues facing the Church hierarchy was how to

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<sup>15</sup> John Ireland, The Church and Modern Society: Lectures and Addresses, Vol. I (New York: D. H. McBridge and Company, 1903); Charles B. Carroll, Educating to Citizenship or Patriotism, Report to the National Catholic Education Association, Thirteenth Annual Meeting, (Baltimore, Maryland, November, 1916), pp. 82-90; James A. Burns, "School Life in the Immigration Period," Catholic Educational Review, III (January, 1912)), p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians, p. 109.



instruct these faithful. The Italians, because of their prior close relationship with the parish priest in Italy, seemed to place much emphasis upon the role of this individual.<sup>17</sup> In Italy, the affiliation was personal with the priest frequently being related to members of the village.<sup>18</sup> Often the priest closed his eyes to minor infractions, such as belief in superstitions or men not attending church. Because he was one of them, the parish priest shared in their joys and sorrows. Such was not the case once they reached the United States. In place of the man who had been an intermediary in all church matters was generally one who neither understood their language nor their customs. Although the Church would later initiate efforts to correct this situation, communication with a group who among other differences considered church support a duty of the state, was sorely needed. The fact that the Church leaders of 1880 were predominately Irish only amplified the difficulties.<sup>19</sup> There seemingly existed a

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<sup>17</sup>It should be noted that the Italian in Louisiana had a great respect for the clergy, but only insofar as the Church was concerned. Most of those interviewed gave no reference to the priest in any capacity save the cleric's role as minister of ceremony, i.e. Mass, communion, etc.

<sup>18</sup>Phyllis H. Williams, South Italian Folkways in Europe and America: A Handbook for Social Workers, Visiting Nurses, School Teachers, and Physicians (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), p. 140. [Hereinafter cited as Williams, South Italian Folkways.]

<sup>19</sup>Handlin, The Uprooted, p. 135; Leonard Bacigalupo, O.F.M., "Some Religious Aspects Involving the Interaction of the Italians and the Irish," in Francis X. Femminella (ed.), Italians and Irish in America (Staten Island: The American Italian Historical Association, 1985), pp. 118-120. [Hereinafter cited as Bacigalupo, "Religious Aspects Involving Italians and Irish."] Some prominent churchmen did protest the Irish influence in the American church. Two of the most notable were Orestes Brownson and Father Thomas L. Riggs, first Catholic chaplain at Yale. See Herbert Janick, "Catholicism and Culture: The American Experience of Thomas Lawrason Riggs, 1888-1943," The Catholic Historical Review, LXVIII, No. 3 (July, 1982), 457-468.

natural antipathy between the two nationalities which exhibited itself on almost every issue. Overall, the Irish had little patience with the Italians whose emotional religious practices sharply contrasted with the Irish brand of Catholicism.<sup>20</sup> So much controversy existed between these two groups that it overflowed into much of the historical literature of the time. One writer succinctly described the religious distinction between the two:

[The Irish had] attached importance to creedal tenets rather than warm personal relationships with God and the Saints; [they believed] in the dichotomy of religious and social celebrations; with the emphasis upon regular Sunday attendance at Mass rather than a felt sense of the Cross; [they held] attitudes of intense reverence and obedience to the hierarchy and the independent respect of the priest as an educated friend; [they maintained a] cold formalism with occasional temper rather than passionate love or hate; all of these attitudes contributed to the survival of the Church in America but also to the feeling on the part of the Italians of being separate and apart. The Church they found here was remote from what they had been accustomed to at home.<sup>21</sup>

However, once the immigrants arrived in America, if they wanted to maintain Catholicism, they had little choice except to attend the Irish Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup> These first attempts at accommodation of each other by Irish and Italian religious communities were hardly

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<sup>20</sup>Francis Femminella, "The Impact of Italian Migration and American Catholicism," American Catholic Sociological Review, XXII (Fall, 1961), 233-241. [Hereinafter cited as Femminella, "The Impact of Italian Migration."]

<sup>21</sup>Browne, "The Italian Problem," p. 67.

<sup>22</sup>Handlin, The Uprooted, p. 135.

successful. The religious perspective of the two ethnic groups as well as other fundamental cultural variations seemed destined to widen the breach between them.<sup>23</sup>

In the early 1800's the Irish had embraced religious roles inextricably tied to their own tragic history as victims of a resolute English and Protestant government. In the 1840's, as the new alien working class, they too had been the object of hostility and violence. The only solace they found seemed to be in religion; therefore, eventually they formed their own version of Catholicism which was nationalistic, English-speaking, and activist. Because of the organized bigotry of American Protestants,<sup>24</sup> in time Irish Catholicism became hardened and more coherent, until there seemed to be no other form except the cultural hybrid of American, Catholic and Irish.<sup>25</sup> To the family oriented Italian, the Irish brand of Catholicism appeared abrasive and removed from the fatherly religion he knew in Italy. Attracted by the opportunities America offered, the Italian could not fully comprehend the differences which now existed in an area which in the past had offered consolation.

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<sup>23</sup>Will Herberg, Protestant, Catholic, Jew (New York: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 160-161.

<sup>24</sup>Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1952), pp. 222-227.

<sup>25</sup>Richard A. Varbero, "Philadelphia's South Italians and the Irish Church: A History of Cultural Conflict," in Silvano M. Tomasi (ed.), The Religious Experience of Italian Americans: Proceedings of the Italian Historical Association (New York: American Italian Historical Association, 1975), p. 39. [Hereinafter cited as Varbero, "Philadelphia's South Italians."]

To better understand the dichotomy between these two ethnic groups, it is necessary to explore some of the religious practices of each. One area of dissimilarity between the two cultures was veneration of the saints. To the Irish, the Italians' homage of saints seemed to delegate God to second place. Almost every Italian home in Louisiana had brightly colored pictures of the Holy Family, the Virgin and Child or Saints Lucy and Anthony.<sup>26</sup> To the Italian immigrants the saints were like special friends who interceded for them with God.<sup>27</sup> Some Italians even believed that certain saints were more accessible than God to prayer and pleas.<sup>28</sup> This idea gained acceptance from the difference in power which Italians believed existed between the saints and God. To the non-theologically versed Italian, God, like the saints, could be capricious and demanding; and however devotedly one served Him, one could never be sure of His favor.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, in many instances the Italians gave more respect and reverence to the saints, justifying their actions on practical grounds. No one had heard of noteworthy miracles recently performed by God, but there were accounts of this or that saint showing himself to be

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<sup>26</sup>Eloise Griffith, "A Social Worker Looks at Italians," Journal of Educational Sociology, 5 (1931), 173. This fact was strongly substantiated through both interviews and the survey. In the survey alone, over 95 per cent of those questioned noted the presence of statues of the saints or of Christ in their homes.

<sup>27</sup>Femminella, "The Impact of Italian Migration," p. 235.

<sup>28</sup>Edward C. Banfield, The Moral Basis of a Backward Society (Glencoe, Illinois: Glencoe Free Press, 1958), p. 131. [Hereinafter cited as Banfield, The Moral Basis.]

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

both willing and able to afford protection in a special class of matters.<sup>30</sup>

There was also the question of attitude toward God maintained by the Italians and the Irish. The Irish tended to fear God, whereas the Italians felt as much at one with God as they did with each other.<sup>31</sup> Although the Italians conceded that it was possible to make God angry, it was even more probable that God's divinity endowed Him with an extraordinary capacity for benevolence and wisdom, which they fully expected Him to exercise.

To add to these disparities in attitudes, there was the problem of actual places of worship. In Italy the proximity of the village church always permitted regular attendance<sup>32</sup> in any environment among fellow Italians; but in the Irish-dominated Church of the United States, such was not the case.<sup>33</sup> If there was a church in the neighborhood it was traditionally Irish<sup>34</sup> with a statue of St. Patrick and all his snakes taking precedence over either St. Anthony or St. Lucy. Also, during the peak years of Italian immigration, the Italian priest, if one was present, might receive permission to cater to his community within the larger Irish parish. Nevertheless, because of

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>31</sup>Femminella, "The Impact of Italian Migration," pp. 233-241.

<sup>32</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 140.

<sup>33</sup>Femminella, "The Impact of Italian Migration," p. 238.

<sup>34</sup>Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians, p. 10.

the distinction between the groups, separate facilities were established for the Italians, including services. Parishes went so far as to have distinct worship services going on simultaneously -- one in English in the main Church and one in Italian in the basement of the Church.<sup>35</sup> Both Irish and Church officials justified this division by stating that the Italians were not able to support their own establishment.

By 1900 the Italian emigrants' disillusionment with the Catholic Church had become so great that it posed a serious threat to the Church's future in the United States.<sup>36</sup> In the April, 1900, issue of Catholic World Lawrence Franklin wrote of the Italians' sentiments:

At home a church or chapel stood at their very door . . . Their parish priest was their personal friend, who had baptized them at their birth, taught them their catechism, and watched over them like a father or elder brother. In the American city, on the other hand, they were suddenly thrown back upon themselves, without either tradition or public opinion to foster their sense of moral and social responsibility . . . No church was to be found in the long run to tenements which form[ed] their horizon line, and the priests whom they met spoke another tongue.

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<sup>35</sup> Browne, "The Italian Problem," p. 67. As far as this researcher could ascertain, it appears that the Italians in the New Orleans area were never relegated to the basement; however, their ethnic church was changed several times and finally removed.

<sup>36</sup> Nelli, "Italians in Urban America," p. 38; John Zarrilli, "A Suggestion for the Solution of the Italian Problem," The Ecclesiastical Review, LXX (January, 1924), 70-71; and John Zarrilli, "Some More Light on the Italian Problem," The Ecclesiastical Review, LXXIX (September, 1928), 256-268.

As a result of these factors, like sheep without a shepherd they too often went astray, wandering into some other fold, through interest or ignorance.<sup>37</sup>

The situation between the Irish and the Italians was one of the most difficult problems which the Church in the United States encountered in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> Because the Irish had been in America longer, Catholic Church membership was predominantly Irish, but by the turn of the century, the Italians led the Irish in numbers emigrating to the United States.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Italians received secondary attention in almost every geographical area, including New Orleans. As the Italians saw it, they seemed to have only three options. They could accept the American Catholic Church as they found it, with its Irish traditions and customs. Acceptance in itself would certainly have helped in upward mobility in the American system, but this acquiescence would imply becoming part of an existing Irish-oriented church. Another choice was conversion to Protestantism, an option most Italians rejected. Finally, they could withdraw entirely from the American religious scene to a position of total indifference.<sup>40</sup> This last option would force the

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<sup>37</sup> Lawrence Franklin, "The Italian in America, What He Has Been, What He Shall Be," Catholic World, LXXI (April, 1900), 72-73.

<sup>38</sup> Nelli, "Italians in Urban America, 93; Browne, "The Italian Problem, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Federal Writers Project, Louisiana State Guide: American Guide Series (New York: Hastings Publications, 1940), p. 257.

<sup>40</sup> Femminella, "The Impact of Italian Migration," 238.

Italian immigrants to try to find some other source for acculturation into American society. However, in choosing this possibility, the Italians would be able to maintain old religious feelings, though not display them in a formal fashion.<sup>41</sup>

For some Italian immigrants, especially the men, the last option seemed to be their choice. They simply turned to other avenues of socialization such as success in their work or professional advancement.<sup>42</sup> As a group, they identified with, and internalized, the more progressive, liberal, and secular images and values of the American society.<sup>43</sup> If they were successful in their status in life, they were not censured by their fellow Italians; however, if they were in the lower socio-economic bracket, they were looked down upon by those who accepted and participated in Catholicism as they found it in America.<sup>44</sup>

Among those who chose to continue their Catholic practices in America, many lost some of their ethnicity and became like Irish Americans.<sup>45</sup> This of course took years, was more easily recognizable among the second generation, and primarily applied to religious norms

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.; Louis M. Giambastiani, "In the Melting Pot: The Italians," Extension, VII (September, 1912), 9-10, 20-21.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 239; Oscar Handlin, in The Uprooted, refers to this problem in a doctrinaire manner ". . . these churches were Irish and not Italian . . ." Handlin, The Uprooted, p. 135; Will Herberg likewise supports this these: ". . . American Catholicism had the tone and character of the Irish American." Herberg, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, p. 160.



as opposed to customs in dress and food.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, among the first-generation immigrants, there did not exist the intense desire to feel as one with their Irish counterparts. On the contrary, most first-generation Italians stubbornly adhered to their old religious practices. They attended the Irish Catholic Churches but continued whatever practices they held dear.

In an attempt to lessen the Irish-Italian conflict, as well as to gain and hold the support of the Italian immigrants, the Church in the United States realized the necessity of offering a reasonable solution to the so-called Italian Problem. So significant had it become that a report of the Committee of Bishops at the Council of Baltimore in 1884 specifically outlined the situation in the following manner: Italian immigrants rarely attended Church or received the sacraments once they arrived in America; they lived widely dispersed throughout cities; they did not come to America as a people coming to a fatherland and therefore did little to support either the priests or the building of churches; and as a group they seemed to have undergone the greatest destitution of all immigrants.<sup>47</sup> Somehow, however, Church officials did not take into account their own possible failure

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid. An interesting phenomenon concerning this change is that by the third generation there seemed to be a better blending of the old Italian religious customs with the second generation's extreme departure.

<sup>47</sup>Browne, "The Italian Problem," p. 59; Bernard J. Lynch, a Catholic priest who studied the situation in lower New York wrote that the Italians coming to America seemed to be the worst off in "religious equipment" of any foreign Catholic. Bernard J. Lynch, "The Italians in New York," Catholic World, XLVII (April, 1888), 69.

to offset such an undesirable situation. Nevertheless, as a result of the Council, the Bishops of the United States as well as the Apostolic Delegate<sup>48</sup> offered some immediate possible solutions to "The great Catholic question,"<sup>49</sup> as it came to be called. Among these were changes in certain church practices, along with the establishment of lay societies, missions, Sunday schools, parochial schools,<sup>50</sup> and the development of the ethnic parish. Although the lay societies were frequently non-theological in nature, the Church began to realize the necessity of meeting the social as well as spiritual needs of the Italian immigrants.<sup>51</sup> In the static, unchanging villages of Italy such organizations would have found little support, but in the United States with its multiplicity of religious sects, each vying for the welfare of the immigrant, old church practices could not remain fixed. The Church had to resort to every possible means to hold together a nationality group which already suffered from a poor religious background.<sup>52</sup>

Historically, one of the primary methods of education and of upgrading the religious life of the Italian was through the parish church.

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<sup>48</sup>The Pope's representative to the United States.

<sup>49</sup>Browne, "The Italian Problem, p. 71.

<sup>50</sup>To be discussed in Chapter IV.

<sup>51</sup>Andrew Shipman, "Immigration," Official Report of The Second American Catholic Missionary Congress, 1913 (Chicago, 1914), pp. 154-171.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.; Albert R. Bandini, "Concerning the Italian Problem," The Ecclesiastical Review, LXII (March, 1920), 278. [Hereinafter cited as Bandini, "Concerning the Italian Problem."]

As previously explained, the Church's first attempt to accomplish this had been through incorporation within the existing parishes.<sup>53</sup> Due to the initial incompatibility of the Irish and the Italians, as well as the Church's inability to ameliorate the situation, the next step was a clear separation of churches according to nationality groups.<sup>54</sup> The outgrowth of separate parishes was a network of Italian churches whose primary purpose was to preserve the Italian personality and create an atmosphere that was religiously and culturally familiar to immigrants.<sup>55</sup> These churches were important to them, not only for devotional purposes, but also for the security and cultural symbols which they represented. In the peasant villages of the fatherland, religion was fused with all other institutions and roles,<sup>56</sup> and more often than not was a way of life for Italians rather than an orthodox set of beliefs.

Within the confines of the Catholic Church in the United States Italians wanted to reproduce a bit of their ancestral past with the priest, the Latin language, the liturgies, and the statues. This soon became evident as Italian parishes began to become realities. In New Orleans it was Archbishop Napoleon Perche who first designated a Church specifically for Italians. Since that portion of the city

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<sup>53</sup>Silvano Tomasi, "The Ethnic Church and the Integration of Italian Immigrants in the United States, in Silvano Tomasi and Madeline Engels (eds.), The Italian Experience in the United States (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1970), p. 173).

<sup>54</sup>Varbero, "Philadelphia's South Italians, p. 46.

<sup>55</sup>Tomasi, "The Ethnic Church," p. 186.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

between North Peters and Decatur Streets had a heavy concentration of Italians, the Archbishop selected a small frame church on Esplanade Avenue, the Church of Resurrection.<sup>57</sup> By 1873 the Church's size proved inadequate; therefore, the Archbishop transferred the designation to the Old Mortuary Chapel on Rampart Street, renaming it St. Anthony of Padua.<sup>58</sup> For the Italians of New Orleans, the Chapel offered a place for Mass as well as for their services to Saints Lucy, Peter and Anthony. In Italy one always requested St. Lucy's help in troubles with the eyes; therefore, a statue of the martyr holding a pair of human eyes in a saucer soon made its way to the Chapel. To the immigrants St. Anthony's or the Mortuary Chapel became "Parrocchia Italiana" and the words themselves were painted across the facade of the church.<sup>59</sup> It appears that the Mortuary Chapel remained the designated Italian church until around 1915 when

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<sup>57</sup> Leonard V. Huber and Samuel Wilson, Jr., Our Lady of Guadalupe Church -- 150th Anniversary Edition, 1826-1976 (New Jersey: Custom-book, Inc., 1976), p. 25; Roger Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana (New Orleans: W. W. Hyatt Stationery Manufacturing Company, 1939), p. 458. [Hereinafter cited as Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana.]

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 339. The Mortuary Chapel or St. Anthony's erected in 1826 was the direct result of needing a public viewing place for Catholics dying of yellow fever. Since city health officials had no explanation for the fever, it was thought that public gathering places, especially churches where the dead might be exposed, were prime carriers. Therefore in 1819, the New Orleans City Council, along with the wardens for St. Louis Cathedral, selected a site on the corner of Rampart and Conti Streets for a mortuary chapel. By 1822 funerals had to be held from this church.

<sup>59</sup> Huber and Wilson, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, p. 25.

Archbishop Blenk of New Orleans wanted the Church closed.<sup>60</sup> Italian immigrants were again reassigned. This time it was to St. Mary's<sup>61</sup> on Chartres Street, an area in which many Italians already had homes or businesses.

Erected in 1846, St. Mary's was located on the same property as the first Ursuline Convent in Louisiana.<sup>62</sup> The exterior was stuccoed brick with a pointed gable surmounted by a small cross. The outside was further ornamented with raised cement work<sup>63</sup> and divided into four equal sections by four pilasters. Two angels in flight carried a chalice between them and were pictured on a freize surmounting the frame of the door. Above the heavy wooden doors, each carved with a cross and stained in imitation of bronze, was an elaborately designed small rose window.<sup>64</sup> The interior was an oblong room with four large

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<sup>60</sup>The Church was to be sold and St. Anthony's was to become a new parish in expanding New Orleans. By 1918, however, the Archbishop reopened it as Our Lady of Guadalupe for the Spanish-speaking people. Huber and Wilson, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, p. 28; Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana, p. 524.

<sup>61</sup>Due to the changing pattern of population settlement, this one-time center of life for the early Italian immigrants no longer exists as such. The Archdiocese of New Orleans made the entire plant into an archival center for research and changed the name to Our Lady of Victory, thus removing any traces of its ethnic past, except in the minds of the people.

<sup>62</sup>The Church was constructed in 1718 when New Orleans was founded.

<sup>63</sup>Federal Writers Project, New Orleans City Guide (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938), p. 210. [Hereinafter cited as New Orleans City Guide.]

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

marble columns, which supported the upper section of the wall of the sanctuary. The main altar, the railing, and the altar steps were all carved marble of elaborate and intricate designs. Just as in the Mortuary Chapel, in every corner was found a statue of some familiar saint such as Anthony, Lucy, or Mother Cabrini with rows of vigil lights in front of them. Here the faithful would frequently come to light a candle begging the saint's intercession for some particular favor.<sup>65</sup> Along with the statues of familiar saints were eleven stained glass windows which depicted scenes from the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary.<sup>66</sup>

At St. Mary's the Italians gathered either daily or weekly for Mass and for events such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals. For immigrants, whether at the Mortuary Chapel or at St. Mary's, unity with countrymen fostered a closer knit Italian community in America. The ethnic parish church became the center where Italians were not only individuals, but also an integral part of a body which had their welfare and that of fellow Italians at heart.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the Italian church was the only organized body of social control which acknowledged the Italian ethnic factor. Some historians maintain that it offered Italians an opportunity to function completely as part

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<sup>65</sup> Among those surveyed, over ninety per cent sixty years of age and older, noted the practice of lighting candles for a special intention every week. See Appendix B.

<sup>66</sup> New Orleans City Guide, p. 211.

<sup>67</sup> Gerald D. Suttles, The Social Order of the Slum: Ethnicity and Territory in the Inner City (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 24. [Hereinafter cited as Suttles, The Social Order.]

of the American mosaic.<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, these churches furnished for Italians a most desirable environment. They could abandon their "bird of passage"<sup>69</sup> behavior, since there was clearly greater value in remaining in America. The consolation of being among fellow Italians,<sup>70</sup> which at first prompted a yearning for the old country, could now be found in their church.

In addition to promoting religious devotion and respecting ethnic identity, the Italian Church was also instrumental in checking unduly rapid assimilation.<sup>71</sup> By preventing widespread social disorganization, the Church enabled Italian immigrants and their children to assume gradually a role in American society.<sup>72</sup> It helped newcomers to retain their ethnic ties, while slowly becoming Americanized, thereby serving as a bridge between the old world of Italy and the new world of the United States. The Church also eventually sanctioned the minor

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<sup>68</sup>Tomasi, "The Ethnic Church, p. 192; Silvano M. Tomasi, Piety and Power: The Role of the Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area, 1880-1930 (Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies, 1975), pp. 1, 200.

<sup>69</sup>"Bird of passage" is a term used in Chapter II to describe Italians who made frequent trips back and forth across the Atlantic.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>71</sup>Nicholas John Russo, "Three Generations of Italians in New York City: Their Religious Acculturation," in Silvano Tomasi and Madeline Engels (eds.), The Italian Experience in the United States (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1970), p. 197. [Hereinafter cited as Russo, "Three Generations of Italians."]

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

cultural changes that were so necessary for the immigrant.<sup>73</sup>

A typical example of some concessions on the part of Church officials occurs in regard to the celebration of a saint's feast day. Ordinarily in the United States each day's Mass is celebrated in honor of some particular saint with no special services; but for the Italians such was not case. From the days in southern Italy there was always the remembrance of periodic famines, during which time the people could do little except turn to their faith. In one particular year they prayed to St. Joseph, the protector of the Holy Family for his help so that the people might have successful crops. Since there had always been a strong and close family relationship in the Italian household, the Italians felt that St. Joseph would intercede for them and their families. When the famine ended, the Italians considered this an answer to their prayers. In gratitude they decided to make offerings in honor of St. Joseph of the most precious possessions they had -- food. Thereafter, each year on his feast day special altars of food were built in thanksgiving for Joseph's aid.

Although different practices developed around the celebration, the altar was always the focus of attention. Days were spent preparing the food, which was of exquisite taste, and displayed in unique works of culinary art. Many times medals of St. Joseph were given to the viewers, with the most popular custom being the distribution of the "fava" or lucky bean. The idea of giving someone a lucky bean also originated from the days of famine. Since the fava would grow well in even the worst soil, it became the life-saving crop for many

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<sup>73</sup>Tomasi, "The Ethnic Church," p. 186.



small farmers; consequently, Italians regarded it as their "lucky crop."<sup>74</sup>

Another example of the Church's concession to Italians' religious outpouring was in respect to processions. For immigrants, processions marked the quintessence of devotion and as such were considered integral to every parish church.<sup>75</sup> In Italy the parish church's name day was generally a day of celebration. It often began with a public procession through the village and frequently was the social event of the year. Once in the United States, Italians, wherever they settled, continued the practice as a means of externalizing their faith. Although Church officials accepted these noisy gatherings as a cultural necessity, they still regarded them as a degeneration of the American spirit.<sup>76</sup>

The establishment of Italian parishes and toleration by Church officials of old world customs was not the everlasting panacea to the religious plight of the Italians in America. As the immigrant population increased, conflict developed between the old and the new Italian Catholics over such things as the nationality of the priest, the language of the liturgy, the saint's day to be observed, and even the names of the Churches.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Information of St. Joseph's altar gathered from formal interviews and researcher's own family background.

<sup>75</sup>Ada Eliot, "Two Italian Festivals," Charities, VII (1901), 321-322; Churchill, The Italians of Newark, p. 97.

<sup>76</sup>Williams, South-Italian Folkways, p. 149.

<sup>77</sup>Handlin, The Uprooted, p. 135.

Part of the reason for these difficulties lay in the inadequate religious background of the Italians. Some church officials were of the opinion that even if the Italian immigrant had been placed in the finest of circumstances with the most idealistic Christianity, he would have remained a problem to the American Catholic Church of the time.<sup>78</sup> Churchmen felt this was true because the Italian immigrant brought with him a "sense of religious ignorance and [the] habit of depending on the state to support his churches."<sup>79</sup> Writings from the Council of Baltimore (1884) suggest that Italians came from a land of many priests and religious, yet suffered from lack "of religious training."<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, many had little basic knowledge of their faith and seemed to know nothing of church support.<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, Italians alone could not be entirely blamed for this situation. Conditions in Europe, such as apathy of the clergy and confusion of administration between the parish priest and the religious, were often contributory causes.<sup>82</sup>

Italian immigrants, whether from among the devout but illiterate

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<sup>78</sup>Browne, "The Italian Problem, p. 51. It should be noted, however, that in many instances Italians did not receive support from either the Irish clergy or hierarchy. Bacigalupo, "Religious Aspects Involving Italians and Irish," p. 117.

<sup>79</sup>Browne, "The Italian Problem," p. 52.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>81</sup>Bandini, "Concerning the Italian Problem," pp. 278-279.

<sup>82</sup>Lynch, "The Italians in New York," p. 72.

group or the devout and seemingly indifferent one,<sup>83</sup> apparently managed to salvage and strengthen their Catholic faith in Louisiana. Both the survey and interview results attest to the fact that over 98.9 percent were practicing Catholics with over 69 percent attending Mass on a weekly basis.<sup>84</sup> Interviews also substantiated the fact that this was accomplished in spite of the failure of the Catholic Church in the United States to relate meaningfully to the immigrants' needs or to understand the Catholicism of Italian peasants.<sup>85</sup> It is true that the Church took some measures in the moral and religious guidance of the immigrants;<sup>86</sup> however, the Catholic hierarchy were slow to understand the characteristics and customs of the Italian.<sup>87</sup>

Catholicism in southern Italy was a parochial and personal type of religion,<sup>88</sup> with the immigrant manifesting a "casual attitude" toward it.<sup>89</sup> Men were subject to take religion as a matter for the weaker members of the family, and rarely would they attend church,

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<sup>83</sup>Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians, pp. 82-83.

<sup>84</sup>See survey results, Appendix B.

<sup>85</sup>Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians, pp. 70-72; J. L. Spalding, The Religious Mission of the Irish People and Catholic Colonization (New York: The Catholic Publication Society Co., 1880), p. 158.

<sup>86</sup>Lord, The Italian in America, p. 69.

<sup>87</sup>Femminella, "The Impact of Italian Migration," p. 240.

<sup>88</sup>Banfield, The Moral Basis of a Backward Society, p. 25.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

except for weddings and funerals.<sup>90</sup> These ceremonies were regarded more as social customs than religious rituals.<sup>91</sup> For them, the women and the old folk were the church; as head of the family, their duty was to look after their own business.<sup>92</sup> For many men going to church was called for three times: "when they [were] hatched, matched and dispatched."<sup>93</sup> In the United States, however, this pattern was not repeated, nor was it acceptable to Church officials. Instead, the Church condemned the apparent lack of theological principles, particularly among Italian men. Indifference to the sacraments and orthodox belief were practices which the tenet-minded Irish hierarchy wanted stopped or stifled.<sup>94</sup>

Thus it appears that between 1880 and 1910 large numbers of Italians who selected New Orleans as their port of entry were either nominally or practically Catholics. Having little or no formal religious education, they frequently found themselves at odds with local church officials who often were Irish Americans. Initial attempts at amelioration seemed at best inadequate. Nevertheless, with time and

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<sup>90</sup>Antonio Mangano, Sons of Italy: A Social and Religious Study of the Italians in America (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1917; reprint ed., New York: Russell and Russell, 1972), p. 71. [Hereinafter cited as Mangano, Sons of Italy.]

<sup>91</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 149.

<sup>92</sup>Leonard Moss, "The Family in Southern Italy: Yesterday and Today," Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Conference of the Italian American Historical Association, 1977), p. 189. [Hereinafter cited as Moss, "The Family in Southern Italy."]

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Varbero, "Philadelphia's South Italians," pp. 40, 44.

patience as well as trial and error, both the Italian immigrants and the established Irish Catholic Church seemed to reach a state of mutual toleration. Through education, example, and almost unremitting pressure, the individualistic southern Italians accommodated the Church, but in their "own fashion and with traditional reservations."<sup>95</sup> The Church yielded to ethnic churches, but only for a time and only as a means of integrating. In most instances, the mutual toleration between Italians and the Church never reached the stage of readjustment, at least among those who came between 1880 and 1910. Most Italians continued to remember the priests and the Church of the "Mezzogiorno"; therefore, they gave only customary deference to the American version. Religion continued to be the Italian's unifying force both in his personal and family life.<sup>96</sup> There is little doubt that the Italian's brand of Catholicism was far from the orthodoxy which existed in the United States. But for the Italian immigrant it was the Church, especially his parish church, that accepted him as an infant, united him in marriage, and finally escorted him in his departure to his heavenly home; therefore, he would not abandon it -- but acceptance had to be in his own traditional way.

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<sup>95</sup>John V. Tolino, "The Future of the Italian American Problem," The Ecclesiastical Review, 101 (September, 1939), p. 221.

<sup>96</sup>Mangano, Sons of Italy, p. 71.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE CREAM RISES TO THE TOP

Analogous with advertising by Louisiana planters for agricultural workers and the immigrants' desire for religious alternatives, economics also appears as a major factor in the advancement of Louisiana's Italian immigrants. Indeed one of the most graphic descriptions of this immigrant group concerns their economic plight after arriving in Louisiana. Although historians give credence to economics as a reason for Italian migration, the complete story of how this group arrived in Louisiana, merged into the economy, and frequently rose to high socioeconomic levels remains largely untold.<sup>1</sup>

Because New Orleans by 1890 had become one of the leading ports of entry for Italian immigrants, this researcher will devote attention to the following topics: New Orleans' need for the unskilled laborers; the Italians' attitude toward settlement; the types of emigrants who came; the system under which many immigrants found work; and the United States reaction to this ethnic group. Specific mention is also made of certain occupations in which this Italian group excelled. It should be noted that most ethnic studies about Italians stress their role as laborers. Nevertheless, in the New Orleans area there seems to have existed a rapid economic acceleration above laborer. Although blue-collar occupations may have appeared as their first employment,

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<sup>1</sup>Foerster, Italian Immigration, pp. 370-371; Robert L. Brandfon, "The End of Immigration to the Cotton Fields," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 50 (March, 1964), 605. [Hereinafter cited as Brandfon, "The End of Immigration."]

they were merely stepping stones to greater opportunities. Since this researcher was unable to determine every avocation pursued by Italians, jobs most often cited in city directories for New Orleans, in interviews with first and second generation Italians, and in the survey results, formed the nucleus of this section.

Following the War Between the States, the city of New Orleans made little economic progress. Its long reliance on the Mississippi River for commerce, along with inhospitable climate and frequent floods, made industrial development an unfeasible choice for both capital and the new entrepreneurs.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding epidemics, poor locations and other previously cited deterrents, evidence seems to support the idea that the city had a large number of companies which employed both skilled and unskilled laborers. In 1870, Henry Richter's Standard History of New Orleans cited the city has having 4411 workers in over 500 factories.<sup>3</sup> By the 1800's, the number of factories had risen to over 900<sup>4</sup> and by 1900 a census report showed over eighty-five percent of all males over age sixteen employed in the work force.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Harry A. Mitchell, "The Development of New Orleans As a Wholesale Center," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXVII (October, 1944), 958.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Richter, Standard History of New Orleans, Louisiana (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1900), p. 537.

<sup>4</sup>Report on Manufacturers at Tenth Census (1800) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), pp. 124-125, 380.

<sup>5</sup>United States Department of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States: Occupational Statistics, 1870-1940, by Alba M. Edwards (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 92.

As the need for inexpensive labor increased, ethnic groups such as the Irish, the Germans and the Italians began settling in the New Orleans area. For the Italians, New Orleans seemingly offered an avenue to success. Employment frequently differed little from that to which they had been accustomed in Italy; e.g., truck farming and sugar cane. Simultaneously, it also satisfied the need for both the temporary workers, who, after exchanging muscle for profit, returned to their native land.<sup>6</sup> These immigrants generally left Italy during the working season,<sup>7</sup> gained employment for a prescribed period of time and then returned to Italy.<sup>8</sup> Paramount in the minds of all "birds of passage" was their desire to earn enough money in the United States to free themselves from the shackles of poverty placed upon them by the Italian government or by the land division system of inheritance. The numbers of Italians moving back and forth across the Atlantic reached such high proportions that an account of it appeared in a United States Congressional Executive Document in 1891:

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<sup>6</sup>Herbert Casson, "The Italian in America," Munsey's Magazine, XXXVI (October, 1906), p. 123. [Hereinafter cited as Casson, "The Italians in America."]

<sup>7</sup>From May to October.

<sup>8</sup>Antonio Mangano, "The Effect of Emigration Upon Italy: Threatened Depopulation of the South," Charities and the Commons, 19 (January 4, 1908), p. 1329. [Hereinafter cited as Mangano, "Effect of Emigration."]



<u>Year</u>	<u>Permanent</u>	<u>Temporary</u>	<u>Total</u>
1880	37,934	81,967	119,901
1881	41,807	94,225	135,832
1882	65,748	95,814	162,562
1883	68,416	100,685	169,101
1884	58,049	88,968	147,017
1885	77,029	80,164	157,193
1886	88,352	83,053	167,377 <sup>9</sup>

Part of the reason for this high rate of repatriation was the original intention of the immigrant. His idea was a simple one: move to America where enough money could be earned and return home as a prosperous man.<sup>10</sup> Once this practice proved successful, the United States became a field for seasonal employment for many Italians. They simply moved back and forth across the ocean, gaining from their work a higher standard of living. Until the United States government began action toward immigrant restrictions, some Italians, or "birds of passage," crossed as many as ten times.<sup>11</sup>

Although it was very common for the Italian immigrants even before reaching America to plan on returning to their native land, it was also true that their experience in America sometimes prompted this repatriation. Americans were at first suspicious of Italians and their

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<sup>9</sup>United States Congress, House, Report of Commissioners on Enforcement of Alien Contract Labor Law, House Executive Document #235, Part 1, 52nd Congress, 1st Session, 1882, p. 231.

<sup>10</sup>Smith, Italy: A Modern History, p. 240.

<sup>11</sup>J. H. Senner, "Immigration from Italy," p. 650.

extreme poverty, odd language, and customs.<sup>12</sup> Then, as temporary immigrants, Italians also became the victims of distrust and ill feeling by members of the American labor force. An interview with Salvador Mandella reflected a marked antagonism between the Irish and the Italians that had long prevailed in the New Orleans area.<sup>13</sup> Italians, according to the Irish and other ethnic groups, worked too hard, too long, and for too little pay. Americans were also frequently without work because the immigrant was willing to work for lower wages. Even the United States government did not benefit from the foreign laborers in that few or no taxes were paid by these workers. The attitude of Americans of the time can be summed up in the words of Edmund Stevenson, an emigrant commissioner in New York during the early 1900's:

My experience in Castle Garden is that hundreds and thousands of skilled mechanics -- stone-cutters, stone masons, glass blowers, locomotive engineers -- come regularly to this country every spring year after year, and stay here until about November. They pay no taxes for our schools, they perform no jury duty nor are they liable to; they do not perform any of the duties of citizenship, except the protection they get from the city or the state where ever they reside. During all the working season they are sending their money back to their wives, their children, their parents,

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<sup>12</sup>United States Department of Labor, The Italian on the Land by Emily Fogg Meade, Bulletin No. 70 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905), p. 479. [Hereinafter cited as U.S. Department of Labor, The Italian on the Land.] Francesco Cerase, "Nostalgia or Disenchantment: Consideration on Return Migration," in Silvano Tomasi and Madeline Engel (eds.), The Italian Experience in the United States (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1970), p. 222. [Hereinafter cited as Cerase, "Nostalgia or Disenchantment."]

<sup>13</sup>Interview with Salvador Mandella, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 7, 1977.

and at the end of the working season they pack their grip-sacks and go back to Europe, spend the winter, and the next year come back here again, and repeat the same thing over and over again. They come into direct competition with American labor; they drive out American labor by their coming here, skilled workmen that they are, and they generally work under the price of American labor. But they earn much more money here, and they can afford to go back there and live for a few months until the working season and they come back here . . . These people displace American workmen. If anybody is to be idle, it will not be them. They live in a niggardly economy, and when snow falls they carry home a saving from the season's work greater than they could accumulate in three years at their home.<sup>14</sup>

Another factor affecting Italians' desire to return home was their own conspicuous alienation. This attitude frequently led to a feeling of insecurity which in turn set definite limits on their social position.<sup>15</sup> At this point, immigrants, aware of their status as naturalized immigrants, became more and more enchanted with the idea of returning to Italy where they would once again be respected and even envied by their neighbors.<sup>16</sup> To remain in the United States meant rejection from membership in certain groups or organizations, as well as being denied the possibility of social advancement.<sup>17</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>14</sup>U. S. Congress, House, Report of the Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Giovanni E. Schiavo, The Italians in Chicago: A Study in Americanization (Chicago: Italian American Publishing Co., 1928), p. 44.

<sup>17</sup>Cerese, "Nostalgia or Disenchantment," p. 222.

their options seemed clear: either stay in America and continue to participate in a limited sense in this society, or return to Italy.

Thus, the return to their native land became a grand dream of the Italian immigrants. In his study, The Italians in Chicago: A Study in Americanization, Giovanni E. Schiavo vividly describes the contents of such a dream:

Still down in his heart Italy reigned supreme. While gathering rags in the street or living in the most squalid basement in the city, the Italian, no matter how illiterate or backward, would dream of the day that he could go back to his native village and put up a house that could be the envy of his old neighbors. A little farm with a beautiful house, with a clinging vine on the front, with American cut glassware, American graphophone, American utensils, American silverplate, everything American. And in that dream the illiterate Italian would toil and sweat until fagged out; he would go back to his couch, with his dream still lingering in his mind.<sup>18</sup>

In many cases the return to Italy was a great disappointment. This was true primarily because often the immigrants had become somewhat "too Americanized" to slip back into the old grooves.<sup>19</sup> One problem was that they could no longer abide the bucolic tranquility of the Italian village; they felt as a foreigner in their native land.<sup>20</sup> Others who returned found the life too difficult to endure.

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<sup>18</sup>Schiavo, The Italians in Chicago, p. 44.

<sup>19</sup>Casson, "The Italian in America," p. 123. During an interview with her in 1977, Mrs. Lena Bologna of Baton Rouge, Louisiana commented: "My mother had no desire to stay in Italy once she had experienced the conveniences of America."

<sup>20</sup>Schiavo, The Italians in Chicago, p. 44.

Mrs. Lena Bologna of Baton Rouge, Louisiana reminisced as follows:

"Once back in Italy, my mother, along with all save Papa, sorely missed the United States. Having our own well in America as opposed to the city fountains of southern Italy for the washing of clothes was only one area of dissatisfaction. Finally Mama spoke to Papa about these inconveniences and soon we were back on our way to the United States."<sup>21</sup> The end result for most "birds of passage" was generally the same -- immigrants would convince themselves that their true place was in America. Once cleared of this mental obstacle, they set out with determination of both heart and mind to make the United States their permanent home.<sup>22</sup>

Although traversing the Atlantic Ocean was prompted by economics, it should be noted that temporary emigration among Italians found its roots in antiquity. Origination seems to have occurred when the eagles of the Roman legions crossed the Alps and the Mediterranean to diffuse Latin civilization into other cultures. The Italian artisan followed the armies into Gaul, Britain, Africa, and the East. This is evident in the bridges, aqueducts, baths, and basilicas which spread over the Empire during this period. All were marked by both the bricks and forms of tiles used by the Italians. Even when Rome fell and Italy was under the dominion of the barbarians, the master-masons and other such artisans were so well esteemed by the captors that they were given privileges equal to those of the free citizenry, e.g., joining

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mrs. Lena Bologna, June 12, 1977, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

unions and exemptions from servile tribute.<sup>23</sup> Thus history reveals that in moving back and forth across the Atlantic, the immigrants of the 1880's were doing what had always been a part of their heritage.

For those who came as permanent settlers, however, the first thought was employment in any available job. Finding work in Italy had not presented a similar problem. If a family was poor, an appeal to the landowners assured any man both a place to live and the necessities of life, meager as they might be.<sup>24</sup> Such was not the situation in the United States. Depending on the geographic location of their settlement, technical fields generally replaced the occupations of fisherman, artisan, or small shopkeeper.<sup>25</sup> In Louisiana, however, especially New Orleans, most Italians began as unskilled laborers;<sup>26</sup> therefore, it was not surprising for city directories to list large numbers occupied in such professions.<sup>27</sup> Letters to friends and relatives in Italy may have spoken of a far better life than the one at home, but most immigrants realized they had to begin at the bottom once they arrived in America. Whatever their monetary returns might

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<sup>23</sup>Mangano, "The Effect of Emigration Upon Italy," p. 1335.

<sup>24</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup>Bolton King and Thomas O. Key, Italy Today (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 365.

<sup>26</sup>Soards, New Orleans City Directory, 1890, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1905, 1906, 1907 (New Orleans: L. Soards Publishers), passim.

<sup>27</sup>Soards, New Orleans City Directory, 1880-1910.

be in these first jobs mattered not; the important idea was that something was being accomplished. One first-generation Italian remarked how her husband worked in a saw mill for the lowest of wages in order to merely exist. Conditions were terrible, but he accepted it as his only means to move ahead.<sup>28</sup>

Because of their adaptability Italians seemed programmed for success. Nonetheless, affluence was not to be achieved without effort and frustration. Frequently, adversities came as a result of reactions from native Americans who feared immigration labor. Unfortunately, however, it often resulted from fellow Italians who had implemented an economic system for channeling Italians into the job market known as the padroni system. The padroni or labor agents were usually semi-Americanized Italian residents. These agents lived in America and arranged under contract to supply recruits for American employers. Sometimes the padroni traveled to Italy for workers, but often times it was the steamship agent who encouraged the immigrant to leave Italy for the United States. Steamship lines were cognizant of the padroni system and had little concern that employment might involve long hours, low pay, and poor working conditions.<sup>29</sup> Since contracts for specific jobs rarely exceeded three years,<sup>30</sup> it was possible for either the padroni or the steamship agent to use the same immigrants over again.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eleanor Bologna, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 9, 1976.

<sup>29</sup> U. S. Congress, House, Report of Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> Marie Lipari, "The Padrone System," Italy-American Monthly, II (April, 1935), p. 8.

In 1885, the United States passed the first alien contract labor law which caused the padroni to adjust their tactics. Since the contract labor law prohibited the importation of labor under contract, the padroni now refrained from such a document, but still managed to form a labor pool through promises of future employment and sometimes even housing.<sup>31</sup> An important element to be remembered is that the padroni were first and foremost business agents; therefore, their primary aim was to realize a profit. If the migrating laborers could not pay for passage the padroni offered to pay for it until work could be obtained. The cost of repayment was usually two or three times the original cost, and in most instances it was the same padroni who, for a fee, located a job for the immigrant.<sup>32</sup> In some cases, because they were able to gather a large enough number of immigrants for passage, the padroni were also able to secure reduced rates from steamship companies. These instances helped to increase the profits made by the padroni once they were repaid by the immigrants. Furthermore, there were cases in the East where the padroni boarded immigrants until positions could be obtained.<sup>33</sup> Thus the immigrants sometimes found themselves bound to the padroni for passage, board, and employment --

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Luciano J. Iorizzo, "The Padrone and Immigrant Distribution," in Silvano Tomasi and Madeline Engels (eds.), The Italian Experience in the United States (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1970), p. 56. [Hereinafter cited as Iorizzo, "The Padrone and Immigrant Distribution."]



debts not easily erased.<sup>34</sup>

If immigrants happened to be able to afford their passage, evidence indicates that the average amount of money in their possession enabled them to live without work for ten to twelve days.<sup>35</sup> Then, unless they were willing to turn to public charity -- which Italians were unlikely to do -- or to relatives, they were at the mercy of the padroni for any type of gainful employment. Although Italians interviewed could cite no incidents of extreme unfairness among local padroni, it was not uncommon in the East to see the padroni acting as bankers, landlords, and employers for the immigrants. Some padroni prospered to the point that government reports wrote of those who rode in carriages, dressed like gentlemen, and gave no appearance that their wealth came from the "sweat and blood of their unfortunate Italian slaves."<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, not all padroni engaged in such devious tactics. Some were content merely to help Italian immigrants secure employment for a fee. Also, if the Italians were fortunate enough to have relatives or friends in the area, the influence of the padroni was practically nonexistent. In New Orleans, in particular, with the exception of sugar cane workers, the inhumane effect of the padroni

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<sup>34</sup> Although there are no serious studies on a comparison of the subject, there is little doubt that the padroni system closely resembled the system of indentured servitude so prevalent in early colonial America.

<sup>35</sup> G. E. DiPalma Castiglione, "Italian Immigration Into the United States, 1901-1904," American Journal of Sociology, II (September, 1905), p. 202. [Hereinafter cited as Castiglione, "Italian Immigration Into the United States."] Interview with Mrs. Catherine Noto, New Orleans, Louisiana, June 8, 1977.

<sup>36</sup> United States Congress, House, Report of Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, 3472, p. 38.

seemed to have been slight.

Employers soon came to appreciate certain traits characteristic of the permanent Italian immigrants -- their industriousness, adaptability, thriftiness, tenacity of purpose, and desire to succeed. Also, the Italian's excellent health and exceptional physical vigor manifested itself in his ability to endure the most exhausting labor.<sup>37</sup> The Raleigh, North Carolina Observer of November 6, 1904, reported that the Italians, even in the most unfavorable working conditions, generally made satisfactory workers.<sup>38</sup> Others regarded them as a hearty and healthy group and as one of the most intelligent elements in the community.<sup>39</sup> On the job they were easy to teach, for their desire to earn money was so strong that even the handicap of language did not deter them from learning the task before them. Although the "get rich quickly" approach to economic prosperity seemed to be the attitude of most Italian immigrants, the truth is they desired success only as independent and self-sufficient businessmen. With both of these attributes, a man gained respect, and to Italians this was paramount. To European, particularly Italians, a man who was not respected by others was a conspicuous waste.

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<sup>37</sup> Lord, The Italian in America, p. 198.

<sup>38</sup> The Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina), November 6, 1904. Similar articles could be found in New Orleans newspapers. The Daily Picayune (New Orleans) wrote of how many Italian immigrants had become wealthy through businesses begun by themselves, August 12, 1904.

<sup>39</sup> John R. Kemp (ed.), Martin Behrman of New Orleans: Memoirs of a City Boss (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1977), p. 139. It should be noted that for some native New Orleanians, Italians represented the lowest immigrant class in the city -- a point to be explored in Chapter V.

In an effort to gain self-sufficiency, some Italians adapted Old World occupations which had served them well in their native land. One such example was Frank DiRosa who had worked as a barber in Italy, because both his father and brother had been barbers.<sup>40</sup> Despite having this background of barbering, Frank developed an additional skill. He learned to sew, and with his cutting skills became a tailor, a profession he continued for over twenty-five years. In Italy, large families necessitated home cuts as a matter of economy. Once in America, if a man desired to be his own boss and lacked substantial means at the outset, barbering required little save a pair of scissors, a chair, and a steady and straight eye. Nevertheless, it also lent itself to other occupations such as tailoring which offered greater financial rewards.

Combined with the Italian's willingness to work and his adaptability was his tenacity of purpose. With the possible exception of the Jewish merchant and peddler, Italians were the most ubiquitous foreigners in America.<sup>41</sup> Essentially, they proved ready to engage in any kind of occupation, anywhere, as long as it provided some income.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the Italian desire and ability to save were almost uncanny. Often they possessed only the bare necessities, but somehow they managed to save from whatever meager wages they received.<sup>43</sup> So

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Mrs. Frank DiRosa, New Orleans, December 28, 1977.

<sup>41</sup> George E. Pozzetta (ed.), Pane E. Lavoro: The Italian American Working Class, Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1980), p. IV.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Emily Fogg Meade, "Italian Immigration Into the South," South Atlantic Quarterly, IV (July, 1905), 222. [Hereinafter cited as Meade, "Italian Immigration."]

exceptional was their ability to economize that even common laborers and bootblacks were able to accumulate enough to eventually become tenement landlords.<sup>44</sup> In commenting on the Italian's exceptional thriftiness, a United States Department of Labor bulletin in 1907 reported:

The Italians' economy is noticeable everywhere. They collect leaves from the public streets for bedding their animals, or beg the underbrush from places that are being cleared to use in their beehive ovens . . . [but] nowhere is the Italian's economy more apparent than in the appearance of his garden. Every inch of ground is utilized, and a great deal is crowded into a small space; if there is an orchard, tomatoes, beans, or potatoes are planted between the trees, and small vegetables are planted between large vegetables and berries . . . He is [also] used to working for long hours with his hands and to labor under a hot sun . . . [accepting] any kind of irksome toil . . . . When he has in prospect the ownership of a number of acres without heavy taxes, his saving instinct is stimulated to the utmost, and he work[s] early and late.<sup>45</sup>

Thus it appears that many Italians gained employment through the padrone system. In some cases it was merely a means of securing work, while in others prior poor conditions led to long term padroni control. Nevertheless, whether independent or under the padroni, Italians by their adaptability, desire for economic ascendancy, and excellent work habits, became one of the most desirable immigrant

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<sup>44</sup>Lord, The Italian in America, p. 77.

<sup>45</sup>United States Department of Labor, The Italian On the Land, pp. 487, 490.

groups in New Orleans.<sup>46</sup>

Although employment was important, another vital part of the economic life was land ownership.<sup>47</sup> This acquisition of property did not necessarily mean the 160 acres people purchased in the days of the Homestead Act.<sup>48</sup> To the Italian immigrants it meant purchasing just enough on which they could live. This ground, no matter how small in size, signified to them that they were part of America. Coming from a land where property ownership meant added social prestige, they were not destined to remain tenant workers.<sup>49</sup> For Italians, acquiring land raised their social level and made them Americans, though it would be years before they acquired citizenship. In southern Italy farmers usually owned the acres they tilled. Once they departed the land, they became persons without roots. Now by acquiring land, homes, or even fruit stalls, they felt they belonged; they were sinking their roots into a new land.

For many of the emigrating Italians, the city and port of New Orleans became their destination.<sup>50</sup> Following the Civil War, New

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<sup>46</sup>Daily Picayune, August 12, 1904.

<sup>47</sup>Maestri explained how his father invested in pleasure boats, sale of mules, furniture business, and other occupations in order to make money for purchasing land on which to build rental houses. Interview with Natale Maestri, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, October 15, 1977.

<sup>48</sup>This Act was passed by the United States government in 1862. It provided that any citizen or any alien who had declared his intention to become a citizen could register claim to a quarter section of public land (160 acres) and after giving proof that he had lived on it for five years, receive title in payment of a fee.

<sup>49</sup>Brandfon, "The End of Immigration," p. 606.

<sup>50</sup>Daily Picayune, October 17, 1890.

Orleans, as previously mentioned, became one of the largest ports of entry for emigrating groups, particularly Italians.<sup>51</sup> Although the majority had come from rural districts in southern Italy, they had not lived on isolated farms. Instead they had crowded together in villages where they enjoyed the companionship of their fellow Italians. For centuries southern Italians lived in large boroughs, even if it meant walking miles to work. Italians thrived on the companionship and support they received from the group. Thus, the American city became the panacea for the Italian. It offered unlimited economic opportunities and at the same time the companionship of former countrymen.<sup>52</sup>

The desire to be among his "paesani" was further strengthened by the Italian's difficulty with the English language. Because immigrants often came to Louisiana with little or no knowledge of the language, they felt more at ease among their own countrymen. Since Italian was the language they knew, it was only natural for them to seek out those who faced the same difficulties in acquiring a proficiency in this new tongue.<sup>53</sup>

Native Americans were suspicious of this close association among Italians. Americans simply could not comprehend this network of closeness which was more permanent than religion and more legitimate

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<sup>51</sup>United States Congress, Senate, "Enforcement of Alien Contract Labor Law," Reports of the Immigration Commission, Senate Document No. 756, Part III, 62st Congress, 3rd Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), pp. 289-292; United States Congress, House, House Executive Document No 235, Part I, 52nd Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), p. 224.

<sup>52</sup>Castiglione, "The Italian Immigration Into the U. S.," p. 200.

<sup>53</sup>Interview with Mrs. Catherine Noto, New Orleans, Louisiana, June 8, 1977.

than law.<sup>54</sup> For the Italians, however, it was their friends, not strangers, who gave them help and trust when they were in need. The United States General Immigration Commission made efforts to offset this tight web through the formation of colonization societies. It was the hope of this Commission that such societies would locate the yet undeveloped land in the United States, and then assist the immigrant in becoming either the owner of this land, or a wage earner on it. In either case, the Italian would be putting his best talents to use and at the same time avoid concentration in one specific area,<sup>55</sup> which for many United States officials tended to keep the Italian an alien within his new country. Although the establishment of such societies was highly regarded by both American and Italian governments, it never gained much acceptance among the immigrants.<sup>56</sup> When agriculture was accepted by the Italian, it was usually done as a prelude to a better-paying occupation, not as a final goal.

Nevertheless, because of their eagerness to work, many Italians initially accepted jobs in the sugar cane fields of Louisiana. For these workers the day began as early as five a.m. If the immigrants lived in the city of New Orleans and were employed by a plantation in

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<sup>54</sup>Ianni, A Family Business, p. 26; Shanabruch, "The Louisiana Immigration Movement," p. 220.

<sup>55</sup>Castiglione, "Italian Immigration Into the U.S.," p. 204.

<sup>56</sup>Between the years 1898-1906 the Biennial Reports of the Louisiana Commissioner of Agriculture and Immigration contain frequent references to land sales and financing in order to help immigrants procure plots of their own land. The Bureau went so far as to publish a pamphlet, List of Louisiana Lands for Sale.

the Lake Pontchartrain area of Orleans Parish, they were transported by box car on Monday morning to the plantation. There they remained until Friday evening when the week's work was complete. The railroad ride to the plantation offered none of the conveniences of modern railroad transportation; instead the immigrants were often crowded like cattle into a stuffy, unventilated car. Sometimes if the plantation was in St. Charles Parish, the ride lasted over two hours, yet the men were expected to begin work as soon as they arrived at their destination. Living arrangements were provided by the plantation, but this often consisted only of a straw bed covered with a blanket. In some cases, the men were fortunate to have an Italian family nearby who welcomed visits from the Italian workers. These families opened their doors to their fellow paesani and, when circumstances permitted, provided a place for a return to the Old World's food, music, customs, and language.

Such was the case of the family of Mrs. Latino of White Castle, Louisiana. Mrs. Latino spoke of her parents' home as being the gathering place of many Italians in the area. On Sunday it was not unusual to have as many as fifteen Italian males for dinner and bocce.<sup>57</sup> In the afternoon she often assisted a worker in writing a letter to his family back home or in mending a torn piece of clothing. In the White Castle, Houma, Thibodaux, and Morgan City areas, workers did not suffer the hardships of being away from family or of being transported by boxcar to the plantation during the week; but the hours were still

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<sup>57</sup> An Italian game closely resembling bowling, except that bocce is played on an outdoor court.



long and the pay low. In many cases sixty cents for a day's work from sun-up to sundown was typical of the wages a worker might receive.<sup>58</sup> Italians, however, did not emigrate to North America with the desire to farm.<sup>59</sup> Their love and need for people, their disdain for the land and the way of life connected with it put them outside the world of "classic peasantry."<sup>60</sup> It would be far more accurate to say that the Italians accepted farming as a temporary occupation in order to survive, but their preference was for urban occupations.<sup>61</sup>

Because of their persistent application to business, along with their thrifty sobriety, some Italians saw profits to be gained from street peddling. Peddling was nothing new to the New Orleans area. At the turn of the century, people of the city were already familiar with men such as Leon Godchaux, and D. H. Holmes who had been peddling manufactured goods since the 1840's. These men had, by 1880, founded small business establishments, but the idea of peddling still had possibilities and was carried on extensively in New Orleans well into the 1900's. Some Italians used their ingenuity and saw the feasibility of supplying the many products which Italians enjoyed eating. They invested their money in carts in which they were able to carry various

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Mrs. Lena V. Latino, White Castle, Louisiana, April 2, 1979.

<sup>59</sup> Foerster, The Italian Emigration, p. 43.

<sup>60</sup> Cronin, The Sting of Change, p. 40.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

goods. Some became vegetable and fruit peddlers, while other carried the coveted cheeses and olive oil so dear to the Italian. Such was the situation of Antonio Bologna and Frank Taromina, who began their respective businesses as independent cart peddlers.<sup>62</sup>

Interviews with Mr. Bologna and Dr. Joseph D. Antonio indicated that peddling was anything but easy. Generally, a peddler had a route of his own, which he felt was necessary in order to succeed.<sup>63</sup> People would get to know him and in turn would welcome his return. The products they carried were often sent to them by relatives still living in Italy, who could purchase the items for far less than the immigrant could obtain them in the United States. Goods came from Italy by steamers and were separated and packaged for sale once they arrived in New Orleans. In some instances dilution of products was necessary before distribution, and many times because of this process the peddler doubled or tripled his money. One worker remarked how in 1936 a new employee of the Crescent Macaroni Factory on Ursuline Street in New Orleans, not knowing about this, poured pure olive oil into containers ready for sale. Within hours after delivery, people were calling to complain about the thick green oil which seemed impossible to use. The owner quickly had the undiluted containers retrieved and replaced with the thinner, more palatable oil.

For Italians, peddling was not new. Most immigrants had become familiar with the "venditori ambulanti" in their native land; never-

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<sup>62</sup>Interview with Salvador Mandella, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 7, 1977.

<sup>63</sup>Interview with Dr. Joseph D'Antoni, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 1, 1977.

theless, there were some significant differences. Peddlers in Italy were more specialized in their salable produce than those who assumed the occupation in Louisiana. Those in Italy bought and sold numerous individual items and services, ranging from water and green vegetables, rags and cat-skins, to pot mending, needles, pins and spoons.<sup>64</sup> However, in the New Orleans area, a peddler's cart might have contained a greater variety of items. Also, regardless of the weather or any other adverse condition, the peddler was daily obliged to sell the greater portion of his stock just to earn the barest living. Even with a defined route, on days when sales were poor, the immigrant peddler often had to lower his already meager prices in order to survive. Sometimes as the day progressed, he was forced to accept whatever the customers offered, rather than to receive nothing, an economic condition not experienced in Italy.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to peddling and working on plantations, the early 1900's found some Italians earning their livelihood in the sale of fruits and vegetables. Actually the Italian immigrant group seemed almost to corner the market in the field of garden produce. The Soard's New Orleans City Directory for 1898 listed twenty-nine persons involved in wholesale fruit, and of these at least twenty were Italians. Furthermore, among the twenty, Salvador Oteri and the Vaccaro Brothers would in time become owners of two of the largest fruit distribution

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<sup>64</sup>Dr. Guisippe Pitre, Biblioteca della Tradizione Popolari Siciliane, 1871-1913, p. 231 in Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 28.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

companies in America.<sup>66</sup> These specific companies branched out into shipping services which marketed fruits and vegetables not only around the New Orleans area but also to many sections of the United States. Their ships plied regular routes to Central and South America where the raw produce could be purchased for little or nothing. The steamers would then return to New Orleans and other ports along the eastern coast of the United States reaping enormous profits wherever sales were made.<sup>67</sup>

The fact that those Italians who turned to agriculture did so in fruits and vegetables was no accident. Between 1870 and 1900 the onerous times in Italy were exacerbated by a slowdown in the production of most foodstuffs except for fresh fruits and vegetables. Therefore, once the opportunity to migrate to the United States became a reality, it was a natural progression for the immigrants to return to working with products which had never failed them in their native Italy.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, success was not easily attained for those who chose peddling products from garden to customer. Dr. Joseph D'Antoni recalled how in the 1880's both his father and uncle rose at two o'clock each morning in order to gather their vegetables and transport them to the French Market in time to serve the first customers. Since

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<sup>66</sup>United Fruit Company and Standard Fruit and Steamship Company respectively.

<sup>67</sup>Records of Standard Fruit indicate that their founders were the first to conceive the idea of boxing bananas in the tropics for sale in the United States.

<sup>68</sup>Luciano Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, Italian-Americans (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971), pp. 40-41.

communication was almost nonexistent, there was no way for the Market's produce dealers to know what other carts and prices might appear; therefore, peddlers who arrived first always sold at top prices.<sup>69</sup> For those who could not sell in the Market, produce was transported in the well-recognized cart throughout the streets of New Orleans. Once the immigrant peddlers saved enough money, they either rented or purchased a stall in the French Market which frequently afforded them homes as well as places of business. Although city directories of the 1880's and the 1890's listed Italians selling produce in almost every geographic area of New Orleans, the heaviest concentration occurred in the French Market.<sup>70</sup> Here Italians congregated in such large numbers that the term "French Market" seemed a misnomer. Nevertheless, it was from this specific area that some of the most successful Italian businessmen would emerge.

Evidence from interviews and city directories indicates that in many instances, an immigrant's initial occupation was only the first step toward the coveted ownership of property.<sup>71</sup> For example, Joseph Bonanno in 1890 listed his occupation as laborer; by 1893 he had become an oyster peddler, and by 1900 he was an oyster seller in the Market; by 1907 the Soards' City Directory listed Mr. Bonnano as a clerk.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Dr. Joseph D'Antoni, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 1, 1977.

<sup>70</sup> Emma C. Richey and Evelina P. Kean, The New Orleans Book (New Orleans: L. Graham Company, 1915), p. 129.

<sup>71</sup> Brandfon, "The End of Immigration," p. 606.

<sup>72</sup> New Orleans City Directory, 1890, 1893, 1900, 1907.

Felix Bertucci in 1890 was listed as a fruit dealer on St. Charles Avenue; by 1892, he was the operator of a saloon, and by 1902 he had converted it -- at least in name -- to a restaurant.<sup>73</sup> Natale Maestri recalls how his father began in the furniture business and eventually expanded into ice making, real estate, selling mules to the city, and even operating two excursion boats on the Mississippi River.<sup>74</sup> Although these examples represent only a fraction of the Italians' occupational moves, they do seem to substantiate the idea of independence and self-reliance, qualities well integrated into the immigrants' characters.

In addition to the occupations already cited, the fine art of making and mending shoes had also been a recognized profession in Italy and throughout Europe. Nonetheless, in America the Italian craftsmen could not compete with the mass production of factory-made shoes. Most Italian shoemakers therefore simply realigned themselves into either retail sales or repairs. A study of the New Orleans City Directory for 1903 revealed that over seventy-five percent of those engaged in shoemaking were Italians. Nevertheless, for the same year there seemed to be an increase in the number of Italians occupied in retailing shoes as compared to previous years.<sup>75</sup> Italians had once again recognized the necessity of adjusting to changing needs. Sometimes,

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 1890, 1892, 1902.

<sup>74</sup>Interview with Natale Maestri, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, October 15, 1977. An interesting note on the excursion boats is that the two boats were necessary in order to have one for the whites of the city and the other for the blacks.

<sup>75</sup>New Orleans City Directory, 1903.

however, an occupation such as shoemaking, merely launched the Italian on his professional career. Such was the case of Sam Scurto, who acquired the talents through the age-old system of apprenticeship.

In respect to his career, Mr. Scurto spoke of how the apprenticeship system worked in the area of Houma, Louisiana around 1910.<sup>76</sup> He had learned the shoe business before he was twelve years old. Since his family lived in the country, a friend of his father allowed Sam to be apprenticed to him while he was attending school. After class young Sam worked in the shop, and at night slept on a mattress in the rear of the store. By the time he was twelve, Sam's parents moved into town, and his father felt he had obtained enough education both at school and in shoe repairs. His father found a shop for him, which he rented for two dollars a month and Sam was in business for himself. His first week of operation netted him \$3.40. He was ecstatic. Although he was only in the fourth grade he was making not only enough money to pay his rent, but actually had money to spare.<sup>77</sup> That Mr. Scurto had to leave school to begin work seemed to be an accepted fact. He had acquired enough knowledge to keep his business going and had also learned a trade -- all in about four years. For the son of a first-generation Italian, he had begun to make his mark in America -- a fact of which his parents were justly proud.

As with Sam Scurto, some Italian immigrants found new pursuits so economically advantageous that they did not return to a trade learned

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<sup>76</sup>Houma is a city located fifty miles south of New Orleans where there is a definite Italian-American population.

<sup>77</sup>Interview with Mr. Sam Scurto, Houma, Louisiana, June 12, 1978.

in the old country. Such was the case of Salvador DiFatta, who came to New Orleans experienced only in mining. He first took a job in a combined grocery and shoe repair shop, but in the early 1900's he acquired a position with General Motors Comapny in New Orleans. Here he began work as a mechanic's helper and eventually became head mechanic.<sup>78</sup>

From many of these early twentieth century ventures such as street peddlers, shoemakers, and repairmen, there emerged in the New Orleans area a most successful group of Italian businessmen. These men immediately perceived the possibilities for a system of trade between the New Orleans area and other Italian-American communities. With this in mind, they formed, with the aid of the Italian Consul in New Orleans, the Itælian Chamber of Commerce.<sup>79</sup> On May 11, 1921, the Italian Chamber of Commerce obtained a charter from the state of Louisiana. The members then set out to revitalize programs of interest to a special group of Italian firms in the New Orleans area, namely importers, wholesalers and professionals.<sup>80</sup> Companies most influential in the development of the Chamber included the Uddo-Taormino Company, Taormina Brothers, Dell Orto, Ltd., International

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Santo DiFatta, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 14, 1977.

<sup>79</sup> Anna P. Lundberg, "The Italian Chamber of Commerce in New Orleans, 1921-1942" (Archives of the University of New Orleans), p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Although this subject falls some ten years beyond the scope of this study, it would be remiss not to mention this concerted effort to foster Italian business.



Products, Inc., Frank D'Antoni and Company, and A. Bologna and Company.<sup>81</sup>

This assemblage made no pretense about being an organization for the small Italian businessman. Instead they assumed a low profile, concerning themselves with the larger project of revitalizing Italy's economy through the port of New Orleans. They attempted no overt campaign toward soliciting members from among the small businessmen, who probably formed about eighty percent of the Italian business community at this time. Although only a few short studies of the Chamber have been made, and surviving records on its New Orleans activities are scarce, evidence seems to indicate that the Chamber's purpose was to downplay the stereotyped portrait of the lowly grocer or peddler. It cannot be denied that the majority of the Chamber's members had started careers in lowly roles, but in less than twenty years they had risen to places equal to the most successful businessmen in the city of New Orleans. Nevertheless, since they recognized themselves as newcomers in the business community, charter members had no interest in upsetting the established economic practices and leaders of the area. Instead, they simply hoped to further enhance their own positions in the business community, thereby overcoming the scorn of the native American business leaders of New Orleans.

The seemingly elitist membership of the Chamber weakened the effectiveness of this group. Later years saw an attempt to open membership to all Italian businessmen, but efforts came too late. The Chamber had neglected the interests of small businessmen in such

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<sup>81</sup>See Appendix C for a copy of the Italian Chamber of Commerce Charter.

matters as improving public markets and promoting fair business practices. Instead, attention remained focused on trade between Italy and New Orleans. This insistence on ignoring the demands of the majority of Italian businesses eventually brought the Chamber to an end. Nevertheless, before its demise the organization succeeded in establishing the Italians as an economically successful group in New Orleans.

Thus it appears that Italians arriving in the New Orleans area engaged in any occupation designed to move them up the economic ladder. In isolated cases some immigrants fell under the influence of the padroni who played a vital role in stimulating and directing Italians to the United States. Sometimes the efforts of padroni were for the best, while in other cases they exploited the immigrants. Whatever their method, the Italian labor bosses were the first group to actively move the Italian immigrants toward the opportunities which the United States, especially the New Orleans area, had to offer. As the years progressed Italians became self sufficient and the influence of the padroni failed, but their efforts formed the vanguard of Italian economic progress.<sup>82</sup>

Italians, by their innate desire to succeed, used every available opportunity to achieve their goal. In many respects they illustrated Jay Gould's claim that anyone who occupied a prominent position had come up from the ranks.<sup>83</sup> In New Orleans, Gould's claim seemed to have great applicability since the Italians there obtained work in areas other than large factories where numbers alone destroyed any

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<sup>82</sup>Iorizzo, "The Padrone and Immigrant Distribution," p. 74.

<sup>83</sup>American financier, 1836-1892.

hope of rising to the top. In Italy, ambition would have been kept dormant by social traditions, and Italians were content to remain at the same level. In Louisiana, the all-pervasive and generally accepted thesis of getting ahead fostered all economic aspirations.<sup>84</sup> Economically, New Orleans offered to Italians fertile ground for advancement, even if it meant abandoning age-old family professions. Life in Italy had afforded a somewhat functionally integrated existence with certain well-defined ends. Migration to America transcended this static existence and thrust immigrants into an urban society merging into the twentieth century. If Italian immigrants were to succeed, and succeed they would, they had one choice: publicly accept changes which New Orleans offered and work in professions which promoted independence and respect. For Italians willing to make these concessions to the New Orleans marketplace, economic ascendancy was inevitable.

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<sup>84</sup>Lilian Brandt, "A Transplanted Birthright," Charities, XII (1904), p. 495.

## CHAPTER IV

### A SMELTING OF OLD AND NEW

Historians generally subscribe to two distinct views concerning the family and Italian immigration. The older view articulated by Oscar Handlin contends that immigrants, on arriving in the United States, followed successive stages of disorientation and isolation in a fruitless attempt to recreate the world from which they departed. Handlin further maintains that because of economic difficulties, unity within the extended family began to disappear.<sup>1</sup> In time parents and offspring became alienated from their past and eventually from themselves.<sup>2</sup>

A later and seemingly contradictory view proposed by Rudolph Vecoli emphasized a unique continuation of Old World customs such as work, strong family ties, religion and patterns of settlement. The family continued as a father-centered unit, and this overflowed to succeeding generations.<sup>3</sup> Present-day historians describe the family as a more flexible organization in which some traditional patterns were adapted to life in America.<sup>4</sup> Since this researcher's conclusions

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<sup>1</sup>Extended family sometimes referred to as the "famiglia" often extended to the third and fourth generations.

<sup>2</sup>Handlin, The Uprooted, pp. 203 ff.

<sup>3</sup>Rudolph Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of the Uprooted," Journal of American History, 51 (December, 1964), p. 417.

<sup>4</sup>An explanation of recent trends will be treated in Chapter VI.

more readily identify with this theme of selective adaptation, it is important to understand the elements comprising the Italian family unit.

As Italians settled, worshipped, and labored in the New Orleans area, one aspect of their lives prevailed -- the family. Sociologists maintain that for first-generation Italians the family was their social structure.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, these same sociologists seemed to agree that as the basic core of social structure the family included the full range of both affinal and consanguineal relatives, and any who might be created by ritual.<sup>6</sup> The family concept also incorporated the location of a human group in a specific physical setting, namely the home, as well as the interpersonal relationships of its members.<sup>7</sup> Because this broad concept of kindred family contained divisions, an explanation of the various relationships within the unit is necessary. Of particular significance is the mother whose gender generally equated her with the lesser place, vis-a-vis the father. Nonetheless, in performance, she emerges as one of the most influential in family matters.

During the later 1880's as Italy's largest numbers emigrated to

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<sup>5</sup>Richard N. Juliani, "Conventional Wisdom and the Ethnography of the Italian American Home," Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association (Washington, D.C.: October, 1976), pp. 198-199.

<sup>6</sup>Francis A. J. Ianni and Elizabeth Reuss Ianni, A Family Business: Kinship and Social Control in Organized Crime (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1972), p. 16. [Hereinafter cited as Ianni and Ianni, A Family Business.]

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

the Louisiana area, Italians represented a folk integrated societal family. Characteristic of Old World Italian peasants, the family seemed inextricably tied to all institutions and practices, thus making isolation of any one part impossible. For example, the family was patriarchal, generally owned both land and home, and usually shared common goals. In New Orleans, however, certain aspects of family life seemed at variance to existence in Italy. Heretofore family<sup>8</sup> and neighbors within the same small village comprised the composite of social and home life; now people from several villages lived within one large geographic area. Within the same few blocks might be immigrants from Partanna, Cefalu, and Entellina. Such combinations of villages frequently forced an intermingling of ideas, customs, foods, and eventually lives. By surviving European wars, depressions, governmental crises, and natural disasters Italian family life strengthened in its cohesiveness. Once Italians emigrated to Louisiana, this unity became an insulation from unaccepting native Americans and for the Italian family circle. Most writers seem to agree that it was within this family circle that Italians in the New Orleans area worked out

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<sup>8</sup>Definitively the mother, father, and children comprised a nuclear family, whereas the extended family included a group of nuclear families and other blood related individuals from several generations all functioning as a single unit. Agricultural or hunting societies generally gave rise to an extended family structure due to the economic need for group functioning. The nuclear family, however, tends to be more common among the urban industrial families where the extended family becomes less economically necessary. Moss, "The Family in Southern Italy," p. 187.

their destiny.<sup>9</sup>

As an ethnic group, Italians continued many of the customs and ideas of their native land, adapting them only when necessary. The family demanded their loyalty and honor and was to be defended at all costs and by any available means. It offered them advice, succor, provisions, and allies. In cases of marriage, family cut across blood lines with little distinction between the rights and privileges of blood relatives and those by marriage.<sup>10</sup> This particular ability to assimilate blood and marital relatives was a characteristic peculiar to the Italian culture.<sup>11</sup> Even if physical proximity between members was not possible there was always the sense of genealogical identification.<sup>12</sup> In New Orleans this kin-centered family emphasis evidenced itself in kinfolk run businesses in which both sons and sons-in-law worked hand in hand.<sup>13</sup> It was also perceptible when sons married, for the new daughter-in-law gained immediate acceptance and was expected to refer to her mother-in-law as "Mama."

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 186; Alberto Pecorin, "The Italian in the United States," The Forum, 45 (January, 1911), 25.

<sup>10</sup> Cronin, The Sting of Change, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ianni and Ianni, A Family Business, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Nicolino Felix Compagno, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 14, 1977, revealed examples of some of these family run businesses: namely Uddo-Taormina Brothers which eventually became Progresso Food Company, the Vaccaro-D'Antoni Fruit Business which became Standard Fruit Company, A. Bologna and Company, a wholesale liquor dealer with a branch in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, run by a son-in-law.

Within the nuclear family existed the primary members -- father, mother, and children. The role of each member was well delineated with the pattern closely resembling the fingers of a hand.<sup>14</sup> It was not uncommon to read of the family described as the dominant father, the submissive mother, and the cherished sons and daughters.<sup>15</sup> The father as head of the household was portrayed as authoritative, stern, patriarchal, and demanding of immediate attention and obedience.<sup>16</sup> No one within the home challenged his authority or decisions which for the most part were final.<sup>17</sup> Children would display an obsequious attitude toward him even after they left home.<sup>18</sup> Within the civic community his occupation generally provided both status and power for his family.<sup>19</sup> Whatever his age, as head of the family he was always respected.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Giovanni Verga, The House By the Medlar Tree (New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 210; Ianni and Ianni, A Family Business, p. 18; Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 180. [Hereinafter cited as Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community.]

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.; Moss, The Family in Southern Italy, p. 188.

<sup>16</sup>This researcher could find little deviation among any writers on describing the father. Also, all persons interviewed spoke of "Papa" in an almost reverential manner.

<sup>17</sup>Cronin, The Sting of Change, p. 71; Lydio Tomasi, The Italian American Family (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1972), p. 15.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>19</sup>Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, "A Flexible Tradition: Immigrant Families Confront New World Experiences," Journal of Social History, VII (Summer, 1974), p. 432.

<sup>20</sup>Francis X. Femminella and Jill S. Quadragno, "The Italian American Family," in Charles H. Mindel and Robert W. Haberstein (eds.), Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variation (New York: Elsevier, 1976), p. 65.



Should infirmity or unemployment curtail his work career, he was still sought out for advice, almost as an elder statesman.

In contrast was the mother who, for all outward appearances, was subservient to the father. Closer to reality was her personification as summarized by the Roman philosopher Cato -- ". . . we Romans rule over all men, and our wives rule over us." Nonetheless, this dominance was subtle and generally interpretive of the father's authoritative wishes.<sup>21</sup> Frequently hers was the inner strength which supported her young immigrant husband during their first difficult years of settlement. Somehow she managed to down-play her own effectiveness, avoided all open confrontations, and frequently succeeded in having the last word in discussions.<sup>22</sup> Through her the children learned love for father, God, and country. Because her role was indispensable, undaunted tenacity became the model for success.<sup>23</sup> From those interviewed who spoke of their mothers, all agreed that success lay in her ability to be mediator and arbitrator between father and children -- a person of great intelligence, always ready to adapt to any situation, and to make any sacrifice to survive.<sup>24</sup>

It is from these two, but more especially from the mother, that

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<sup>21</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 77.

<sup>22</sup>Luigi Barzini, The Italians (London: Hamish Hamilton Press, 1964), p. 20; Carlo Levi, Words are Stone (New York: Ferrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1963), p. 20. [Hereinafter cited as Barzini, The Italians.]

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Cornelisen, Women and Torregreca, pp. 227-229.

the children became socialized.<sup>25</sup> There are conflicting views concerning the degree of authority possessed by the father and mother; however, convention permitted the father to dominate. Because occupations kept him out of the home most of the time, the mother frequently took over. So strong was her influence that two anthropologists studying the Italian family found applicability of the proverb "if the father should die, the family would suffer; if the mother should die, the family would cease to exist."<sup>26</sup> From both parents children learned the values and principles which were important to Italian society.<sup>27</sup> Father and mother each consciously created a sense of necessity of the family in the lives of their children. This need found expression in Constance Cronin's work, The Sting of Change:

[Parents must] inculcate in a child a central value of service to the family . . . [They must] make the home the only safe place in the world; [they must] present family members as the only trustworthy people . . . [Parents should] make [children] subject to the[ir] dictates and commands . . . [placing] all decisions in the hands of adults . . . foster[ing] . . . a dependence on the [family] which makes [children] unable to survive alone.<sup>28</sup>

The heavy emphasis on necessity of the nuclear family was so

<sup>25</sup>United States Department of Labor, The Italian on the Land by Emily Fogg Meade, Bulletin #70 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907). [Hereinafter cited as Meade, The Italian on the Land.]

<sup>26</sup>Leonard W. Moss and Walter H. Thompson, "The South Italian Family: Literature and Observation," Human Organization, 18 (Spring, 1959), 38. [Hereinafter cited as Moss and Thompson, South Italian Family.]

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>28</sup>Cronin, The Sting of Change, p. 102.

effective that political scientist Edward C. Banfield found Italians in urban America unwilling to "act for any end transcending the nuclear family."<sup>29</sup> Although Banfield concluded that his statements merely explained the Italians' reaction to needs created by life in a New World, it should be noted that the Italians' singlemindedness of purpose is at the core of this study. Because Italians desired a better life, they accepted the challenges offered by Louisiana. Since wealth and respect could be attained only through hard work -- and respect was paramount to all Italians -- parents directed every effort and member toward that end. In this way family unity was strengthened, but more importantly, the Italians were moving up the socio-economic ladder.

For children of this family unit, life was demanding and seemingly unbalanced. Although all children worked, it was sons who were both highly regarded and cherished for they carried on the family name.<sup>30</sup> More notable was the first-born son for whom parents would deny themselves anything for his higher education.<sup>31</sup> A poor Italian who worked to send his son to college would no longer be regarded as poor by his "paesani." In addition to being the future family leaders, boys were also given the responsibility of being co-guardian with their father of their sisters. This duty carried the obligation of protection as

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<sup>29</sup>Banfield, The Moral Basis of a Backward Society, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup>Barzini, The Italians, p. 193.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.; I. W. Howerth, "Are the Italians a Dangerous Class?," The Charities Review, 4 (1894), 20-24.

well as assuring the best possible marital match for their sisters.<sup>32</sup>

The adulation given males was in direct contrast to conduct toward females who seemed valued primarily for domestic competence. For girls, education meant acquiring cooking, sewing, and embroidery skills, complemented by knowledge of the social graces. To immigrants, these abilities made young women more attractive and appealing as future wives.<sup>33</sup> Too much formal education for females was feared among the first immigrants. Daughters who knew more than the men they married was something no self-respecting Italian wanted. It was far better to educate them in domestic and cultural arts, both necessary for good wives.

According to interviews and surveys, the first-born girl was as unlikely to complete her formal education as the first-born son was destined to conclude his.<sup>34</sup> Once other children were born, the mother required the assistance of her daughter. Because most Italians had large families and a small income, the eldest girl was expected to truncate her formal education. There seemed to be no definite age at which this might occur. As in their religious and economic history, Italians allowed judiciousness free reign. In this incidence, expediency meant the time at which those at home exceeded the mother's ability to properly care for the residence, help with the family business, and

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<sup>32</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 78.

<sup>33</sup>Sydel Silverman, "Agricultural Organization, Social Structure and Values in Italy: Amoral Familism Reconsidered," American Anthropologist, 70 (February, 1968), pp. 11-15.

<sup>34</sup>Interview with Catherine Noto, New Orleans, Louisiana, June 8, 1977; Interview with Eleanora G. Bologna, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 9, 1976.

continue child-rearing and child-bearing.<sup>35</sup>

This nuclear unit -- father, mother and children -- initially lived in meager surroundings, which usually included one or two rented rooms. Although owning a home was essential, most first-generation Italians lacked the necessary cash for the initial down payment on a purchase. Therefore, they would live under any conditions to save for the future residence.<sup>36</sup> If no relative with an available room could be located, immigrants generally secured a place in one of the large overcrowded tenement complexes near the Mississippi River. New Orleans, much like other port cities in the early 1900's, became a haven for these large, unsightly lodging houses. In commenting on the overcrowded conditions around Kingsley House, Eleanor McMMain wrote how one small lodging house accommodated as many as thirty Italians.<sup>37</sup> So populated with Italians did certain areas become, that periodical literature referred to them as "Little Palermos."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Colleen L. Johnson, "The Maternal Role in the Contemporary Italian-American Family," Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Conference of the Italian American Historical Association (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1978), pp. 237-238.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> Eleanor McMMain, "Behind the Yellow Fever in Little Palermo," Charities and the Commons, 15 (November 4, 1905), p. 158. [Hereinafter cited as McMMain, "Behind the Yellow Fever."] Eleanor McMMain was a native of New Orleans who, after training at Chicago's Hull House, set up the Kingsley House in New Orleans. This particular comment came as she toured the area around Kingsley after the Yellow Fever epidemic.

<sup>38</sup> Paul V. Kellogg, "After General Cleaning-up Day -- What? Housing Conditions in New Orleans," Charities and the Commons, 14 (September 2, 1905), 1043.

One such area in the early 1900's was the French Market.<sup>39</sup> A 1905 study of one housing district in that section reported that in a square block there existed seventy-one houses containing 493 rooms, 144 families with 517 people.<sup>40</sup> A further explanation cited the presence of at least three different styles of architecture: two-story brick; three-story (usually the corner) brick; and the old French style building of two to three stories. Whatever the pattern, these basic features emerged:

1. Houses closely built and jammed together with no side openings;
2. An entrance to the second story accessible only by vaulted passages or through back alleys;
3. Houses of three or more rooms in depth, the middle room being dark and without any outside ventilation;
4. Toilet accommodations being the worst features with instances of seven families sharing the facilities;
5. Floors in many of the street-level tenements wet and rotten;
6. Reliance for water supply coming from inadequate running cisterns.<sup>41</sup>

For these accommodations rent averaged \$6.30 per week, with over

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<sup>39</sup>French Market is defined as the area along Decatur and North Peters Streets from Barracks to St. Ann Street. It consisted of five separate buildings, in close proximity and divided into stalls, where fruits, meats, fish, and vegetables were sold. The Federal Writers' Project, Guide to 1930's New Orleans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935), p. 255.

<sup>40</sup>John Ker Towles, "Housing Conditions in the Vicinity of St. Mary's Market in New Orleans" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1904), p. 27. Mr. Knowles' work was used as a report by Eleanor McMain. The description of housing appeared in retyped form in Kingsley House papers, pp. 1-3, located in Tulane University Archives, New Orleans, Louisiana.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-27.

54.4 percent of the inhabitants paying over fifteen percent of their income toward it. An interesting comparison done by a Tulane University student of the period revealed that the United States Department of Labor considered 14-2/3 percent as a fair share for housing. Although the rates seemed equitable, a further analogy revealed that over 17.7 percent in this tenement were receiving less than \$5 per week, while 76.6 percent were receiving less than \$10.<sup>42</sup> Considering these less than desirable accommodations along with the generally low level of wages, it was not surprising to read of the adversities of Italians in the progressive periodical Charities and the Commons. Charities, always sympathetic with the plight of this group, recorded that some Italians went without food, clothing, and other necessities in an effort to remain in the United States.<sup>43</sup>

Whether home was the tenement or with a relative, it seems that inconveniences of space had little negative effect on the group. Most Italians had experienced a confined living situation in their native land; therefore, one room in New Orleans posed no dramatic change.

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<sup>42</sup> Although these figures bespeak hardship, the portion giving national data generally favored the industrial Northeast. State and local differences like cost of living, length of workday, and unemployment caused variations. Since the period in question lacked the sophisticated twentieth century means of acquiring figures, we can only assume that Italians were contributing a large share of their low wages to poor housing. Edith Abbott, "The Wages of Unskilled Laborers," pp. 363-365. Carroll Wright, The Italians in Chicago: A Social and Economic Study (reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1970), pp. 58-64.

<sup>43</sup> Salvatore Mondello, "The Magazine Charities and the Italian Immigrants, 1903-1914," Journalism Quarterly, 44 (Spring, 1967), p. 91. [Hereinafter cited as Mondello, "The Magazine Charities."] ]

Literature indicates that when an extra room was available, it was utilized for a boarder. An additional income would hasten the day of home ownership.<sup>44</sup> Bearing any unforeseen illness, immigrants who labored assiduously for eight to ten years might save the \$500 to \$1,000 needed for the purchase of their own home. So important was home ownership that immigrants often risked two or three mortgages for its attainment.<sup>45</sup>

It should be noted that in some circumstances immigrants faced no economic crisis in the purchase of a dwelling. Some were fortunate enough to rent a small shot-gun house from the outset. However, among first-generation Italians, ownership of the initial residence was the exception rather than the rule. Normally, change of residence often accompanied economic success.<sup>46</sup> One such example was Eleanora Guzzo Bologna who told how her husband originally worked in a saw mill for forty cents a day. With the money saved he purchased a horse and wagon from which he sold household articles. Once he acquired enough money, they married and moved to the East Bank around St. Mary and St. Thomas Streets. Here they had a fruit stand which was her job, while her husband used the wagon for selling coal in the mornings, and oil, macaroni, and other foods in the evening. As the business grew her husband sold the horse and wagon and purchased a home in the French

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<sup>44</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 46.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>46</sup>Churchill, The Italians of Newark, p. 140; Barnes, The New America, p. 89.



Market where he was able to have his own stall. At this point her fruit-selling days ceased, but her family grew. With prosperity her husband considered bigger and better housing, moving the family to the Broad Street and Esplanade Avenue area where he purchased a two-story dwelling with over fifteen rooms.<sup>47</sup>

Although home ownership in itself was an objective, Italians also enjoyed having the space to welcome friends. For them hospitality was a natural instinct, and the proverbial expressions, "the door is always open" and "there is always enough for one more," were household words.<sup>48</sup> Everywhere there existed a strong sense of propriety and visitors were always welcome to food and drink. Furthermore, should a visitor be invited to remain for a meal and refuse without suitable excuse, the host considered it a personal affront.

With the preoccupation of family interests, there seemed to exist a lack of community and social commitments among this ethnic group. Once again past experiences discouraged any positive progress. Distance, lack of a strong central government, and general land abuses in Italy had provided poor training and experience for those who might

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Eleanora Guzzo Bologna, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 9, 1976; see also Maestri and Cangelosi interviews that indicated similar experiences; see also survey results which indicate two to four home moves for over 69 percent of those polled. Thomas Kessner, in writing of this movement across social and economic lines claims that New York's immigrant population outpaced all other groups. Thomas Kessner, The Golden Door: Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880-1905 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 148-152.

<sup>48</sup> Churchill, The Italians of Newark, p. 140.

one day improve their situation in life.<sup>49</sup> This was compounded in Louisiana by established Americans who stopped at nothing to prevent Italians from participating in any form of social or political activities.<sup>50</sup> Because of these two factors, most Italians turned to their families in all matters. During the early years, the inward turn toward the family satisfied most Italians' needs for social contacts. However, as Italian Societies expanded and the need for education became obvious, New Orleans Italians moved more and more into the mainstream of twentieth-century American life.

One avenue which guided them toward a greater understanding of America was education. Nonetheless, Italian families held an ambivalent attitude toward formal learning. In Italy there existed no compulsory school attendance until the late 1870's. Statistics indicate that the law did produce better results in literacy by the 1920's, but this improvement was not without adversities.<sup>51</sup> Part of the reason for the ineffectiveness of compulsory education throughout Italy lay primarily in the schools themselves, and in the Southern Italian's attitudes toward learning. Regarding the state of the schools there appeared

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<sup>49</sup>Edward C. Banfield, The Moral Basis of a Backward Society, p. 16; Frank Cancian, "The Southern Italian Peasant: World View and Public Behavior," Anthropological Quarterly, 34 (January, 1961), 7-8.

<sup>50</sup>A mere perusal of newspapers of the period indicates some anti-Italian fever in the New Orleans area; nevertheless, none of the persons interviewed considered it worthy of discussion. Daily Advocate, December 8, 1892, March 5, April 28, December 23, 1893; Daily Picayune, November 15, 1902, December 30, 1903, January 20, 1904. See Chapter V for an explanation of the political climate of the period.

<sup>51</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 124.

the following description by Signor Allesandra Lustig in the Rome newspaper, Nouva Antologia:

Very few of the school buildings [are] constructed for the purpose [of education], and only 50 per cent of the majority have been adapted in the slightest to their present use. The few buildings constructed expressly for the school purposes are often not well adapted for they are generally indecent, crowded, airless, and located in positions unfavorable to the health and morals of their inmates. In one province, out of 217 buildings, 84 (35%) are excessively damp. In some provinces there are many schools where there is no water in the school buildings nor any forms of water closets. In one province 70 per cent of the buildings have none. Almost without exception the school rooms in the elementary schools have insufficient cubic air-space, are badly lighted, and filled with germ-laden dust. In one province 70% of the school rooms have no means of warming them, are without light, damp and dirty, and 81% have no water . . . .<sup>52</sup>

With this description in mind, there can be little uncertainty about why incoming Italian immigrants had such negative reactions toward schools and educational facilities. Nevertheless, Italians' opinions regarding the actual structure paled in light of their attitude concerning the necessity and length of education.

For many Italians, education was useful only for obtaining a position and for behavior training. Any subject matter which did not contribute directly to employment seemed a conspicuous waste of time and talent.<sup>53</sup> Academic skills, particularly advanced training,

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<sup>52</sup>"America's Interest in the Education of Italian Children," The American Review of Reviews 36 (July-December, 1907), 375.

<sup>53</sup>Herbert J. Gans, The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans (New York: Glencoe Free Press, 1962), p. 130. [Hereinafter cited as Gans, The Urban Villagers.]

portrayed a "kind and virtuosity" much like musical ability -- desirable and attainable only for the intellectually gifted.<sup>54</sup> To immigrants, practical skills and arts could be acquired either through working at home or through apprenticeship. In Italy, knowledge, skills, and work techniques required no elaborate process of transmission from generation to generation.<sup>55</sup> Instead, a relatively static body of knowledge came from parents, relatives, and friends. Even moral customs passed to each generation without stimulation from a formalized school situation.

Entering any school meant the harvest must wait too long for the reaping. An added problem was the widening gap between the interest of the child and that of his parents. Adults undoubtedly prided themselves on offsprings' intellectual prowess, but not so much that they wanted a widening span between their children's ability and their own.<sup>56</sup> Studies indicate that Italian parents may have complied with compulsory educational requirements for younger children, but as soon as they reached the legal age of withdrawal, parents removed them from school. Frequently they secured positions for children while they attended classes in order to supplement the family income.<sup>57</sup> Mr. Sam

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Francis Cordasco and Eugene Bucchioni, The Italians: Social Backgrounds of an American Group (Clifton: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1974), p. 523.

<sup>56</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 139.

<sup>57</sup>United States Bureau of Education, Education of the Immigrant, Bulletin No. 51 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), p. 10. [Hereinafter cited as Education of the Immigrant.]

Scurto attested to this fact in an interview with this researcher. Mr. Scurto's parents apprenticed him to a shoemaker while he attended elementary classes. His father was anxious for Sam to have a useful occupation, and, given the senior Scurto's Italian concept of formal education, mending shoes seemed more dependable.<sup>58</sup>

With this perspective, most Italian immigrants initially exhibited hostility toward schools. The classroom removed children from the job market and prevented them from making an economic contribution to the family. New ideas which filled children's minds appeared contradictory to the preservation of family traditions. Consequently, opposition to compulsory education on economic grounds, at least beyond a reasonable number of years, seemed inevitable. In truth, parental resistance was a manifestation of cultural conflict between the mores of the American system which controlled education and those of the Italian peasant who saw little need for it.<sup>59</sup>

Another factor which produced negative ideas on education was the Italians' policy of using the United States merely as a place for gaining financial status before returning home. It is obvious that for those who cherished hopes of returning to Italy, there was no conscientious effort to conform to the American pattern of education. In Italy, the majority had experienced few opportunities for schooling beyond the elementary grades.<sup>60</sup> In American, however, changes in the compulsory age of attendance between the years 1896 and 1903 saw the

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Sam Scurto, Houma, Louisiana, June 2, 1978.

<sup>59</sup> Cordasco and Bucchioni, The Italian, p. 531.

<sup>60</sup> Education of the Immigrant, p. 10.

age rise from twelve to sixteen respectively. This seemed to heighten the antagonism between immigrants and the American educational system. In 1896, a child could obtain working papers at the age of twelve. If children now had to attend school, immigrants expected a loss of potential wage earners.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, with the law of 1903 extending the compulsory school age to sixteen, some Italian immigrants began to bemoan the American school system as a force ruinous to all decent living Italians and destructive to the sanctity of their homes.<sup>62</sup>

In all matters, it appears that economic needs and immediate compensations weighed heavily on the minds of first-generation parents.<sup>63</sup> In Italy education offered few advantages because of the priority of agricultural pursuits.<sup>64</sup> However, life in Louisiana presented a different circumstance to the immigrants. Economic ascendancy now seemed contingent on exposure and acceptance of the American educational system. Since prosperity remained their goal, the Italians, much like the chameleon, adapted their educational outlook to those of the people of the United States.

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<sup>61</sup>Cordasco and Bucchioni, The Italians, pp. 531-533. In the survey done by this researcher the idea of working at a young age seems to have been accepted by those over sixty. See questions 1 and 33, Appendix B.

<sup>62</sup>Survey results indicate that of the 117 people who answered, over 60 percent worked by age 14; nevertheless, this death knell idea on education seems to have been short lived among first-generation Italians.

<sup>63</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 134.

<sup>64</sup>Mangano, Sons of Italy, p. 100.

In the New Orleans area there existed not only the free public schools, but also a parochial school system.<sup>65</sup> Nationwide, the parochial school system began as early as 1810.<sup>66</sup> During the first years many of the best parish schools were in church basements. With the rapid influx of immigrants after 1880, and the growth of the Catholic population, separate school buildings began to multiply.<sup>67</sup> Initially these schools cared for only a few students; however, the immigrant surge of the 1880's necessitated changes. The Catholic Church, much like the Federal government, recognized that the United States had become an industrial and mechanical society, teeming with immigrants who in some way had to be educated to meet demands of the country. For the church, Catholics numbered over 4,500,000 in a nation of 40,000,000.<sup>68</sup> Faced with such growth, it became incumbent on Church leaders to assist millions of Italians, Poles, Czechs, Germans, and

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<sup>65</sup> James J. Hughes, Education in America (Illinois: Row, Peterson and Co., 1960), p. 330. Parochial schools are non-public schools which operated on the elementary and secondary levels under the control and with support of an ecclesiastical organization. Because public schools did not offer specific programs to aid a particular ethnic group, they will not be examined in this section.

<sup>66</sup> Annabelle M. Melville, John Carroll, Bishop of Baltimore, Founder of the American Hierarchy (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1955), p. 155.

<sup>67</sup> James A. Burns, "School Life and Work in the Immigration Period," Catholic Educational Review, 3 (January, 1912), 22.

<sup>68</sup> Frances P. Cassidy, "Catholic Education in the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore," Catholic Historical Review, 34 (October, 1948), pp. 260-261. [Hereinafter cited as Cassidy, "Catholic Education."]

other minorities adjust to the American system.<sup>69</sup>

On their part, immigrants faced the dilemma of where to send their children for an education. Parochial schools were few in number and the free public institutions were Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. Also, the prescribed reading of the King James version of the Bible in schools was far from satisfactory to most Italians. So important did the question of education become that in 1884 the Catholic Church convened the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore.<sup>70</sup> Although the Council's results concerned all areas of education within the Church, this researcher will concentrate on the decrees affecting parochial schools.

The most significant mandate from the Council received by Catholic parents was that all children must attend parochial schools unless dispensed for sufficient cause by a bishop.<sup>71</sup> This decree placed burdens on pastors and immigrants. Many immigrants frequently lacked the financial means to pay tuition while parish priests were unable to afford the necessary structures. Most parishes had far exceeded their budgets as they grappled with the immigrant surge after 1820.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>As mentioned in the section on the Church, the Catholic hierarchy disagreed on the immigrant question, and some refused to make any concessions to immigrants. Cardinal Gibbons, one of the highest ranking prelates, felt that for the good of all, the Church in the United States should remain homogenous with the country. Vincent P. DeSantis, "The American Historian Looks at the Catholic Immigrants," in Thomas McAvoy, Roman Catholicism and the American Way of Life (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1960), pp. 225-234.

<sup>70</sup>Cassidy, "Catholic Education," p. 257.

<sup>71</sup>Thomas T. McAvoy, The Great Crisis in American Catholic History, 1895-1900 (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., Publishers, 1957), p. 32.

<sup>72</sup>John Tracy Ellis, The American Catholic and the Intelleactual Life (Chicago: Heritage Foundation Inc., 1956), second edition, pp. 25-28.



The decree from the Baltimore Council did not rest as heavily on the New Orleans clergy. As early as 1820 Bishop Dubourg of New Orleans brought six Italian priests to his diocese.<sup>73</sup> Other actions were also cited in the section on the Church, but none dealt specifically with the education of Italian children until 1890. In that year the bishop of New Orleans persuaded Francesco Saverio Cabrini, foundress of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, to assist in this project. By 1892, the Cabrini Sisters opened both a school and an orphanage for the Italians of New Orleans.<sup>74</sup>

Under the direction of Mother Cabrini's sisters and with the financial assistance of wealthy Italians, St. Mary's Italian School opened on Chartres Street. Not unlike most ethnic schools of the period it remained small in enrollment. Nonetheless, the school provided the children with an educational environment sensitive to family ways and traditions.<sup>75</sup> Since the religious women were Italian, instruction took place in both English and Italian. Teachers spent time in the rudiments of religion, reading, writing, and arithmetic, along with sewing and needlework.<sup>76</sup> An excerpt from a teacher's manual of the early 1900's reveals the determination to train the heart, head,

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<sup>73</sup>Baudier, The Catholic Church, p. 290.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>"Italians in America," Manufacturer's Record, 46 (July 28, 1904), 24.

<sup>76</sup>Interview with Sister Claire Sullivan, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 11, 1977.

and hand as part of the scheme of the educational system.<sup>77</sup>

If there was a defect in this early educational system it came in both the parochial and public schools' failure to include the parents in the educational process.<sup>78</sup> In reality schools provided little opportunity for the parents to obtain information about their aims and objectives -- thus leading to constant conflict between parents and children.<sup>79</sup> Regardless of what students learned during the school day, once they returned home there was a natural reversion to old familial ways. Because of this lack of communication, educational institutions made slow progress in promoting Americanization of both parents and children.

This acceptance of ethnic identities and ability to merge into American society attained fulfillment in agencies such as Italian benevolent societies, evening schools, community centers and continuing educational classes.<sup>80</sup> Prior to the formation of these groups, there seemed to be no organized effort to raise the educational standards of

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<sup>77</sup>James A. Burns, "School Life and Work in the Immigration Period," Catholic Educational Review, 3 (January, 1912), 24.

<sup>78</sup>Sister Mary Fabian Matthews, C.S., "The Role of the Public School in the Assimilation of the Italian Immigrant Child in New York City, 1900-1914," in Silvano M. Tomasi and Madeline H. Engel (eds.), The Italian Experience in the United States (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1970), p. 144; Daisy H. Mosely, "The Catholic Social Worker in an Italian District," Catholic World, 114 (February, 1922), 618-619.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Florence Wilson, "The Work of the Schools for the Foreign Element in New Orleans" (M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1925), p. 102.

the parents. Local citizens frequently blamed Italians for their failure to learn language and customs, but this seemed to come more from a lack of opportunity than a lack of desire.<sup>81</sup>

In the early 1900's leading citizens of New Orleans banded together in a program designed to foster education among immigrant adults. Although the first formal program did not take place until April 7, 1918, the prior years were significant in the Association's history.<sup>82</sup> Initially, the Association set up the Italian Political Society for those who could not attend public schools. The Society then hired teachers to educate their members on the Constitutions of both Louisiana and the United States and to indoctrinate them in American ideals.<sup>83</sup>

Historically the idea of benefit societies was not new. Organized in England, they provided the working class with instruction about self government, sickness, and old age benefits. In the New Orleans area benevolent societies for Italians began in coffee houses, grocery stores, and barbershops.<sup>84</sup> Here Italians organized according to the province, town, or village from which they had come. Initiated as purely social groups, the societies generally shunned politics.

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 52. It is interesting to note that of all nationalities in New Orleans, the Italians were among the first to hold a formal program aimed at Americanization and education among adults.

<sup>83</sup>Wilson, "The Work of Schools," p. 54. The work of this Association will be discussed in Chapter V.

<sup>84</sup>Michael John Parenti, "Ethnic and Political Attitudes: A Depth Study of Italian Americans" (New Haven: Yale University, 1962), p. 31.

However, there are some who support the thesis that they became centers of political debate.<sup>85</sup>

During the early years of migration Italians had few assets and could ill afford the extra expense associated with sickness or death.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, they eagerly joined a group wherein they received sickness and disability benefits, a place to bury their dead, and the comfort of being around fellow Italians.<sup>87</sup> The sick benefit included a physician's care, nursing services from fellow members, and a weekly disability payment from five to seven dollars.<sup>88</sup> If the member's illness was terminal, he could return, at the Society's expense, to his native land.<sup>89</sup> If death occurred in New Orleans or any other city, the Society guaranteed a funeral comprised of a brass band, flowers, a money donation, the Society's members' presence, and a burial place in the Society's tomb.<sup>90</sup> Henri A. Gandolfo, custodian of Metairie Cemetery<sup>91</sup> for over sixty-five years, maintains that the Societies' tombs

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid. This seemed more applicable to areas in the northeastern United States than in New Orleans. See also Maselli interview.

<sup>86</sup>Virginia Amato, "Metairie Cemetery's Avenue B," Italian American Digest, 5 (Autumn, 1978), 7.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Gino Carlo Speranza, New York Times, March 8, 1903.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Interview with Peter Compagno, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 14, 1977. He spoke with fondness of the comfort derived from the societies. In particular, Mr. Compagno mentioned the loss he felt as members began to die and the younger generation saw no need for such a group.

<sup>91</sup>Location of many Italian Societies' tombs.

were never intended to be permanent burial places for all who were put into them. Once the deceased's family was financially able, they would relocate the member's body into the family's plot. If this was not possible, the remains were lowered into the bottom.<sup>92</sup>

Although some regarded the mutual aid societies as a perpetuation of the disunity of Italy, the majority realized that family and individuals remained powerless in a society which emphasized collective strength.<sup>93</sup> Earliest efforts at mutual service and protection simply served the group's needs until more stable positions could be attained. Through the social interaction of members, these societies became sources of recreation, charity, and, more importantly, social and educational regeneration.<sup>94</sup>

Thus it seems that because Italians lacked inherited wealth they generally occupied positions requiring long hours, low wages, and little social contact. Since employment absorbed the greater portion of their waking hours, family gatherings such as meals (especially

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<sup>92</sup>Because of the practice of transferring people once a family could afford it, many of the existing societies' tombs have no names inscribed on them. Amato, "Metairie Cemetery."

<sup>93</sup>Leonard Moss, "Family and Community: Voluntary Association in South Italy and Detroit," Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Italian American Historical Association (The Italian American Historical Association, 1983), p. 18.

<sup>94</sup>New York Times, March 8, 1903.

Sunday's),<sup>95</sup> church services, weddings,<sup>96</sup> and funerals<sup>97</sup> provided defined opportunities for camaraderie with others. This restrained social interaction was further limited by instinctive distrust for anyone outside the family.<sup>98</sup>

Notwithstanding these difficulties, many among the first generation realized that advancement in New Orleans society required solidarity, not individualism. Drawing from their experiences in Italian villages, families united into societies based on professions or provincial consanguinity. Through efforts of these groups, Italians

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<sup>95</sup> Almost all persons interviewed spoke of the importance of family meals, especially on Sunday. Mrs. Conchetta Fesi related how her parents, although living in Houma, Louisiana, were expected and willingly traveled, to be in New Orleans at her grandparents' home every Sunday. This involved crossing the Mississippi River without the Huey P. Long Bridge, a fifty mile trip taking over three hours. Once they assembled for the meal, her grandfather sat at the position of honor with her grandmother at his side. Each family then sat as a group with no one daring to eat or leave the table until her grandfather did so. Interview with Conchetta Cangelosi Fesi, Houma, Louisiana, February 21, 1978; Meade, "The Italian On the Land," p. 516.

<sup>96</sup> Weddings were always times of great celebration. Even if an Italian was in financial straits, he went to great lengths to hire a hall, have music, food, wine and people present. This represented an Italian custom known as far figure, meaning making a good impression. Sydel Silverman, Three Bells of Civilization: The Life of an Italian Hill Town (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 40.

<sup>97</sup> During this period, funerals generally took place in the home wherein nothing was considered too expensive. Candles, crosses, holy pictures of the saints, flowers, and expensive caskets all had their place. Arrangements also included a church service, a procession to the cemetery, and provisions for someone remaining with the body until burial. Underlying this preparation and expense was the custom that all must measure up to the memory of the dead.

<sup>98</sup> Cronin, The Sting of Change, p. 59.

slowly resolved their internal conflicts with the dual societies.<sup>99</sup> Night classes, community centers, and formal education all influenced the children. Throughout the process, however, the strong father-centered unit, along with family customs, remained intact. These first immigrants realized the necessity of learning the principles, practices, and fundamentals of their adopted New Orleans; but they would never abandon their past. They looked outward for economic mobility, but they never lost their inward gaze.

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<sup>99</sup>The theme of first-generation Italians caught between the two ends of a dual society is a common one in Italian-American authors such as Pietro DiDonato, Christ in Concrete (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939) and Three Circles of Light (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1966); Gambino, Blood of My Blood; Guido D'Agostino, Olives on the Apple Tree (New York: Arno Press, 1940).

## CHAPTER V

### PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

In the early 1900's two prominent authors wrote the following concerning Italian immigrants and civic responsibilities:

The Italian[s] [are] keen . . . in the study of [their] advantage[s] in political affiliation . . . [and] they are already a force which no party can afford to neglect in any closely divided district, city or state.

As to their alleged proneness to crimes of violence, there has been much exaggeration.<sup>1</sup>

Such phrases aptly describe the Italians in New Orleans, who emerged as one of the most controversial ethnic groups of the time. Newspapers between 1880-1905 made constant references to Italians as the less respectable elements in New Orleans, and present day writers echo this theme in noting the possible usefulness of Italians to the political machine.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, evidence demonstrates that most first-generation Italian settlers in New Orleans had little direct

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<sup>1</sup>Lord, The Italian in America, p. 224; Herbert Casson, "The Italian in America," Munsey's Magazine, 36 (October, 1906), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>Daily Picayune, April 26, 1882; July 12, 1883; March 14, 1891; New Orleans Mascot, June 11, 1892; Daily Picayune, June 13, 1902; Joy Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Political and Urban Prograess, 1880-1896 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 232; George Reynolds, Machine Politics in New Orleans, 1897-1926 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 226; Raymond O. Nussbaum, "The Ring Is Smashed: The New Orleans Municipal Election of 1896," Louisiana History, 17, No. 3 (Summer, 1976), 295-296.



connection with either politics or criminal activities.<sup>3</sup> As members of New Orleans' newest and fastest growing ethnic group, Italians became the natural target of ills which occurred primarily because of the city's inability to cope with the problems of municipalization. Furthermore, as the nationality blamed not only for the killing of Police Chief David Hennessy in 1890, but also for the frequent Sicilian street battles, Italians aroused a xenophobia among the general public which held them responsible for all misfortunes.

Politically, as city leadership divided between old line regulars and reformers, new immigrant voters became the ingredients for success. For the most part, New Orleans Italians remained unaware of their possible political impact. As new immigrants they moved quietly and slowly toward achieving economic security. Fearful of outsiders who frequently ridiculed their speech, dress, and other habits, Italians kept their communities closed. Although Louisiana delegations had sought them as workers, the general public regarded Italians with disdain. In 1907, however, this attitude changed. With the kidnapping and murder of the son of a prominent Italian, both natives and immigrants realized the possibility of cooperation.

Nationwide the 1880's and the 1890's marked a burgeoning of population in many cities of the United States. In 1860 not one city

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<sup>3</sup>New Orleans seems to have been in direct contrast to Chicago where criminal activities, both within the Italian community and outside, was much more obvious and successful during this period. According to Nelli, crime "facilitated immigrant adjustment" and occupied a place "in the acculturation of Italians . . . along with immigrant-community institutions, education, the padrone system, and politics." Humbert S. Nelli, The Italians in Chicago, 1880-1940: A Study in Ethnic Mobility (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 154-55 (Hereinafter cited as Nelli, Italians in Chicago).

in the United States had a population of more than one million; however, by 1890 New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago had expanded beyond that number.<sup>4</sup>

Coupled with population growth were both business and technological developments aimed at creating a more comfortable existence. As in any rapid transformation, confusion sometimes resulted, and New Orleans, much like other major cities, was no exception. As cities absorbed thousands of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, a need for more professionalization among municipal services became apparent. Demand for accommodations doubled, and municipalities found themselves unprepared to handle increased requests for such services as crime control, sewage disposal and care of the poor.<sup>5</sup>

For New Orleans in the 1880's crime was an ever present problem.

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<sup>4</sup>Joseph C. G. Kennedy (comp.), Superintendent of Census, Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Return of the Eighth Census Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior (Washington, D.C., 1864), pp. xxxi-xxxii; Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900 (Washington, D.C., 1901), I, Pt. 1, p. lxix.

<sup>5</sup>Although New Orleans experienced difficulties in every area, this study centers on the relationship between crime control and population. For those interested in other areas of municipal improvements see John Tylden Magill, "Municipal Improvements in New Orleans in the 1880's" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of New Orleans, 1972); William G. Clement, "Over a Half-Century of Electricity and Gas Industry Development in New Orleans" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of New Orleans, 1947); Dennis East II, "Health and Wealth: Goals of the New Orleans Public Health Movement, 1874-1884," Louisiana History, IX (Summer, 1968), 254-75; Russell D. Shannon, "The Growth of New Orleans and Her Labor Force: An Examination of the Urban Thesis of Economic Development" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Tulane University, 1962); Stanford E. Chaille, "The Vital Statistics of New Orleans," New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal, XIV (May, 1881), 1036.

The city measured nearly 200 square miles with most of its 216,000 settlers occupying an area approximately twelve miles long.<sup>6</sup> Politically, the city was divided into seven districts with the largest portion of settlement being in the First, Second and Third Districts.<sup>7</sup> To police this dispersed geographical crescent, New Orleans set up a budget of \$250,000 in 1879, which by 1888 had fallen to \$171,000.<sup>8</sup> Since this equaled about one-fourth of the allocated amounts during Reconstruction, it was not surprising that there were problems.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>William Coleman (comp.), Historical Sketchbook and Guide to New Orleans and Environs with Map. Illustrated with Many Original Engravings and Containing Exhaustive Accounts of the Traditions, Historical Legends, and Remarkable Localities of the Creole City (William Coleman, New York, 1885), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Most of the immigrant population was initially located in the Second District which included the French Quarter, the Riverfront and Canal Street. In 1880 the Second District population was 44,542 with Italians numbering only 1,995 in the entire city. By 1900 their number had climbed to 5,398, but their location seemed to have expanded into the Third and Sixth Districts. The Third District was bounded by Esplanade Avenue, the river and Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne. The Sixth District was located between the river, the lake, Lowerline and Toledano Streets. Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, pp. 6-9; L. Soards, New Orleans City Directory, 1881 (New Orleans: Soards Publication, 1885), pp. 5, 41; Coleman, Historical Sketchbook, pp. 3-6; Twelfth Census of the United States in the Year 1900, pp. lxxix, cix.

<sup>8</sup>New Orleans Times, August 15, 1879; Daily Picayune, January 5, 1883, January 1, 1885, December 28, 1887; Annual Report of the New Orleans Metropolitan Police (1869-1870), pp. 8-11 and (1873-74), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup>New Orleans' lack of money for the police department stemmed from Reconstruction. With less than dedicated politicians, overextended bonds, a poor tax base and an increased black population of 32,000, by 1880 New Orleans owed over \$21,000,000. Daily Picayune, February 15, 1880.

However, the bargain basement approach to funding municipal services led to frequent outcries for reform from the media. In 1880 the New Orleans Times observed that the police department secured good personnel only if citizens were out of work.<sup>10</sup> Like other Gilded Age cities, the problems facing the New Orleans police department seemed to be rooted in money, increasing populations and entangling politics.<sup>11</sup> Low budgets kept the department constantly undermanned, leaving little continuity among those who remained. Also, partisan politics frequently led to the appointment of special officers who seemed to possess little police ability. So notorious did the special forces become that by 1888, the New Orleans City Council reported their numbers to comprise about one-fourth of the regular department.<sup>12</sup> Since earlier reports indicated a lack of expertise within the department, one can only surmise the debilitating effect patronage had on the force.<sup>13</sup>

As to the Italian link to the criminal elements in New Orleans,

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<sup>10</sup>New Orleans Times, April 27, 1880.

<sup>11</sup>"Recent historians have begun to down-play some of the criticisms heaped on Gilded Age governments, calling them 'marriage[s] of convenience' in which all parties -- businessmen, upper elite, ward politicians and any others involved -- tolerated one another because there existed no other choice." Jon C. Teaford, The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>12</sup>Daily Picayune, January 2, September 11, November 7, 1888.

<sup>13</sup>New Orleans Times, January 4, 1879. One newspaper writer commenting on the poor police protection noted his amazement that "the thieves [don't] pick up the town and carry it off." New Orleans Times, April 27, 1880.

there appears no direct evidence.<sup>14</sup> Daily newspapers carried accounts of crime of every disposition along with inferences about the presence of the Black Hand and the Mafia, but generally the press provided no direct correlation between the last mentioned group and the local Italian settlers.<sup>15</sup> In 1882 the Daily Picayune reported the presence of opium dens in the French Quarter area.<sup>16</sup> Although the city made attempts to close some of these facilities, most continued to operate into the last 1890's. Additionally, there could be found accounts of gambling sharks and petty thieves who seemed to roam at will throughout the French Quarter.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, many Americans of this period, including the United States Immigration Commission, believed Italians to be inherently criminal. Although others worked to emphasize the Italians' better qualities, they never seemed to gain the notoriety of the sensational "Black Hand" crimes.

<sup>15</sup> Daily Picayune, May 6, 1891; Times Democrat, June 13, 1902; August 11, 1903. It should be noted that the terms Black Hand and Mafia appeared simultaneously in the New Orleans papers, whereas in other United States cities such was not the case prior to 1890. Before the Hennessy affair of 1890, the term Black Hand generally referred to crimes within the Italian colony. After 1890, all Italian activities became Mafia related. In order to gain some clarification, in the early 1900's Italian language newspapers began using the term "Black Hand" to identify crimes within the Italian community. This idea continued until the 1920's. Nelli, The Italians in Chicago, pp. 125-33.

<sup>16</sup> Daily Picayune, May 2, 3, 1882; New Orleans Mascot, August 3, 1889.

<sup>17</sup> Daily Picayune, January 13, 18, 19, 1881. Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, notes that almost every issue of the local newspapers during the 1880's related tales of juveniles involved in some form of crime. P. 24.

Undoubtedly the most significant activities reported concerned labor unrest and politicians. On the issue of labor, disturbances frequently focused on control of the docks, which by the late 1880's centered on the Provenzano and Matranga families. Until 1890, when they were replaced by the Matrangas, the Provenzanos had been the head stevedores on the fruit wharves of New Orleans.<sup>18</sup> The Provenzanos never accepted the Matranga overthrow, and resolved to win back leadership. An altercation ensued on May 6, 1890, on the corner of Claiborne and Esplanade Avenues, resulting in the wounding of Charles Matranga and Rocco Gerraci.<sup>19</sup>

Although the Provenzanos temporarily made good their escape, they were soon captured and brought to trial. Through the testimony of many policemen the Provenzanos won acquittal, much to the anger of the Matrangas. A new trial was set for October 22, 1890. Most significant about this event was the presence of New Orleans Police Chief David Hennessy, who had gained notoriety during his earlier days on the force. As a detective Hennessy had spent much time tracking down the perpetrators of Mafia crimes. His greatest achievement came in 1881, when he captured the bandit Guiseppi Esposito and had him deported to Sicily.

With the Matranga trial, rumors about their Mafia ties were rampant. Reports indicated that Hennessy was about to make known his

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<sup>18</sup>Ralph Edward Carroll, "The Mafia in New Orleans" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Notre Dame Seminary, 1956), p. 13.

<sup>19</sup>Times Democrat, May 7, 1890.

<sup>20</sup>John E. Cox, "The New Orleans Mafia Incident," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XX (January-October, 1937), 1071; New Orleans New Delta, May 10, 1891; Daily Picayune, July 8, 1881.

findings on the Matranga link with the Sicilian organization.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the truth, before the second trial or the alleged revelations could be made, Hennessy was murdered.<sup>22</sup>

The killing of Police Chief David Hennessy marked the high point of anti-Italian feelings in New Orleans. It provoked public outcries against Italians whom the Chief supposedly identified as his killers, and culminated in the lynching of eleven Italian prisoners.<sup>23</sup> This incident reached international proportions before it faded, but more significant locally was the public's ability to practice vigilante justice.<sup>24</sup> The New Orleans police department seemed to have lacked either the ability, the desire, or both, to prevent the lynchings. Their ineptitude, combined with the xenophobic attitude of the

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<sup>21</sup>Time Democrat, October 21, 1890.

<sup>22</sup>For a detailed study of the Hennessy murder see Orleans Parish Criminal Court Records, Docket # 14414, New Orleans, Louisiana. Also Records of the Criminal Court of New Orleans, Book No. 10, December 1890-1892; Richard Louis Carroll, "The Impact of David C. Hennessy on New Orleans Society and the Consequences of the Assassination of Hennessy" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Notre Dame Seminary, 1956).

<sup>23</sup>Daily Picayune, March 14, 15, 1892; Times Democrat, March 14, 15, 1891.

<sup>24</sup>New Orleans seemed not to be alone in their anti-Italian sentiment. In 1892 six Italians charged with murder at Hahnsville, Louisiana, were taken from the parish jail by an unidentified mob and three of the prisoners were hanged. In 1899 five Italians were lynched in Tallulah, Louisiana, in a dispute over the wounding of an American doctor. In 1908 Frank Scaglioni, a crippled shoemaker in Sumrall, Mississippi, was severely beaten and threatened with death. Scaglioni, as leader of the Italian colony in Sumrall, was attempting to protest and protect his fellow Italians from discrimination by the local natives. Robert Brandfon, "The End of Immigration to the Cotton Fields," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 50 (1964), 609.

citizenry seemed to have overshadowed any rational actions. Civil Service requirements would eventually rectify some of this disorder, but not before 1900.

The years following the lynchings witnessed Italians slowly working their way back into favor with their fellow citizens. Some such as Joseph Vaccaro, Antonio Monteleone, and Peter Lamana, became not only prosperous businessmen, but also well respected community members.<sup>25</sup> However, for the majority who arrived between 1880-1910 this would not occur until the 1920's. These Italians continued to work in an attempt to establish some form of economic security. Except for occasional street battles and reminders of the Hennessy affair, life seemed peaceful within the Italian community.

The period of calm came to an abrupt end in June, 1907 with the

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<sup>25</sup>In 1880 Antonio Monteleone opened a cobbler's shop at 241 Royal Street. In 1888 he purchased the Commercial Hotel on the corner of Royal and Iberville Streets. By 1903 he added thirty rooms to the structure and by 1908 renamed it the Monteleone Hotel which still exists today. Joseph Vaccaro became one of the founders of Standard Fruit Company -- see D'Antoni interview in Appendix A. Peter Lamana started a funeral home in Algiers and then moved it to 624 St. Philip Street in the heart of the French Quarter. The permanent home on Rampart Street continued until the late 1970's when Lamana-Panno-Fallo Funeral Home moved to a new building on Veterans Boulevard. Giuseppi Uddo came to New Orleans in 1907. He began his career selling Italian products from a cart to fellow Italians. When World War I produced an embargo on Italian products, he made substantial profits on nearly 3,000 cases of tomato products he had purchased before the prohibition began. With the help of his family whom he had brought from Italy, he formed Uddo Brothers. In 1926 they joined with California in-laws who had a canning factory to form Uddo-Taormina. In 1928 they merged with New York relatives and the Progresso Food Products became their emblem. In the 1970's the Uddo and Taormina Company was sold for a sizeable profit. See Times Picayune, November 29, 1981 for an account of Uddo's rise to prominence.



kidnapping of Walter Lamana, the seven-year-old son of Peter Lamana. This event marked the beginning of cooperation and better understanding between the Italians and the citizens of New Orleans. The kidnapping and subsequent murder of young Walter brought on a reaction similar to that of the Hennessy affair. People rioted through the streets in reckless abandon, threatening any Italian they thought might be responsible. Nevertheless, the Italian community immediately mobilized, fearing the loss of respectability they had gained since the murder of David Hennessy.

Meeting in Union Hall on Wednesday, June 12, 1907, Italians were joined by non-Italians. All pledged to apprehend the kidnapers and to remove any vestiges of the Black Hand which might exist in New Orleans.<sup>26</sup> By June 13, every political and business group vowed to support the Italian Vigilance Committee, as the Union Hall Group came to be called.

Although the Committee failed to locate the Lamana child alive, it did help apprehend the kidnapers. Moreover, the time spent in the search yielded much press coverage encouraging Italians to report any threat they might receive from the Black Hand.<sup>27</sup> It had long been rumored that many of the more successful Italians frequently received letters demanding money under threat of harm to either their

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<sup>26</sup>Times Democrat, June 12, 13, 1907; Daily Picayune, June 13, 1907.

<sup>27</sup>The Times Democrat put out three extra daily editions in order to keep people apprised of the situation. This paper also presented one of the most comprehensive accounts of the tragedy.

families or their businesses.<sup>28</sup> Peter Lamana himself admitted that in 1905 he received a note demanding money for the safety of his children.<sup>29</sup> Because he ignored the threat and no reprisal occurred, he hoped the same might happen in 1907.

It is important to note that the perpetrators of this senseless murder were not among the regular Italian immigrant settlers of New Orleans.<sup>30</sup> Although not all the responsible parties received justice, the entire plot seemed devised by persons totally unaware of both the area and personalities involved. One obvious example of misinformation appeared in their demand for \$6,000, a figure far in excess of Mr. Lamana's holdings. As the father of eight children and the director of a new undertaker's business, he owned only a few mules and a funeral carriage, scarcely enough to help raise such money.<sup>31</sup>

The Lamana kidnapping seems to have marked the turning point of bigotry against Italians in New Orleans. The formation of the Vigilance Committee, supported by both the newspapers and leading citizens, promoted a new spirit of cooperation between New Orleans and its

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<sup>28</sup>On June 12, 1907, the Times Democrat reported how Italians who failed to respond to letter blackmail had suffered frightful losses. Some stock owners had their animals killed and cruelly disemboweled in an effort to bring fear to the immigrants. None of the first-generation people I interviewed would speak of the Black Hand. One respondent alluded to them as a cause of a possible fire, but quickly moved to another subject.

<sup>29</sup>Robert Tallant, Ready to Hang: Seven Famous New Orleans Murders (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 92.

<sup>30</sup>Times Democrat, June 11, 1907.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

leading ethnic group.<sup>32</sup> Italians appeared more open to report injustices to authorities, who in turn attempted to ferret out any trouble-makers. With the exception of an incident around 1910, the Black Hand threat ended in 1907.<sup>33</sup>

Thus it would seem that the charges of Italians being the less desirable and more criminally-inclined members of New Orleans society have little relationship to the truth. Inadequate training, public antipathy, poor finances, and vestiges of a spoils system kept the New Orleans police department from any notable successes. That the Italians were held responsible for the lawlessness seemed but a coincidence of place and time. As the most recently arrived immigrants, Italians were the natural "alien" targets.

Politically the Italians of this period produced no Fiorella La Guardia to champion their cause. Reality presented them with individual leaders, but no Italian would emerge through a consolidation of power until Robert Maestri became mayor in 1936.<sup>34</sup> A primary reason for their delay in achieving political success was the lack of concentrated numbers of Italians in New Orleans as compared to immigrant populations in cities like New York, Philadelphia and Chicago.<sup>35</sup> Even in relation

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<sup>32</sup>Times Democrat, June 18, 1907.

<sup>33</sup>John S. Kendall, "Who Killa De Chief," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXII (April, 1936), p. 504; Daily Picayune, July 14, 15, 23, 1910.

<sup>34</sup>Times Picayune, July 6, 16, August, 16, 17, 1936.

<sup>35</sup>The Census of 1900 listed New Orleans as twelfth in comparing population and foreign born, a drop of six places since 1860. Twelfth Census of the United States in the Year 1900, p. lxix.

to other ethnic groups within the city, namely the Irish and the Germans, Italians surfaced third in number. They realized greater increases in population during this period; however, the older nationalities continued to dominate politically due to their earlier presence.<sup>36</sup>

Because Italians represented the largest unassimilated ethnic group, political factions within New Orleans made every effort to garner their support. Since Reconstruction political power generally rotated between the Regular Democrats and the Reform Democrats. The Regulars (sometimes referred to as the machine) claimed to represent all people working together toward good government.<sup>37</sup> Their opposition came from the Reformers, an upper class, "silk stocking" group who claimed an ideological legacy from Thomas Jefferson.<sup>38</sup> Both factions exhibited a highly organized system of ward bosses and precincts, but beyond formal structure, all similarity ended.

Although each group desired the Italians' votes, it was the Regulars who seemed to make the greater effort.<sup>39</sup> Because Italians frequently knew little or no English, the Regulars attempted to

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<sup>36</sup> Ninth Census; Vol. I: The Statistic of Population of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), pp. 382-389; Twelfth Census of the United States (1900) Population, p. 757.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond O. Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans, 1896-1900" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Tulane University, 1974), pp. 33-37; Daily Picayune, April 14, 1896.

<sup>38</sup> Times Democrat, April 3, 1896.

<sup>39</sup> Times Democrat, March 23, 1896, August 25, 1899.

instruct them by holding separate functions, such as rallies and meetings.<sup>40</sup> In this way, speeches could be given in Italian, assuring the Regulars that the immigrants understood what was expected. This practice gained widespread popularity in cities like Chicago, Newark and New York, but its effectiveness in New Orleans during this period remains unclear.

Supplementing and expanding the efforts of political parties to instruct immigrants was the city's educational system. In 1918 a group of leading citizens organized a campaign for educating aliens in the democratic system.<sup>41</sup> The initial meeting received support from all nationalities, whereupon it was decided that each could best be served by conducting their own organization. The Italians were the first to meet, calling themselves the Italian Political Association. According to their directives, the Association would seek out naturalized Italians, educate them to the benefits of citizenship, and help with the examination on the Constitution and the filing of citizenship papers.<sup>42</sup> In every case the Association would work with the immigrant

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., March 23, 1896. An interview with Joe Maselli revealed how he hated these attempts at accommodation by the ward bosses. As a young man growing up in New Jersey, he sometimes accompanied his father to the meetings, where much was promised by the bosses but soon forgotten when the election was over. Interview with Joe Maselli, New Orleans, Louisiana, June 9, 1977.

<sup>41</sup>Wilson, "The Work of the Schools For the Foreign Element in New Orleans," p. 52. Wilson indicates that the Americanization Committee became necessary because the newest ethnic groups in New Orleans lacked direction in becoming Americanized.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

until all documents were completed. In addition to fostering the Italians' organization, the Americanization Committee became instrumental in offering evening classes in reading and writing, and in opening two special schools for foreigners.<sup>43</sup>

Notwithstanding these efforts to Americanize the Italians, participation in politics rested with the individual. Interviews, surveys, and available material attest to the fact that most had come to Louisiana with little thought of politics. Once in New Orleans, however, Italians came to realize a relationship between economic ascendancy and citizenship.<sup>44</sup> Although all political factions made attempts to secure their political allegiance, significant results would not exist for this generation. The Regulars seemingly experienced some successes but not before 1910.<sup>45</sup> The Italians' penchant for social mobility, coupled with early political apathy, prevented significant, concrete results. As in the economic, religious, and social arenas, first-generation Italians exhibited some readiness to become part of the political process, but only insofar as it

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>44</sup>Oscar Durante, owner and editor of Chicago's newspaper L'Italia, constantly reminded Italians that economic advancement came after natrualization, not before it. Nelli, Italians in Chicago, p. 88.

<sup>45</sup>In 1898 Louisiana altered its constitution to include literacy tests, residence requirements, and a poll tax. Some writers believe that the Regulars, in an effort to protect poor white voters while eliminating negroes, introduced the "grandfather clause." This provision exempted everyone from the educational tests whose father or grandfather had been eligible in 1867. The controversy became so widespread that local newspapers ridiculed the convention for making special provision for the illiterate "Dago" vote. Since statistics verify that the provision reduced both white and black voters, one wonders if the true victory was not white man over white man. Reynolds, Machine Politics

contributed to economic survival, and it did not interfere with family.

Thus it appears that neither participation in politics nor responsibility for criminal activities emerged as priorities for first-generation Italians in New Orleans. Because they comprised the fastest growing ethnic group during the period, they became unwilling victims in the political battle between the New Orleans Regulars and the upper-middle-class Reformers. This fracture was not singular to New Orleans as almost every major port city faced similar struggles.<sup>46</sup> As cities absorbed thousands of southern and eastern Europeans, the foundation of order seemed threatened. Demand for services doubled and most cities found themselves unprepared to handle the increased needs. Newspapers continually wrote of crimes committed in an apparently lawless city, and citizens felt threatened by burgeoning numbers of immigrants whom they could not understand.

With the assassination of Police Chief Hennessy, anti-Italian hysteria reached an all time high. When vigilantes broke into the jail and executed eleven Italian suspects, even the Mayor approved the action.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, once calmer minds prevailed, the incident seemed more related to the city's inability to deal with municipal problems than to Italian compulsion toward crime. By the early 1900's, with the introduction of Civil Service, New Orleans became better

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in New Orleans, p. 73; Woodward, Origins of the New South, p. 337; George E. Cunningham, "Italians: Hindrance to White Solidarity, 1890-1898," Journal of Negro History, 50 (January, 1965), p. 34; Times Democrat, March 6, 1898.

<sup>46</sup>Teaford, The Unheralded Triumph, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup>Times Democrat, March 15, 1891.

organized in both government and services. Xenophobia toward Italians remained, but the kidnapping and murder of young Walter Lamana initiated a more controlled reaction by both the Italians and the citizenry.

Politically, these first-generation immigrants seemed bound by deterrents which affected participation. Lack of past political experience, concern for economic survival, inadequate understanding of the resources of United States law combined with the inability to perceive politics as a desirable profession, initially caused Italians to ignore politics. Nevertheless because political leaders frequently expanded their own influence with the votes of ethnic groups,<sup>48</sup> Italians found themselves caught between a behavioral pattern of no participation and one of political accommodation. Since party affiliation in New Orleans seemed to equate with economic mobility, some compromises were inevitable. Not always willing participants, these Italians recognized that support of the political machine was a minor accommodation on the road to economic success.

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<sup>48</sup> Robert Dahl, Who Governs: Democracy and Power in an American City (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 34.



CHAPTER VI  
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

The historiography of Italian immigration in the early decades of the twentieth century was a relatively neglected field. This neglect is understandable because the importance of immigration history itself seems to have eluded academia as an area of worthwhile investigation. Although various explanations are given for this lack of interest, it appears that acceptance of the prevailing melting pot thesis -- that immigrants were immediately transformed into indistinguishable Americans -- primarily caused the scholarly neglect of immigration history. For Italians more specifically, the inaccessibility of source materials also discouraged historical analysis.

With the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's, historians initiated closer studies of the values, contributions, and institutions of Italian and other ethnic groups in specific communities. Meanwhile, well before the 1960's, histories (of a sort) began to appear near the end of the nineteenth century. Few of these were written by Italians. Almost four million Italian emigrants entered the United States between 1880 and 1910, thus furnishing an apparent fertile field of inquiry. However, since people struggling to survive rarely have time to record their history, it was the social workers, nativists, newsmen, clergy and some fellow countrymen who produced the volumes. Many of their findings appeared in the magazine Charities which seemed to reflect as much ambivalence about Italians as the progressives it represented.<sup>1</sup> Articles in the periodical ranged from those suggesting that

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<sup>1</sup>Charities was started in 1887 as a leaflet entitled Lend-a-Hand. Its

Italians settled in rural areas due to the congestion they created in the cities, to ones which expressed fears for Americans because of criminal activities among Italians.<sup>2</sup> Other popularly read periodicals such as Outlook, North American Review, and Century, together with daily newspapers, reflected the same half sweet-half bitter idea -- aliens, especially Italians, who did not assimilate well, frequently caused more problems for cities.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding the numerous prejudicial articles, in 1919 Robert Foerster, a Harvard historian, published one of the first historical books on Italians. His work, The Italian Emigration of Our Times<sup>4</sup> remains a standard in the field and should not be neglected. Although both the conceptual framework and sources used by Foerster have changed, his emphasis on the Italian background lends credence to

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stated purpose was to keep members of an organization known as New York Charity Society in touch with their work. Since Italians comprised a large portion of New York's immigrant population, the reformers from settlement houses composed a series of articles on "The Italian in America." Writers and workers such as Jane Addams and Robert A. Woods wrote of the Italians among them.

<sup>2</sup>Eliot Norton, "The Need of a General Plan for Settling Immigrants Outside the Great Cities," Charities, XII (1904), p. 153; see also Robert A. Woods, "Notes on the Italians in Boston," Charities, XII (1904), p. 452.

<sup>3</sup>A sampling of such ideas can be found in Jacob A. Riis, How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), pp. 113-114; Daily Picayune, November 15, 1902, December 30, 1903, January 20, 1904; Lee J. Langley, "Italians in Cotton Fields: Their Superiority Over Negroes Shown On an Arkansas Plantation," Manufacturer's Record (April, 1904); "Our Italian Immigration," Nation, LXXX (April 20, 1905), 304; "The Making of Americans," Outlook, LXXIV (August 23, 1903), 969-971; Henry Cabot Lodge, "Efforts to Restrict Undesirable Immigration," Century Magazine, LXVII (January, 1904), 466-469 [Hereinafter cited as Lodge, "Efforts to Restrict Undesirable Immigration."]

<sup>4</sup>Foerster, Italian Emigration.

today's cultural pluralists. Foerster also became one of the first to direct attention to the Italians' proclivity for repatriation, an area only recently studied in depth by Dino Cinel in From Italy to San Francisco.<sup>5</sup> However, since Foerster's work appeared at a time prior to the interest in immigration history as a field of inquiry, it was not until the 1960's that it began receiving just recognition.

The historian most often cited for initiating immigration study in the United States is Marcus L. Hansen. His work, The Atlantic Migration,<sup>5</sup> is one of the first to show immigration caused more by Europe's social and economic ills than by America's promise of a new home.<sup>7</sup> His immigrants were a part of a European expansion movement. The very "process of emigration" seemed more important than the "impact of the immigrant on American society."<sup>8</sup> With the publication of Hansen's essays, much of the prejudicial literature of the early twenti-

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<sup>5</sup>Cinel, From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience. Through a study of 2,000 naturalization records from the years 1850-1930 in nine selected communities in Italy, Cinel looked at the nature of continuity and change in the immigrant experience. Vis-a-vis earlier studies which first recognized a total break from the European past and later ones which stressed continuity between the two experiences, Cinel depicts for San Francisco a more interactionary process between the two. See also Betty Boyd Caroli, Italian Repatriation from the United States 1900-1914 (Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies, 1973).

<sup>6</sup>Marcus L. Hansen, The Atlantic Migration 1607-1860 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940). A collection of Hansen's essays also appeared in 1940 as The Immigrant in American History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940).

<sup>7</sup>Allen H. Spear, "Marcus Lee Hansen and the Historiography of Immigration," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XLIV (Summer, 1961), pp. 262-263.

<sup>8</sup>Spear, "Historiography," p. 265.

eth century received closer scrutiny. Moreover, Hansen succeeded in providing a meaningful structure for immigration historiography for all to follow.<sup>9</sup>

Oscar Handlin was one of the first to use Hansen's theories in his investigation of immigration. For Handlin's "uprooted" peoples, immigration often became "the central experience" in their lives. Not only did emigration alter America, it also altered the immigrant, who for Handlin "existed in an extreme situation" for decades.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1960's Handlin's interpretation came under fire from Rudolph J. Vecoli, who cited Handlin's failure to account for the unique Italian regional attributes.<sup>11</sup> For Vecoli, one could describe the ideal immigrant only by knowing "the distinctive cultural character of each ethnic group and the manner in which this influenced its adjustments in the New World."<sup>12</sup>

Following the Handlin-Vecoli controversy, works on Italian immigration remained sketchy until the 1970's. With the publication of Half Bitter, Half Sweet<sup>13</sup> and The Italian Americans<sup>14</sup> by De Conde and

<sup>9</sup>Hansen, The Atlantic Migration, pp. 146-171.

<sup>10</sup>Handlin, The Uprooted, pp. 4-6. Handlin's classic work, Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941; Rev. ed., 1959) is considered the most perceptive account of immigrant adjustment to America.

<sup>11</sup>Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of the Uprooted," p. 404.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 417.

<sup>13</sup>Alexander De Conde, Half Bitter, Half Sweet (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971).

<sup>14</sup>Iorizzo and Mondello, The Italian Americans. Although intended as a survey, the book does emphasize the prejudice experienced by Italians. In so doing the authors present a detailed account of the lynching in New Orleans.

Mondello respectively, a significant change in historical evaluation began.

In reviewing the literature applicable to settlement in New Orleans, this researcher concentrated on works describing southern Italians who migrated after 1880. It should be noted that there were Italians in Louisiana as early as the 1700's. In contrast to the later group, these first Italians were from northern Italy. Although smaller in number, many owned real property and engaged in sound fiscal endeavors. More importantly, they organized benevolent societies which remained until the mid-1900's.<sup>15</sup>

The primary records containing information on Italians in Louisiana after 1880 are as follows: Records of Louisiana Sugar Planters Association; Louisiana Immigration Convention Notes of 1893; Reports of the Louisiana Commissioner of Agriculture and Immigration; and daily newspapers of the period. Substantiating these works were definitive articles dealing with Louisiana's endeavors to attract immigrants. Some of the more important ones are Walter L. Fleming, "Immigration to the South States,"<sup>16</sup> Charles Shanabruch, "The Louisiana Immigration Movement, 1891-1907,"<sup>17</sup> and E. Russ Williams,

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<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed study see Russell M. Magnaghi, "Louisiana's Italian Immigrants," Louisiana History, 27 (Winter, 1986), 60-61. See also New Orleans City Directories, 1860-1870.

<sup>16</sup> Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," pp. 276-297.

<sup>17</sup> Shanabruch, "The Louisiana Immigration Movement," pp. 203-226.

Jr., "Louisiana's Public and Private Immigration Endeavors, 1866-1893."<sup>18</sup> In general, all evidence verified by interviews attests to Louisiana's desire for immigrant agricultural workers in preference to blacks. The Italians' penchant for thrift, as well as their industrious work habits and good moral family standards, marked them as the preferred laborers.<sup>19</sup> By comparison, their counterparts in the East found employment in "packing plants, . . . stove factories, steel mills, electric generating plants, mail order houses . . . [and] clothing shops."<sup>20</sup> Although numerous articles expressed concern "over the illiterate races, such as . . . Italians [who] remain[ed] in the cities [and] lower[ed] the standards,"<sup>21</sup> nothing seemed to deter them from the industrial life. It would appear that Italians in the United States arrived seeking economic opportunities. In the East those prospects frequently existed in the industrial centers, although

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<sup>18</sup>E. Russ Williams, Jr., "Louisiana's Public and Private Immigration Endeavors, 1866-1893," pp. 153-173.

<sup>19</sup>Daily Picayune, October 17, 1890; August 12, 1904; Lord, The Italians in America, pp. 144, 234; Shanabruch, "Louisiana Immigration Movement," p. 220. Note: The trait of thriftiness which gained respect for Italians as workers was condemned by some Louisiana businessmen who resented the immigrants' habit of sending the "larger part of their earnings to Italy." See Louisiana Planters and Sugar Manufacturers Records, IV (December, 1892), 469-470 as found in Jean Ann Scarpaci, "A Tale of Selective Accommodation: Sicilians and Native Whites in Louisiana," Journal of Ethnic Studies, Vol. V, No. 3 (Fall, 1977), p. 42.

<sup>20</sup>Nelli, Italians in Chicago, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup>Lodge, "Efforts to Restrict Undesirable Immigration," p. 468.

there were exceptions.<sup>22</sup> In Louisiana they began in agricultural pursuits such as sugar cane and strawberry planting.<sup>23</sup> In Tampa, Florida,<sup>24</sup> in Portland, Oregon,<sup>25</sup> in the trans-Mississippi west,<sup>26</sup> and in Des Moines, Iowa,<sup>27</sup> Italians engaged in manufacturing, truck farming, agriculture, coal mining and retail businesses. It seems that Italians were able to accommodate to conditions wherever they settled.

<sup>22</sup>Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, pp. 38-42. McLaughlin notes that Buffalo's Italians sought jobs outside the factories, in construction, on docks, and in railroad yards. She attributes this choice to their familiarity with what had been done in Italy. In Buffalo they took any available jobs. When there were none, they migrated to the countryside, not unlike the Italians in New Orleans who worked the Carrollton, Algiers, Donaldsonville, and other surrounding sugar cane areas.

<sup>23</sup>Jean Ann Scarpaci, "Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes: Recruitment, Labor Conditions, and Community Relations, 1880-1910," Labor History, 16 (Spring, 1975), 165-183; John V. Baimonte, "Immigrants in Rural America: A Study of the Italians of Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1972), presents an account of Italians who developed the strawberry industry in Louisiana.

<sup>24</sup>Gary Mormino, "We Worked Hard and Took Care of Our Own: Oral History and Italians in Tampa," Labor History, XXIII (Fall, 1982), 395-415. Tampa's Italians first worked as cigar makers, but later expanded into retail stores and fruit stands.

<sup>25</sup>Charles F. Gould, "Portland Italians," Oregon Historical Quarterly, 77 (Fall, 1976), 239-260.

<sup>26</sup>Andrew F. Rolle, The Immigrant Upraised: Italian Adventurers and Colonists in an Expanding America (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968). Rolle's Italians are frequently described as achieving success faster than their eastern counterparts because the discrimination factor was not present. Rolle also seems to connect the lack of crowded tenements in the West with a rapid upward mobility, as compared to the crowded slum or ghetto conditions in the East.

<sup>27</sup>Maureen McCoy and William Silog. "The Italian Heritage in Des Moines: Photographs," Palimpsest, 64, No. 2 (1983), 58-68.

For Handlin, this accommodation was a distinct break with the past;<sup>28</sup> for the Italians of New Orleans it was more an integration of cultural inheritance with economic opportunities of the marketplace. By appearing to accept the white elite's ideas on certain matters such as the inferiority of blacks as workers, Italians experienced greater economic acceleration than their eastern counterparts.<sup>29</sup> Coupled with occupational choices was the pattern of settlement in urban areas used by immigrants. Current studies show cities such as Buffalo, Utica, and Rochester, New York along with Kansas City, Missouri and San Francisco, California, had distinct Italian neighborhoods.<sup>30</sup> New York's Italian area existed as early as 1880.<sup>31</sup> New Orleans City Directories of the 1890's indicate that Italians lived along Ursuline, Chartres, Royal, Barracks, Decateur, and other streets near the French Market.<sup>32</sup> Handlin frequently referred to these areas as "ghettos,"<sup>33</sup> but the term seems inappropriate when referring to

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<sup>28</sup>Handlin, The Uprooted, pp. 200-230.

<sup>29</sup>Scarpaci, "A Tale of Selective Accommodation," p. 44.

<sup>30</sup>Yans-McLaughlin, Italians in Buffalo, pp. 116-117; John W. Briggs, An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1880-1930 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978). Briggs studied Italians in cities of Utica, Rochester, and Kansas City. Cinel, From Italy to San Francisco, pp. 103-116.

<sup>31</sup>Kessner, The Golden Door, pp. 128-129.

<sup>32</sup>Soards, New Orleans City Directory, 1890-1900.

<sup>33</sup>Handlin, The Uprooted, pp. 129-151.



Italians. During the early years of settlement these immigrants often settled in the older parts of urban developments, but just as many lived in other parts of cities.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, there were no rigid, unchanging colonies -- particularly in the 1880-1910 period -- where Italians moved in and out of areas in search of better living conditions.<sup>35</sup> Thus a restricted area did offer a place where immigrants shared language, customs and traditions, but it was not an attempt to defy assimilation. As Italians moved to other sections, often not far from the original settlement, they transplanted their culture to a new neighborhood. It will undoubtedly require more specialized studies of immigrants in American cities before a clear understanding of this topic is reached.

Because the concept of family is central in the lives of southern Italians, it is important to understand the lack of unanimity among historians concerning Italian families. Central to the issue is understanding the various institutions comprising the family unit.<sup>36</sup> One of the earliest writers to enhance knowledge of this unit was Phyllis H. Williams, who authored a handbook for visiting nurses, social workers, teachers and physicians.<sup>37</sup> A later helpful study was

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<sup>34</sup>Nelli, Italians in Chicago, p. 53.

<sup>35</sup>Yans-McLaughlin, Italians in Buffalo, p. 78.

<sup>36</sup>Institutions generally considered important are the nuclear and extended unit, the Church, mutual benefit societies and education.

<sup>37</sup>Williams, South Italian Folkways.

Leonard Covello's comparison of Italian family conventions with the educational system in Italy and America.<sup>38</sup> Since little, if any, scientific data on the traditional family structure existed prior to World War II, these works provided new insights into practices of the southern Italian family.

Although not classified as immigration history, Edward C. Banfield's The Moral Basis of a Backward Society is especially significant.<sup>39</sup> Banfield focused on the southern Italian's intense concern for family. Because his theory of "amoral familism" is a key to understanding the social customs of their society, it is a topic frequently debated by writers. For example, Moss finds that by extending Banfield's thesis to its logical conclusion one can affirm that life in Italian villages becomes chaotic, a condition in turn transferred to America.<sup>40</sup>

One frequently discussed topic regarding the institution of family is whether the unit in America marks a continuity or a change

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<sup>38</sup> Leonard Covello, The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child. A Study of the Southern Italian Family Mores and Their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America, edited by F. Cordasco (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967). This is a revision of a Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1944.

<sup>39</sup> Banfield, The Moral Basis of a Backward Society, p. 107.

<sup>40</sup> Moss, "The Family in Southern Italy," p. 185.

from the original pattern. Oscar Handlin,<sup>41</sup> Irvin L. Child,<sup>42</sup> John Mariano,<sup>43</sup> Herbert Gans,<sup>44</sup> and Constance Cronin<sup>45</sup> are just a few writers who addressed the question. For Gans, the Italian neighborhoods provided the protection necessary to maintain the family circle as it existed in southern Italy,<sup>46</sup> while Cronin's approach resembles a surgical examination of the dynamics of change. Her thorough investigation helps to explain why the Italians' fondness for keeping things hidden results in a mirage of interpretations concerning the nature of the family.<sup>47</sup>

Recent studies to challenge the Italians as uprooted, fatalistic, amoral familists who entered the United States with little semblance

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<sup>41</sup>Oscar Handlin, in The Uprooted, pp. 200-230, saw emigration as a disintegrating force in the lives of immigrants.

<sup>42</sup>Irvin L. Child, Italian or American? The Second Generation in Conflict (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), pp. 76-117, explained difficulties within family as being intergenerational. See also Paul J. Campisi, "Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family in the United States," Journal of Sociology, 58 (May, 1948), 443-449 for a similar view between first generation peasants in southern Italy and first and second generations in the United States.

<sup>43</sup>Mariano, The Italian Contribution to American Democracy, p. 30, depicts American Italians as "seeking to retain the best and most representative of old world culture . . . while striving to secure a full measure of the new."

<sup>44</sup>Herbert J. Gans, The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans (New York: Free Press, 1962), p. 210, concluded that the goal of sustaining the nuclear family was achieved.

<sup>45</sup>Cronin, The Sting of Change.

<sup>46</sup>Gans, The Urban Villagers, p. 205.

<sup>47</sup>Cronin, The Sting of Change, p. 30.

of organized family are those by John W. Briggs and Virginia Yans-McLaughlin.<sup>47</sup> In researching three medium sized American cities -- Utica and Rochester, New York, and Kansas City, Missouri -- Briggs concludes with an interpretation for all Italians in the United States. He manages to congeal a complex group of Italian workers into upper level, middle class agriculturalists. Because of their shared cultural variables, Briggs' Italians did well once they reached America, exemplifying the writer's belief in continuity between past and present.<sup>49</sup> It would appear that Briggs created an interpretation which could apply to New Orleans Italians or any other group in a major city. Nevertheless, Briggs' lack of antagonistic forces casts some doubt on the application. Whether middle class, poor, rural, or urban dweller, no immigrant could deny the influence of ethnic prejudice. To deny its existence, particularly toward Italians, is to create the fatal flaw. Nonetheless, Briggs deserves much credit for challenging the narrow views of Banfield.

Yans-McLaughlin's research of Italians in Buffalo, New York, also challenges the conventional Handlin view of abrupt discontinuities between folk and urban societies.<sup>50</sup> McLaughlin's approach combines

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<sup>48</sup> Briggs, An Italian Passage; Yans-McLaughlin, Italians in Buffalo; and George E. Pozzetta, "Italians and Urban America," Journal of Urban History, VI, No. 3 (May, 1980), p. 360. [Hereinafter cited as Pozzetta, "Italians and Urban America."]

<sup>49</sup> Briggs, An Italian Passage, pp. 271-276.

<sup>50</sup> Yans-McLaughlin, Italians in Buffalo, p. 18.

the modern quantitative and traditional qualitative approach to produce a dynamic city of give and take.<sup>51</sup>

[T]he family is a flexible organization which while adapting to new social conditions may continue to rely upon traditional forms and ways of relating.<sup>52</sup>

It is in the persistence of tradition combined with seizing one's opportunity that this researcher sees compatibility between New Orleans and Buffalo. For example, in both areas men first accepted outdoor work in place of dependable labor in factories or sawmills, reflecting a traditional Old World pattern. Women avoided employment outside the home because the Italian ideal was to keep them at home.<sup>53</sup> However, in New Orleans women seemed to have fewer options in the work place compared to Buffalo where summer employment was found in the Niagara Falls harvest area. According to McLaughlin, it is precisely such limitations of opportunities that allows the traditional values to remain intact.

Another part of Italians' social milieu was crime. To date, most efforts to explain the antagonistic relationships within the family group have been sociological and theoretical in nature, but there are

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 20, 22.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

Some writers who present the historical New World perspective.<sup>54</sup> One recent investigation in this area is Humbert Nelli's The Business of Crime<sup>55</sup> in which the author examines Italian crime between 1890 and 1940 in fourteen of the largest cities in the United States. Although the intricacies of this work are not all relevant to this research, Nelli's theme of the "Americanization" of an Italian institution is noteworthy. His explanation focuses on how crime, as practiced in Italy, underwent systematic changes once immigrants reached the United States. Nelli saw no one pattern of growth for the early gangsters; instead they shaped their organization to the courts, police, and shifting local conditions.<sup>56</sup>

One Italian familial institution common to every geographical area in America was the mutual benefit societies. Vecoli cites their early presence in the United States as proof that they were not

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<sup>54</sup>George E. Pozzetta, "Italians and Urban America," 362. See Francis A. J. Ianni and Elizabeth R. Ianni, A Family Business: Kinship and Social Control in Organized Crime (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1972). Ianni uses the methods of a social anthropologist to study how the American crime families adapted to America. Their efforts concentrate on the Mafia first in Italy and then in the United States.

<sup>55</sup>Humbert S. Nelli, The Business of Crime: Italians and Syndicate Crime in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>56</sup>In an earlier work, Nelli specifically showed how urban Chicago offered its Italians success and economic advancement through criminal activities. In its own strange way, crime became part of the acculturation process. By offering more lucrative methods of operations, an Old World system was streamlined in the quest for money. There seems to be no evidence that this idea prevailed in New Orleans. Nelli, The Italians in Chicago, pp. 154-155; Pozzetta, "Italians and Urban America," pp. 361-362.

"transplanted" institutions.<sup>57</sup> In New Orleans notice of the establishment appeared as early as 1843, twenty-five years prior to Chicago's announcement.<sup>58</sup> Whether the society's establishment came before the great tide of emigration of the 1880's and 90's, or during it, all benevolent Italian organizations formed for the purpose of assisting Italian immigrants, their widows and orphans. In time, the goals of the societies widened, dependent upon area and population. In some cases societies merged, but to the first generation immigrants they offered physical assistance as well as identity in their new environment.<sup>59</sup>

Historiography on the place of the Catholic Church in the lives of the Italians in New Orleans remains notable by its absence. With the exception of St. Mary's Church on Chartres Street, established for Italians around 1915, their principal benefactor and recorder was Mother Frances Cabrini and her Missionary Sisters of the Sacred

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<sup>57</sup> Nelli, "Italians in Urban America," p. 49.

<sup>58</sup> Russell M. Magnaghi, "Louisiana's Italian Immigrants Prior to 1870," p. 60. See also Cinel, From Italy to San Francisco, p. 200. Cinel cites the first mutual society in San Francisco in 1855. To the social problem of caring for impoverished and sick Italians, the society added caring for impoverished and sick Italians working in the California mines.

<sup>59</sup> See Edwin Fenton's unpublished dissertation, "Immigrants and Unions, A Case Study: Italians and American Labor, 1870-1920" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1957), for background on the connection between labor unions and Italy's earliest mutual benefit societies.

Heart.<sup>60</sup> This group established a school in New Orleans for the education of children of Italian immigrants. The History of the Catholic Church by Roger Baudier, published in 1939, is the only approved text of the period.<sup>61</sup> This dearth of material is in stark contrast to the numerous accounts of the Catholic Church's encounters with Italians who settled in the East.<sup>62</sup> In addition to Vecoli's work, Silvano Tomasi has done extensive research into the importance of the national parish in New York, emphasizing the role played by the ethnic church in the process of assimilation.<sup>63</sup> Although one does not doubt the effective work of Church authorities in the New Orleans area, the specific accounts remain known only to Church archivists. It should

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<sup>60</sup>All religious communities like the Missionary Sisters keep extensive records known as Chronicles. Since the Missionary Sisters worked so closely with the Italians in the early 1900's, it is believed that their records are among the best; however, they are closed to researchers until one of their sisters completes a work on the life of Mother Cabrini.

<sup>61</sup>Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana, p. 605.

<sup>62</sup>Rudolph Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church," Journal of Social History 2 (Spring, 1969), pp. 217-268.

<sup>63</sup>Tomasi, The Ethnic Church, pp. 163-193. See also Silvano M. Tomasi, Piety and Power: The Role of the Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area (Staten Island: New York Center for Migration Studies, 1975). To further facilitate research in Italian immigration, an annotated bibliography entitled Italian-Americans and Religion, edited by Silvano M. Tomasi and Edward C. Stibili was published in 1978. It contains 1,158 items covering three major periods of the Italian religious experience in America, namely the missionary period, the period of mass migration (1880-1925), and the contemporary period.



be noted, however, that secrecy was a problem for all geographic sections of the Catholic Church until the advent of Tomasi, Vecoli, and Engel. The inaccessibility of sources combined with slow movement of the Church in recognizing the immigrant experience runs parallel to their apparent lack of understanding of all ethnic groups. Also, in the past Church history was primarily biographical with lives of the bishops being the major concern. Since bishops "were almost exclusively Irish, Italians, Poles, Slovacs, and other Catholic immigrants could not be much represented and were not."<sup>64</sup>

Literature on the Italian political situation in New Orleans at the turn of the century suffers from an emphasis on the Hennessy killing and the Italians' lynchings, with some attention to the New Orleans Machine control of Italian votes. It is a period in which Italians receive scant political attention save a consciousness among all factions of the useful immigrant vote.<sup>65</sup> This was not true of Chicago and New York, where the Italians' presence was significant.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that Chicago, and especially New York, did not fit the normal political pattern in that they had a greater concentra-

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<sup>64</sup> Silvano M. Tomasi, "Research and Studies on the Religious Experience of Italian Americans," in Tomasi and Engel (eds.), The Italian Experience, p. .7.

<sup>65</sup> Reynolds, Machine Politics in New Orleans; see also Raymond O. Nussbaum, "The Ring is Smashed! The New Orleans Municipal Election of 1896," Louisiana History, 17, No. 3 (Summer, 1976), p. 290.

<sup>66</sup> Humbert S. Nelli, "John Powers and the Italians: Politics in a Chicago Ward, 1896-1921," Journal of American History, 57 (June, 1970), pp. 67-84. See also Arthur Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, 1882-1933 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1959), pp. 314-320.

tion of Italians capable of achieving results.

Generally, politics was a vehicle of upward mobility for all ethnic groups. As their numbers grew, ethnicity within the political process enabled them through acculturation to succeed in the political process.<sup>67</sup> Although Dahl believed that ethnicity and the political process would be abandoned once upper class status was achieved, another view saw ethnicity remaining long after the group completed the stages of mobility.<sup>68</sup> Studies in San Francisco, and Providence, Rhode Island also do not bear out Dahl's thesis of upward mobility through politics. San Francisco's primary deterrent was a population of middle class northern Italians who for centuries had no connection with any governmental process.<sup>69</sup> In Providence, the Italians accepted the wishes of the dominant Irish and have yet to make any political strides.<sup>70</sup> Although there are isolated examples of ethnicity being used successfully as a means to political power, they seem to be more a response to specific conditions than a measure of success. For Italians to participate in politics, it was necessary to wait until a member of

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<sup>67</sup> Robert Dahl, Who Governs: Democracy and Power In An American City, p. 34.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Parenti, "Ethnic Politics and the Persistence of Ethnic Identification," American Political Science Review, LXI (September, 1967), pp. 717-726, and Richard A. Gabriel, "A New Theory of Ethnic Voting," Polity, IV (Summer, 1972), p. 405.

<sup>69</sup> Cinel, From Italy to San Francisco, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, "The Urban Italian: Patterns of Political Accommodation to Local Regimes" in Pat Gallo (ed.), The Urban Experience of Italian-Americans (Staten Island: American Italian Historical Association, 1975), p. 112.

the old stock withdrew from the political scene.<sup>71</sup> Once the way became clear, it was essential that Italians desired participation. It was at this juncture that most first-generation Italians became affected by their past; for the game of politics was not as pressing an activity as other obligations.<sup>72</sup> If politics could be used to secure advantages for their families, then it was done. In New Orleans, voting and naturalization seemed tied to a man's ability to succeed in business. Therefore, by the end of World War I, many Italians actively sought ways of attaining American citizenship, hoping it might advance their economic opportunities.

As historians struggle to prove which, if any, Old World values persisted, which were modified, and why and how this pattern has changed over time, the "cultural persistence" theme of past Italian immigration historiography has expanded. There exists today a growing body of comparative studies in which either two or more different ethnic groups are studied, or Italians in different geographical locations are compared. Thomas Kessner's quantitative work of Italian and Jewish immigrant mobility within New York City between 1880 and 1915 demonstrates how both groups had the same opportunities for unrestricted upward mobility.<sup>73</sup> Because Italians repatriated,

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>72</sup>Barzini, The Italians, p. 190; see also Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Search for an American Identity, Continuity and Change," in Lydio F. Tomasi (ed.), Italian Americans: New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity (Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies, 1985), pp. 88-111.

<sup>73</sup>Kessner, The Golden Door.

they lacked the long term goals required for rapid economic ascendancy. Jean Ann Scarpaci's study of Sicilians and native whites in Louisiana portrays Italians as possessing "selective accommodative social behavior."<sup>74</sup> As they translated Sicilian attitudes into behavior patterns valued by the whites, Italians frequently supported whomever was necessary to win acceptance.<sup>75</sup>

Overall there exists a plethora of state studies describing Italian settlements in every section of the United States. Whether authors focus on Italians in California, Indiana, Louisiana, or decried conditions of Italians in the garment factories of New York, none leave doubt as to the social and economic impact of this ethnic group on the region. In some instances a state appears different -- such as Arizona, where the settlement yields no Italian neighborhoods, restaurants, churches, or newspapers -- yet their need for socialization led to the formation of clubs and organizations; institutions intimately connected with the family unit.<sup>76</sup>

Overall, evidence indicates that first generation Italians entered New Orleans dreaming of a better tomorrow. The urban experience presented them with situations requiring accommodation to some degree. In certain cases Old World ways had to be modified, but never to the point of repudiation. Institutions such as mutual benefit societies and the Italian press seemed to diminish as Italians

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<sup>74</sup>Scarpaci, "A Tale of Selective Accommodation," p. 37.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 46, 50.

<sup>76</sup>Phyllis Cancilla Martinelli, "Italy in Phoenix," Journal of Arizona History, 18, (No. 3, 1977), pp. 319-340.

adjusted to life in New Orleans. By the second generation, the melting pot thesis appeared as the way to prosperity, yet the survey done by this researcher, as well as other studies, illustrate that ethnic identification remained strong. Because present research bears out the realities of cultural persistence, it will be for future generations to show that generalizations concerning all Italians can not be made. Interactions between members in New Orleans differed from those of Italians in San Francisco, Boston, and Buffalo, but cultural identity remained.

## CONCLUSION

The oceanic vessels which delivered Italians to the New Orleans Port of Embarkation served a function not unlike the time machines of science fiction. In coming to the United States immigrants had departed a land of almost semi-feudal existence for one of an industrialized nature. In many respects the upheaval and transformations in every day living presented them with almost bewildering choices. Changes of every conceivable magnitude seemed to reach out to the Italians and nothing resembled the quiet, slow-moving villages of their native land. Work habits, food, dress, housing, streets, and even the pace and tempo of life exhibited a world for which immigrants had little experience. Even their sacred religion, which formerly offered solace, now belonged to those people who had come before them. In Italy, their churches always contained statues of Saints Anthony and Lucy in whom Italians could find comfort. In America these two glorious patrons gave way to a figure standing on snakes whom the natives referred to as St. Patrick!

Language which had once served as an effective mode of communication now became a barrier to social interaction. Until Italians mastered the skills of English their mobility remained limited. Schools, night classes, and Italian societies worked to overcome these problems, but in many instances inability to speak the language forced the immigrants into ghetto-like living areas. There they could gather with family and friends to share the foods and customs they knew so well. This apparent clannishness frequently led to distrust from native Americans. Nonetheless, it presumed to furnish the only resource

in a cultural abyss which separated the Italians from the indigenous population.

To overcome this ostensible disparity, Italians accepted any job which furnished them a living and did not detract from family life. Work in sugar cane fields, saw mills, street carts, groceries, along with various other positions seemed to offer most immigrants their initial occupation. Some eventually made economic strides. Success, of course, did not come easily to everyone, but for those who took the time and exerted the energy, it was inevitable. In the words of almost every person interviewed by this researcher, there emerged the idea that even though they possessed little, first-generation Italians knew how to save. Nevertheless, in this effort to garner money for the future, little time remained for anything other than the ambition to be successful. Every other activity played a subservient role; for unless a man attained his goal, there remained little hope for the family he was bound to protect.

Initially this anticipation of future success included the hope of returning as wealthy men to their native land. In instances where this actually occurred, Italians found themselves confronted with living conditions far more demanding than they had experienced in Louisiana. Therefore, for most who tried, repatriation was short-lived. With family and baggage they returned to New Orleans, but this time with the idea to call the city home.

Life in New Orleans also presented hardships as the city grappled with enormous reconstruction debts, political upheavals, and increased criminal activities. Because Italians represented the largest ethnic group to enter New Orleans during this period, their support was sought

by every political faction. Italians' innate distrust of those outside the family initially engendered their limited participation in community activities, especially in the area of politics.

Through struggle, concerted effort, and indefatigable labor these immigrants slowly added a new ingredient to the already ethnically mixed New Orleans community. They replaced many blacks in the sugar cane fields, Irish and French in the produce area, and any group who did not show the tenacity for long hours and hard work. They never saw themselves as a part of history nor did they even have the time to dream of it. Instead they moved through each day in pursuit of owning their own piece of America. Through frugality, patience, and a quiet determination they slowly etched their way into the mainstream of Louisiana life. Their dream had been simply to belong; the reality came in their unlimited contributions to the New Orleans and Louisiana area. In truth it can be said of this ethnic group

[They] launch'd forth filament . . .  
out of [themselves]

Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly  
speeding them . . .

Surrounded, detached in measureless  
oceans of space,  
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,  
seeking the sphere to connect them.  
Till the bridge [they] will need be  
form'd, till the ductile anchor hold.  
Till the gossamer thread [they] fling  
catch somewhere . . .<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Walt Whitman, "A Noiseless Patient Spider," Modern American Poetry and Modern British Poetry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1962), Vol. I, pp. 4-5, Volume II, pp. 7-10.



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**APPENDIX A**

**INTERVIEWS**

INTERVIEW WITH ELEANOR GUZZO BOLOGNA  
New Orleans -- August 9, 1976

INTERVIEWER: What is your name?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Eleanor Guzzo Bologna.

INTERVIEWER: When and where were you born?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I was born in Partanna, Sicily on May 10, 1884.

INTERVIEWER: When did you come to New Orleans?

MRS. BOLOGNA: We came in 1898 aboard an Austrian ship named the "Bolivia." It was supposed to have been the last voyage for that ship.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned "we" in the last question; who came with you on your trip?

MRS. BOLOGNA: My father, mother and two sisters.

INTERVIEWER: Were there many other immigrants aboard the ship?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Oh yes, the ship had about one thousand on board. To help with the food, live cows had been brought on the ship. As food was needed, they were slaughtered and used to feed us.

INTERVIEWER: When you reached America, where did you land?

MRS. BOLOGNA: We landed at the Port of Embarcation in what we now call Algiers.

INTERVIEWER: Why did your family choose to stay in the Gretna area?

MRS. BOLOGNA: We had an uncle living in Gretna who had written about how much better life was here in Louisiana. He had told Papa that we could stay with his family until we were ready to go on our own.

INTERVIEWER: What if immigrants had no relatives?

MRS. BOLOGNA: There was a hotel for them. I really do not know too much about it except Papa told us that it was for people who had no relatives here. (Note: Mrs. Bologna's reference to a hotel probably referred to the rooms set up by the local padroni until jobs could be found for the incoming immigrants.)

INTERVIEWER: Did you work after you came to Louisiana?

MRS. BOLOGNA: We all worked in the sugar cane fields. For working in the fields, Italians were given a small house with two or three rooms and a small piece of land. I am sure Papa paid for it with part of our hours, but it was a good way to get started.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet Mr. Bologna?

MRS. BOLOGNA: We were introduced at a family gathering. Even though our families were both from Partanna, I did not know him before then. After that meeting he came to see my Papa to ask if he could call on me. In those days everything was done through the girl's Papa.

(Note: At this point Mrs. Bologna seemed to want to speak primarily of her husband and herself as a unit. In order not to detract from the flow of the interview, I allowed it to move in this direction.)

INTERVIEWER: Why did Mr. Bologna come to Louisiana?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Just like my family, Papa saw Louisiana as a land of opportunity. He came in 1897 at age 22 and obtained a job at a saw mill in Gretna. He did not enjoy this type of work, but it earned him forty cents a day,

and he saw this as his way of getting a start. After he was established, he sent for his younger brother, Eugene.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how long Mr. Bologna remained at the sawmill?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Well, I am not certain, but it had to be only about two or three years, because he left before we were married.

INTERVIEWER: Did he leave for a better job?

MRS. BOLOGNA: In a way, yes. But the real reason was his younger brother. Both he and Gene worked at the sawmill and Papa considered himself responsible for Gene. One day as they were working, somehow Gene got caught as the logs were passing and he was killed. Papa felt responsible and decided he needed to do something else. He had saved enough to purchase a horse and wagon from which he could sell fruits and vegetables to Italians in Westwego and Marrero.

INTERVIEWER: Did this offer him a successful way toward his final goal?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I guess I would say yes, because in less than a year after he started with the horse and wagon, he asked my Papa for permission to marry me. Since my Papa knew Antonio was from a good family and also was anxious to get ahead he agreed to the match. We were married at St. Anthony's Church on Rampart Street in New Orleans on April 20, 1902. (This is the present-



day location of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in New Orleans. See chapter on religion for explanation of name change.)

By 1904 we had our first daughter, Lena. Then in the years after there was Anthony, Vincent, Eugene, Frank, Rose, Salvador, Joseph, and Roy. I lost one child through a miscarriage; another son, Joseph, died at six months; and my son, Vincent, was murdered in 1935. Vincent's death was one of our greatest sorrows . . . so young. . .

INTERVIEWER: With such a family, Mr. Bologna must have done well in business.

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes, but it was not easy. After marrying we moved to the East Bank around the St. Mary's Market area. There Papa rented a three-room house. With these three rooms we ran two businesses and lived. You see we had in the back a stable for the horse, and in the front a fruit stand. The rest was for living. Of course we did not yet have all the children. In the morning I ran the fruit stand while Papa took the wagon and sold charcoal for fuel, making about two or three dollars a day. In the evening he again took the wagon and sold olive oil, macaroni, and other Italian food products to the neighbors who were mainly Italian. Generally, he then made about four to five dollars, which with the morning sales and my sales was good money. As business got better, Papa decided to sell

the horse and work just from the stand. Shortly after that he rented a house in the French Market which had a stall attached.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned a fruit stand. Where did you get fresh fruit?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Papa would rise before sunup and go to the area where the farmers would bring in their produce. He would buy it from them and then we would sell it for a few pennies more for the convenience of obtaining fresh fruit near their homes. Most people were willing to pay the extra money. Of course, it made for a long day for us, but it was necessary.

INTERVIEWER: It appears that each time you moved the living improved.

MRS. BOLOGNA: Well, you see as a person did better he would move to a bigger and better house, always working for the day to own it. Then he also had to be sure it was big enough to take care of all the children which God might bless them with.

INTERVIEWER: During all this time did your husband ever consider returning to Sicily?

MRS. BOLOGNA: After my daughter, Lena, was born Papa decided we could return to the home country as wealthy people, but it did not last long. Life was not easy in New Orleans, but we had far more conveniences here than in Partanna.

INTERVIEWER: Was your husband content to own a stall in the French

Market?

MRS. BOLOGNA: No. In time he opened a grocery with the Taromina brothers. The Tarominas decided they wanted to return to New York, so Papa in 1910 opened his own import and manufacturing business under the name of A. Bologna & Company. It was primarily for selling Italian food products. Sometime in the early 1920s -- I'm not sure of the year -- he became a wholesale liquor dealer -- opening a business at St. Peter and North Claiborne. With all our sons it was necessary to be in business on our own.

INTERVIEWER: Since your husband's education was limited, how did he manage?

MRS. BOLOGNA: In the beginning Papa would remember the orders, but as customers grew he began taking the boys with him. They would write down the orders until they returned to the store, then they would box and deliver them.

INTERVIEWER: What about your home -- did you continue to live in the French Market?

MRS. BOLOGNA: No. Papa was always looking for something bigger. As he expanded his business, he began buying land. In those days land was cheap -- going sometimes for twenty-five cents an acre. The Carrollton Avenue area was still swamp, but Papa saw this as a good place for the future, so he bought acres. Then he purchased a big house on North Broad. It had two floors and plenty of rooms. Today they have made it into four

or five apartments. Anyway, we felt this was all the room we needed for our family.

INTERVIEWER: Was this your last move?

MRS. BOLOGNA: No. After the children married, the Broad Street house was too much. Papa had become very ill with pneumonia which left him with asthma so bad that he had to retire in the mid 1930s. In the early 1950s we built a home on Gentilly Boulevard.

INTERVIEWER: With all the emphasis on success in business, what about the children's education?

MRS. BOLOGNA: In the early grades we sent them to the Missionary Sisters on Chartres Street. Then the boys went with the Brothers -- either Aloysius or Stanislaus. The girls went to the Sisters on Ursuline. None went to college only because they took over the business due to Papa's illness.

NOTE: This interview concluded and was supposed to be continued the following week. Due to Mrs. Bologna's sudden illness and subsequent death the following month, the interview never took place.

INTERVIEW WITH JOE BOLOGNA  
Baton Rouge, La. -- June 12, 1977

INTERVIEWER: From what village in Italy or Sicily did you and your brother come?

MR. BOLOGNA: It was Partana, Sicily.

INTERVIEWER: In what year did you come?

MR. BOLOGNA: 1920.

INTERVIEWER: How did you finance your trip here?

MR. BOLOGNA: My daddy gave me the money for the trip.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how much it was?

MR. BOLOGNA: Yes, I remember how much it was. It was about \$120.

INTERVIEWER: What was the trip like?

MR. BOLOGNA: Well, the boat was a commercial boat. It was after the war -- 1918 -- and they had a few passenger boats. This was a commercial boat, but it changed some to bring passengers. It took twenty-eight days from Palermo to New York, but the regular boat only took seven days.

INTERVIEWER: After you arrived in New York how did you get to Louisiana? Did you stay in New York?

MR. BOLOGNA: No. The next day we took the train to New York and came way down to New Orleans. We were supposed to come to New Orleans because my uncle was going to be there. He used to write to my daddy. After the war they used to have shootings and killings over in Sicily. My uncle used to write to my daddy about taking the boys off the road.

INTERVIEWER: Before you left Italy what kind of work did you do?

MR. BOLOGNA: We used to do commercial work. We used to go out of town and buy some olive oil, some cheese, and some wheat where they grow and then sell it to people where these things didn't grow.

INTERVIEWER: So when you came over here you were probably thinking of the same type of thing.

MR. BOLOGNA: Well, I started work on my own when I was 14.

INTERVIEWER: How many children were in your family?

MR. BOLOGNA: Nine -- five boys and four girls.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to school?

MR. BOLOGNA: Yes, I went to school. I got to the fourth grade. After fourth grade I quit. I had three brothers in the army. I took one of my brother's place.

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents leave it up to you as to whether you stayed in school or not?

MR. BOLOGNA: Yes, they left it up to me.

INTERVIEWER: Did they pay for your education or was it free?

MR. BOLOGNA: It was free.

INTERVIEWER: Did any of your brothers or sisters finish school?

MR. BOLOGNA: Yes, my brother, who was two years older than me, finished college. He's a professor of Latin and Greek and he was an assistant president at Palermo University. I had one brother, Stellas, who was a professor; one brother, Jerry, who went into the army and I took his place; and my brother Eugene who came here 230 days after I did. He came up on a commercial

boat to New York, then to New Orleans, in 1922.

INTERVIEWER: If you had to think about your life in Italy, would you say it was an easy or a tough life?

MR. BOLOGNA: I had an easy life in Italy. To tell you the truth, if it hadn't been for my daddy, I wouldn't be here today. I used to work over there pretty good. I used to make good money, even as a fourteen-year-old boy.

INTERVIEWER: When you came to New Orleans where did you work?

MR. BOLOGNA: I worked for six months in macaroni factories, and after six months I told my uncle, "I would like to go into business for myself."

INTERVIEWER: Where did you live when you first came to New Orleans?

MR. BOLOGNA: First I lived with my uncle for a couple of months. Then I moved to Bologna and Taromina's place. They had a macaroni factory, and I lived upstairs.

INTERVIEWER: Where was the macaroni factory?

MR. BOLOGNA: It was on Chartres Street near Cathedral.

INTERVIEWER: In the French Quarter, by Jackson Square?

MR. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You lived above the macaroni factory?

MR. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you work there?

MR. BOLOGNA: Six months.

INTERVIEWER: After that did you move from the macaroni factory?

MR. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you live then?

MR. BOLOGNA: Further down Chartres Street, next to St. Mary's

Church. It was Mrs. Arogas' place at the time, and we used to live upstairs. We rented a little store downstairs.

INTERVIEWER: Who opened the store with you?

MR. BOLOGNA: My brother, Gene, and the Taromina brothers, Frank, Joseph, Rosario and Gene. We had all come to New Orleans together. Frank and Joe Taromina and my brother and I opened the grocery. After one year Joe decided to pull out and return to New York. There he eventually married Marie Uddo and became part of the Progresso Food Line Company. A year later his brother, Frank, decided he too wanted to return to New York. So my brother and I bought him out. Around that time -- 1924 -- Antonio Bologna and the other Tarominas decided to break up their partnership. Since I married Mr. Bologna's oldest daughter Lena in 1923, he asked me and Gene to join. We did and A. Bologna and Company was formed. There we remained until 1937. During that time, however, Mr. Bologna sent us to open a branch in Baton Rouge. We still remained part of the company until 1937, when we became independent and called ourselves Bologna Brothers.

INTERVIEWER: When you were in New Orleans, and when you were first starting out, did you belong to any organizations, church organizations, or have any type of social life -- an Italian society or anything?



MR. BOLOGNA: Yes; we belonged to an Italian Society, which had its club on Rampart Street.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about it?

MR. BOLOGNA: No; I was not very interested. I used to belong, and go to meetings sometimes. I was interested in working.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you join?

MR. BOLOGNA: I joined because they used to go around and make the people become citizens of the United States. I came in 1920. In 1922 a sailor came to see me. He belonged to an Italian Association. He said, "We will help you to get the citizen's papers." That is why I joined the organization. I took the first paper after two years and after five years -- in 1927 -- I became a citizen of the United States.

INTERVIEWER: Basically the organization helped you get your citizenship.

MR. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: It is often said that the priests were supposed to be helpful to the immigrants that came in. Do you remember any contact with priests or did you feel the church was helpful in any way?

MR. BOLOGNA: No.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that people discriminated against you because you were Italian? Was it a hindrance?

MR. BOLOGNA: No.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever been involved in, or did you ever think about getting involved in, politics when you came to

America?

MR. BOLOGNA: No desire.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever feel that perhaps it would have been helpful to you or your children?

MR. BOLOGNA: No.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever felt that being Italian was a hindrance?

MR. BOLOGNA: No, I never felt that being an Italian was a hindrance. The only thing is that I never had an education. Maybe if I had, it would have been more helpful to me.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the Tarominas and Bolognas. Can you remember any other families when you were in business -- early in business -- that were struggling and doing as well as you?

MR. BOLOGNA: Cangelosi -- Charlie Cangelosi was very helpful to me. To help with deliveries he carried the bags on top of his head and walked 10 or 15 miles to get orders to customers.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about your first house after you married? Was it a big house -- was it one room, two rooms?

MR. BOLOGNA: The first house was at Silas. Then we moved on Bonvillain Street. It was a shotgun house which we rented. Then we moved to Baton Rouge. We rented a house for \$22.50 a month and lived there for nine and a half years.

INTERVIEWER: Where was this house located?

MR. BOLOGNA: On 18th Street here in Baton Rouge.

INTERVIEWER: When did you begin renting it, do you remember?

MR. BOLOGNA: About 1929.

INTERVIEWER: Did the rent ever go up?

MR. BOLOGNA: She told me, "If you stay nine and a half years, I will give you one month free."

INTERVIEWER: At this time were you in business for yourself?

MR. BOLOGNA: That is when we were still A. Bologna and Company -- up to 1937.

INTERVIEWER: In 1937 you returned to Italy and you took a car with you -- or did you buy it over there?

MR. BOLOGNA: I took my car from here. The tickets cost \$240 a piece. I had my wife and four children. It cost me \$157 round trip to take my car. We drove from here to New York, and there I put my car on the boat and got off at Palermo. We toured Italy for three weeks. We had a nice time. At that time one dollar was 24 liras. It was at that time that Mussolini was in power.

INTERVIEWER: It must have been something for the people over there to see that car.

MR. BOLOGNA: Every time I stopped in a town there were 1000 people around the car.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you tour?

MR. BOLOGNA: Two or three weeks touring Italy. We stayed over there for two or three months.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the first time that you had returned to Italy?

MR. BOLOGNA: No; the first time was in 1927 when I got my citizen's papers. After that, my brother Gene went over in 1934. After I came back in 1937, he went over in 1939. After the war, I think we were the first people to fly to Italy. Me and my brother have been going every year around August. We go back to see the family.

INTERVIEWER: When you went back before World War II did you find conditions the same?

MR. BOLOGNA: The conditions before the war were 100 percent better because Mussolini was in power. They had Vashista (sic). A lot of people did not like the Vashista because they made some people happy, some people aren't happy. To me, I think Mussolini did a lot of good because he cleaned all the Mafia out. People could walk at night and nobody would bother them. And everywhere you stopped, there was respect for the American people.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about the Mafia in Italy? Was it really a protection like they say it was?

MR. BOLOGNA: Well, I tell you, there's no protection whatsoever in Italy. The Mafia is too wild. One wants to be the boss of the other. When they start to fight they fight between themselves and they kill between themselves. One day somebody would kill men on the other side and then the next day the other side would take revenge. Before I came here in 1920, in my home town, for 15 days they were killing for whatever. The police knew who they were and they said, "so long as you kill

between yourselves."

INTERVIEWER: What were the reasons for fighting? Was it to see who was the strongest?

MR. BOLOGNA: The fighting was over who had control of the organization.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any relationship between the Mafia there and the one that sprung up here?

MR. BOLOGNA: I do not believe it myself, but a lot of people say yes. They say the people over there came to central over here, but I do not believe all that stuff. But at that time, you see -- in 1920 -- it was before Mussolini. When Mussolini came to power, he cleaned all the Mafias up. They went in one night with a truck, and they put them all in a truck and took them to jail. During the night they cleaned all of Sicily. I do not know how many people they picked up during the night of a surprise attack. After '37-'38 everything was peaceful.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about Partana before you left? What kind of place was it?

MR. BOLOGNA: It was a nice little town with about 18,000 people. We had much of everything except water. We had to go up town for water to drink. Of course, they had this water that came from the rain -- from the cistern. But when I went back in '27 they had water, they had electrical lights -- they had much of everything. Today it is just as nice as an American city. They

have everything we have here. When I went after World War II they had a Ford automobile in my home town. Now they have at least 15,000. They got more automobiles -- they got to keep them. So over there they live high. Their customs are high. They are like here -- people want a washing machine, they go out and buy the machine. . They got small costs, they got big costs.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned your father, but you haven't said anything about your mother. Can you tell me anything about her?

MR. BOLOGNA: Well, I can't tell you much about my mother, except she used to be a housewife.

INTERVIEWER: You say a housewife -- you said they had to go to the fountain for water -- she had to do the washing.

MR. BOLOGNA: We used to go out and get the water with the wagon. Every 15 days they used to go out of town about 3-4 miles and do the big washing.

INTERVIEWER: What was your mother's name before she got married?

MR. BOLOGNA: Francesca Yatza.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me anything about your father? What kind of man was he?

MR. BOLOGNA: My daddy was a real good man in society. The only trouble with him was that he never liked to see me go to work for anybody else. He would say if you go work for somebody else, you make the pay before you finish -- what you make in your early years -- your

spending money. Work for yourself is different.

INTERVIEWER: What was his name?

MR. BOLOGNA: Francesco.

INTERVIEWER: Did he have a store also?

MR. BOLOGNA: No, No. He and the Tarominas used to be together.  
He used to buy stuff for selling it here.

INTERVIEW WITH LENA BOLOGNA  
Baton Rouge, La. -- June 21, 1977

INTERVIEWER: Would you tell me your name, please?

MRS. BOLOGNA: It's Lena Bologna.

INTERVIEWER: When were you born?

MRS. BOLOGNA: February 1, 1904.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

MRS. BOLOGNA: In New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your parents?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Mr. and Mrs. Antonio Bologna.

INTERVIEWER: Where were your parents from?

MRS. BOLOGNA: From Sicily, Italy -- Partana.

INTERVIEWER: I'd like to ask you something about your parents.  
Do you know when your parents came to this country?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I don't remember the year that they came. It must  
have been in the 1890's, I imagine.

INTERVIEWER: I think grandma came in 1898.

MRS. BOLOGNA: Something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give me your earliest recollection of the  
home of your parents, the one that you remember?

MRS. BOLOGNA: The one I remember is the one I was born in, on  
Chartres Street in the French Quarter.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about the house?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Just a little one-shotgun house.

INTERVIEWER: What did your father do as for business?

MRS. BOLOGNA: A wholesaler of cheese and macaroni and tomato paste  
and stuff like that.



INTERVIEWER: Did he have carts? How did he get this business?  
Who helped him out?

MRS. BOLOGNA: An uncle of his that was here before he came.

INTERVIEWER: He didn't have a truck, so how did he get the goods  
around?

MRS. BOLOGNA: They used to have a horse and wagon in those days.

INTERVIEWER: Did they have a name for his place? It was his own  
business -- right?

MRS. BOLOGNA: It was his own business then. It was just Bologna  
then.

INTERVIEWER: What did he do before he went into this business?  
He probably had to get some money, so do you know  
what he did before?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Well, when he first came to the country, he landed in  
the town of Marrero, Louisiana in Harvey. That's  
where he started business in the sugar cane fields.  
That's how he started when he came to the United  
States.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know where your parents were married?

MRS. BOLOGNA: In New Orleans at St. Anthony's Church on Rampart  
Street.

INTERVIEWER: The business that he eventually opened after he moved  
to this side was on Chartres Street. Where did they  
move after they left Chartres Street?

MRS. BOLOGNA: On North Peters Street, right across the Mississippi  
River.

INTERVIEWER: He still had his produce business?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes, and at that time he started with Taromina.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of house did you live in on North Peters?

MRS. BOLOGNA: We lived upstairs from the business.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know how long you stayed there?

MRS. BOLOGNA: It probably was about six or seven years, maybe.

INTERVIEWER: Was the house better than the one on Chartres.

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes, a little better.

INTERVIEWER: How many children were in your family?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Nine -- seven boys and two girls.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you move from North Peters?

MRS. BOLOGNA: From North Peters he moved on Decatur Street. That's where he had his business and it was burnt down afterwards.

INTERVIEWER: It was an accident that it burned?

MRS. BOLOGNA: It must have been an accident, but we never could find out how it started.

INTERVIEWER: You don't have any idea of the year that this happened?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I must have been about nine years of age. About 1913.

INTERVIEWER: After Decatur did you move again?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Well, he moved to Chartres Street at the Cathedral, at the corner where they started Bologna and Taromina. Macaroni Factory.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live there too?

MRS. BOLOGNA: No, we lived on Kerlrec Street. That's near the French Quarter, too.

INTERVIEWER: You lived generally in the French Quarter area. Were there many Italians living in that area at that time?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: The house on Kerlerec Street -- what was it like?

MRS. BOLOGNA: It was a five room shot-gun house. The blinds were on the outside.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say that this house was the same as the last one or maybe even a little bit better? Was he making more money then?

MRS. BOLOGNA: He was making more money. We stayed there until we left to go to Chicago after. From there we moved to Chicago and we stayed in Chicago for six years -- I mean six months.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know why he moved to Chicago?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Things were going contrary in the business, and he got disgusted and he wanted to go back to Europe. But, he said, "I'm going to try Chicago first." So we stayed there six months and things were just as bad, if not worse. So we came back to New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: What did he do while he was in Chicago?

MRS. BOLOGNA: A salesman.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know who he worked for?

MRS. BOLOGNA: No, he worked for himself every time.

INTERVIEWER: It was still produce.

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How many children were there by the time you moved to Chicago?

MRS. BOLOGNA: There must have been about three of us.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you? Do you know?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I was about 11.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you live in Chicago?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I couldn't tell you the street. In the center section of Chicago. It was right in Chicago where we lived.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything at all about the neighborhood, the people, or anything?

MRS. BOLOGNA: No.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember that as a pleasant time?

MRS. BOLOGNA: As a child, it was an adventure for me. But for my daddy, it wasn't. He just couldn't see himself there so he came on back to New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: When you came back to New Orleans, this is when he went in with Taromina. Where was this business?

MRS. BOLOGNA: On Chartres Street, on the corner of the Cathedral.

INTERVIEWER: And this was Taromina and Bologna?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Bologna and Taromina.

INTERVIEWER: Was this the macaroni business?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes,

INTERVIEWER: About how long did they stay in this business?

MRS. BOLOGNA: They stayed quite a while. As the children grew up they separated. My daddy sold to the Taramenos. He moved on to another place and opened a macaroni place too.

INTERVIEWER: That was called Crescent?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know when he decided to go into wholesale liquor?

MRS. BOLOGNA: When they gave up the macaroni, they went into liquor. That's when they moved to North Claiborne.

INTERVIEWER: Your father sounds like he was a pretty courageous man.

MRS. BOLOGNA: He was.

INTERVIEWER: He doesn't sound like he is afraid.

MRS. BOLOGNA: No. When he was young, he used to tell his mom that "I'm going to America and I'm going to become a rich man." And she said, "no, you're not." But he did; he came to America and made a name for himself. And the name Bologna sounded real good to everybody until they fell apart.

INTERVIEWER: Did you every go back to Italy?

MRS. BOLOGNA: We went back in 1913.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about that. Why did he go back?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Because he thought he could do better by going back to his own country. Instead, he couldn't see himself. He was a salesman; he would go out of town. He said there was no advancement there yet. Everything was going backwards there -- no lights, no water, you had to go to the fountains to get water. It was hard times, and poor mamma, she was used to having water and having everything convenient. She said, "I can't see myself doing all this hard work, having to get water every day." So he got tired doing his business, too, so he said, "Well, let's go back to the states." And then they heard rumors of the world war breaking

out, so he said, "Let's go back before that breaks out." And sure enough, as soon as we got back the world war broke out.

INTERVIEWER: You sailed from Italy and came to New Orleans or to New York?

MRS. BOLOGNA: To New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: It's amazing that he just closed the business when he got ready to move.

MRS. BOLOGNA: But it's just wonderful that -- well, he had money and he knew how to save it and he knew how to use it.

INTERVIEWER: When he came back from Italy this time, what business did he go back into?

MRS. BOLOGNA: The macaroni factory.

INTERVIEWER: Was it in the same place?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little bit about your mother. What was her maiden name?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Eleanora Guzzo.

INTERVIEWER: Was she born in Partana?

MRS. BOLOGNA: She was born in Partana, too. They both met in Marrero, and they got married in New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: When she came over here she wasn't working, was she?

MRS. BOLOGNA: No, they were just housewives then.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father become a citizen?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother become a citizen?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I don't know. In those days they said that if a man

comes from Europe, the wife eventually becomes a citizen.

INTERVIEWER: After you came back from Italy, where did you move?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I think that was on Kerlereg Street. And then we moved again. The next stop was on Dauphine Street. That was the biggest home we ever had.

INTERVIEWER: You say big. Tell me how big.

MRS. BOLOGNA: It was two-story, with the gallery and the patio in the back, with high brick walls on each side. We had a house in the back, and my grandmother and grandfather stayed there. He was a baker from our home town, and he used to bake our bread, pizzas, and all that stuff. He raised our garden there. In the back of us they had this public school -- McDonough 15 School -- and your mother used to go to school there. And the teachers there used to say, "When your grandfather makes the bread tell him to send us some. That bread smells so good."

INTERVIEWER: Whose parents were they -- your father's or mother's?

MRS. BOLOGNA: My mother's.

INTERVIEWER: How long did they live?

MRS. BOLOGNA: He died at 74 and she died at 86.

INTERVIEWER: They stayed with you until they died, or at least in the house in the back?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you married?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Nineteen.

INTERVIEWER: Were you the first one in your family to get married?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You're the oldest in the family. How much education did you get?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes; I got as far as the eighth grade.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother expect you to help out with the rest of the children?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What about language? Your mother learned English. How did she learn English?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Well, she studied a little. They used to have someone that helped them out in the English language when they lived across the river. But, mamma was going to be a school teacher in her home town, because over there sixth grade makes eighth grade in the States. They are so much more advanced in their teaching. Outside of that, that's how she learned. And we spoke all the time English. Mamma would speak to me sometimes in Italian. I caught on to the language because when I went to Italy we stayed a year over there and I went to school. Then when I went to school in New Orleans, I kept the language up. They used to teach a little Italian at St. Mary's Church, so I learned to read and write. And I kept correspondence with the kinfolk and that's how I kept up the language.

INTERVIEWER: You said your mother thought about being a teacher --



she went through the eighth grade in her education.

What about your father?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I don't think he was too much advanced in those days -- say third and fourth grade they knew plenty.

INTERVIEWER: What about his brothers? Did he have any brothers?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes -- Vincent. He was a Salecian Father and he was a professor of philosophy and the languages.

INTERVIEWER: In Bologna?

MRS. BOLOGNA: In Bologna, Italy and in Partanna, Italy. He was in the war and he was wounded, and then when the second World War came, he passed away.

INTERVIEWER: He's the one whose picture was in the uniform. So he was a priest and a soldier.

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: That means that someone in your father's family did get higher education.

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother had three sisters?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Three sisters.

INTERVIEWER: Did they come to the states?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes, they were all here. One lived in Chalmette, Louisiana, and then in her older years she retired in New York, and in Rhineland, New Jersey, where her daughter, Josephine, lived.

INTERVIEWER: What was her married name?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Accardo. And Aunt Lena across the river -- it used to be McDonoughville, but now it's Gretna, Louisiana.

The third one was Mamma.

INTERVIEWER: Are you related to the Taramenos?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Well, yes, we are cousins. My mother was their first cousin -- it is our second cousin. Because there were seven brothers, there were seven brothers in the Taromina family, too. And that's why they had so many Tarominas.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you married?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I was married in Mobile, Alabama.

INTERVIEWER: You went there by train?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes. We had a special coach to take us, and we even took the hairdresser, the lady to dress me up for the wedding, and the maids. We had the wedding over there and the reception was at the hotel. The Bishop Gerard -- then he was the pastor of the cathedral -- he married me and then he became bishop later on.

INTERVIEWER: You had a special coach which means your father really had to have a little money.

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: The whole family went to this wedding?

MRS. BOLOGNA: The whole family. And then we came back that Sunday. Saturday night we had the big reception at home.

INTERVIEWER: When were you married?

MRS. BOLOGNA: 1923.

INTERVIEWER: When is your anniversary?

MRS. BOLOGNA: October 10.

INTERVIEWER: Did you pick your own husband?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think -- or do you remember what -- discipline was like? Who did the disciplining?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Papa mainly, but Mama was just as strict.

INTERVIEWER: I gather they must have approved of Uncle Joe to let you go out with him. Or did you go out that much?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Well, we would go out, but we had to have someone with us. We used to take my brother, Anthony, and his girl friend, too.

INTERVIEWER: After you were married, how long did you stay in New Orleans?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Just about a year or a year and a half, because then we came to Baton Rouge and we opened up a house here in Baton Rouge.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you live when you first came to Baton Rouge?

MRS. BOLOGNA: On North Boulevard -- the business was downstairs and I lived upstairs.

INTERVIEWER: That's when you were renting from D'Agostina.

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You lived there for nine and a half years.

MRS. BOLOGNA: No; that place we lived in for about four and a half. I moved to the house for nine and a half years.

INTERVIEWER: You were renting for \$22.50 a month. Can you tell me about the ownership of the Baton Rouge store?

MRS. BOLOGNA: My husband was in partnership with my father.

INTERVIEWER: And he stayed in partnership with your father until

when?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I think it was 1937.

INTERVIEWER: How many children do you have?

MRS. BOLOGNA: I have four -- two boys and two girls.

INTERVIEWER: Has your husband always done the type of work that he's doing now?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: In 1937 he eventually went on his own.

MRS. BOLOGNA: In fact, we had produce then, too. We used to have produce to sell in this new house at the end, on 14th Street, before he went into the liquor completely.

INTERVIEWER: Did you and Uncle Joe ever join any Italian Social organizations?

MRS. BOLOGNA: My husband did -- one of them. I think he belonged to the Elks. He belonged to the Italian Society they had here. I don't remember the name. But he didn't stay too long with that.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give me any of your personal comments -- what are your feelings about religion?

MRS. BOLOGNA: No help at all from the church. Everything was done on our own.

INTERVIEWER: As a child you attended St. Mary's Italian School. Can you tell me what was an ordinary day there? What were some of the things you studied. What were some of the things that they taught?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Well, they had English, Geography, Spelling, Reading and Writing, Penmanship -- they had a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Did they have the whole day in English or did they split some up for Italian and some of it in English?

MRS. BOLOGNA: We had a special teacher that used to come in and give us instruction on the language. Either you would take Italian or French. I took Italian. It is just like out here. I guess they have more than one teacher.

INTERVIEWER: Did anyone in your family ever take part in politics?

MRS. BOLOGNA: No.

INTERVIEWER: What are your feelings on this? How do you feel about people being in politics?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Well, it's alright to belong to politics just so long as they don't go overboard.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any particular subject which you would like to mention?

MRS. BOLOGNA: Yes, it's about my mother and how hard she worked. She raised us, cooked, and clothed all of us, took care of Papa, the house, the special baking, and found time to sell from her home. Her life was far from easy, yet she never complained. As we grew older and married, she continued to prepare Sunday meals for all -- even though our numbers doubled. Holidays meant people everywhere. Yet her composure remained undaunted. The strength she possessed was a lesson for us all.

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. MARY CAMMARATA  
New Orleans, La. -- June 11, 1977

INTERVIEWER: What was your husband's full name?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Nigell Cammarata.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Travia.

INTERVIEWER: When were you born?

MRS. CAMMARATA: November 11.

INTERVIEWER: What year?

MRS. CAMMARATA: I don't know. I'll be eighty-six years old on  
November 11. (Circa 1889).

INTERVIEWER: Where were you married?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Chackahoula.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the date you were married?

MRS. CAMMARATA: September 9.

INTERVIEWER: What year?

MRS. CAMMARATA: I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you were married?

MRS. CAMMARATA: I guess I was about eighteen.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me the name of the village in Sicily where you  
were born.

MRS. CAMMARATA: Travia.

INTERVIEWER: You lived there until you were about fourteen?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me anything about the village of Travia?  
What was your house like?

- MRS. CAMMARATA: I remember we didn't have a fancy house, but we had a comfortable house.
- INTERVIEWER: What kind of work did your father do?
- MRS. CAMMARATA: He was a gardener. He raised all kinds of vegetables and fruit. He also raised wheat for our mules.
- INTERVIEWER: How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- MRS. CAMMARATA: I have four brothers and three sisters.
- INTERVIEWER: When you were in Sicily, did you go to school?
- MRS. CAMMARATA: Oh, yes.
- INTERVIEWER: Did your brothers and sisters go to school as well?
- MRS. CAMMARATA: No.
- INTERVIEWER: How long did you stay in school?
- MRS. CAMMARATA: I went to the third grade.
- INTERVIEWER: What about your sisters?
- MRS. CAMMARATA: My older sister didn't go. My older brother skipped school. My mother wanted him to go, but he didn't want to go because he wanted to go to work. You know a young boy like that wants to go to work and they like to swim. As for my other three brothers, two of them didn't know nothing. My third brother went to school for a while.
- INTERVIEWER: You said your older sister didn't go. Was that because she helped your mother?
- MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes. She worked together with my daddy and my brothers in the fruit business.
- INTERVIEWER: Did your father sell any of the fruits and vegetables that he raised?

MRS. CAMMARATA: He did.

INTERVIEWER: When he decided to come to America -- do you know why he decided?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes. You see, my two brothers was here already. One by one they came here.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father pay their way?

MRS. CAMMARATA: My two brothers sent for my father, me and one of the brothers, and we came.

INTERVIEWER: Where did your brothers live when they first came here?

MRS. CAMMARATA: On the plantation.

INTERVIEWER: When you came to America, did you land in New York or in New Orleans?

MRS. CAMMARATA: In New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the name of the ship you came on?

MRS. CAMMARATA: No. I was very young. I was more sick than anything else on the ship.

INTERVIEWER: You said the voyage took about a month.

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes, I remember that.

INTERVIEWER: When you came here you said that you went to a plantation near Thibodaux.

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes, that's right.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father start working on the plantation?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes, but he didn't like it too much.

INTERVIEWER: Did he do that work all of his life or did he eventually change?

MRS. CAMMARATA: No. After we came from Italy, we went there four



or five years and then we moved to Donner. It was a sawmill. All my four brothers were working in the sawmill. But my daddy didn't work not too much. They had a piece of ground on the side of the house and he continued to grow vegetables for us. But, outside of that, he didn't work any more.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you meet your husband?

MRS. CAMMARATA: On the plantation. He was working on the plantation at the time, just like my brothers.

INTERVIEWER: Did you choose him or did your parents choose him?

MRS. CAMMARATA: I chose him.

INTERVIEWER: So your marriage wasn't arranged. In Italy they sometimes arrange the marriage.

MRS. CAMMARATA: I could remember somebody else that I liked. But that's destiny -- where you are going to go. And I didn't want to change for you or the other one. I couldn't marry you, I couldn't marry the other one.

INTERVIEWER: You were married in Chackahoula?

MRS. CAMMARATA: In Chackahoula. I was living in Donner. As soon as I got married, I went to live in Bogalusa.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of work did your husband do then?

MRS. CAMMARATA: He worked in the sawmill.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you live in Bogalusa?

MRS. CAMMARATA: I don't know exactly how many years. I had four children there.

INTERVIEWER: How many children did you have altogether?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Seven.

INTERVIEWER: How many girls and how many boys?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Four boys and three girls.

INTERVIEWER: While your husband was working in the sawmill, were you doing anything besides raising a family?

MRS. CAMMARATA: No, I couldn't.

INTERVIEWER: Did you send all of your children to school?

MRS. CAMMARATA: I did.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what school they attended in Bogalusa?

MRS. CAMMARATA: My oldest daughter went to school in Bogalusa. Then we moved here after I had four children. Sharon, the oldest, went to school in Bogalusa for a while and then she started here. She didn't finish because I had all the children. My husband set up a little grocery store, and I had to do all the washing and other things, so she helped in the store. She knew enough, and, even though she didn't know all that much, she was the best dressmaker in town.

INTERVIEWER: Where was your store when you first came to New Orleans?

MRS. CAMMARATA: The first time we were on Claiborne Avenue.

INTERVIEWER: Was it Cammarata's Grocery?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you move after that?

MRS. CAMMARATA: After that my husband wanted to close the store. I don't remember why. The minute we closed, we didn't know what to do with ourselves. Later we went back in the grocery on Claiborne and Melpomene.

INTERVIEWER: What did your husband do after he left the grocery?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Nothing -- he couldn't do nothing. So we went back to another corner and opened a business again.

INTERVIEWER: Did he buy or build this place?

MRS. CAMMARATA: We rented it both times. We had to buy a house to live in. When we got out the first time from Claiborne we had bought the house to live in.

INTERVIEWER: Was the house right by the grocery?

MRS. CAMMARATA: No, we were on Toledano Street.

INTERVIEWER: Were you still in the same house the second time you rented the grocery?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you stay in the second grocery business?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Twenty years.

INTERVIEWER: Did you stay in the same house the whole time?

MRS. CAMMARATA: We moved after twenty years. My husband was tired and he wanted to get out. So we bought a house on Amana and Broad. We lived in this house almost twenty years, too. My husband got very, very sick and then he got well. After five years he died.

INTERVIEWER: When he died, were your children old enough to work?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes. I only had two at home.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of work did your children do? You mentioned that one was a seamstress.

MRS. CAMMARATA: One wasn't doing anything -- the middle of the three daughters -- but she married before the others. Then her husband died so we kept her at home to help us. Because she lost her husband she wasn't feeling too well. She was nervous, so the doctor told her "You have to go to work; you have to get out of the house." So that it was she did. She is still active; she gets on the bus in the morning and goes to Maison Blanche.

INTERVIEWER: When you came to New Orleans, did you or your husband join an Italian society?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes, he did.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know why he joined?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Because it was an Italian Society.

INTERVIEWER: Did he become a citizen?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you also become a citizen?

MRS. CAMMARATA: No. Not at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Are you children citizens?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You must be a citizen today?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What church did you attend when you came to New Orleans?

MRS. CAMMARATA: St. John the Baptist on Dryades. All my children went there.

INTERVIEWER: Did the priest ever come to your house to visit with your family?

MRS. CAMMARATA: If I was sick, yes. He did come a couple of times.

INTERVIEWER: Did he come only if you were sick?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes. I never saw him any other time.

INTERVIEWER: Did any member of your family go into politics?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Yes. The son that died. His name was Augustino Cammarata.

INTERVIEWER: What did he do in politics?

MRS. CAMMARATA: He really didn't work for a politicians, but he was active.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of work did he do?

MRS. CAMMARATA: He did a couple of different things. I won't be able to remember. He worked for my son-in-law, Gerald, as a clerk.

INTERVIEWER: How old was he when he died?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Forty-four years old.

INTERVIEWER: What was the cause of his death?

MRS. CAMMARATA: He had leukemia.

INTERVIEWER: When you and your husband began here in New Orleans, were people ever unkind to you because you were Italian?

MRS. CAMMARATA: No.

INTERVIEWER: Who were some of your neighbors and friends?

MRS. CAMMARATA: I knew your grandfather, because he used to come to the grocery. Mr. Vedarome -- there were quite a few but I can't remember all of them.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of store was it?

MRS. CAMMARATA: Groceries and vegetables, and a little fruit.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever return to Sicily after you came here?

MRS. CAMMARATA: No. I'm dying to see it, but I'm too old now.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father and mother ever go back?

MRS. CAMMARATA: No. Only Andrew and Angelo.

INTERVIEWER: When you came here was there anyone in your family who remained in Italy?

MRS. CAMMARATA: We were the last, except for other relations.

INTERVIEWER: When you first came here what kind of work did your brothers do?

MRS. CAMMARATA: They were all working on the plantation in the beginning. When we moved, my youngest brother and my daddy worked at the sawmill.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to the last store that you and your husband owned?

MRS. CAMMARATA: We just got out. My husband got sick and my young son, who was not living at home, didn't want to care for it. We sold everything -- not the property, it was mine -- we sold the grocery things -- fixtures and all that. We got rid of it.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a hard life?

MRS. CAMMARATA: It was a hard life. It was a help with the Blessed

Mother, with my prayers and everything. I came out all right all the time. I worked hard; I raised my children myself. I sent them to school as clean as a pane. I never let them miss school; they had to be ready to leave. I was very devoted to my church; I worked so much for my church, St. John the Baptist. I was the sacristan. I washed the priest's alb, vestments; I washed finger towels. I loved to do it. I'm sorry I can't do that now because I'm too old. Every year when we had a festival in church me and my friend baked and cooked. I think I did my share for the church.

INTERVIEW WITH CONCHETTA CANGELOSI  
Houma, La. -- February 21, 1978

INTERVIEWER: What is your full name?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Conchetta Cecile Cangelosi.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

MRS. CANGELOSI: In New Orleans in 1899.

INTERVIEWER: Where were your parents born?

MRS. CANGELOSI: They were married in New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: But where are they from?

MRS. CANGELOSI: My mother and daddy were born in Cefalu, Italy. My daddy came over when he was seventeen and my mother came over when she was nine.

INTERVIEWER: Did your daddy come by himself?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did he have any relatives here?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He was a sailor and he travelled all around the world.

INTERVIEWER: How did your mother come here?

MRS. CANGELOSI: She came with her daddy.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of work did her daddy do?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Her daddy was a fruit merchant.

INTERVIEWER: Did he have his own business -- did he have his own little cart?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He used no cart that I know about. He did have a store in which he sold fruits and Italian products.

INTERVIEWER: Where was it?

MRS. CANGELOSI: On Decatur Street.



INTERVIEWER: What was the name of the place?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Cangelosi Company.

INTERVIEWER: Did anyone work with him? Did he have a brother who worked with him?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He was in company with his brother and brother-in-law.

INTERVIEWER: What were their names?

MRS. CANGELOSI: My daddy's brother's name was Frank and his brother-in-law's name was Salvador Delfarso (sic).

INTERVIEWER: How many children were in your family?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Ten -- five girls and five boys.

INTERVIEWER: Did all of you go to school?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go to school?

MRS. CANGELOSI: McDonough Fifteen and the high school. We did get our religious instruction at St. Mary's Italian.

INTERVIEWER: Did all your brothers and sisters go to school?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes. They all went to school and they all finished high school and college.

INTERVIEWER: Did anyone work with your daddy in the fruit business?

MRS. CANGELOSI: None of them worked.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you meet your husband?

MRS. CANGELOSI: In New Orleans at a cousin's wedding.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you married?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Between 23 and 25.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you married?

MRS. CANGELOSI: At St. Mary's Italian Church on Chartres Street.

INTERVIEWER: When were you married?

MRS. CANGELOSI: April 18, 1922.

INTERVIEWER: How many children did you have?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Four children. I had two miscarriages, so I had a total of six -- three girls and one boy.

INTERVIEWER: How many are still living?

MRS. CANGELOSI: All of them.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do for a living after you were married?

MRS. CANGELOSI: I worked in a shoe shop.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work in New Orleans or here?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Here in Houma.

INTERVIEWER: Did your brothers and sisters stay in New Orleans?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Are you related to the Cangelosis in Baton Rouge?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: To which Cangelosi family in Baton Rouge are you related?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Rosalie Cangelosi is my third cousin. She is second cousin to my daddy. Her daddy was Sam Cangelosi and my daddy was Joseph Cangelosi.

INTERVIEWER: Did your brothers work for your daddy?

MRS. CANGELOSI: No. They all worked for different companies. They were bookkeepers. One of my brothers was an auditor at the bank.

INTERVIEWER: Tell my about meeting your husband. Did you meet him at a wedding?

MRS. CANGELOSI: No, I think it was just in company.

INTERVIEWER: Did you date or did you just meet him?

MRS. CANGELOSI: It was through my cousin.

INTERVIEWER: Were you allowed to go out with him?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: By yourself?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes, we did not need a chaperone.

INTERVIEWER: What did your mother and dad think about your leaving New Orleans?

MRS. CANGELOSI: They did not care about it so much. The problem was that they did not want me to marry him.

INTERVIEWER: Why didn't they want you to marry him?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Because his people were not of the same background as mine.

INTERVIEWER: Did any of your brothers or sisters come to Houma?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes. They visited all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Did any of them ever live here?

MRS. CANGELOSI: No, they all lived in New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever work?

MRS. CANGELOSI: No.

INTERVIEWER: On week days, what time did your husband start working?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He worked from 8 until 6, depending on what the job was. He had the shoe repair shop and it depended on how much work he had to do.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think he was able to provide you with a good living?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes, we made a good living.

INTERVIEWER: Did your husband ever invest in property?

MRS. CANGELOSI: None except where the shoe store was and our home.

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to send all of your children to school?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell me what an ordinary Sunday would be like in your family when your children were growing up?

MRS. CANGELOSI: The families would get together. My daddy's brothers and my mother's brothers and their children would all come to our house on holidays and on special occasions.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of entertainment did you have when you were growing up?

MRS. CANGELOSI: We used to go to different parties, a sewing class and embroidery classes.

INTERVIEWER: Where were the classes held?

MRS. CANGELOSI: At Maison Blanche, a store located on Canal Street in New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: Were any of your brothers or sisters ever active in politics in New Orleans?

MRS. CANGELOSI: No.

INTERVIEWER: Did you or any one of your brothers or sisters ever belong to any of the Italian Societies?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What Italian Society did you belong to?

MRS. CANGELOSI: The St. Joseph Italian Society.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you join?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Because they were soliciting members.

INTERVIEWER: Did the society do anything for you? Did they have

meetings?

MRS. CANGELOSI: They had very few Italians here and that was their way of getting together.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have many Italian friends here in Houma?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have many friends who were not Italian?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Name some.

MRS. CANGELOSI: Strada, Decates, Romano, LeBlanc.

INTERVIEWER: When you first came here, were you in St. Francis parish? Was that the only church parish here at the time?

MRS. CANGELOSI: St. Francis was the only church.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever see the priest except on Sunday?

MRS. CANGELOSI: No, just on Sunday.

INTERVIEWER: Did the priests ever come out and visit?

MRS. CANGELOSI: When I was sick one day they would come out.

INTERVIEWER: Let's go back to your days in New Orleans. Where did your mother and daddy live?

MRS. CANGELOSI: On Royal Street, around the Missionaries Sisters. Mother Cabrini was there at the time and my mother was friends with her and she used to go to my daddy's store. They used to go around in a wagon. They had a driver and the two nuns would sit in the wagon and they'd go from place to place to get groceries. When they'd go to my daddy's store, he would fill up their wagon. Mother Cabrini would come visit Mama at our

house, and my mamma would go to the convent. She used to sit in Mother Cabrini's chair. She knew Mother Cabrini very well.

INTERVIEWER: Did they always live in the house on Royal Street?

MRS. CANGELOSI: We always lived there until my daddy passed away.

INTERVIEWER: How old was your daddy when he died?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He was 89.

INTERVIEWER: Was he still working when he died?

MRS. CANGELOSI: No; he retired about five years before.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to the business?

MRS. CANGELOSI: After my daddy retired, my uncle got sick and they could not keep up the business, so they sold it.

INTERVIEWER: What was the address on Decatur Street?

MRS. CANGELOSI: I think it was in the 1200 block.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me some of the jobs your brothers did. Tell me their names and their jobs.

MRS. CANGELOSI: Sal was a bookkeeper; Frank was an Internal Revenue man; Charlie was an auditor at the bank.

INTERVIEWER: What did Anthony do?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He was a druggist.

INTERVIEWER: What about your sisters -- who did they marry?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Santa Michael, Elsie Bush -- Rose and Sarah did not get married.

INTERVIEWER: Describe your house in New Orleans.

MRS. CANGELOSI: It was a three-story brick building. It had four bedrooms on the second floor and three bedrooms on the third floor. There was a staircase with 28 steps to

the second floor and to the third floor there was a stair case with 15 steps. On the third floor, there was a double room. The room was the size of the house and they used to give balls up there.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever go to any of the balls?

MRS. CANGELOSI: No. That was before I was born.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother have any maids or servants?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How many?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Two; one for the laundry and one for the house.

INTERVIEWER: After your father died, did your mother sell the house?

MRS. CANGELOSI: We had it for sale because my daddy was sick and the house was too large for the family and for my mother to take care of. It was sold after my daddy died. Then my mother bought a house on South Cortez. An investor bought the house and they made an apartment house out of it.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother and dad celebrated their 50th anniversary. Tell me about it.

MRS. CANGELOSI: Father came over to bless my mother and daddy and the five girls and five boys acted as bridesmaids and groomsmen. From the second floor, each bridesmaid would come down the stairs and meet the groomsmen at the end of the stairs. My mother had one of her bridesmaids and groomsmen living and they were both in the reception. A ceremony was performed just like a wedding. There was the blessing of the marriage in

the living room. The altar was fixed with candles and flowers. There were flowers all around the house and everything was trimmed in gold. Then the band started playing and everybody started dancing.

INTERVIEWER: How were you dressed?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Each bridesmaid had a different color dress.

INTERVIEWER: How was your mother dressed?

MRS. CANGELOSI: She had a blue lace dress and she wore a gold cross and gold chain which was her grandmother's. My daddy wore a suit.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that all Italians celebrate their 50th anniversary like this?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about Christmas.

MRS. CANGELOSI: We would go to New Orleans the day before Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve there was a large tree and everybody exchanged gifts. There were 15 grandchildren and there was a gift for each from Grandpa and Grandma which was usually a dress or something she had made. She would have a gift for her ten children. For the girls she would always have the same thing -- maybe a piece of jewelry, such as a nice cross with their birthstone or some kind of earrings or some piece of jewelry to be remembered. We all had this big dinner and each family sat down as a family. Nobody left the table until Grandpa got up. If you finished your meal, you would not leave until he got up. He got up



first.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned other times that you went to New Orleans.

MRS. CANGELOSI: Almost every weekend on Saturday we would go to the city. It took at least three hours, because there was no Huey P. Long Bridge. When I would come back home I was always a little sad because I'd miss my friends. When we would come back to Houma it seemed such a small town. Mother would never let us out of the house because she was used to the city life. She was always protective -- you didn't go any farther than the front yard. She always locked the door and you looked out the window.

INTERVIEW WITH ROSALIE CANGELOSI  
Baton Rouge, La. -- June 21, 1977

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me your father's full name?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Charles Rosario Cangelosi -- in Italian his name was Calogilo.

INTERVIEWER: Where was he from?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Cefalo, Italy.

INTERVIEWER: What about your mother?

MRS. CANGELOSI: She was from Cefalo also and her name was Josephine (Guisseppena) Cangelosi.

INTERVIEWER: Was she a Cangelosi also before?

MRS. CANGELOSI: They were first cousins.

INTERVIEWER: When did they -- did they marry in Italy?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Papa came to America at the age of about 14 -- 13 or 14 -- and his brothers were already here. His father had come with some of the older boys.

INTERVIEWER: So he came here about the age of 14?

MRS. CANGELOSI: My father did, yes. And my grandfather had been here before. His father was here before him, but he didn't stay very long because my grandfather had a very severe heart condition. The doctor sent him home to die really. He knew his condition was bad so he told him, "Why don't you go back to your home town. It will probably do you some good." So he went back and the two older boys stayed. And then my father came over.

INTERVIEWER: How did he come? Did your grandfather send for him? Did he pay your father's way or did your father just come on his own?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He came on his own. Probably the older brothers sent him money. They had a business and they had some money.

INTERVIEWER: What business did they have in Sicily?

MRS. CANGELOSI: They were merchants. They had a ship and they bought things from different cities. If one city was known for certain things, they would go there, pick up a shipload of goods, and then sell the goods. When the railroad started it sort of put them out of business. They couldn't make as much profit, since the railroad could ship things cheaper by rail than they could by ship.

INTERVIEWER: When the railroad put them out of business, do you think that in same way influenced them to come here?

MRS. CANGELOSI: They still had a little money -- they weren't poor. I think what influenced them to come here was the climate. New Orleans was a port where people from the southern part of Europe would come. It has been closed as an immigration office; however, in the late 1800s the ships would land in New Orleans. It was a southern place where it was warm and they were used to warm climates -- they weren't used to the cold climates like in New York. They heard about Louisiana from other people who had been there and then returned

home.

INTERVIEWER: So when they first came, they really went to New Orleans. How did they get to Baton Rouge? Did they come up river?

MRS. CANGELOSI: I don't know how they came to Baton Rouge.

INTERVIEWER: Did they stay in the merchant business once they got to Baton Rouge?

MRS. CANGELOSI: They had a little fruit store -- a little grocery store -- a little combination grocery and fruit store. I guess they saw other Italians in that same thing and they didn't like to work for other people; they liked to work for themselves, except when they worked for relatives. There was no other place for them to work, so they just opened up their own little store.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know anything about your father's return trips to Italy?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He went back, but he didn't go back to stay. His mother was living, his relatives were living. When he married my mother his father-in-law expected him to stay. He wanted to put him in the business in Sicily with him. My mother's father was in business there; he didn't come here at all. His business was selling the merchandise that had been shipped in. He had a big store where he would sell the merchandise.

INTERVIEWER: Are you speaking of the in-law?

MRS. CANGELOSI: That's my mother's father, but they were related.

INTERVIEWER: So one was bringing the merchandise in and one was selling it.

MRS. CANGELOSI: I guess you could say that, but it was owned by both brothers. In fact, I think it was three or four brothers -- it was a family business.

INTERVIEWER: From what I understand, your father eventually invested in property.

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Here in Baton Rouge?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: The story goes that he moved out toward Baton Rouge because that was where many Italians were moving. Where is the property?

MRS. CANGELOSI: There's no special area. My father always lived downtown. There are very few other Italians living in this area. Third street -- Riverside Mall -- was the main street -- the Canal Street of Baton Rouge. That's where he had his business. He worked with his older brother first, then he went on his own. The first piece of property he bought was across the street from where he worked because he was afraid the landlady was going to sell the property he was renting. So he bought this little piece of property across the street from where he worked, and it is still there. We've had offers to sell it, but we won't do it. It's on Third Street, and it's empty. It's right next to a little jewelry shop -- Eschnot Jewelry shop. He

claims he bought another piece of property just a few blocks from there, but I don't remember that. He just bought this place in case the landlady would sell the place he was in. This was his first piece of property. Then he bought another piece of property on St. Ferdinand Street where we moved -- it was larger and better.

INTERVIEWER: Did he build a house there?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He built a big store and we lived upstairs. We had a combination store and residence.

INTERVIEWER: Did he call the store "Cangelosi's"?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He didn't call it anything -- just a store.

INTERVIEWER: Did he sell merchandise from there?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes; he sold cigarettes and fruit. By the time he went into wholesale, he would buy things by the car-load.

INTERVIEWER: How many children were in the family?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Seven. Five girls and two boys. My younger sister died at the age of about twenty-one.

INTERVIEWER: You said that you felt your father would have done better if he had had more boys.

MRS. CANGELOSI: The boys would have helped him with his business. We were five girls, and by the time my oldest brother finished L.S.U., he was drafted in World War II. He spent five or six years in the army.

INTERVIEWER: Did he insist that all of you go through school?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He didn't insist; he put us in school and we were supposed to go to school. And we went. He took it for granted that was what you were supposed to do. He had some education himself.

INTERVIEWER: How educated was he?

MRS. CANGELOSI: I would think that he had a junior high education. From there he sort of educated himself, because I could remember as a child that he would have an Italian-English dictionary and he would write and order things for the store. He was educated in Italian -- he was thirteen years old, so he would have had similar to a junior high education

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that your older brother went to L.S.U. Did both brothers go to college?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes; one of them is a lawyer and one of them finished in chemical engineering.

INTERVIEWER: What is the relationship, if any, to the Cangelosi at L.S.U.?

MRS. CANGELOSI: The one that is dean -- his father is my mother's nephew. His father died when he was quite young and when he was in his teens, his mother sent him over here. He stayed with my mother until he got old enough to stay on his own. He was about sixteen or seventeen when he worked with my father.

INTERVIEWER: After your father went to St. Ferdinand Street, did he keep that place or did he move somewhere else?

MRS. CANGELOSI: From there we moved here.

INTERVIEWER: What about his place of business?

MRS. CANGELOSI: About that time he began investing in property and these chain stores began selling everything. So he invested in property and stocks. He was the director of the Union Federal, the Homesteads. He was director of the City National Bank.

INTERVIEWER: Well I imagine if he invested in stock and property, and was director of Union Federal, he was probably doing well enough that he didn't have to worry about the business.

MRS. CANGELOSI: He was doing well enough, and by that time we were all educated. I was a school teacher and my sister was a school teacher; Josey worked at the capital; the fourth sister got married; and the fifth one died. My brother was a chemical engineer; he had been out for about a year and was working in a sugar place analyzing the sugar cane. He worked for maybe one or two years and then the draft got him. He was in the army when they declared war; he was in the army for about five or six years. My younger brother was in school and when he got to be twenty-one I guess he didn't get to go to law school; he was drafted in the army.

INTERVIEWER: So all of you were very well educated?

MRS. CANGELOSI: We were educated.



INTERVIEWER: I'm asking this to show that most immigrants were educated and had some business.

MRS. CANGELOSI: Well my father believed in education. He really believed in people being educated. My mother didn't think too much of women being educated; she thought they should be wives and mothers.

INTERVIEWER: Did anyone in your family ever have anything to do with politics?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Papa didn't do much for politics except on one occasion when a Baton Rouge man was running for governor. Governor Fucalay was running for governor. Everybody in Baton Rouge was helping him so Papa helped him. He did what he could. He went to New Roads, where there was a small group of Italian people, and spoke to them. But that's about the only time. He was interested in that man because he was a Baton Rouge man and all the business men in Baton Rouge were helping him.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find the Church was in any way helpful to you?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Our priests were pretty interested in the people, especially Father Blasco. Father Blasco was at Sacred Heart. I remember the priests we had at St. Joseph; they were pretty interested. Of course there was a little language barrier with the older folks.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if your father became a citizen?

MRS. CANGELOSI: I have his citizenship papers if you would like to see them.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if your mother became a citizen?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Well, according to the law, my father married my mother in Italy and he stayed there a while and went into business with my grandfather and I was born there. According to the law then, when a man became a citizen his wife and family automatically became citizens. I think the law has been changed several times since then, but at that time when he became a citizen my mother automatically became a citizen too. I don't know if she became a citizen when she married him.

INTERVIEWER: After they came to this country, did they take other trips back?

MRS. CANGELOSI: He came first and he intended to go back. After he was married, he stayed a while; my grandfather didn't want my mother to come over. But my father said, "Well, I'll go over and make a little money and go back to get her." But he didn't make money quite that fast. Grandfather told Papa, "You come over in business with me and you can stay here." So they did for a while, but in the meantime Mama got pregnant. So my father told my grandfather, "I'll go over there for a couple of years and then I'll come back." In the meantime my mother's brother came over in a boat as a crew member. So since she was pregnant she could come over later with her brother.

INTERVIEWER: He left her over there?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: She stayed about two years by herself, or did he come back and forth?

MRS. CANGELOSI: She was with her family and then one of my father's cousins was going over for a visit with his family, so my father said, "Bring my wife and child over."

INTERVIEWER: After you came, did you ever go back to Sicily?

MRS. CANGELOSI: My mother never did, but I did. My father, sister, and I went back.

INTERVIEWER: Just for a visit?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Just for a visit. The rest of the family was here and my mother's father and mother had died, so she lost interest in going back.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you came over here?

MRS. CANGELOSI: One and a half or two years old.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you went back?

MRS. CANGELOSI: I guess about twenty-one.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that when Italians came over here, since they had no place to work they went out on their own. Do you think this was common for Italians that came?

MRS. CANGELOSI: I think most Italians like to be on their own. I don't think they like to work for other people. They are independent. Most of the ones I knew had their own little stores. It may not have been much but it was their own. My father was just thirteen years old so he couldn't very well open a place of his own; he

went in with his brothers. Then, when he got older, he went on his own.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me anything about your first school days?

MRS. CANGELOSI: It was at St. Joseph Academy; it was a private school and they paid tuition. My parents made sacrifices so we could finish. In fact, all four of us girls boarded at the school because Mama thought that was the best education a lady could get -- convent education. She had a sister who was in the convent.

INTERVIEWER: Was she in a convent in America or Sicily?

MRS. CANGELOSI: In Sicily. My brothers went to St. Vincent Academy -- it's Catholic High now. One of the priests said they should teach Home Economics at the Academy, but the nuns said they had mothers that could teach them that.

INTERVIEWER: Did they make any effort to help the children who spoke a foreign language?

MRS. CANGELOSI: Well, I was only two years old.

(This interview ended abruptly as Mrs. Cangelosi did not wish her remarks taped.)

INTERVIEW WITH PETER COMPAGNO  
New Orleans, La. -- November 14, 1977

INTERVIEWER: What is your name?

MR. COMPAGNO: Nicolino Felix Compagno.

INTERVIEWER: How long have you been living in New Orleans?

MR. COMPAGNO: I'm 65 now; I lived in New Orleans 50 years and Metairie 15 -- Jefferson Parish.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your parents?

MR. COMPAGNO: My daddy's name was Peter Compagno and my mother's name was Angelina Petusi.

INTERVIEWER: Where was your father from?

MR. COMPAGNO: My father was from Utica. It's a little island about a two-hour ride from Palermo, which is the capital of Sicily. When you went to Utica you had to go to Palermo first, then catch a boat to the island.

INTERVIEWER: When did he come to America?

MR. COMPAGNO: When he died he was 65 years of age. He's been dead 41 years. If he was living right now he'd be 106 years of age. He came here when he was 12 years of age. That would make him coming here about 90 some odd years ago -- 95, 96 years ago.

INTERVIEWER: So he came to the United States about 1893. Do you know if your mother came at the same time?

MR. COMPAGNO: My mother was born here, she wasn't born in Italy. My grandfather was born in Italy. My mother was born after he came to this country.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if your father came with his family or did

he come alone?

MR. COMPAGNO: He came by himself. He was 12 years of age. When he came here he came to his grandfather. His grandfather, at the time, was in an oyster and fruit business. The location of the place was Felicity and Magazine.

INTERVIEWER: What was the name of it?

MR. COMPAGNO: Compagno's. I guess in those days it was a fruit stand. He came here and then he started working for his grandfather.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if his grandfather sent for him, or his father just got the money and sent him?

MR. COMPAGNO: I think my grandfather sent for him. He was the first brother here. After he was here for a while, then he sent for another brother. After that brother was here, he sent for another brother. They all started working in this same place where my daddy was. In the meantime my grandfather died. At the death of my grandfather, my Dad's uncle took over the business. My father continued to work there until he had enough money to purchase the business. Once he acquired it, he sent for his own brothers who willingly came.

INTERVIEWER: What were their names?

MR. COMPAGNO: Their names were Frank, Anthony and Charles Compagno. They worked in this corner on Felicity and Magazine. After they worked there for a while, they started going out into business for themselves. Anthony Compagno opened up a restaurant and bar at Washington

and Laurel. They came at different intervals. One would come then another would come. When they got finished, there were three brothers working here. I'm not positive if they all worked here at the same time. When one would accumulate a little money he'd open up a place for himself. Then the other one came and when he'd accumulate a little money, he'd do the same. Maybe my daddy helped them to accumulate a little money to start in business. My Uncle Frank came next. He opened up a place on Magazine Street -- in the 4600 block on Magazine Street -- 4605 Magazine. My Uncle Charley came last. He opened up a place on Fern and St. Charles. They were all in business then. My daddy was on Felicity and Magazine, one of my uncles was on Washington and Laurel, and one of my uncles was on Magazine Street. After that he had another nephew who came here.

INTERVIEWER: Your uncles actually started working together and then ended up working separately.

MR. COMPAGNO: Yes, having their own businesses.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever remember hearing your father talk about the actual work he did?

MR. COMPAGNO: He'd work in the fruit stand and he'd deliver orders. When they had oysters, he used to deliver them, which I did myself in later years when I grew up. When I got to be 14, 15 years of age, then he had me doing the same thing he was doing when he was 12, 13 years

of age.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about it.

MR. COMPAGNO: I went to Warren Easten High School on Canal Street. When I'd come home from school, instead of going home and sitting down to read a book, I'd have to go to the barroom. There they'd have oysters on a half shell and fried oysters in platters. With my two good legs, I'd walk all around the neighborhood delivering these oysters, sandwiches, and beer. When beer came back in 1933, I used to deliver beer in cans and things like that. My father also did this as a young man, except there was no high school.

INTERVIEWER: Where did your father live? Did he have a house?

MR. COMPAGNO: He used to live with his uncle who had a place on Felicity Street. The bar room is located on Felicity and Magazine and my uncle used to live about a half a block from the bar room.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any idea about how old he was when he got married?

MR. COMPANGO: When he got married he was 40 years of age. My mother was 30. When he died, he had been married 25 years.

INTERVIEWER: He continued to work independently in the business?

MR. COMPAGNO: Well he met my mamma and they had some kind of a fight and they were separated for ten years. My mamma lived two blocks away from where my daddy had his place. They stayed away from each other for ten years. After ten years something happened and they made up and got



married. She was 30 and he was 40. My mother, when she died, was 91 years of age. My father was 65. My mother outlived my daddy about 33-34 years.

INTERVIEWER: How much education do you think your father had?

MR. COMPAGNO: I think he had about a third grade education -- not even that I don't think.

INTERVIEWER: What about his brothers?

MR. COMPAGNO: His brothers didn't have much education either. All they knew was how to handle a dollar. They knew how to make a dollar. In those days it was easier to make than today.

INTERVIEWER: In turn, did he see that you and your brothers got an education?

MR. COMPAGNO: Yes. When my brother was ready to go to school my daddy was dead. Then it was on me. So my mother had control of the business and I used to work in the business. I'm talking about when he was going to school. The money from the business would help to pay his education, and sent him to school. The only thing that he'd done in his life was once a week he'd come and stay there for me. At that time my daddy had died and I was running the place then for my mother. The money that payed his tuition came from the bar room.

INTERVIEWER: When you were growing up -- say in your teens -- what would have been a typical day for you?

MR. COMPAGNO: The old time Italian people were very peculiar. They didn't think a boy should go out. I mean the old time

people. Well, it's a different story today because the children go like they want. I used to have a bunch of fellows that I used to bum with and we used to go to sorority dances. I used to belong to a fraternity. Certain nights in the week -- on a Friday night he'd give me \$2.50, \$3.50 -- that was my money for the week. In those days I'd go to the show, go anywhere, and I'd still have some money left when I came home.

INTERVIEWER: While you were working were you paid?

MR. COMPAGNO: No salary. He gave me that spending money. He would feed me at home -- I was living in the house with him. I was 30 years of age when I got married.

INTERVIEWER: What about clothing? Did your mother buy it, make it, or what?

MR. COMPAGNO: They bought the clothing. My mother wasn't much on sewing. She didn't do too much sewing.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you meet your wife?

MR. COMPAGNO: I went out on a picnic. Her mother and daddy was in business, and they used to come to the place and buy oysters from my daddy. She'd buy raw oysters or fried oysters -- she knew the cook that was there. They'd come from their house; they lived about 8 or 9 blocks from where we used to live. And then I went out on a picnic and we met.

INTERVIEWER: What was your wife's name before she got married?

MR. COMPAGNO: Her maiden name was Fazzio.

INTERVIEWER: Who were her parents?

- MR. COMPAGNO: Her mother was named Rose Panno. Her daddy was Frank Fazzio. He was part-owner of the Horseshoe Pickle Works. It was on St. Mary's Street. Then they moved up to Washington and Tchoupitoulas.
- INTERVIEWER: Where were you married?
- MR. COMPAGNO: My wife, at the time, was living on State and Magazine. I was married in St. Francis Assisi Church, which is on State and Patton.
- INTERVIEWER: Do you have any children?
- MR. COMPAGNO: Five children.
- INTERVIEWER: Did you see that all of them received the same amount of education?
- MR. COMPAGNO: To the best of my ability I tried. Some of them didn't want to go to college. Some of them went out to work when they got out of high school. I have two girls and they got married. When they got out of high school, they got married. The three boys -- one boy went to two or three different colleges, and the other boy finished high school. He's doing better than all of them right now, with just a high school education.
- INTERVIEWER: Before your marriage, do you remember ever being teased about being Italian?
- MR. COMPAGNO: To me it got to be routine. I was situated in a neighborhood that was all Irish. To me it didn't mean nothing. But I knew all those people that was calling me, if anything had to be done and they had to help me, they would go to hell for me to try to

help me out. If I needed money from one of them, they'd say, "sure dago this and dago that," but it didn't bother me because I knew that those people were friends of mine.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think the same thing existed when your father was your age?

MR. COMPAGNO: I think they said the same thing to him. When my father was coming up, they had all Irish politicians who used to hang at this place. Most likely many times they'd call him "dago." They called me "dago." It didn't phase me because I knew to them it didn't mean nothing.

INTERVIEWER: So you honestly feel, as far as discrimination to the Italian, that it really didn't exist?

MR. COMPAGNO: No. I knew that all those people who was calling me "dago", if I had wanted to go and ask them a favor -- which some of them were politicians -- they would do it for me. Or they'd help me out. If I needed money from them, they'd see that I got it.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say that the business that your father engaged in was successful?

MR. COMPAGNO: I think it was because in those days everything he bought was strictly cash. In those days they didn't have homesteads like they have today. Every time he got two or three thousand dollars accumulated he bought a house. We got tired of the papers. He paid for everything cash on the barrel. At one time there were

six corners by the bar room and he owned five of them.

INTERVIEWER: Are the records of his business still in existence?

MR. COMPAGNO: No.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give me any reason why practically all of these early businesses with the Italians have no records left?

MR. COMPAGNO: I know as a fact that none of them have any records left. I don't know what their idea was. In those days there was hardly any income tax. There wasn't nothing to pay. Years later, my Uncle Tony -- he never kept a record -- one time the Internal Revenue came there and asked him for books. He said, "What books?" He talked in a broken accent -- half English and half Italian. He was telling them, "I don't keep no books" in Italian. He never did show them any books. The guy got disgusted and never did check up on it. They were trying to check up on it to make him pay taxes. He played dumb and he got by with it. He didn't have no records of it.

INTERVIEWER: It's amazing that they didn't keep records and yet they had successful businesses. Today we can't do anything unless we write it down.

MR. COMPAGNO: The laws were different then. Now if you run a little bitty peanut stand you have to have a bookkeeper to keep your books. You think you've got a few dollars on you and some guy comes along, or the state will come

along and say, "you owe me this," or the city will come along and say, "you owe me this." If you don't pay your sales tax, they close you up. They won't give you your license for the next year. If you owe \$500 sales tax and you can't pay it, when your license times comes up, you can't get a license.

INTERVIEWER: You said your dad, as he would collect enough, would automatically buy a house. Did he sell or rent the houses after?

MR. COMPAGNO: He used to rent them. When my father died, my mother lived on the rent from the property. My mother didn't do a lick of work all her life.

INTERVIEWER: So actually he had two sources of income -- the seafood and the bar.

MR. COMPAGNO: And the rent from the houses.

INTERVIEWER: To your knowledge, did he ever invest in anything else?

MR. COMPAGNO: Oh yes. He bought lots out here, he bought land out here.

INTERVIEWER: Anything else besides land and the business?

MR. COMPAGNO: No.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if he was ever interested in politics?

MR. COMPAGNO: He wasn't interested. In his days, when he was living, they didn't have all this politics they have today. They had one party, it was the Old Regular party. They were in control. Politicians used to bum in his place. He told me many times that big politicians would bum in his place. Some fellow would come in

there and want a job from these politicians. These politicians would tell them, "well look, tomorrow morning you go see so and so." This man would go down there and see so and so and he'd get a job with the city. They had enough influence that they could get him jobs with different companies.

INTERVIEWER: What about your father's personal interest in politics?

MR. COMPAGNO: No, he wasn't interested. It's only in later years that my brother ran in politics. But my daddy -- no. He wasn't in politics at all.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the church or religion ever playing a predominant role in your family's life?

MR. COMPAGNO: Yes. Around Christmas time the Italian people from Medina -- this island -- they used to pray to this saint. About 20-25 days before Christmas time, they'd start praying up until Christmas day. They'd have our Lord in a crib and they'd have him on the table and all of us would pray at that time. Every night at this certain time we all had to say the prayers.

INTERVIEWER: It was a regular family custom?

MR. COMPAGNO: A family custom.

INTERVIEWER: Anybody that you knew who was from that same island. . .

MR. COMPAGNO: You could invite them. They had the same thing -- they did the same thing. They did the same thing right before -- so many days before -- Christmas time.

INTERVIEWER: Was the family expected to be together on holidays?

MR. COMPAGNO: On holidays, he'd close the bar room up and we'd come

home, since we only lived one block from the bar room -- really only three hundred feet from the bar room.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a bit more about your work day.

MR. COMPAGNO: When I'd come home from school, I'd go there and they'd have all kinds of orders on the counter. A dozen oysters, which today sells for \$2.50, was two bits a dozen delivered. They'd have a tray which would have four and five dozen oysters on it, and they'd open them up. I'd take it on my hand and I'd deliver it to those people and those people, when I got to the house, would take it off the tray and they'd give me my dollar. No taxes then -- no taxes. They'd give me my dollar and I'd come and bring it to them. That went on from about 3:00 to about 7:00 at night. No far distances -- with an area from about 8 or 9 blocks all the orders would be. They'd phone in the orders. A dozen fried oysters would be 35 cents. They'd have a platter with three dozen fried oysters on it. I'd pick up the platter and I might take it two blocks from where the bar room is. They would give me my \$1.05 and I'd come back and give it to them. Sometimes I'd take two and three of them at the same time because they'd be in the same area. I'd go deliver them and I'd bring the money back to them. In those days a sack of oysters used to cost 90 cents. Today the same sack of oysters is \$10. We had a steady order. In those days they'd follow the fast days --



Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday was all fast days. We had a standard order for 25 dozen oysters every Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. We'd deliver 25 dozen oysters to St. Alphonsus Church. I'd go bring them into the kitchen, then I'd go into the priest's house -- the rectory -- and I'd collect \$4.75 for those 25 dozen oysters. Today if you wanted to buy 25 dozen oysters, you'd have to get it on the installment plan.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you father get the oysters?

MR. COMPAGNO: He used to buy them from Martina. Martina used to deliver them there. On a Friday they'd dump 100 sacks of oysters on the sidewalk. He had three people who was opening oysters. They had three pans on the counter -- one pan for the soup oysters, one pan for the eating oysters, and one pan for the frying oysters. The small oysters they'd put in one, the big oysters they'd put in another. People would come there with bottles, they'd come there with pitchers -- they'd come there with all kinds of things. They'd buy a dozen oysters. The soup oysters was 15 cents, the frying oysters was 20 cents a dozen, and the eating oysters was 25 cents a dozen. The three of them would open oysters all day long. Just as soon as they'd get the pans full, somebody would come and say, "give me ten dozen oysters." They never could catch up with the oysters.

INTERVIEWER: Since your father had employees, did you ever have to open oysters?

MR. COMPAGNO: Yes. I didn't open them too much. I opened them in later years.

INTERVIEWER: How many people did your father employ?

MR. COMPAGNO: In those days the salary was very little. At that time he had myself, he had a man that worked downstairs, he used to work behind the counter, and they had a cook upstairs. The average pay in those days was sixty dollars. He paid them about \$15 a week.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if he was ever active in any organization such as the Italian Chamber of Commerce or the Italian Society?

MR. COMPAGNO: No -- never was active. I was often more active than him. I belonged to the Italian Society. I belong to St. Bartholomew's Society. My grandfather was, but not my daddy.

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell me something about the St. Bartholomew's Society?

MR. COMPAGNO: Years ago my grandfather was president of St. Batholomew's. They used to have a funeral home right across the street from St. John's Church, which was the McMann Funeral Home. They used to hold their meetings there. In those days, they used to have 250 to 300 members in it. Once the old timers died, the children didn't get into it like they should. Right now the St. Bartholomew's Society has about 21 members in it.

It's all children of the old timers that are in it.

INTERVIEWER: Why did they join the society? What was the purpose?

MR. COMPAGNO: They honored a patron saint which we hold every 24th of August -- we honor St. Bartholomew. St. Bartholomew is one of the apostles. He was one of the twelve apostles. He came from France to help the Italian people. Now there aren't enough people who need the Society's help. At one time they had 52 Italian Societies. Right now if they have 8 or 10, they're lucky.

INTERVIEWER: What was the origin of the 52 societies?

MR. COMPAGNO: They were from all parts -- most of them were from Sicily. The biggest one in the city now is Contessa Entellina. All the people in this society were supposed to, or their parents were supposed to, have come from Contessa Entellina.

INTERVIEWER: Evidently these societies were supposed to help the people when they first came.

MR. COMPAGNO: Yes; I guess it got them together.

INTERVIEWER: Do they keep records?

MR. COMPAGNO: Yes. Years back, when it started, it used to be in Italian. The brother who was secretary used to write in Italian. None of the members can now -- there's one or two of them. Years back they used to hold the meeting in Italian. Now it's all in English. Half of the ones that would be sitting at the meeting wouldn't understand what they were saying.

INTERVIEWER: Who's the present leader of this organization?

MR. COMPAGNO: The one right now is Peter Petusi, who is a cousin of mine. Right now we hold a meeting and I'm the only one who's not an officer. We have a meeting now with four members.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think is the reason that this society still exists today?

MR. COMPAGNO: Just to keep fellowship up. Years ago they didn't give all kinds of things. Now they give different things. Just three months ago we had a celebration at the little Italian restaurant in Fat City. After we went to Mass we went up to the little restaurant. All the members and their wives were allowed to go free. Any outsiders would have to pay \$7.50 to come. It gives benefits. Every three months you get \$8 worth of medicine. We also have a tomb so if you die and you don't have a place to be buried, you could be buried in St. Bartholomew's tomb in Metairie cemetery. It was bought years and years ago by the old time people. All we do now is keep it up. When the plaster goes bad or the cement goes bad, we fix it. We just had it painted. It cost us twelve or thirteen hundred dollars to paint it. But we can't get none of the young people to join, because they say they can get more out of that money by putting it in an insurance policy. They put \$18-\$20 a year in an insurance policy; they can get more benefit out of it than we get.

INTERVIEWER: What you're saying about the organization is apparently true for all of them. The idea was medicine and a doctor.

MR. COMPAGNO: It got to where we couldn't afford the doctor any more. We had Dr. Bologna and we had that Dr. Latradi. He used to be right by Jefferson Davis and Canal. He's connected with Mercy Hospital. Years ago the Society would pay him; he accepted to get the business. If a member had to be operated on, that was extra money. The Society didn't pay for the operation. If he's treating you and one day he tells you that you have to be operated on, that's business for him. I think that was the object of being in those societies. After a while, all these doctors didn't want to fool with it. They got big and they didn't want to fool with these little societies. But at that time we had 55-58 members when we used to have the doctor. Now, an old person that's in it can get more medicine out of it than he's paying in dues. He's paying \$4.50 every three months and he's allowed \$8.00 worth of medicine. So he's getting more out of it than he's putting into it. And there's the certain ones that get medicine every month. The younger fellows don't get nothing out of it. I doubt the bill is \$18, \$20, \$22 a month, but some months its nothing.

INTERVIEWER: But it's still paying today?

MR. COMPAGNO: It's still paying -- yes. Like us, we couldn't spend

the money that they have in the treasury now. Someday somebody is going to get it. Some young guy will end up with all the money, I guess. But all the old timers -- we're all going to leave.

INTERVIEWER: When you were growing up did you ever feel that things were really tough, or was your father able to make it?

MR. COMPAGNO: I didn't find it tough no time, because I lived in a neighborhood where I knew people didn't have nothing. I'm talking about during the depression. From 1929 to 1933 I've seen people that didn't even have a nickel on them. I always had a dollar and I was like a big shot to them. Me with my \$1.50, \$2.00 in my pocket. They couldn't even get on the street car. They didn't have a nickel to get on the streetcar.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think your father ever really went through a time of not having?

MR. COMPAGNO: No, I don't. Because I always did say, the best thing they have in this world is a business. If you have a business, you're always going to eat, you'll always have a little money in your pocket, if you run it right. If you don't run it right, you are not going to have nothing. During the depression those people didn't have nothing in their pockets. I always had my \$1.50, \$2.00, \$3.00 in my pocket.

INTERVIEWER: Somewhere along the line the Compagno business had to start. When your grandfather came here, did he come with enough money to start?

MR. COMPAGNO: No; he didn't come with nothing. My daddy came with nothing.

INTERVIEWER: How did he actually start?

MR. COMPAGNO: That part I don't know. All these people were over there in Italy. Most of them were most likely not making their living. On the island where my daddy lived, if you didn't get along with the people in charge, you would be put in prison. You couldn't get out because, if you tried to swim, the sharks would get you. So you stayed on this island. A friend of ours was a middle class person in this country. He had a business and he sold his business and went over to Italy. The people in charge made him mayor of this island. He lived there and he had a big home there. The people governing the island were supposed to pay him so much a day for each one of the prisoners. It was the mayor's job to see that each one of these prisoners were fed. He had to give him so much a day. From this money that they gave the prisoners, they let these prisoners walk around on this island. All of them had little bitty small businesses there. From this money spent by the prisoners, the island people continued to grow and prosper.

INTERVIEWER: They in turn used the money to get passage here.

MR. COMPAGNO: I guess in those days it didn't cost too much to come here. I guess it was very reasonable to come here.

I always used to kid all these people there. All these Irish people used to kid me. I'd say my daddy came on a sailboat. He came on a sailboat and they landed at Algiers and they all had their little knapsack on their shoulders and they had one of them as a leader. He told them when they got off the boat to walk from the river to Magazine Street. This is my story I used to tell them. The leader of them said, "whenever you get on Magazine Street, any place you see a vacant lot, you open up a bar room, a grocery store, a fruit stand. They used to get a kick out of it. It was true. They came here and they didn't have nothing. But they had to have somebody here to get them started. In those days, they couldn't have just gotten here and started. Just like all my uncles, they had my daddy here first. I don't know what they'd have done if they had come here and had to start from scratch.

INTERVIEWER: I guess that's why I was asking you if you have any idea how he started. Apparently he had some other job to accumulate the money.

MR. COMPAGNO: He must have had it. The grandfather was starting all my uncles. He accumulated and he got my daddy's uncle to go in that business. My daddy's uncle must have got tired of the business and he must have asked my daddy if he wanted it. He might have said, "you pay me so much a month," or you pay me this or you pay me that. I don't guess my daddy had enough money at the



time to sell, "Well, here, I'm going to buy this from you," like they do today. He most likely said, "I'll give you so much." He got it and after that he started sending for all his brothers. They all were in the restaurant business. The children have them now. I got the barroom and restaurant from my daddy. My cousin on Fern and St. Charles got it from his daddy. My other cousin got the one on Fern Street. My two cousins are on Cadence and Magazine. My other cousin is up on State and Magazine. He's got a barroom. He didn't get it through his people; he got it from his father-in-law. He retired and turned it over to my cousin. He and his brother ran the place. His brother got killed and now the boy has it by himself. He's about sixty-three, and he's still behind that bar.

INTERVIEWER: How did you help in the oyster business?

MR. COMPAGNO: I can tell you one thing. In those days they made their money honest. They weren't in no shady deals or nothing. Everything they made they made through the hard work of working and putting in long hours. Getting back to what you were asking me of what I would do. I would stay on a Friday, or Saturday, or Sunday -- I'd stay there with my daddy till about 12:00 at night. He'd close up and we'd get an oyster sandwich. They used to make a long pistolette and they'd put four oysters on it. In those days that used to cost

15 cents for that sandwich. They used to take a whole loaf -- they used to have that panbread -- they'd cut that and they'd make four half loafs out of that. Sometimes they'd take one loaf of panbread and cut it in half and take all the dough out of it and put a dozen oysters in there for 45 cents. Today an oyster loaf costs you \$2.50-\$3.00. You don't have the same kind of oysters, because everything is done deep fried and all that. Deep fried is good if you know how to operate it. Some people don't know how to operate deep friers. This way they used to fry so many oysters in a pan with pure lard. Now they use anything. You don't know what they are using now.

INTERVIEWER: Weekends didn't leave much time for social life for you, did it?

MR. COMPAGNO: It didn't bother me. Well, I used to have social life when I used to go out with these fellows to dances. They'd come get me at 8:00. All the old man would say was "you going out again? OK." Then the next day he'd forget it, but they just didn't like it. All of them were the same way. They just didn't like it. I had a cousin who couldn't have a car until his daddy died. His daddy didn't want him to have an automobile. Until his daddy died he didn't have a car. He's an old bachelor right now. He's living on Cadence and Magazine -- him and his mother. His mother is 95 years of age and he's 48-49. Till the day his daddy

closed his eyes he never had a car. He was against it. That is how the old time people were. They thought that all you had to do was work. The ones in grocery stores -- they were worse, because the old man would open up the grocery store in the morning, then he'd stay there till 12:00-1:00. He'd go take a rest and the old lady would come out. The wife would come out and watch the store till he got his rest. When he got his rest, he'd come out again and he'd stay there till 11:00-12:00 in the grocery store. They all made money.

INTERVIEWER: Mr Compagno made note that as long as the old Italian people were living, everybody went home on holidays. The day was for the whole family to get together. After the old people died, particularly the mother and the father, this was no longer true. The family seemed to scatter. Evidently there was a unity in the Italian family which was established by the mother and father -- at least if they lived around the 1910s, 20s, 30s, or 40s. Beyond that time there is not much to be said.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. JOSEPH D'ANTONI  
New Orleans, La. - October 1, 1977

- INTERVIEWER: Dr. D'Antoni, are you a first- or second-generation Italian-American?
- DR. D'ANTONI: I suppose I would be considered second generation.
- INTERVIEWER: Would you tell me about your now famous father?
- DR. D'ANTONI: My father was Salvador D'Antoni, who was born in Cefalu, Sicily on March 12, 1874. He came to the United States in 1886 by working his passage and he landed in New Orleans. He was met by a relative from Baton Rouge with whom he found a temporary home. He could speak no English at the time, but out of necessity learned English in six months.
- INTERVIEWER: Would that indicate that he had a good educational background?
- DR. D'ANTONI: No, his formal education ended at third grade, but by the end of his life he had learned to speak five languages and two or three dialects.
- INTERVIEWER: How did he earn his living?
- DR. D'ANTONI: In the first days he peddled shoelaces and other articles on the street. Within a few years he was joined by his brother, Carmelo. The two of them pooled their resources and opened a general store in Burtville. It's a plantation about ten miles south of Baton Rouge.
- INTERVIEWER: From where did he obtain his produce?

DR. D'ANTONI: They started purchasing from Joseph Vaccaro who, like Papa, was in business with his brothers. It was a good relationship because Joseph Vaccaro had a daughter, Mary, who would become my mother in 1899.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about this merger or business venture.

DR. D'ANTONI: Well, by the time Papa and Mama married, Papa had returned to New Orleans. A flood in 1897 had destroyed his store and in that same year he went into partnership with Joseph Vaccaro -- my grandfather. The arrangement was that Papa would buy the entire crop of oranges from the citrus grower below New Orleans. My uncle Carmelo supervised the picking and cooked for the crew. Papa did the selling. All the oranges were transported to New Orleans on luggers owned by my grandfather. As fate might have it, in 1899 a freeze wiped out the orange crop. Maybe this was a blessing in disguise, for it influenced my grandfather to look to Central America for another fruit -- bananas.

INTERVIEWER: In the late 1890s, wasn't this considered a bit pre-  
sumptuous?

DR. D'ANTONI: Well, truthfully, everyone concerned was worried. Those only slightly affected said the venture would fold in six months. Nonetheless, with what money they had they purchased a two-masted schooner -- the "Santo Oteri." The first trip to Honduras was in

December of 1899 and when the ship returned it was loaded with coconuts purchased partially on credit. I'm not sure why the coconuts came first, except that it was probably a good deal. The man who gave Papa the credit told me that when Papa returned he paid off the credit plus an additional fifty percent. When he protested, Papa told him that since he had made a profit the man who trusted him should be part of it. By 1905 the company became known officially as Vaccaro Brothers and Company.

INTERVIEWER: What about the bananas?

DR. D'ANTONI: It seems that Papa worried about losing the bananas during the twenty-one day trip. Therefore, Papa and my grandfather decided to charter a steamer, which only took five days, for the bananas and keep the sailing vessels for the coconuts. By 1900 first "The Premier" was chartered and later "The Nicaragua."

INTERVIEWER: Would you say the Vaccaro-D'Antoni company had a monopoly?

DR. D'ANTONI: Not exactly a monopoly, but I do believe my father's business practices helped him secure much of the crop. One particular help was his practice of always paying for everything he ordered.

INTERVIEWER: Was Standard Fruit, as it later became, your father's only interest?

DR. D'ANTONI: No. In the early 1900s he needed some type of re-

frigeration to retard the ripening of bananas. There-  
for he built an ice company -- the Tropical Ice Com-  
pany -- and then proceeded to buy up every other ice  
house in New Orleans. By about 1919 he realized he  
needed the security of having fuel for his ships, so  
he purchased the Chalmette Oil Company. You might  
also want to know that even in their later lives,  
the Vaccaros were still buying. For example, they  
purchased an old downtown hotel and rebuilt it as the  
Roosevelt. Then they purchased laundries which they  
consolidated into the Chalmette Laundries. All in  
all, these immigrants greatly influenced the business  
and social life of this city.

INTERVIEWER: Dr. D'Antoni, I realize we have spent most of the  
time on your father's accomplishments. Is there  
anything you would like to add to this interview?

DR. D'ANTONI: I'd just like you to know that my grandfather,  
Joseph Vaccaro, had a beginning much like my father's.  
He was born in Contessa, Italy around 1855. He came  
to the United States around 1867 with only a third  
grade education. He landed down river at a place  
near Magnolia Plantation and very soon obtained work  
there harvesting rice. By seventeen he was working  
in the cane fields and peddling fruit around the  
Carrollton area. With all the jobs and no one ex-  
cept himself to support, he saved enough to purchase

a small tract of land in St. Bernard Parish. He started growing his own fruit which he would harvest and bring to the French Market each morning to sell to the produce stand owners. It was not easy but, like the countless other Italians who came to New Orleans, he knew how to save.

NOTE: This interview was to have been continued. However the subsequent interview never took place.



INTERVIEW WITH SANTO DI FATTA  
New Orleans -- November 14, 1977

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Di Fatta, are you married or single?

MR. DI FATTA: Married.

INTERVIEWER: What is your wife's name?

MR. DI FATTA: Veronica Therese Grisaffi.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

MR. DI FATTA: In New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your parents?

MR. DI FATTA: My father's name was Salvatore Di Fatta; my mother's name is Conchetta Greco.

INTERVIEWER: Where was your father born?

MR. DI FATTA: In Sicily -- in Cefalu, a little town in Sicily.

INTERVIEWER: Was your mother from the same place.

MR. DI FATTA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: When did your father come to America?

MR. DI FATTA: He came to America when he was a young boy; he must have been about 20 years old. He came here single.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any idea when he came here -- before the turn of the century, 1900?

MR. DI FATTA: I would say before the turn of the century.

INTERVIEWER: Where did he meet your mother?

MR. DI FATTA: In Cefalu, Italy.

INTERVIEWER: They met before they came here?

MR. DI FATTA: Yes, my father came to America alone.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what he did for a living when he first came to America? Have you any idea how your father

financed his trip to America -- did somebody send for him or did his parents pay his way?

MR. DI FATTA: They came down by boat and, truthfully, I think they worked for their fare. He came down as a young boy and got himself a job mining coal, making money until he accumulated enough money to go back to Italy. He married my mother over there and then brought her here as a bride. He never went back to Italy after that.

INTERVIEWER: Did he land in New York?

MR. DI FATTA: Yes -- not New Orleans. He went to work in a coal mine and then went back to Italy and married my mother, and came back here.

INTERVIEWER: When he came back the second time, did he go to New York or New Orleans?

MR. DI FATTA: He went to New York first, then straight to New Orleans. Upon arriving in New Orleans he went to work with one of his cousins in a town about 125 miles from New Orleans, named Clinton, Louisiana. It was a combined grocery and small shoe maker shop. In later years, it faded out and he came to New Orleans. Here he went into business with one of his relatives and it didn't work out, so he went to work for General Motors. He went to work there as a helper and was promoted to one of the top men in General Motors.

INTERVIEWER: How many children are in your family?

MR. DI FATTA: Three.

INTERVIEWER: What are their names?

MR. DI FATTA: Camille, Vincent, and myself.

INTERVIEWER: About how much education do you think your father had?

MR. DI FATTA: My father had a third grade education in Italy which was equivalent to about the eighth grade here in America.

INTERVIEWER: Did he see that you three children were educated?

MR. DI FATTA: Yes, he did. He sent us to school.

INTERVIEWER: Where?

MR. DI FATTA: I went to St. Mary's Grammar School and my sister and brother went there too. My sister finished high school at McDonough 15. I went to Aloysius. I got a scholarship from St. Mary's to Jesuits and I went there for one day and didn't like it. I quit and then I went to Aloysius for a year and a half. I skipped school and then when my father found out about it, he put me to work.

INTERVIEWER: Where did he put you to work?

MR. DI FATTA: Well, by that time he was in business for himself in the automotive business on Esplanade and Frenchman.

INTERVIEWER: What was the name of the place?

MR. DI FATTA: Di Fatta's Auto Repair.

INTERVIEWER: So by skipping school, he simply assumed that you did not want to attend, so he put you to work?

MR. DI FATTA: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Did your brother and sister finish school?

MR. DI FATTA: My sister finished high school, but my brother was a drop out.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father put him to work too?

MR. DI FATTA: Yes. I got all my experience from my father. I am an automobile mechanic myself. He taught me the business -- he taught me whatever I know.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you live when you came to New Orleans?

MR. DI FATTA: We lived on Rocheblave and La Haye for six or seven years. Then we moved to 529 Esplanade and we lived there for about 17 years.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall the first place you lived?

MR. DI FATTA: Esplanade Avenue.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall your father talking about his early days here? Was it really a struggle for him?

MR. DI FATTA: Yes it was a struggle because, from what I can understand, he did not have the education he needed to make his way up. He couldn't read or write and that seemed to bother him. I can remember during the Depression he was making twelve dollars a week and supporting a family. That was kind of rough. They would go without clothes to feed and clothe us.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother sew your clothing, or was it bought?

MR. DI FATTA: She made some and bought some.

INTERVIEWER: In the household, who would you say was the controlling member, your mother or father?

MR. DI FATTA: My father was the master of the house; when he left

my mother was in control. My father was the boss.

INTERVIEWER: About how long did he work for General Motors?

MR. DI FATTA: He worked there about twenty years. It gave him enough time to accumulate some capital -- capital, experience and learn how to know people.

INTERVIEWER: Did he keep records?

MR. DI FATTA: Not himself because he couldn't read or write.

INTERVIEWER: Did he see any need for keeping records?

MR. DI FATTA: At that time -- we are going back many years ago -- bookkeeping and bookkeepers weren't as essential as they are today. Today you really couldn't operate without a lawyer. I would imagine he thought it was essential, but I don't think that was his main concern. It didn't bother him that much.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall him ever talking about the fact that being Italian was a hindrance?

MR. DI FATTA: Well, yes and no. I would have to say yes to that now. When he was at General Motors, he started as a young man making twelve dollars a week. Then he promoted himself from being a helper to being a mechanic. He was also put into a position where he was the head mechanic. He knew the GMC trucks from one end to the other. At the time I can remember him coming home and saying that one foreman had no use for him. If he hadn't known his business, he would have been long gone because he was an Italian. He had to fight the idea that he was an Italian at all times.

INTERVIEWER: When did this happen?

MR. DI FATTA: It seems to have been in the 1920s.

INTERVIEWER: Where was the GM place?

MR. DI FATTA: The GM Company was at Giraud, between Magazine and Tchoupitoulas.

INTERVIEWER: He kept his job in spite of the fact that he was Italian. Once he went into business for himself, did the idea of his being Italian help?

MR. DI FATTA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it was his foreman's opinion of him or the general idea that Italians weren't as good?

MR. DI FATTA: It was in general, because he had more than one foreman or manager at the time. It would be the same thing over and over.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any other Italians working at GM whom he would speak of?

MR. DI FATTA: At the time no, but there were in later years.

INTERVIEWER: Was he ever involved in an Italian society?

MR. DI FATTA: No, he wasn't the type that got involved in those kinds of things. He was backward because he couldn't read or write and he couldn't speak English fluently. He was just shy that way. Personality wise, he couldn't be beat -- you couldn't find a better man.

INTERVIEWER: What about family life?

MR. DI FATTA: He was a very good family man and a very good father.

INTERVIEWER: What were holidays like as far as the Di Fatta family

was concerned? What did holidays mean to you?

MR. DI FATTA: It meant a lot. It meant that we were all together. We were very close, and my dad presided over all.

INTERVIEWER: Were the children in the family given allowances?

MR. DI FATTA: He would see that food was on the table at all times. He would worry about me, my brother and sister and my mother. Whenever we needed anything we would ask and get it. But as far as getting an allowance, the answer is no.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do for recreation?

MR. DI FATTA: We would go out for a Sunday ride in those days or you would go see your relatives. There wasn't too much recreation in those days, because you are going back to times that were rough. A Sunday ride was a big thing.

INTERVIEWER: You had a car then?

MR. DI FATTA: We had a car. The only reason we had one was because the old man was in the automobile business. In those days I can remember two cars parked in the 500 block of Esplanade Street. Nobody had cars -- you couldn't afford them. Had he been in another business, he couldn't have afforded it.

INTERVIEWER: How long would the Sunday rides have been?

MR. DI FATTA: Sometimes all day; it all depended on what you felt like doing.

INTERVIEWER: What church did you attend?

- MR. DI FATTA: St. Mary's.
- INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that the priests, at that time, were really interested in the Italian people, or was it a matter of seeing the priest only on Sunday?
- MR. DI FATTA: I think the Italian priest at that time was interested in the Italian people. That's my feeling.
- INTERVIEWER: Did you see a lot of them -- were they ever around?
- MR. DI FATTA: There was interest, yes. We often heard about the Irish priests working very closely in New Orleans, whereas there were not as many Italian clergy.
- INTERVIEWER: How active were they with the Italian community?
- MR. DI FATTA: In those days you had St. Mary's in the Vieux Carre, where I was raised. There were many prominent Italian families and St. Mary's Church was built around these Italian people in that vicinity. As the Italian people started moving out of the Vieux Carre the population of St. Mary's Church started thinning out.
- INTERVIEWER: What about food and groceries? Did your mother go to the French Market or to the local grocery store?
- MR. DI FATTA: In those days we lived only about three blocks from the Market -- in the 500 block of Esplanade. Three blocks and you were in the French Market. I can picture my mother getting her basket and going up Decatur Street -- nobody bothering her -- going to market and coming on back.
- INTERVIEWER: What about politics? Was there any interest?



MR. DI FATTA: None whatsoever in those days.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the time when Maestri was mayor?

MR. DI FATTA: It meant nothing. But you have to remember in those days, when you were Italian you knew all the Italians. There was a lot of respect and you were close to one another. Today it's gone.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that it is basically because the old people have died out and the unity died with them, or because the city has grown?

MR. DI FATTA: I will tell you what I attribute it to. I attribute it to a lot of things. I attribute it to automobiles; I attribute it to air-conditioning. I can remember my family in the days when we didn't have air-conditioning or a window fan. Everybody would sit out on the front porch and you knew everybody. You knew all the neighbors from the whole block -- from across the street -- because they would be walking and say hello. You had a closeness whether they were Italian, French, German or whatever. You had a closeness. Today, I don't even see my next-door neighbor. That is the way things have changed and the reason for that is you turn on your air-conditioner and you don't come outside. In those days you had to come outside because it was so hot you would smother. In those days you wouldn't lock your front door, you would leave it open because Vincent was going to come home. When he came home, all he did was close the front door. You

never locked your doors.

INTERVIEWER: You were talking about unity and the fact that today it seems to be missing. Today we are all occupied with our own little world, but in earlier days people were forced out.

MR. DI FATTA: Well, I wouldn't say they were forced out. You were very friendly with the people across the street and you'd bump into them or see them at church -- at that time St. Mary's Church -- and you would meet everybody you knew in church. But as the Vieux Carre started to thin out, and people began to get automobiles, window fans, air-conditioning, then they started to close themselves in their houses and then you didn't see anybody.

INTERVIEWER: Twice you referred to the Vieux Carre and the fact that there were a lot of Italians. Would it have been like a "Little Italy" in that section? Was there a heavy concentration of Italians there?

MR. DI FATTA: Definitely.

INTERVIEWER: What were conditions like there?

MR. DI FATTA: In some spots there was a lot of poverty in the Vieux Carre and in other spots there weren't. In general, I would say it was fair. But you did have a lot of poverty.

INTERVIEWER: Did people own what they had or was it basically rental houses?

MR. DI FATTA: A lot of people owned their own home, but a lot of them were rented.

INTERVIEWER: What was the relationship between you and your father?

MR. DI FATTA: We got along like two brothers. He didn't treat me like a son; he treated me like a brother. He had the highest respect for me and I had the highest respect for him. I loved him as a father. As time went on, as I grew older, he more or less left the business in my hands. I never received a salary; everything I made went into the pot. I guess it was customary in those days for people not to pay sons a salary. Not that I wouldn't get anything -- he bought my clothes -- but I was not on a salary. If I needed anything I would go to the register and take it. I would never steal anything from him because I knew my mother and my family needed it. When I was working, I was working for the family, not for myself. It was all for the good of the family. I think all the Italian people in those days -- at least my family, and I think its true of a lot of others -- grew up that way. They worked for the family. The times change, I guess; people are different. But in those days when I was working with my dad, we were working together. If some proposition came up and I asked him if I could leave, he would say go ahead. In time I opened my own repair shop and I was very successful with it. I would go back to my dad's and help him as he grew

older. I went to him and said, "I think what you ought to do is sell out and come with me." As time went on, we worked together. My father decided that he wanted to get out of the repair business.

INTERVIEWER: What business did he go into?

MR. DI FATTA: He went into the restaurant business with a friend. He gave me the auto business -- he gave me the fixtures, the stock, the assets -- lock, stock, and barrel. He gave it all to me, no money or nothing. I in turn carried on for quite a few years, very successfully, and by that time, my dad had gone broke. He came back to work in the garage business. I wouldn't say he exactly worked for me; we worked together. By that time I was married and had a child, and a proposition came offering me a better chance in another business. So I returned the auto business to him. I gave it back to him, lock, stock, and barrel.

INTERVIEWER: Was the shop still on Esplanade?

MR. DI FATTA: No, by that time we had moved to a larger place.

INTERVIEWER: But it was still Di Fatta's?

MR. DI FATTA: Di Fatta's Auto Repair. We moved on Royal Street. Prior to that I had wanted to expand, so I rented a place for twenty dollars a month. I took a place worth 150 dollars a month and he thought I was crazy. He said I was going to go broke and ruin myself. But nonetheless, I was successful. Then I decided to go into another business, so I gave the auto business

back to him. The business I went into was very successful. By that time, my father was getting older and I told him that he should close up and come to work for me again.

INTERVIEWER: Were you still in the repair business?

MR. DI FATTA: No. By that time the place I went into was successful.

INTERVIEWER: What business did you go into?

MR. DI FATTA: I went into the coin machine business. I told my father that he should sell his business and come to work for me. So he did. I sold his place, gave him all the money, and he came to work for me. We also worked the same way; he received a salary, because by that time I was partners with your Uncle Anthony. He came to work for me, we gave him a salary, and he stayed with me for many years until he got sick and passed away.

INTERVIEWER: You haven't mentioned your brother.

MR. DI FATTA: My brother at the time was working with all of us. I left my brother with my dad, and when my daddy sold out, my brother didn't want to go back into it. He wanted to go work somewhere else. So he went to work in the city.

INTERVIEWER: You really changed occupations. That's not very typical. Most of the people I have interviewed so far have been steady -- they stayed at whatever they were successful with.

MR. DI FATTA: I went into the coin machine business until October 24, 1969. I quit. I didn't do anything for about three or four years. Then I went back into the automobile repair business.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't do anything for three or four years?

MR. DI FATTA: Right -- I fiddled around.

INTERVIEWER: But you had to do something to earn a living.

MR. DI FATTA: I had some money.

INTERVIEWER: Eventually, you ended up where it all began.

MR. DI FATTA: Yes, back in the auto business again. My mother's sister and brother lived down South.

INTERVIEWER: So there was a reason; there were relatives down here.

MR. DI FATTA: Yes, I had relatives down here. I had relatives in Arkansas -- my mother's sister. She had another sister who was living at the time, but she was killed in a train wreck.

INTERVIEWER: So you had a reason for coming here?

MR. DI FATTA: My father had no relatives here.

INTERVIEWER: Did they all stay in Sicily?

MR. DI FATTA: I just went to see them about a month ago. I went to Italy to see all of them -- there is a flock of them.

INTERVIEWER: So your father's sisters are still living.

MR. DI FATTA: Yes, in Italy.

INTERVIEWER: About how old are his sisters?

MR. DI FATTA: I guess they are in their eighties.

INTERVIEWER: Would you consider them successful people, middle of the road, or average?

MR. DI FATTA: In Italy they are what are called middle-class people. They all have nice houses in Cefalu, Italy. They are hard-working people; they are clean people; they are not in poverty.

INTERVIEWER: What do they do for a living?

MR. DI FATTA: One of his nephews has his own cabinet shop; another nephew is a detective; another works in the railroad department; another one works for the railroad; another one does detective work. Another relative works in a Federal department of the passport division.

INTERVIEWER: Your father, himself, never went back to Italy. Did he not wish to?

MR. DI FATTA: Yes, he desired to, but he didn't have the money. By the time I was able to send him to Italy, he had passed away.

INTERVIEWER: How old was he when he died?

MR. DI FATTA: Seventy-three.

INTERVIEWER: What about your mother?

MR. DI FATTA: My mother is still living; she is eighty-four. She is in the hospital now.

I think all Italian people, or most, are that way. As time went on, my father would have a few dollars. When he was working for General Motors he was making good money. When I say good money, I mean he would probably have a buck that he would save. My mother would tell him, "Let's go buy a house." He would say

"No, I won't buy a house; things are bad, bad." He didn't want to buy a house because he didn't want any notes. Or she would say, "Go buy a washing machine." He would say, "No." Anything he bought he wanted to pay cash. That's the way he was. He didn't want to buy anything on time. If he couldn't pay for it, he didn't want to lose it.

INTERVIEWER: Then he never made any big investments, like land?

MR. DI FATTA: No. He was scared. Had he listened to my mother, he would have made a lot of money. He was making good money but he didn't put it to use. If he were living today and could see the things I do, he would think I was insane. When he left me the place, I was paying twenty dollars a month. When he came back to work, he would never work for me. When he came to work with me, something came up and I said, "I am going to move." He said, "You are crazy, you are crazy. You are going to go broke." I said, "Don't worry about it." Well, I had a lot of nerve. That's what he didn't have. So I moved anyway and he came with me. I got me a place as big as this. What he didn't know was that I was renting out for storage the space I was getting. By the time I got my storage, I was getting better than free rent. He didn't want to take that chance. If he had made some investments he would have been very successful with it, but he didn't. He was happy



the way he was going -- making a good living, two dollars in the bank, but never an investment. He didn't know how to read or write; he didn't know the business end of it.

INTERVIEWER: Not reading or writing was common because many of them signed their names was an X.

MR. DI FATTA: I will tell you how good he was. To work with automobiles, you had to know the firing order. He would put his firing order in his cap, so when he would get into a problem, he would pull his hat off and look at it. In those days you had Hemlock and Main telephone exchanges. Let's say Main would be "MA," and Hemlock would be "HE." He couldn't read or write, but he would dial the number. If you told him your number was, for instance, MA 5-9292, he would ask someone what numbers were "MA" and he would write your number in his book using only numbers. He was GMC's top mechanic. I owe all my success to him. We started off at Frenchman and Esplanade, across the street from the Mint where they made the money. Then we needed a larger place, so we went town to 519 Frenchman Street. Then I needed a larger place, so I went down to 926 Royal Street. When I left my father, the business was at 926 Royal Street. At the end, he sold out at 926 Royal Street.

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. FRANK DIROSA  
New Orleans, La. -- December 28, 1977

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. DiRosa, what was your husband's name?

MRS. DIROSA: Frank DiRosa.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

MRS. DIROSA: Right here in New Orleans. May 15, 1892.

INTERVIEWER: Was your husband born in New Orleans?

MRS. DIROSA: No, my husband came here when he was 7 years old.

INTERVIEWER: Where was your husband from?

MRS. DIROSA: Sicily -- some part of Sicily.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet your husband?

MRS. DIROSA: His sister-in-law, she introduced us.

INTERVIEWER: How old was he when you met him?

MRS. DIROSA: Thirty-two.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you at the time?

MRS. DIROSA: Nine years younger.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of work was he doing at the time?

MRS. DIROSA: He was a tailor. At one time he had been a barber but he did not like the barber trade because people would breathe in his face and he did not like that. So he got to be a tailor -- a very good tailor.

INTERVIEWER: Did he have his own place or did he work for someone?

MRS. DIROSA: He worked here until he had too many children and I could not help him, so he went out to work. He worked in Maison Blanche for 25 years. He was working there when he died.

INTERVIEWER: You said before, "he worked here." In other words,

he had his shop in the front of this house. Did everybody just know this was Frank DiRosa's?

MRS. DIROSA: When he went to work, he got work from different tailors, different businessmen from uptown.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know how he got to be a tailor? Did he just pick this up on his own? Do you think that when he was a tailor, or when he was on his own, he provided a comfortable living for you all?

MRS. DIROSA: Oh, yes. We went through the depression. We made it. The reason, I think, I could sew and I could do almost everything. And it was a big help. When people did not know how to do anything, I think they paid for it. The depression was really depressing for them, but, otherwise, I could cook, and I could sew, and it did not affect us.

INTERVIEWER: How many children did you have?

MRS. DIROSA: Three boys and two girls.

INTERVIEWER: What are their names?

MRS. DIROSA: Joseph, Anna Marie, Frank, Jr., Isabella, and Louie.

INTERVIEWER: Where did your children go to school? Elementary school first -- did they go to the same elementary school?

MRS. DIROSA: Joseph went to McDonough -- we used to be two blocks from there. The others went to St. Louis Cathedral.

INTERVIEWER: So they went to schools in the area?

MRS. DIROSA: Yes. Only when they grew up, Joseph was taught at Loyola. He graduated from there. Louie went to

Loyola too. Frank was the only one who went to LSU in Baton Rouge.

INTERVIEWER: What nationality are you?

MRS. DIROSA: French

INTERVIEWER: Did your family react in any way when you decided to marry an Italian?

MRS. DIROSA: That did not bother them at all. The Italians were bothered more.

INTERVIEWER: It bothered his family?

MRS. DIROSA: Because they would have liked him to marry an Italian.

INTERVIEWER: Did he come to America by himself?

MRS. DIROSA: He came to America with his godfather and an uncle of his. His father came here first and then sent for his wife and three daughters.

INTERVIEWER: So your husband's father came first, then he sent for his wife and three daughters and your husband came after.

MRS. DIROSA: No. My husband came before. And he had another brother, Tony. And he came here with his father.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what he did when he first came here? You mentioned that he had tried being a barber and he did not like that, and he was a tailor.

MRS. DIROSA: When he first came here he had to go to school; he was only 7 years old.

INTERVIEWER: But his first type of employment?

MRS. DIROSA: He tried to be a barber because his brother was a barber, but he did not like it.

INTERVIEWER: You said you lived in this house practically all your life.

MRS. DIROSA: This house was built for me to get married. My husband built this house. They had another house here, but he built this house.

INTERVIEWER: You said you lived here all this time. When were you married?

MRS. DIROSA: 1915.

INTERVIEWER: Where, what place?

MRS. DIROSA: St. Mary Italian Church.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that when you first started living in the area there was any type of strong Italian community in the area?

MRS. DIROSA: No, and I will tell you why. I just lived three blocks away and I had been living there awhile, and at 1120 Bourbon, and from 1120 Bourbon we moved to 930 Bourbon, and that's when I got married. And where I met my husband was right around the corner. And we had just moved there from Scott Street -- like during the week -- and that Sunday we went to visit my sister-in-law, who was French also, and that is when I met my husband. (Isabella) They were good friends, my mother and my aunt. After they moved close by, they went to visit and my father was there.

INTERVIEWER: In our terms, did you have a long courtship?

MRS. DIROSA: Five years.

- INTERVIEWER: Did your parents allow you to see him frequently or did he just visit once a week?
- MRS. DIROSA: For awhile, then he started coming Wednesday and Sunday.
- INTERVIEWER: Did he come to dinner? Was he allowed to come for meals?
- MRS. DIROSA: He was allowed to come for meals, but his mother wanted him by her. So it was very seldom.
- INTERVIEWER: I was just seeing what the courtship was like in those days. You had five years to figure out if he was the right one or not.
- MRS. DIROSA: Yes.
- INTERVIEWER: Can you remember if your husband at any time joined any Italian associations -- like the Italian Chamber of Commerce or political association?
- MRS. DIROSA: He was not involved in anything at all. The only thing I remember him belonging to was the Elks.
- INTERVIEWER: Frequently, I have found that many of the Italians who came from Sicily belonged to an organization which consisted of people from their own village.
- MRS. DIROSA: No.
- INTERVIEWER: He did not join anything like that?
- MRS. DIROSA: No. We had cousins, brothers, sisters, and they were all here, and when you weren't going to one cousin's house you were going to the other. They were going to see their cousins and that's how they stayed together. They have plenty of cousins. My husband's

cousin, she's down at the Cabrini School on Espanade Street.

INTERVIEWER: What is her name?

MRS. DIROSA: Sister

INTERVIEWER: Does your husband have any sisters living?

MRS. DIROSA: One sister left.

INTERVIEWER: What is her name?

MRS. DIROSA: Conchetta.

INTERVIEWER: She's the only one left, and you have his cousin who is a nun.

MRS. DIROSA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was the only type of social acitivity you can remember visiting, or was there anything else -- did you go to the levee on Sundays?

MRS. DIROSA: We went to the river front and they used to have a show on Royal Street there. That's when the children started growing up. I mean we used to go to City Park. We could walk to City Park. We used to sit in City Park for awhile and then walk home.

INTERVIEWER: Was this a Sunday deal or during the week?

MRS. DIROSA: Sunday. And coffee was only 5 cents then. We had fun. My cousins lived across the street, who was older than I, and sometimes after work she would call me and she would say, "Would you like to walk to City Park?" So I would say, "That would be nice," and so we would go and we had another cousin, so the three of us would walk to City Park and waik back. On the

way back, we would stop at Esplanade. There was a young girl who lived there who was a friend of my cousin. I think their name was Esposito. And we would stop there for a little while. A long time ago you would do more walking than you do now. I used to walk from Maison Blanche to 1120 Bourbon four times a day, because at that time you did not have cafeterias and all that, and I did not want to bring my lunch. And I used to go to work, walk home for my lunch, go back again and come home.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you work?

MRS. DIROSA: Maison Blanche. I got married when I was working there.

INTERVIEWER: So you actually went to work and you were working when you met your husband?

MRS. DIROSA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work after you were married?

MRS. DIROSA: Never.

INTERVIEWER: Who decided whether you would work?

MRS. DIROSA: We didn't talk about it. It was like the natural thing to do.

INTERVIEWER: So your place was at home?

MRS. DIROSA: My first son was born 10 months after we were married. That's why he had to work. That's when he went to work out, because I used to help him and I couldn't help him any more -- too many children.

INTERVIEWER: With him being Italian and you French, what type of



food predominated in your house?

MRS. DIROSA: Italian. I had to learn. The cooking was so different from my mother's. Even the coffee. They would throw the coffee grounds in there and boil them. My mother used to drip the coffee. So many differences.

INTERVIEWER: I think a little French sneaked in and he was eating both. Where did you learn the Italian cooking?

MRS. DIROSA: I had to learn.

INTERVIEWER: I mean, who taught you the Italian cooking?

MRS. DIROSA: My mother-in-law lived here with me. And I had to learn it because she made up her mind she was not going to talk English. So it was either I had to learn it or not. We used to sit at the table and I had a brother-in-law who used to work here, my mother-in-law, and my husband, and then they would talk at the table and they would laugh. And I would laugh and I did not know what I was laughing at, and I felt stupid. You laugh to yourself and you do not know what they are saying.

INTERVIEWER: The family that moved in with you when you moved into this house -- was it his responsibility or did his mother decide she was moving in?

MRS. DIROSA: I knew that before because this house is built like an "L", and those two rooms -- one was for my mother-in-law and one was for my brother-in-law, because he was not married.

INTERVIEWER: Was your husband the oldest one?

MRS. DIROSA: His brother, the barber, was the oldest.

INTERVIEWER: But he was married also?

MRS. DIROSA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was it because your husband was 32 -- was the family his responsibility?

MRS. DIROSA: No. Because he was never married and he always lived with them.

INTERVIEWER: What about the brother-in-law that moved in with you -- did he ever marry?

MRS. DIROSA: Yes, he married.

INTERVIEWER: Once he married, did he stay here or did he move out?

MRS. DIROSA: He moved out until they took him in the service and his wife came here to live with us. He just died last year (1976).

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about your mother-in-law living with you all that time? Was it a difficult situation?

MRS. DIROSA: No, it was not difficult at all. What helped out was that she had two daughters who lived in the same block and it wasn't a constant thing. It was the idea she came home when she wanted. She also left when she wanted to. We never had any arguments. One time she did something to me and I knew it was wrong and I went and told my husband. He said, "Well, let me tell you something -- my country right or wrong, my country. So my mother." So I thought to myself, "Thank God it wasn't another woman." It could have been worse.

INTERVIEWER: Was his father still working at this time?

MRS. DIROSA: His father was a shoemaker, but he died not too long after we were married. So he was the support for his mother.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about a Sunday meal?

MRS. DIROSA: Sunday was macaroni with the gravy and meatballs and things like that -- maybe chicken, salad, and then they would go out and buy a cake or something.

INTERVIEWER: Once your children were married, did they come home on Sunday? (At this point the daughter joined in.)

DAUGHTER: Yes, I was always here. I moved away for about three months when I was first married, and my husband went in the service and I was expecting my first child -- a little girl -- so I moved back.

MRS. DIROSA: They bought a house -- they still own that house -- and they had a lot of colored people living around there, and my husband said, "You can't bring those children around there and raise them around colored people." It wasn't like that at first. The reason they bought that house was that her husband's mother lived right across the street, and it was close.

DAUGHTER: We bought the house and started renovating it, and by the time we renovated it, my father died.

MRS. DIROSA: They also bought a lot on Drieux Street. They got what they paid for it.

INTERVIEWER: What was your maiden name?

DAUGHTER: Anna Marie Mariano.

INTERVIEWER: What is your husband's name?

DAUGHTER: Angelo.

INTERVIEWER: What are your sons and daughters again?

MRS. DIROSA: Two daughters and three sons.

INTERVIEWER: Is your other daughter married?

MRS. DIROSA: Yes; Mrs. Lester Barback.

INTERVIEWER: Did your husband ever talk to you about why or how his family decided to come here?

MRS. DIROSA: Well, the way I understood it was his grandfather wanted him to marry a different girl. He didn't; he married the girl he wanted. He was supposed to be well off over there and he'd let all the other children jump the fence, but when his grandchildren would go there he would run them. So then his father decided to leave the country and come over here.

INTERVIEWER: What were they doing for a living over there?

MRS. DIROSA: He was well off, as I understand -- he had ground.

INTERVIEWER: Sometimes I figured your husband would have spoken about it.

MRS. DIROSA: They used to treat them bad and that's why his father decided to come to America. That killed him more than anything, because he was the only son.

INTERVIEWER: Your husband's father was the only son?

MRS. DIROSA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: If you had to go back to the time you were married until your husband died, was there anything that stuck out in your mind?

MRS. DIROSA: The day my husband died, he told me I was a good pal and that is something you don't forget inside.

INTERVIEWER: Did he die of a heart attack?

MRS. DIROSA: No. He was in the hospital for six weeks. I would go there early in the morning and my daughter-in-law would pick me up late that evening -- around 9:30.

INTERVIEWER: So, actually both of you saw your children grown and educated and went on to college?

MRS. DIROSA: The boys; the girls got married.

INTERVIEWER: How much education did your husband have?

MRS. DIROSA: He just went to grammar school. He went to St. Philip's.

INTERVIEWER: What about yourself?

MRS. DIROSA: I always lived around here in this section. I went to a school on Rampart Street. They called it the French Union School. I went there to school. And I went to Sacred Heart. At one time we lived on Scott Street. That's when I was young.

INTERVIEWER: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MRS. DIROSA: Two brothers and three sisters. There's only my youngest sister and me left. The rest of them died.

INTERVIEWER: Did any of them marry an Italian?

MRS. DIROSA: No.

INTERVIEWER: Was your husband living when Joe went into politics?

MRS. DIROSA: I don't think. But Joe loved politics. I even told him, "Joe, I don't understand you. Papa hated politics, I hate politics, and you love it." He loves it

-- the truth.

INTERVIEWER: The reason I asked is that most older Italians did not have any great love for politics. And I was wondering if your husband was living, what was his reaction?

MRS. DIROSA: He was not involved in politics then. Joe was just teaching at Loyola and worked at the brewery and he was teaching at Loyola for a long time.

INTERVIEWER: Have you accepted it that Joe is going to stay in politics?

MRS. DIROSA: I hope not. He tells me that he will run again. I hope he never runs again. We went to a St. Lucas Society and there was a lot of women there. All of a sudden there was a lot of clapping and I was wondering what was going on, and a lady sitting next to me said, "That's your son coming in." My sister, Isabelle, told him, "You'll never win. You know why? Public service is against you and big corporations are against you." People would vote for him but not big corporations. They want someone they can turn over the way they want, and when Joe says something that is it.

Before concluding the interview, Mrs. DiRosa mentioned that even before she married Mr. DiRosa, he had already informed her that his first two children would have to be named after his mother and father. This is a typical Italian custom, but she is the first one who actually brought out this point.

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. LENA VALENZIANO LATINO  
April 2, 1978 -- White Castle, La.

INTERVIEWER: What is your name?

MRS. LATINO: I am Mrs. Peter Latino; before marriage I was Lena Valenziano.

INTERVIEWER: Have you always lived in White Castle?

MRS. LATINO: No. As a young child I lived outside of New Orleans. After I married we moved here.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember most as a young child growing up?

MRS. LATINO: We lived on a sugar cane plantation. What I remember most are the workers. Often times they would be transported by train out of New Orleans for the week's work. They would then live in rooms provided for them by the plantation owner. On Sundays, if they had family in New Orleans, they took the train back. If they were alone, they stayed on the plantation. Frequently, those who remained were invited to the main house for Sunday dinner. After dinner the men frequently played bocce. Since many could not read and write, my Daddy gave permission for me to help them with their letters home. On holidays or special saints' days, there was music by one of the men who generally could play an accordion. We would then sing songs from the old country.

INTERVIEWER: You said you lived on a plantation. Did your family

own it?

MRS. LATINO: No. My daddy's family had a tract of land which they worked. The workers generally came from a neighboring plantation which owned hundreds of acres. Because we were Italian the workers were like family.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any Italian in your area owning a large tract of land?

MRS. LATINO: No. The one thing that prevented Italians from staying on plantations was the fact that Italians were not allowed to be foremen. This was generally the native born.

INTERVIEWER: What happened once sugar cane season ended?

MRS. LATINO: Once grinding was completed one Italian, who had emerged as a leader mainly because he possessed a skill, gathered a group of Italians and headed toward another project. Sometimes it was the railroad, sometimes it was just another crop. I know this because that is how my father-in-law earned a living during his first years in Louisiana. He had been a blacksmith before he came to Louisiana, and since he had a trade the other Italians looked to him as a leader. Most of the time the groups he took north worked on the railroads.



INTERVIEW WITH NATALE A. MAESTRI  
Baton Rouge, La. -- October 15, 1977

INTERVIEWER: What is your name?

MR. MAESTRI: My name is Natale A. Maestri

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

MR. MAESTRI: I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana.

INTERVIEWER: When?

MR. MAESTRI: May 6, 1909.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your parents?

MR. MAESTRI: My father was Caesar Maestri and my mother Louvi  
Carie Maestri, born in Chicago.

INTERVIEWER: Where was your father born?

MR. MAESTRI: My father was born in New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: The first place that you remember in New Orleans -  
where did you live?

MR. MAESTRI: I was born on Claiborne and Allen Street. One block  
from around St. Bernard Circle. From there I was  
really raised on Esplanade and Claiborne.

INTERVIEWER: What is the earliest recollection you have of your  
house? Can you tell me what it was like?

MR. MAESTRI: It was a two-story house on Claiborne and Esplanade.  
We lived in the upstairs apartment. My father  
rented the downstairs apartment.

INTERVIEWER: What did your father do for a living besides renting  
this apartment?

MR. MAESTRI: He owned that house.

INTERVIEWER: That was his sole source of income?

MR. MAESTRI: No, my father was in the furniture business on Rampart and St. Ann -- Beauregard Furniture Company.

INTERVIEWER: Was he in this business by himself?

MR. MAESTRI: My grandfather started that business years before. He and my uncle and my grandfather operated the furniture store on Rampart and St. Ann.

INTERVIEWER: How many children were in your family?

MR. MAESTRI: I had four sisters and I am the only brother.

INTERVIEWER: How would you characterize your family financially -- wealthy or average -- when he first went into the furniture business with your grandfather?

MR. MAESTRI: I considered them financially successful.

INTERVIEWER: Did your family move from the house with the apartment that he rented?

MR. MAESTRI: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How many times did you move after that?

MR. MAESTRI: We moved from Esplanade and Claiborne to 3810 Gentry Boulevard, where he built a home right near the Peoples Canal -- just before you get to Peoples Canal, right after Franklin Avenue.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the last move?

MR. MAESTRI: Yes, the last move.

INTERVIEWER: What was that house like in comparison to the one before?

MR. MAESTRI: Much larger. We all had our own private bedrooms and a downstairs basement, where we would bring our friends in -- it was paved -- and have parties and

dance. It was practically a whole square of ground there.

INTERVIEWER: Which indicates that you must have been achieving much more success once you got older.

MR. MAESTRI: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Besides renting the apartment and the furniture business, did he do anything else?

MR. MAESTRI: Yes, he operated the Republic Ice Company on Laperouse and Galvez.

INTERVIEWER: Was he in this by himself?

MR. MAESTRI: With my Uncle Richard, Caesar, and my grandfather. They were always together; the three of them.

INTERVIEWER: Did you, as the only boy, go to work for either one of them? That is, either the furniture or the ice business.

MR. MAESTRI: When I was about ten years old, from school I would go over to the furniture store on Rampart and St. Ann. I went to school at St. Aloysius on Esplanade and Claiborne -- no, Esplanade and St. Claude. I would study and do my lessons and I would help them take inventory and where they couldn't read the numbers on the back of the furniture, I would climb up there and call the numbers out to them and we would take inventory. I would help them watch the help and dust furniture. It was a four story building.

INTERVIEWER: What about the girls? Were they ever required or asked to work?

- MR. MAESTRI: No. My sisters would help my mother around the house and things of that kind. The girls never worked.
- INTERVIEWER: Did everybody have the same amount of education? Did everybody go through high school?
- MR. MAESTRI: Yes. My grandfather had fifteen grandchildren in school at one time. The school of their choice.
- INTERVIEWER: Where did your sisters go to school?
- MR. MAESTRI: My sisters, when they were young, went to St. Joseph's Academy on Ursuline. When they got old enough, we sent some of them to St. Mary of the Pine in Chat-tawa, Mississippi. They sent me and two of my cousins, my father's sister's children, to Springhill in Mobile, Alabama. They sent my first cousin, Alga Maestri, to a school of music in Memphis and then she went to Wisconsin and majored in the school of music.
- INTERVIEWER: Were your father and mother educated or were they self-educated?
- MR. MAESTRI: Both educated. My father finished eighth grade and from the eighth grade my grandfather took him out of school and put him to work at the furniture store when he first organized it.
- INTERVIEWER: Do you have any recollection of any social or fraternal organizations that your family may have belonged to?
- MR. MAESTRI: My father and my grandfather were never socially

active, all they did was work. They enjoyed themselves with their own hobbies, hunting.

INTERVIEWER: Did you feel that the church, meaning the priests, helped in any way or were they just there on a Sunday bit? Do you have any recollection of the priest trying to be helpful? Maybe not so much to your family, because they were more successful, but new Italians which probably you would have been familiar with at the time. Do you think the church was in any way helpful, or did the priest just stay in the rectory and take care of that?

MR. MAESTRI: To be honest with you, my grandmother was a very religious person and my mother saw that we all went to Catholic schools. But my father and grandfather, they were very charitable to the church but they worked during the week and on Sunday was their past time for their hobbies, and they very seldom attended church.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any recollection of the priest helping out in any way? Did they ever enter your home?

MR. MAESTRI: The priest would come by and visit us occasionally, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Would that be maybe twice a year or what?

MR. MAESTRI: I don't recollect that.

INTERVIEWER: Was your father interested in politics at all?

MR. MAESTRI: No. He had a cousin that was in politics, Robert Maestri.

INTERVIEWER: As you grew up and started on your own, did you feel that being a Maestri, being an Italian, and having an Italian background ever hindered you?

MR. MAESTRI: No.

INTERVIEWER: You are now living in Baton Rouge. How did that come about?

MR. MAESTRI: In 1929, when the crash came, my grandfather was running into a little financial trouble; like I told you, he had fifteen grandchildren in school. I was at Springhill College in Mobile, Alabama. I finished high school there and I was in my second year of college. I was going to enter law school. I was the first one they pulled out of school. They put me to work. They tried to keep the rest of them in school. Two of my cousins, there was Vincent Maestri, they kept him in school. He went to the veterinarian school and graduated from the veterinarian school in Ohio. Another cousin of mine, they kept him in school and he finished dentistry at Loyola University. Olga Maestri was another cousin of mine, she finished the school of music from Wisconsin. My other sisters, they just finished high school at St. Mary's of the Pine, because they were much younger than I was at that time. He saw them all through school as far as they wanted to go.

INTERVIEWER: When did the business become yours? How did that work?

MR. MAESTRI: After I got out of school they first brought me to a plantation my father had bought in Thibodaux, where they were raising cattle. They put me to work over there on the farm. I didn't particularly care for it. I stayed with him for about six months. I told my father that I didn't like it and I was going to quit. I was going to go to Baton Rouge and get me a job. In the mean time, he had the People's laundry in Baton Rouge that I knew of. I wanted to go to work in Baton Rouge at the laundry instead.

INTERVIEWER: Was that your father's laundry?

MR. MAESTRI: That was the three of them together. Richard, Ceasar, and my grandfather Maestri. They owned it together.

INTERVIEWER: How did they happen to get a laundry in Baton Rouge?

MR. MAESTRI: They sold the furniture store in New Orleans and they opened up an ice factory, Republic Ice Company on Laperouse and Galvez. It was about in 1923. They had the laundry, I mean they had the ice factory, in New Orleans and then they opened up an ice factory in Baton Rouge -- the Liberty Ice Company. That's in 1923 I'm talking about now. He had the furniture store then he sold out. He opened up a laundry in place of it where the auditorium is now. He operated that laundry and a laundry in Baton Rouge. They also had some excursion boats in New Orleans. They had the steamer, Greater New Orleans, at the foot of Canal

Street. Things were segregated at that time and they bought another boat and they opened it up on Napoleon Avenue for the colored people. The steamer was named Steamer Idlewild.

INTERVIEWER: Did it happen that you got old enough, or was it simply that you wanted to work at the place in Baton Rouge on your own when you didn't like the farm any more?

MR. MAESTRI: I was going to get out on my own. My father said I was determined to go out on my own. That's when he got me to go to Baton Rouge and work at the Laundry.

INTERVIEWER: When did you get married?

MR. MAESTRI: I got married in 1932.

INTERVIEWER: What's your wife's name?

MR. MAESTRI: My wife is Pearl Maestri. She's originally from Thibodaux. I married Pearl Price, who my father bought the plantation from.

INTERVIEWER: That was in Thibodaux that you had first started work on that you didn't like.

MR. MAESTRI: Thibodaux. We still own it.

INTERVIEWER: How many children did you and your wife have?

MR. MAESTRI: Two; a girl and a boy -- Nellie Clair and Natale, Jr.

INTERVIEWER: I've heard Nellie talk often of how she worked. I gather that you considered this important.

MR. MAESTRI: Nellie Clair worked for a while after she finished school. She worked at the City National Bank in Baton Rouge in the saving account department.



INTERVIEWER: When they were growing up, both children, did you ever let them help in anything?

MR. MAESTRI: In everything -- I always assigned them tasks to do.

INTERVIEWER: If you had to describe or mention a difference between the way your childhood was, as opposed to theirs, what would you say was the biggest difference?

MR. MAESTRI: I gave them as much as my mother and father gave me. We had everything we wanted.

INTERVIEWER: Both of your children finished college?

MR. MAESTRI: Both finished college.

INTERVIEWER: Nellie and Joe have seven children. What about your son? How many children does he have?

MR. MAESTRI: My son has four.

INTERVIEWER: Is he older or younger than Nellie?

MR. MAESTRI: Three years younger than Nellie.

INTERVIEWER: In New Orleans, which church parish do you remember living in?

MR. MAESTRI: The first church was St. Ann's Church in New Orleans, when I lived on Esplanade and Claiborne. When we moved to Gentilly, we went to St. James' Catholic Church.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have any affiliation with so-called St. Mary's Italian Church?

MR. MAESTRI: No. I knew of it. It was on Charters Street. In my day, when you were Italian, most people didn't want to associate with you. We were discriminated against. I was never discriminated against because I

was an Italian. I was friendly with everyone. No one condemned me or accepted me as an Italian. We were just friends and that's it. Our nationality didn't mean anything to us.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that the fact that you were more accepted had anything to do with the fact that you were almost third generation, whereas some of these people living at the same time were just first generation Italians?

MR. MAESTRI: I don't know. My family always raised me to just live with people and enjoy people. As long as they were honest and clean, regardless if they were Italian or American or French or Spanish or whatever nationality they were, as long as they were clean and neat and acceptable and friendly, they would allow me to associate with them.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give me anything that you can remember happening as an indication of the fact that in your day Italians were discriminated against.

MR. MAESTRI: When some of my cousins was going to school and they wanted to join sororities and fraternities, they weren't accepted because they were of Italian descent.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know of anything in the business world that would have shown discrimination, in the sense that some businesses were burned, etc., because they belonged to Italians?

MR. MAESTRI: We never had any trouble like that.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recollect anything like that happening?

MR. MAESTRI: I don't.

INTERVIEWER: Somewhere along the line your family starts off with the furniture business.

MR. MAESTRI: When he first came to New Orleans, what I'm told, he used to peddle chickens in a basket. This is when my grandfather started off.

INTERVIEWER: He's the one who came from Europe?

MR. MAESTRI: He's the one who came from Italy.

INTERVIEWER: What you understand is that he peddled chickens. Was his first business the furniture, after the chickens? Do you know?

MR. MAESTRI: When he first came to New Orleans he married my grandmother. He came to the United States as a young boy with his uncle.

INTERVIEWER: What's his name again?

MR. MAESTRI: Natale. His uncle brought him on the boat. It took them thirty days to cross the ocean. They landed up in New York. Why my uncle took him and none of the other relatives I don't know. But, he was a bus boy at one of the hotels in New York. When he was nineteen years old, he had saved enough money and went back to Italy. And he married my grandmother, which was his first cousin, Nedie Maestri. She was a Maestri also, and they had to get a dispensation from the pope to get married. After they married, he found his way back to the United States with my grandmother. That's when they migrated down into the city of New

Orleans. He and my grandmother started off, and that's when he was peddling chickens in a basket. From that he made enough money, he finally opened up a grocery store on Claiborne near Orleans. And then he sold groceries and he had a little wine dispensary there. From the grocery store, when he accumulated enough money, he went into the furniture business on Rampart and St. Ann. And that's when he took my father and my uncle out of school and put them to work to help him out. He was originally in business with Robert and Francis Maestri. That's the Robert that's the former mayor of New Orleans. They were in business together on Rampart and Iberville, just one block from Canal Street. Then, when my father and my uncle were old enough, he wasn't satisfied there, so they split partnerships. They called that the F & P Maestri Furniture Company. Then he left the F & P Maestri Furniture Company and organized Beauregard Laundry. After he organized the Beauregard Laundry and he had the laundry, that's when he opened up the Republic Ice Company on Lapeyrouse Street. In addition to that he put his niece into the dairy business, right back of the city park, going into the lake. He would go to Wisconsin and buy cattle by the car loads and bring them in here. And what they didn't use at the dairy, they would have an auction sale and sell the body to them.

INTERVIEWER: That's amazing to think that he's straight from Italy.

MR. MAESTRI: Couldn't write his name. Grandfather didn't have any education, but he had a mathematical mind. When I was in school studying arithmetic and algebra and things of that kind, he would give me figures to work in the decimal point. I would take it on paper and pencil and he'd say, "You're wrong, figure it over again." And fractions too. But he couldn't write his name. I sat on his lap reading the primer book and I taught him. He learned to read English from me sitting on his lap reading my primer book. And he read the primer book with me and he recognized the names and things of that kind from the picture book. Then he learned to read the newspaper. But this took years. And finally, when I was about fourteen or fifteen years old, I said, "Granddad, you can't sign your checks and mark an "X" on it. You got to learn how to write your name." And we sat down at the table and I spelled his name out for him and then he took his pencil and he would copy it and transform it, and finally he learned how to write his name. He could read, but he couldn't write the English. The only thing he could write in English was his name.

INTERVIEWER: Whatever happened to the Beauregard Furniture Company?

MR. MAESTRI: They liquidated the Beauregard Furniture Company and they organized the Beauregard Laundry.

INTERVIEWER: Then what happened to that?

MR. MAESTRI: We sold the Beauregard Laundry and bought the plantation in Thibodaux.

INTERVIEWER: What about the laundry that you had in Baton Rouge?

MR. MAESTRI: He had opened the Republic Ice Company and also the Liberty Ice Company in Baton Rouge. Then he sold the Liberty Ice Company at a large profit and took the property and built a laundry in Baton Rouge -- the People's Laundry, Inc.

INTERVIEWER: Is that still in existence today?

MR. MAESTRI: No. I used to work there, but I sold it and retired.

INTERVIEWER: After you sold it, did the new owner continue to operate the laundry?

MR. MAESTRI: Well, I had a heart attack in November 7, 1949 or 50. When I had my heart attack, my brother-in-law and my wife decided I couldn't go back, and they leased it out to one of my competitors. He operated it for about two years. In '52 I wasn't satisfied the way the operation was going on, so I just took it back from him and I dismantled it and I sold the building.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do with all the records of this?

MR. MAESTRI: I destroyed them.

INTERVIEWER: When you father died, what businesses did he own?

MR. MAESTRI: My father, in addition to the laundry and the ice plants, also had extensive investment in real estate in New Orleans and Baton Rouge also. My father was always very active. He would go to St. Louis, San

Antonio, Texas, buy mules by the car load and bring them in. He sold mules in New Orleans and Thibodaux, and Baton Rouge. He would buy these mules and sell them. As soon as he sold them he would go back and buy more. Some people wanted white, some wanted tan, and some wanted black. (NOTE: The city of New Orleans used mules to pull the street-cars.)

- INTERVIEWER: All of this was going on at the same time?
- MR. MAESTRI: At the same time. In addition to the pleasure boats, steam boats, the Greater New Orleans and the Idlewild.
- INTERVIEWER: How did he think about mules? Was that just something he found with which to make money?
- MR. MAESTRI: They'd buy anything that they could make money with.
- INTERVIEWER: Does this include all of his businesses or are there any that you have forgotten?
- MR. MAESTRI: In the real estate business they used to buy land and build houses all over the city of New Orleans and put them out for rent.
- INTERVIEWER: Under what name?
- MR. MAESTRI: No particular name -- just my grandfather Maestri.
- INTERVIEWER: They would buy the land, build the houses, and then sell them?
- MR. MAESTRI: These were tenant houses. I used to collect the rent

for them when I was about sixteen years old. After school I would go out and collect the rents in the evening. Most of my rent collections would be on Saturdays and Sundays, when they would get paid off. They got paid off on Friday and I'd collect Saturday and Sunday. I'd go to five o'clock mass on a Sunday morning and I wouldn't come in from collecting rent until about twelve thirty or one o'clock. And the ones I couldn't catch, I would catch them after school in the evenings. We had a map with all the rental units tagged. We used colors to check vacancies. Green was rented, yellow delinquent, and red was vacant. I would go and check on the vacancies and I'd find out if the guy who collected the rent would have the rent sticker on there. They'd be in there two or three weeks and sometimes a month before he reported them as being rented. When my father found that out, that's when he turned the rent collections over to me.

INTERVIEWER: I would like you to tell me about your father as a man and as a businessman.

MR. MAESTRI: My father was a very calm, easy-going man. He raised my four sisters and myself and I never remember the day that my father put a hand on either one of us. When he spoke, he meant it and we obeyed. He gave us anything we wanted within reason. I don't believe we ever asked for anything out of reason. He was very



generous to us. He saw that we had everything that we wanted. He was a good father. He was a good family man and he was a good businessman.

INTERVIEWER: In your family what was the basic place of your mother? Was it strictly the home? Who had more authority as far as the children and everything else?

MR. MAESTRI: My mother. She took full responsibility of the house and the children. When we didn't obey and when we did anything that she felt she couldn't control, she would report it to my father and my father would sit down and talk to us and that was it.

INTERVIEWER: As a businessman then, your father, through your grandfather, engaged in various occupations. You mentioned the furniture business, the laundry business, the ice house, real estate, and mules and cows. Can you think of anything else that he may have done for a living?

MR. MAESTRI: Well, he had those excursion boats too.

INTERVIEWER: Since he did these things, these should all be in the city records -- right?

MR. MAESTRI: Correct.

INTERVIEWER: His mule company -- do you know if it had a name?

MR. MAESTRI: No, he just had his business.

INTERVIEWER: The cows -- did he sell the cows or was it milk or what?

MR. MAESTRI: He would sell the cows and he would sell them also to my cousin for the use of her dairy. And as she would

sell her milk, she would repay them for the cows they would purchase. The extras that they had they would put up at auction and sell at auction.

INTERVIEWER: In all of these businesses it was your grandfather and your uncle and your father together.

MR. MAESTRI: Richard, Ceasar, and my grandfather. I had another uncle by the name of Walter, but he never participated in the business.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if they ever experienced any trouble working with one another?

MR. MAESTRI: None whatsoever. My father was the head man, though. Whatever my father said, the rest of them went with him.

INTERVIEWER: That was after your grandfather died.

MR. MAESTRI: While my grandfather was living, my grandfather would turn everything over to my father. But my father would consult with my grandfather. Whatever my father decided, that's what was done.

INTERVIEWER: Your daddy had one brother.

MR. MAESTRI: Two brothers, but one didn't work.

INTERVIEWER: What about sisters?

MR. MAESTRI: He had two sisters. One was a retarded child and the other one married Dr. LaRocca. He was a veterinarian.

INTERVIEWER: You were talking about at one time your grandfather had fifteen children and grandchildren in school.

MR. MAESTRI: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Do you mean that he was responsible for them?

MR. MAESTRI: He paid for our tuitions and room and board and lodgings.

INTERVIEWER: Was he doing this, or was it done through all the family?

MR. MAESTRI: He did that himself.

INTERVIEWER: Why did he pay the bills for your uncle's children?

MR. MAESTRI: He sent them all to school -- Dr. LaRocca's children, Richard's children, and my father's children.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any reason that he did this?

MR. MAESTRI: Out of the charity of his heart.

INTERVIEWER: The others had to be doing as well as he.

MR. MAESTRI: Correct. But he just chose to do it on his own.

INTERVIEWER: Can you think of anything at all that you'd like to say with regard to growing up, business life, social life, that we haven't touched on?

MR. MAESTRI: My business life and my social life was always pleasant. When my father died in 1936, I was working with him at the plant. They educated me in business since the time I was a little boy. I followed them around from the time I was about five. And then as I grew up, they used to give me little chores and little responsibilities and they paid me a little salary. They started me off at \$2.50 a week. I worked for my family all my life.

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INTERVIEW WITH SALVADOR MANDELLA  
New Orleans, La. -- November 7, 1977

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Mandella, where were you born?

MR. MANDELLA: New Orleans, Louisiana.

INTERVIEWER: When?

MR. MANDELLA: August 29, 1902.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your parents?

MR. MANDELLA: My father's name was Salvador Mandella and my mother's name was Rosina Stassi.

INTERVIEWER: Were they both from New Orleans or were they immigrated here?

MR. MANDELLA: They were immigrated here. My father was born in Santa Christina, Italy and my mother was born in Piano Degraci, Italy.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know when they came to this country?

MR. MANDELLA: They came to this country in 1898.

INTERVIEWER: What business were your parents in, or what did your father do for a living?

MR. MANDELLA: My father used to work for New Orleans Railway and Light Company, changing car wheels for the old time street cars. He continued to do that until he died. My mother never worked. The old time people never worked in those days. It was considered those days that if an Italian woman was married and worked, she had no business working in the outside world because she had to raise her family and keep her home. That was the tradition in those days.

- INTERVIEWER: How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- MR. MANDELLA: I have one brother and one sister, and my mother lost two through miscarriages or we would have been five in the family.
- INTERVIEWER: As a young boy, tell me about yourself, as far back as you can remember. Where did you go to school?
- MR. MANDELLA: I went to school at Jackson school, which is at Terpsichore and Magazine and is still there. In other words, that is the new school. The original school was knocked down and rebuilt. My school principal in those days was Mrs. Gordon.
- INTERVIEWER: How long did you attend school?
- MR. MANDELLA: I attended school until I graduated from grammar school and then I attended Soule College. The old Soule College is still at Lafayette and St. Charles Avenue. When I was going to Soule College, the original Mr. Soule was still living. He was what they would call "a very good magician." In other words, he could do a lot of tricks with his hands to prove that your hands were quicker than your eyes.
- INTERVIEWER: When you finished school what did you do? Did you have a job while you were in school?
- MR. MANDELLA: When I finished school, I attempted to get a job. My folks were in the grocery business at Toledano and Prytania.
- INTERVIEWER: You said your folks were in the grocery business and you first said that your father was working for the

New Orleans Railway and Light Company.

MR. MANDELLA: My folks that I am talking about was my mother's brother and my aunt, which was my mother's sister, and my grandmother, which was my mother's mother. They opened up a grocery store after we had moved to 1422 Prytania Street. The house was very big and there was a small house in the back, which my uncle bought all together, and told my mother "why you want to come way over here to Prytania Street? Move all together. We will knock the fence down and the family will be all together." So we were all together there for years. In other words, we were on that corner for 27 years in the grocery business.

INTERVIEWER: What was the name of the grocery?

MR. MANDELLA: Stassi's Grocery.

INTERVIEWER: After you finished school you went into the grocery business.

MR. MANDELLA: After I finished school, I got a little job with H. G. Hynes and Co., which was down on Chartres Street and they were going to pay me \$9.00 a week. My uncle said, "why do you want to go work for somebody else when I can give you more than that in the grocery store?" In those days when I went to Soule College, we paid \$12.00 per month tuition, which was terrific.

INTERVIEWER: Were your parents able to send you to Soule College?

MR. MANDELLA: My uncle sent me to Soule College; my daddy could not afford it.

INTERVIEWER: What was your uncle's name?

MR. MANDELLA: George Stassi.

INTERVIEWER: Was he older than your mother?

MR. MANDELLA: Yes, he was older than my mother. In other words, after my father died, he was just like my father. He gave me what I wanted and practically raised me.

INTERVIEWER: When you first went to work at the grocery, what were some of the jobs that you had?

MR. MANDELLA: Opening up oysters, cutting pork chops which we sold those days 3 for a dime. We sold the small oysters for fifteen cents a dozen and the large ones for twenty-five cents a dozen. In those days you gave green onions and parsley and never charged for that. We had to boil our own hams; the hams never came boiled. They came in barrels and we bought the hams raw. We bought all our hams from Kingman Company which was one of the well-known packers, and we used to buy 2 barrels of ham per week. We always had 4 to 6 hams boiling at one time in big tubs with wood fire. That's all they had in those days. The modern thing was the furnace with charcoal and you boil them in the back yard. To take the salt out of the ham in those days, we would put a great big hunk of charcoal in the water; the charcoal would absorb the salt out of the hams, which made the hams very sweet and not salty. That was one of the tricks of the trade of having the best hams in the neighborhood.

INTERVIEWER: Was the Kingman Company in New Orleans?

MR. MANDELLA: No, they were not in New Orleans. They would have their stuff shipped here, just like Swift has its shipped in here now. They have no plant here now. The salesman used to take the order and what you wanted this week he would ship next week. In those days butter came in tubs, 60 pound tubs only. We carried 3 different brands. We carried Swifts, Brookfield Pet butter and Airshi butter. Pure lard came in tubs and it had to be refrigerated to keep from melting. Lard came in a great big barrel and you sold it loose, from 5 cents worth to 15 cents worth. In those days, pure butter was sold for 35 cents a pound, the same price as ham was sold for. We had no slicing machines. You had to cut the slab of bacon by hand. The scales were measured off by weights. They never had no automatic scales those days. You would put a one pound weight on one side and when you put a pound on the other side the scale would balance and then you'd know you had a pound.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about a typical day at the grocery.

MR. MANDELLA: We used to open the grocery store at 5 a.m. and we would close at 10:30 at night. We had no holidays; those days the store stayed open 7 days a week. The long loaf of bread was sold for a nickle. No loaf of bread came wrapped; they were unwrapped. We had no sliced bread; a loaf of pan bread came unwrapped and



the long french bread came unwrapped. Macaroni came originally long and was not wrapped and you have to take it out of the case, weigh it, break it in half and wrap it up in paper. Macaroni those days was sold for ten cents a pound.

INTERVIEWER: When the store opened at 5 a.m., was the bread delivered?

MR. MANDELLA: The bread was delivered at about 4:50 a.m. The bread man used to deliver it with a horse and a wagon and he just dropped it off in big boxes and put it right in front of the store. You had to be there to bring the bread inside or it would stay on the sidewalk. If you never had time to bring it inside, you'd put it on the sidewalk. About 5:30 in the morning the milkman came. We sold milk for five cents a pint and nine cents for a quart of milk in glass bottles. There was no such thing as cartons those days. Everything in the grocery store was loose. Flour, grits, corn meal, beans came loose. We bought sugar in the barrels. It never came in a sack. You bought a barrel of sugar, a barrel of flour and everything had to be weighed. Nothing was in packages. In those days, Octogan soap was sold for five cents and on Saturdays you bought them three for ten cents. Washing powder in those days was Octogan powder and Grandma powder, which was sold two packages for five cents and on a Saturday you could get a package of washing powder

and a box of salt, which sold two boxes for five cents, either a box of salt or a box of washing powder for five cents. In other words, in those days people worked for \$1.50 a day. My father used to do laborious work from 7:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. for \$2.00 a day. In those days, people were very happy, they got along good, they ate good, they cooked meals at home. There was no such thing as a family going out to a restaurant because they could not afford it.

INTERVIEWER: Since everything was loose, some of the things, would you leave them loose or would you wait until the customer came in then wrap the food?

MR. MANDELLA: You would not wrap the bread. You would just put it in a paper bag and if they came in and said "I want 10 cents worth of grits" or "I want 10 cents worth of flour," you would put it up yourself. There was no such thing as having it prepared. Everybody was waited on those days. There was no self-service.

INTERVIEWER: What was your major job in the store?

MR. MANDELLA: My major job in the store was to stand behind the counter and wait on the customers and if a customer gave you an order and she bought too much merchandise, you would be obliged to deliver it to her home. We used to use a horse and wagon to deliver the goods. Our main thing in the summer time was ice; you had no refrigerator. We used to have to sell ice for 5 cents

worth up to 50 cents worth. If they bought a good amount of ice, you would deliver it to the house and every day you had to deliver ice to these boarding houses. In the grocery store, you had to put the ice on the top of your refrigerator. My uncle put some coils up on the top rather than waste all of the nice cold water and the air up on the top, connect it with a faucet of water and we always had nice cold ice water in the grocery store. You either put ice up on a box or everything you had in your refrigerator would go bad. We never had no refrigeration; we had four electric fans in our grocery store. During the night, we used to keep one electric fan running all night to protect the fruit on the fruit stand which would keep it cool. If you wouldn't do that the next morning you would have a terrific loss of your bananas over-ripe on you and your tomatoes get very ripe on you and you would have to throw a good amount of your fruit away. We never had no paved floors those days; you had wooden floors in the grocery store. You had to keep them scrubbed and you had to keep them clean. You had to keep your counter scrubbed at all times. We never had no register because it was unknown. We had a cash drawer under the counter and when you would pull it, there would be a little bell that would ring and there is where you kept your money. When we originally started in the grocery store,

everybody kept their money in their pockets. They had aprons on and they kept the money in the apron pocket. There was no such thing as the cash register.

INTERVIEWER: Was there anyone besides family employed in the store?

MR. MANDELLA: It was all family. Everybody that had grocery stores those days would be run by family. They never hired anybody. We used to do our own delivering and own work in the grocery stores. We could not afford to hire any help.

INTERVIEWER: How much were you paid? Or were you paid?

MR. MANDELLA: I was not paid. If I needed 50 cents to take a girl out, or if I needed 25 cents to go to the picture show or something like that, it was always available to me. All I had to do was just ask for it and it was given to me.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever eventually own the store or were you just a part owner? How did it work?

MR. MANDELLA: My uncle was in one place 27 years and then we were first on Magazine and another grocery store after he retired for about a year. He wanted to go into the grocery business again, so he opened another grocery store and we were there 15 years. After he was in the grocery store, he wanted me to take over the grocery store. I declined because I did not want to be locked up all day in a grocery store. I took a job with the Dan & Match Company. I was with them for 19 years and I went on the streets as a salesman.

INTERVIEWER: Did anyone else in your family continue the store?  
When you uncle was ready to retire, you didn't take it. Did anyone else take it?

MR. MANDELLA: No. When we sold out, that was the end of my career in the grocery business.

INTERVIEWER: Did someone else continue it as a grocery or did they just buy the building?

MR. MANDELLA: They continued it as a grocery and the one that originally bought my uncle's store had died and the family just let it go out, and the corner was never a grocery store anymore. It is now an antique shop.

INTERVIEWER: Who bought it from your uncle?

MR. MANDELLA: A gentleman by the name of Harry Webb.

INTERVIEWER: What was the last corner you all were on?

MR. MANDELLA: First and Magazine Streets. That was considered the garden district.

INTERVIEWER: Your own home -- you mentioned one place then you said you moved to where the grocery store was -- is this where you continued to live?

MR. MANDELLA: When I was small, from two years old until I was about seven years old, we lived at 1422 Prytania Street, where my brother and my sister was born. In those days, you called in a mid-wife. The three of us cost my mother \$3.00 -- \$1.00 each. My mother paid the mid-wife with a silver dollar. In those days if you called the doctor you had to be almost dead, because a doctor would charge you \$1.00 and he used to come

with his horse and buggy and come in and prescribed for you. You had to pay the doctor right away. There was no such thing as sending bills out. You had to pay him or you would never see him come back again.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what your house was like? Could you describe it?

MR. MANDELLA: At 1422 Prytania Street we had a very, very nice single home and we had a nice side porch, a big backyard with a big shed. During the week my brother and I would take a little wagon that my father made and wherever there was a house being demolished or wherever we could find wood, we would bring it home. On a Sunday, when my father was off from work, he would see it, stack it up against the wall. We used that for fuel in the winter time or in the summer time to start the fire. We took baths in the kitchen in a wooden tub. We took a bath once a week, which was on a Saturday and with Octogan soap. We had no sanitary toilets. We had out-houses before. The house was so big my mother only paid \$8.00 per month, but she rented the front room out to a dress maker, which was a very fine old lady, for \$3.00 a month and our rent was for \$5.00 per month. In those days we had no electricity, we had no screens on the windows. It was unheard of. We slept under mosquito bars and we used kerosene lamps. Oil wagons used to pass by every

week and he used to sell a whole gallon of kerosene in a can. You would give him the can and he would give you another can full for 10 cents per gallon. That is how much kerosene was sold for. In the daytime, my mother used to trim the wicks for the kerosene lamps, and at night around 8:30 the lights were out and we were in bed. We went to bed early and we got up early in the morning.

INTERVIEWER: How early did you get up in the morning?

MR. MANDELLA: In the morning my mother always made us get up at 6:00. We had to do that because my father had to catch the streetcar at St. Charles St. He had passes in those days; the railway company used to give him passes to get to work and he had to go all the way into Carrollton where the barn was and naturally he had to leave home around 6:20 to be there for 7:00.

INTERVIEWER: What about at night? Could you describe a typical evening?

MR. MANDELLA: At night we would have supper right after my father would come home at 6:00. In those days we never had any money to buy any luxuries such as cakes or candy. We would have a great big jug of country syrup. If we had bread left over, which my mother used to make her own bread in the back yard, we would cut that hard bread, put pieces of it in a plate and pour good country syrup over it. That was the best treat; we did not need any cake or candies in those days.

INTERVIEWER: Did your family ever involve themselves in any Italian Society?

MR. MANDELLA: We were in a society. My Daddy was one of the originators in the society called Piano de Graci Society. We still have the tomb at the cemetery and the last one that took it over just died about three months ago. He lived until he was 90 years old. I stood for him when he got married and his sons now have the books and the title. The tomb at the Metairie Cemetery is called Piano de Graci.

INTERVIEWER: What was the purpose of this organization?

MR. MANDELLA: If you would get sick, you would have a free doctor, and if you died, you would be buried in the tomb. We used to pay a doctor so much a month. In those days we had a free doctor and he wouldn't charge you anything and he was what you would call a society doctor.

INTERVIEWER: How did you become a member of this organization?

MR. MANDELLA: They would come around to everybody that was born in that province. They would ask you to become a member and it would cost you \$1.50 a month.

INTERVIEWER: Was there anything else besides furnishing medical care and a tomb that these organizations were offering?

MR. MANDELLA: They would prescribe medicine for you.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any socials?

MR. MANDELLA: Once a year they would carry the statue of



the saint out like St. Rosalie's Day in Kenner. We had a procession like that too. It was just like St. Joseph's Day. We carried the saint around and we'd have a procession and then we go back to the Italian hall. Then we'd have like a social; everybody would cook something.

INTERVIEWER: Where was the Italian hall?

MR. MANDELLA: The Italian hall was on Esplanade Street, right off Rampart Street. The Masonic Lodge was upstairs and the Italian hall downstairs.

INTERVIEWER: Were there quite a few Italian organizations?

MR. MANDELLA: Yes, and that's why we had an Italian hall.

INTERVIEWER: Were they formed from the hometown from where people were?

MR. MANDELLA: Yes, they were formed -- just like there is another Italian organization like ours called Contessa Entellina. We talked the very same language as Contessa Entellina. All Italians can't understand us but we can understand them. We have a little dialect of our own. Everybody would cook something at home and we would go down to the Italian hall and we would have big tables like St. Joseph tables, and everybody would cook different foods to cut down on expenses. You would bring a box of cakes or buy a pie, or you would bake a big cake at home, or you would take Italian cakes. You'd have Italian horse beans and everybody would participate and we would have a little Italian music and

we'd all have fun.

INTERVIEWER: Would it be just your organization or would it be several organizations?

MR. MANDELLA: No, it would be your organization. On the nineteenth of September every year is Contessa's Day. We would be on the first day of September all the time. Contessa's Day is on the nineteenth of September -- that is their day. They would have their patron saint, then they would have food. They would give a dance every year. So when one of your members died, naturally your organization would take care of the family.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember if your parents had an interest in politics?

MR. MANDELLA: No, they did not have any time for politics in those days. They were just law abiding citizens and never had to worry about nothing.

INTERVIEWER: What about citizenship?

MR. MANDELLA: My daddy applied for his citizenship as soon as he came to this country.

INTERVIEWER: Are you familiar with the Italian Chamber of Commerce?

MR. MANDELLA: No, never was.

INTERVIEWER: Did you uncle with the grocery, and you when you were young, ever feel that people were anti-Italian?

MR. MANDELLA: In those days, yes, they were. Mostly the Irish people were anti-Italian.

INTERVIEWER: Could you give me some examples of things that would prove this?

MR. MANDELLA: They used to call you Dago and we used to call them Shammy Irish. That was the trend those days, even when you were going to school. The school kids were anti-Italian and would call you Dago.

INTERVIEWER: Why were they anti-Italian?

MR. MANDELLA: Because the Italian people were always getting out front. They were always furthering themselves and the elder people were not. They were satisfied just the way they were. No one accumulated anything. They'd live from hand to mouth. The Italians were always trying to get ahead. They were very hard-working people those days.

Because the remaining portion of the interview did not concern specific areas of the dissertation it has been omitted.

INTERVIEW WITH JOE MASELLI  
New Orleans, La. -- June 9, 1977

INTERVIEWER: Are you a first, second, or third generation Italian-American?

MR. MASELLI: I guess I'm second because my father and mother were born in Italy and I was born here.

INTERVIEWER: From what village in Italy or Sicily did your parents come?

MR. MASELLI: My father came from the province of Foggia, which is on the Adriatic side of Italy, about 70 or 80 miles from Naples. My mother came from a small town -- St. Giorgio al Liri -- which is right across from Montecassino. It is about thirty miles north of Naples.

INTERVIEWER: Have you any idea how your parents financed a trip to America?

MR. MASELLI: Their relatives put up the money. My father came here when he was a young teenager. His brother was already living here. His father and his older brother had come to the United States years before -- in about the late 1890s -- and they worked in the West Virginia coal mines. Then they went back to Italy. My father was born in 1897 and he came to this country in 1913. He was about 15 or 16 years old when he came here. He had his brother living in Newark. The rest of his family was living in Italy and they all contributed to the fare. At that time I think it was about twenty-five dollars.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know where they lived? For example, when your father came, did he ever come to New Orleans?

MR. MASELLI: When my father came to this country he lived in Newark, New Jersey. When he arrived in New York he immediately went to live with his brother who lived in a small town called Lenhearst. His brother was married at the time. Then my father traveled a good bit as he worked on a railroad. He also went to Columbus, Ohio; then he went into the service in 1918. But, basically, he was working in Newark. He met my mother in Newark. I was born in Newark. My mother had come from Italy in 1920. They met -- I don't know just how -- some mutual friends introduced them and they were married in 1923. I was born in 1924. I went into the service and then was transferred to New Orleans in 1944. I met a girl from New Orleans and was married. My father, mother, and brothers moved to New Orleans in 1950. My parents died here; they are buried here in New Orleans.

INTERVIEWER: When your father moved down here was he still working or was he retired?

MR. MASELLI: He had left his job. When my father moved here he was fifty-three years old, exactly the same age as I am now. He came down here because I was doing better than the rest of them financially. So I pushed for all of us to live here because I was going back and forth about once a year to visit. They came here

when I got married and they liked it. My mother and father didn't like cold weather. They found the winters were so mild here that they both decided they would move to New Orleans. My youngest brother came with them and he graduated from Fortier High School.

INTERVIEWER: How many children were in your family?

MR. MASELLI: There were three survivors. We had four, but one died.

INTERVIEWER: Did everyone in your family have the same amount of education?

MR. MASELLI: We all went through high school. After the war I went through Tulane University on the GI bill. I started the first of my family to get the secondary degree.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think your parents would have had enough money to get you through college?

MR. MASELLI: No. I went to night school even with the GI bill, and before the war I was going to night school. I graduated right at the time the war broke out. So I worked and I went to night school at Rutgers University with my own money. My father and mother were not able to afford to send me beyond high school.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if your parents belonged to any organizations in Newark? Was the church very influential in your life?

MR. MASELLI: Socially my father was very active in a society of his home town called the Society of the People from Dellechito. That was the little town that he came

from which is about ten miles from Foggia. It's similar to Kenner and New Orleans. They also belonged to a couple of others like the First Ward Political Club and the Belleville Italian American Political Club. My father was a club member; he liked to play Bigliardo and Bocce. Then he learned to play poker and dice. My father liked to gamble. My mother, on the other hand, was a cripple and she was an invalid most of her life. From the time we were born, I believe, she fell and hurt her leg. Then, ultimately, my mother went blind. As a result my mother was a homebody; she was more of the typical old housewife. She cooked, stayed in the house, and raised her family. I don't think she ate two meals outside the house in her whole life. The only place she ever went was when my father drove her in the car for visits. She loved that. He'd take her to Burris when they came here; he'd take her sightseeing. Then he died and she went blind right after that, so he never knew my mother to be blind.

INTERVIEWER: Was your father just a member in those political clubs, or was he active in politics?

MR. MASELLI: He was active insofar as the club itself was active. Most politicians were not Italian. They would come to the club and have a half a keg of beer and have a rally. One might give a speech and say, "I'm running

for councilman, mayor, or whatever, and I need your support." Then he would use two or three Italian words and pat everybody on the back and think that he'd have the Italian vote. I know it so well because from the time I was old enough to travel, I'd travel with my father. He used to get into serious arguments with other men because they'd curse in front of me. He said, "If he has to learn, let him learn with me." So I learned to play different card games and pool from the time I was eight years old. I could probably play every game that people who were twenty-five couldn't play. I witnessed with my own eyes the bull that the non-Italian politicians were giving to these Italians. At that time, of course, I was too young to understand how much the Italians were being taken in. I got taken in too because I thought they were really being our friends. But once they left there, they were no more friends to the Italians than they were to the Germans or whatever. It was just a sham on their part to get the vote. When they got into office, they didn't do anything to help the Italians or Americans.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father have the same job the entire time he was in Newark?

MR. MASELLI: Most of the time. My father was a molder by trade, so he went from working at Thomas Edison to a place



called Tungslenville. The last job he had was for twenty years. Overall, from about 1922 to about 1950, when he worked in Newark or that part of the country, he worked as a molder.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel in your early business career, that being Italian was a hinderance in any way?

MR. MASELLI: No, I've never felt that way. I've told this to other people -- I could be put in a desert myself and I'd get along. But that is the way I feel.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that's because of your personality?

MR. MASELLI: Well, I believe in myself. My brothers didn't do as well as I. I don't include just my blood brothers; I include all my Italian-American friends. Our pride is very much in awareness and significant to our style of living. I think sometimes we do and say things that, maybe because of our pride, could be different. Maybe I'm not clear on this. But Italians need to be true to themselves, like our parents were.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that the Catholic church in New Jersey was helpful to you and your family in the early days?

MR. MASELLI: My mother was not able to go to church, but she was very religious. My father was able to go, but never went to church. I was very religious, however, I have a bad taste in my mouth about the people involved in religion, and it has never really been completely wiped out. I go to church today and I think I am a

practicing Catholic. I would have been more of a practicing Catholic had they taken the time. The church is where I saw my first discrimination, because, in our area, the Italians were second-rate. The blacks were the lowest, and we were second. We came from a place they called Ginni Hill and the blacks lived in the valley. The other non-Italian non-blacks ruled the city. The Irish were the superiors. The Irish priests, Irish this, Irish that, Irish mayor, Irish police -- they kicked us in the teeth pretty good. Through the church I have two instances that were very contrary, I'm sorry to say. I was pals with a fellow named Scotty and we talked him into going to take his Confirmation lessons at the time. He came in dungarees and the priest run him out. He was the first one to get killed in World War II from our neighborhood. After the incident he never went back to church and he died without ever having been confirmed. I have an Irish daughter-in-law, so I'm not altogether anti-Irish, but at that time the Irish were kicking us in the teeth. I went through the test of various schools. I went to public school, so to take my Catechism lessons, I had to go at night or on weekends. We were the public schools against the parochial schools. In our town the public schools were a degree or two better than the parochial

schools. It is just the opposite here, in New Orleans. After I finished Catechism classes I really got to dig it. I was fourteen years old, not thirteen, and I wanted to go further so I sat in the catechism class again after I made my Confirmation. I actually went back through the class to see where I could go from there, because I thought I recognized that they had just whetted my appetite. Well, I was put out. When they asked certain questions at the beginning of the class, I recognized that I didn't belong there. I was in the class for people who were just starting to take their Confirmation classes. I knew from the beginning; I don't know why the sister didn't know it. She told me that I didn't belong there since I had already made my Confirmation. I don't say she kicked me out physically, because she couldn't do that. But she did make me feel very uncomfortable as if I was kind of a moron. I was really going to seek more information, but nobody at that time offered any assistance. In fact, it was just the opposite. I was made to feel like an outcast. I never went back. It didn't bother me a bit, but it did leave a serious imprint. We finally started getting our fill of it because we weren't being kept up to date, so most of us, when we got to be sixteen or seventeen, just quit going to church. I quit and I didn't go back to church

until after I was married. I would see the priest involved in different things and I didn't believe what they used to say -- "Do as I say, not as I do." I believed in them setting the example and living a good life for us to follow. I could talk as good as they could, but their actions left me very much in want of something else. I could have been a Jew or a Baptist as far as the Catholic Church was concerned. For the longest time it didn't make the least bit of difference to me.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have predominantly Irish personnel in your area?

MR. MASELLI: I would say, with the exception of the little Italian church where there were Italian priests, the church, the bishop, and everybody was Irish. That still prevails to this day. That is going to be our next broad attack in the federation. When we check on how many priests they have and how many Italians they have in the Catholic religions, we don't have too many bishops in the United States.

INTERVIEWER: When you came to New Orleans did your family ever attend St. Mary's Italian Church?

MR. MASELLI: I did, but my wife lived in the St. John the Baptist area. Her family comes from the area around Dryades Street and Claiborne. For sixty years they have been going to St. John's. I was married there, my wife

was christened there, confirmed there, went to St. John's school, we've had our vows renewed there, all my children were baptized there. We didn't have that identification with St. Mary's. The irony of it is that the priests there have always been good friends of mine; Fr. Liberto, Fr. Luderamy and Fr. Vee -- I knew every one of them. The French Quarter was out of my beat, because when I came to New Orleans I came during the war, and the last thing I was worrying about was locating a church. I was in the service and I was looking for girls and having a good time. After I got out of the service, I kind of fell in with my in-laws; they all went to St. John's so I went to St. John's.

INTERVIEWER: I understand that the priests at St. Mary's were quite active among the businessmen.

MR. MASELLI: That is how I knew your uncle. I knew him from my own business and from St. Mary's. D'Antoni's and Anthony Bologna were two of the prime movers in that recreation center in the early 50s. Without them there wouldn't have been any. They built that.  
[Note: Mr. Maselli was referring to a gymnasium which was built for St. Mary's children through the efforts of the successful Italians in New Orleans.]

INTERVIEWER: I understand that the Church may have plans for this center.

MR. MASELLI: Well, let me go another step. This might sound like I am anti-Catholic or anti-religious, but I am not. They have a father over there whose name I won't mention who worked with the archbishop. A couple of years ago one of our marching organizations had a problem at St. Mary's. They used to want to store their carts and little floats in the yard. After two years there, you can't do it. They knew that the second year, but they didn't make any other plans. All I'm saying is the church will not let them in and now the grounds are vacant. They asked me to intercede, so I went right to the archbishop and he turned me over to this particular man. This man gave in, but very reluctantly. He made me kind of swear in blood two things: 1) that I would be personally responsible for seeing that it was cleaned up, and this didn't seem so bad; 2) that I would start telling the Italians not to call it St. Mary's Italian Church. It was St. Mary's Church. Well, if you don't think that stuck in my craw, this from a guy who was involved. I got good friends that feel towards St. Mary's like I do towards St. John's. They love it. I never told them the second thing because they would have lost another 200-300 parishioners all over the city.

INTERVIEWER: It is interesting about wanting to drop the name "Italian" because the church is definitely an ethnic church. It is like that all over the country. You

have the German church and people still talk about that here in New Orleans. But I guess that is modern.

MR. MASELLI: Well, when you take into consideration, sister, that everybody is talking about roots. But to me, it was another nail in why I dislike some of the things about religion. It's because a guy, an Anglo-Saxon, whatever he is, is telling me to omit a name. What am I doing? Am I holding the place up? Am I a criminal? The fact is that, first of all I couldn't change that because I never did name it. It was named by tradition and tradition will change it if that is the case. But to dictate that as one of the 1-2-3 -- I think that was so wrong. I have seen a couple of people over the years about this problem and they say, "Well' don't blame all the priests, don't blame the church, don't blame the religion," -- that's a lot of baloney. That's who it is and that's who I'm blaming. I am blaming the priests and everybody connected with it because they haven't been realistic.

Since the remainder of Mr. Maselli's interview concerned current topics, it has been omitted.

INTERVIEW WITH CATHERINE NOTO  
New Orleans, La. - June 8, 1977

INTERVIEWER: What is your name?

MRS. NOTO: Caterina in Italian -- you can use Catherine.

INTERVIEWER: Were you the first-born in your family?

MRS. NOTO: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How old was your mama when she married your papa?

MRS. NOTO: My mother was born in February, 1876. I was born in 1891 after they had been married a year. That means they were married in 1890. So she was fourteen when she got married.

INTERVIEWER: How many children did your mama have?

MRS. NOTO: Twelve; but one of them was premature and died after me. I would have a sister next to me.

INTERVIEWER: Where did your papa work when he first came to America?

MRS. NOTO: Papa worked on the plantations. They worked in the field when the grinding was not on. But in the grinding time they worked in the sugar house, because they made a little more money there.

INTERVIEWER: When they worked in the fields, what did your papa do?

MRS. NOTO: When they worked in the fields at planting time, they planted cane. When it came to working the cane, he would drive the mules. It didn't matter what they did. They didn't worry about what they did as long as they were making a day's work.

INTERVIEWER: How much did he make a day?

MRS. NOTO: I don't know. I don't believe they were paying them



much in those days when he first came -- maybe fifty cents. The ones that used to run the plows used to get seventy-five cents; sunup to sundown with one hour for a meal.

INTERVIEWER: What plantations did he work?

MRS. NOTO: He worked in Westfield, which is off of Paincourville in Assumption Parish. He work at Saint Emma between Paincourville and Donaldsonville. He worked in Saint James. He worked at Petervain, Donaldsonville. That's where I was born. It later burned.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live there rent-free?

MRS. NOTO: All that went with your salary. You didn't pay rent. If you had a piece of ground in the back you were allowed to make your own garden with your own time. On Sundays the men liked to work in the garden.

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents ever return to Italy?

MRS. NOTO: They returned when I was five and a half years old.

INTERVIEWER: When they went back, had he saved up enough money for his fare or did someone pay his way?

MRS. NOTO: At that time they never used to pay much for voyages -- not over about \$30 or \$35, which he saved.

INTERVIEWER: When you arrived in Sicily where did you live?

MRS. NOTO: We landed in Naples, then we went to Palermo and finally to Sambuca.

INTERVIEWER: How did they earn a living?

MRS. NOTO: They worked for my uncle picking grapes. They staked

the grapes in a row. When the plants bloomed they would pick grapes two or three days a week. My father, uncle, and my mother went mainly to watch.

INTERVIEWER: Did they go to the field by the day?

MRS. NOTO: No, my uncle had a little house near the orchard. He kept plenty of straw which was covered with blankets for sleep. The hut also had a fireplace for cooking and a table and chairs. Generally we stayed out three days.

INTERVIEWER: What about the homes in the village?

MRS. NOTO: In the village some of the houses were two stories, some three, but ours was one. We had a big room that could have been two rooms with a little partition and two doors. Then there was a room for Papa's hay. Then you came down about six or seven steps and that was our living room. On the side of that was a room with a dirt floor for Papa's horse. Over it they had a shed supported by reeds.

INTERVIEWER: Was church part of your life there?

MRS. NOTO: Everybody went to church. If it would be dry weather they would all get together for God to make the rain come, because the wheat needed water. They depended on that wheat; that was their bread. They used wheat; they used chichita which they called garbonza in Spanish. They raised another kind of bean like a pea -- as big as my fingernail. They called it chacheti. They raised husk beans. We called them horse beans

- INTERVIEWER: How much land did your father own?
- MRS. NOTO: They called it a "trentina." I don't know what that is, but I know it was a good stretch. There were three pieces. One he had inherited from his daddy. One section had the vineyard. When he made his crops he had to give his brothers a certain amount of what he made. He had to give his mother the oil and the wine if she wanted.
- INTERVIEWER: Even though he inherited it, he still had to give them a part?
- MRS. NOTO: They drew who was going to get it. That went to him. He had to share with them. They went to help him too.
- INTERVIEWER: Did the girls get anything?
- MRS. NOTO: They didn't have girls. There were only three brothers.
- INTERVIEWER: If they would have had girls, would they have gotten any?
- MRS. NOTO: The girls were given the dowry when they married. If they got plenty of land, they give them a portion. They give them all the bedding and everything.
- INTERVIEWER: Tell me about going to school in Sicily?
- MRS. NOTO: I was maybe six or seven years old when I went to school for the first time.
- INTERVIEWER: What did you study?
- MRS. NOTO: I studied the primer, which is learning the syllables. You learn your ABCs, you learn mama, papa, and all that. After you learn your ABCs, you learn a-e-i-o-u. The numbers you learn a little later on.

INTERVIEWER: Did you learn your numbers?

MRS. NOTO: I didn't learn the numbers over there. In the first grade I didn't go to school too much. Mama got sick. I couldn't have been too young when I started. I must have been seven. Because I was ten when we got here. I went to school the following year and it was the same teacher.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds as if you did not attend much of the first grade.

MRS. NOTO: That is right. Because I had to help Mama with the family there was little time for school. Every other day I had to take my little brother to the hospital. You could go to both the doctor and the hospital for free as it was paid by the government. Now if you called the doctor to your house, you had to give him something.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you return to America?

MRS. NOTO: Mama began talking to Papa about returning. She told him, "I want to go back to America, I want to go back to my people." Her mama, daddy, sister, and brothers were all here. Daddy said, "I better take you to America because if you die over here your daddy's going to say I killed you." So he sold his wheat, he sold his horse, he sold everything. He then asked Mama to write her papa for money for her trip because the cost for everyone would wipe out his savings. Right away \$50 came and we were headed back to America.

On the boat you had to go down below deck to sleep. But you had to go on deck in the morning. We didn't go back down until night, because they would fumigate all the places where people were sleeping. They had the men separated and the ladies separate with the children. They had to fumigate that deck every day. Then after that they have to open it and air it out. When it is time and you can go in, I believe they rang a bell.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how long it took you to come back?

MRS. NOTO: I believe we made it in nineteen days. But going over there I don't know how long it took.

INTERVIEWER: You said you landed in New York.

MRS. NOTO: Well, in New York where the port is. We went in a hotel while we waited to go on the ship. I remember the hotel very well. It had the elevators that go with a rope.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get to Donaldsonville?

MRS. NOTO: First, we came on the ship to New Orleans. The name of the ship was "Manila." My grandfather came to meet us at the port.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get from New Orleans to Donaldsonville?

MRS. NOTO: By train.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what year it was?

MRS. NOTO: Probably about 1901.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of work did your father find?

MRS. NOTO: At first he worked for Mr. Bob LeBlanc at a plantation

called Westfield. Already my daddy had worked that plantation before he had returned to Italy. But he wanted his own place. Since he had sold his place in the old country, he had \$1,000 for new land, but the money was not all with him. My uncle had sold property for Papa and sent it to him in \$200 money orders since that was the limit. Not knowing, my uncle made out two of the four money orders in my brother's and my names and these had to be returned for remaking. Finally the money arrived. Papa was offered a place across the river which Mama did not like since her family was on the Donaldsonville side. She said, "I have got to be coming and going." So then old man Potanno came up and told Papa about a place. If Papa wanted to buy it, it would only cost \$1,000. Papa went to look at it and the weeds were a mile high. Papa said that if the weeds could grow, so could other things. But the land turned out to be more blackjack than good soil.

INTERVIEWER: Where was the land?

MRS. NOTO: In a section called Hebert. Papa bought it for \$1,000 and after Mama died we sold that same land for \$12,000.

INTERVIEWER: Was this where your family was raised?

MRS. NOTO: Yes, but the house came later. But before Papa bought the land we had one more crowded time. Because Papa's money took so long in coming, we first lived with my grandfather. He had an extra warehouse which he had wanted to use for a grocery. Since the grocery did not

open, he offered the warehouse to Papa. All I can say is the entire family stayed in that one room.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you live in that room?

MRS. NOTO: Not long because Papa's cousin came by and offered to help him get the house built. It was two rooms made of wood. He built it in a section of Donaldsonville called Churchville.

INTERVIEWER: Once the house was built, did you and your brothers go back to regular school attendance?

MRS. NOTO: Only after grinding.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go to school?

MRS. NOTO: In Donaldsonville in a two-story building on Railroad Avenue.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that even in America you missed school. Why did you miss?

MRS. NOTO: Mama started having the babies over here and I had to start helping with the babies.

INTERVIEWER: What grade did you reach?

MRS. NOTO: The second grade, that's all. Even that was hard.

INTERVIEWER: Since you only got to second grade, did your brothers go any further?

MRS. NOTO: Well a little. My sister Marie (she's in Japan right now), she finished. And my brother, Joe, finished. I believe Pete went about to the fourth grade.

INTERVIEWER: What do you mean by "finished?"

MRS. NOTO: Joseph and Marie finished high school -- they graduated. Albert made the second or third grade. Pete must have

made about the third grade.

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Noto, is there anything else you would like to mention regarding church, social life, or life in general?

MRS. NOTO: Just that it was a hard life, but I am glad we came. I wish I could have had more schooling, but the oldest daughter was expected to help at home. I could not get the book learning. But I did make sure my children did.



INTERVIEW WITH MRS. SAM SCURTO\*  
Houma, La. - June 2, 1978

INTERVIEWER: What is your name?

MRS. SCURTO: Rose Marie D'Alfonso.

INTERVIEWER: What is your married name?

MRS. SCURTO: Rose D'Alfonso Scurto.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

MRS. SCURTO: In New Orleans, Louisiana; in the 1100 block of Chartres Street, opposite the St. Mary's Church.

INTERVIEWER: When were you born?

MRS. SCURTO: In 1894.

INTERVIEWER: Were your parents born in New Orleans?

MRS. SCURTO: No, they were both born in Cefalu, Italy.

INTERVIEWER: Were they married when they came to America?

MRS. SCURTO: No; my father was fifteen years old when he came to America and my mother was eleven years old.

INTERVIEWER: How did your father come to this country -- did he come with his parents or did he come alone?

MRS. SCURTO: He came with his parents, I'm sure. When he came here he was working at little odd jobs here and there. Then when he became of age, he went into the wholesale fruit and product business. They imported Italian foods from Italy.

INTERVIEWER: You said he wanted to be on his own. How did this happen?

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\*Comments made by Mr. Scurto at the end of this interview have been incorporated.

MRS. SCURTO: He was a salesman for his own company. He went into business with his brother-in-law and cousin. He traveled from New Orleans to Lafayette selling fruit and produce to the people.

INTERVIEWER: What was the name of the company?

MRS. SCURTO: Joseph Cangelosi Company Limited.

INTERVIEWER: What do you know of your mother; did she come here with her parents?

MRS. SCURTO: She came with her mother. Her father had been here for years. Her father and brother came first and they sent for her, her little sister, and my grandmother.

INTERVIEWER: What was their name?

MRS. SCURTO: Giardino.

INTERVIEWER: What business were they in?

MRS. SCURTO: Well, my grandfather died three months after they came to America. When he first came he was in Donaldsonville, but when he became sick they moved to New Orleans to be with the family. He died within three months after they arrived.

INTERVIEWER: Have you any idea how old your mother and father were when they married?

MRS. SCURTO: My mother was eighteen and my father was nine years older, which made him twenty-seven.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know where they were married?

MRS. SCURTO: At The Lady of Guadalupe on Rampart Street [it was St. Anthony's Church at that time].

INTERVIEWER: How many children were in your family?

MRS. SCURTO: We were six but two of them died. One died at sixteen months and another died when she was eleven years and eleven months. Then we were four children; now we're three.

INTERVIEWER: How many boys and how many girls?

MRS. SCURTO: There were three girls and three boys.

INTERVIEWER: What were the girls' names?

MRS. SCURTO: I was the first child, Rose. My little sister was Santa Margarite; my other sister was Theresa Florence. The boys were Joseph, Frank, and Anthony.

INTERVIEWER: Where did your parents live when they were first married?

MRS. SCURTO: On Chartres Street, opposite the St. Mary's Church. When I was six years old we moved to 1132 Bourbon Street.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything about the house on Chartres Street?

MRS. SCURTO: It was a two-story house. We had three bedrooms in the front part of the house and there was a little step going down to the back part where my grandmother lived. She had two rooms there and the kitchen and a sort of utility room downstairs.

INTERVIEWER: They moved when you were six?

MRS. SCURTO: When we moved from Chartres Street we moved to 1132 Bourbon Street.

INTERVIEWER: Was that house bigger?

MRS. SCURTO: It was a private home for ourselves. We didn't have

two apartments -- one up and one down -- we had a home of our own. There were five bedrooms, three in the front part of the house and two in the back part. We had a living room, dining room, and breakfast room downstairs. The kitchen was a little way from the house -- it was a kitchen and utility room.

INTERVIEWER: Was your grandmother still living at the time?

MRS. SCURTO: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did she move with you to the house?

MRS. SCURTO: Yes. Grandmother always lived with us.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go to school?

MRS. SCURTO: When I first started school, the Missionary Sisters had a school right back of our house. We lived on Chartres and they were on Governor Nicholls Street. I was four years old and Sister Rose was one of the sisters there. I couldn't speak very fluent English because my grandmother spoke Italian only. I learned the Italian language before the English language.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother speak more Italian than English?

MRS. SCURTO: Yes, because Grandmother was with us all the time and they always conversed in Italian. That's how we learned to speak it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if your mother and daddy attended school in Cefalu?

MRS. SCURTO: Yes, they went to school in Cefalu. School in Italy was so much different than here. I think my father only had a second grade education but he was in the

wholesale business and he went into other companies and made out all his sales slips. My mother went to school in Italy also. They both learned to read the paper and learned to speak fluently by reading the newspaper. Mother loved to read.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know where your mother and daddy met?

MRS. SCURTO: My father and mother were first cousins. But Mother was in Italy and Daddy was here, so they didn't feel like they were relatives.

INTERVIEWER: How much schooling did you have?

MRS. SCURTO: I finished the eighth grade and I had one year of high school.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go to high school?

MRS. SCURTO: On Esplanade Street -- I can't remember the name. I went to McDonough 15 for elementary school.

INTERVIEWER: Did your brothers and sisters do the same thing?

MRS. SCURTO: Yes, they went through school. Frank went to St. Aloysius. He didn't finish college - none of us finished college. We did go to high school for one year.

INTERVIEWER: When you were growing up, what would a typical Sunday have been like?

MRS. SCURTO: My aunt had ten children -- five boys and five girls. The family was very close and they worked together and we always stayed together. So on Sunday all the girls in the family would eat at Aunt Rose's house and the boys ate at my mother's house. My uncle, who was

living with my aunt, would eat at my house on Sundays. That's how we spent our Sundays. And practically every night we went to Aunt Rose's house because we had lived in the same house -- my aunt lived downstairs and we lived upstairs. We never could stay away from each other; we were very close.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you meet your husband?

MRS. SCURTO: At my house. One day, when I was coming home from school, he had come to buy from my daddy. My mother-in-law and my grandmother were good friends from Italy. I was coming in from school for lunch and my husband and his brother were at my house. I passed right by and ran into the kitchen to see what we were having for lunch because I had to get back to school. My daddy felt very bad because I didn't tell them good afternoon. I didn't think I was supposed to, I guess. He called me back and embarrassed me because he said, "Come here. Didn't you see these men here? Why didn't you say good afternoon?" I said, "I was in a hurry because I have to get back to school."

INTERVIEWER: How old were you then?

MRS. SCURTO: I must have been about twelve or thirteen -- I don't know for sure.

INTERVIEWER: How old was he at the time?

MRS. SCURTO: He must have been about thirteen or fourteen years old.

INTERVIEWER: What happened after that? Did you ever see him again?

MRS. SCURTO: Well, I saw him again after that in 1912. We came

here to christen one of the Fesi girls. My mother and father were going to be godparents. From then on we corresponded.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you get married?

MRS. SCURTO: We were married in St. Mary's Church in 1919 -- October 15, 1919.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you were married?

MRS. SCURTO: Twenty-five. We weren't sweethearts or anything -- we'd just see each other off and on. I got engaged in 1919 on St. Theresa's Feast Day.

INTERVIEWER: You said there was not really a courtship. Did he ever take you out? Could he take you out?

MRS. SCURTO: After I was engaged we went out to the shows and to the park.

INTERVIEWER: When Sam considered marriage, did he ask your father's permission?

MRS. SCURTO: Well, he spoke to me first and then I told my father and mother that I loved Mr. Scurto and was thinking about marrying. My mother said, "Well, you know if you marry Sam you are going to have to move to Houma. I said, "I'll go to the devil's elbow and back for him." So Mama said, "If that's how you fell, God bless you and go on." So I said, "I must have gone to the devil's elbow and back because I sure cried."

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents like the idea of your marrying somebody in the shoe business?

MRS. SCURTO: If that was what I wanted, they were going to make

their daughter satisfied. Of course, my daddy must have cried almost as much as I did when I first told him I was going to get married and move out of town. He thought that was terrible.

INTERVIEWER: Did your sisters marry men from New Orleans?

MRS. SCURTO: They all married New Orleans girls and boys.

INTERVIEWER: You were the only one who lived outside New Orleans?

MRS. SCURTO: I was the only one who married and moved away.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that you didn't have children for nine years. When you finally did have children, how many did you have?

MRS. SCURTO: My two daughters. There was two years minus two weeks difference in their ages. That was it. I had those two and no more. No miscarriages -- nothing.

INTERVIEWER: I'd like to talk a little bit about your father's business. It was a wholesale business?

MRS. SCURTO: It was a wholesale produce business.

INTERVIEWER: Did your brothers work in this business?

MRS. SCURTO: My oldest brother first worked with the French Market Ice Company, and from there he went to work with the Whitney National Bank. He worked there from the time he was a teenager until his death. The second one worked with the Whitney National Bank but he was on Decatur and Ursuline, right by the French Market. And the other one worked on Carondelet Street. That's the only job he had.



- INTERVIEWER: What eventually happened to the business? Does it still exist today?
- MRS. SCURTO: At one time they branched off into the banana business, but they did take a big loss. That almost floored them for a while, but they didn't declare bankruptcy. They got back on their feet and paid off everything. They were still in business when my father died.
- INTERVIEWER: Did your father's death end the business?
- MRS. SCURTO: The business was still in operation when my father died. I think when my mother died, they paid off everything and dissolved the partnership.
- INTERVIEWER: Do you still speak Italian?
- MRS. SCURTO: Yes, I can still speak some -- not very well, but I can still speak it.
- INTERVIEWER: Do you remember celebrating any special feasts? Were there any special feasts that were special to your family?
- MRS. SCURTO: St. Salvador's Feast Day. That was the feast day of the old country and they made a big feast out of that and the band would come to church and play. St. Joseph was also a big feast day. Although St. Joseph is big among most Italians, in our family St. Salvador got a bigger day.

INTERVIEWER: When was St. Salvador celebrated?

MRS. SCURTO: On the sixth of August.

INTERVIEWER: Did you sing any songs that were taught to you by your parents?

MRS. SCURTO: No. My daddy and mother were opera lovers and they had all the records of the operas. Every opera that came to New Orleans they went to it. As a child I went to several operas. I can remember Cavalleria rusticana and when that man rolled down the hill and died, I was so heart broken. Everybody loved the operas.

INTERVIEWER: That indicated that they were well off, because there weren't that many who went to the opera in those days.

MRS. SCURTO: Well, they went to every opera that came to the French opera house.

INTERVIEWER: As a child, were there any special games that you and your brothers and sisters played?

MRS. SCURTO: I played everything the boys played, because I was the only girl until I was fifteen years old. So if they played baseball, I did too. If they played marbles, I played marbles; if they spun tops, I spun tops.

INTERVIEWER: To your knowledge, did your family ever become involved in politics?

MRS. SCURTO: No.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever remember your daddy talking about the Italian Chamber of Commerce or the Italian Association?

MRS. SCURTO: No. I remember sometimes he had to go to the Italian council, but I don't know why.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything of interest that I haven't asked you?

MRS. SCURTO: Well, Christmas and New Years we have a big family reunion. My aunt had that big house at 934 Royal Street. It had a double dining room and it had a great big dining room at the back of the house. We would all go there on Christmas Eve. The whole family would be there -- there must have been about forty of us. They set two tables, one for the children and one for the grownups. We'd have a big supper for Christmas Eve. My Aunt Francis Giardina and her five children would come and we would all sleep there. Christmas day was a big feast day. We would all go to church and then we had to run home to see what Santa Claus had left for us. Then we would go back to my Aunt Rose's and we would leave after supper on Christmas day. We spent two nights and two days over there. We did the same thing for New Year's. My uncle would buy a lot of Roman candles and firecrackers and blanks for the pistols and we'd celebrate New Year's by going outside. The bells would be ringing, and we were close to the river so you could hear the train whistle blowing and the church bells ringing. Everybody would be shooting firecrackers and Roman candles to celebrate the coming of the new year.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever remember being discriminated against or treated unfairly by anyone because you were Italian?

MRS. SCURTO: Sometimes different kids would get mad at you and call you a "Dago" or something like that. It would irritate you a lot. I remember one instance when the little girl next day called me a "Dago" and I said, "Well, alright, I'm a 'Dago' but when I get on that streetcar I can sit up in front and I know I'm completely white. But I don't know if you're completely white and if you're entitled to sitting up in the front." Other than that I don't remember anybody ever being ugly about it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if your daddy's business ever had a problem because it was run by an Italian?

MRS. SCURTO: No.

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Scurto, you seem eager to speak. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

MR. SCURTO: I have two brothers. There were four girls and three boys in our family. Only one of my sisters and I are living. My daddy used to live on a plantation, and he used to get eighty cents a day from "can't to can't" -- from the time you can't see in the morning until you can't see in the evening.

INTERVIEWER: Did he work in the fields?

MR. SCURTO: In the fields. In order for me to go to school, I used to live in town. A fellow had a shoe shop and I used to stay there in the back of the shop on a mattress

on the floor. In the morning I would get up and eat a little breakfast, go to school, and at 12:00 I'd come back, eat another piece of burger, then go back to school. In the evening I'd stay there and clean shoes. I stayed with him until the end. Then my people moved to Houma from the plantation. They went into a little grocery business -- a little food store. My daddy made me quit school when I was twelve years old and open up a shoe shop. The first week I made \$3.40. I thought I was rich. I was paying two dollars a month rent for my place. I made a little more as I went along. I was in the fourth grade.

INTERVIEW WITH SISTER CLARE SULLIVAN  
New Orleans, La. - October 11, 1977

This interview was conducted primarily because Sister Clare was one of the last living persons to have worked so closely with Italians at St. Mary's Church. Her community, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, had been founded by Mother Cabrini specifically as missionaries. After reading the paper of Bishop Scalabrini of Rome on the Italians' emigration to America, Mother Cabrini decided her work was to be with these Italians. She came to New Orleans in 1892, following the lynching of eleven Italian prisoners who had been blamed for the death of New Orleans police chief David Hennessy.

INTERVIEWER: Sister, please give me your full name and your place of birth.

SISTER CLARE: I am Sister Clare Sullivan and I was born in New York City.

INTERVIEWER: Although you were not here when Mother Cabrini first opened her home, what can you tell me about it?

SISTER CLARE: When Mother came in 1892 she rented rooms in an old tenement building of the Vieux Carre on St. Philip Street. Although the building and the area was run down, Mother knew she had to be among the Italians, and this is where they lived. After a few years, the building was offered for sale. With the help of donations Mother purchased it. Once the Sisters owned the building, they immediately began repairing it. On the bottom floor was a chapel for the convent. In the courtyard were added shrubs, flowers, and other plants -- all donated. The courtyard soon became a place for both social gatherings and religious

instruction. Before too long a day school and an orphanage became operational.

The day school became the place for all Italians' children. Many Italians, however, never realized that education was costly; instead they thought tuition would be covered by the government. In reality, the school became the life-line for these people. Since the numbers of Italian-speaking priests were pitifully low, this was one of the few places religious instruction could be received. The school survived primarily through donations of wealthy Italians. Each day the sisters would go out into the Quarter requesting donations. Many times the owners of businesses would be so generous that a wagon would be used to transport the goods back to the house.

As for the school itself, instruction took place in English and Italian. Since many children knew no English when they came to us, it was our task to teach them to be able to converse in both languages. Many times it was through our instructions that the parents learned English. Once the children were home, it was only natural that they use some of the English they had learned. Since parents realized the more English they knew the better off they would be economically, they made great attempts to learn

the language from their children.

In addition to English, we tried to teach domestic skills to the girls, e.g. sewing, embroidery, cooking. This was necessary since we had no idea how long the girls would remain in school. Since most Italians had large families, the girls were often needed to help out at home. Therefore, to prepare them adequately for the domestic life, we added these finer arts to reading, writing, and arithmetic.

I do know it was not easy. Many of our children were so poor that the only well-rounded meals they ate were at school. I sincerely wish I could tell you more, but the best I can do is to say it was only through God's help that they survived. Nonetheless, I should add, Mother's [Cabrini] quiet determination had much to do with it.



APPENDIX B

SURVEY RESULTS

GENERAL BACKGROUND

1. In which of the following age groups do you belong?

<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40-49</u>	<u>50-59</u>	<u>60-69</u>	<u>70-79</u>	<u>80-89</u>	<u>No Resp.</u>
6	11	21	31	63	39	13	2
3.2%	5.9%	11.3%	16.7%	33.9%	21.0%	7.0%	1.1%

2. Indicate your sex

<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>No Response</u>
123	61	2
66.1%	32.8%	1.1%

3. Are you

<u>married</u>	<u>widowed</u>	<u>single</u>	<u>divorced</u>	<u>no response</u>
144	22	16	3	1
77.4%	11.8%	8.6%	1.6%	.5%

4. Where were you born?

<u>Sicily</u>	<u>United States</u>	<u>Southern Italy</u>	<u>Northern Italy</u>	<u>No. Resp.</u>
28	157	0	1	0
15.1%	84.4%	0.0%	.5%	0.0%

NOTE: If your answer to Number 4 is the United States, skip numbers 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12; You are to go directly to number 13.

. . . If your answer to Number 4 is Sicily, Southern Italy or Northern Italy, you go on to number 5; do not skip any questions.

5. When did you come to the United States?

<u>Before 1880</u>	<u>1880-1900</u>	<u>1901-1910</u>	<u>1911-1920</u>	<u>1921-1930</u>
0	3	14	2	4
0.0%	10.3%	48.3%	6.9%	13.8%
<u>After 1930</u>	<u>No Response</u>			
2	4			
6.9%	13.8%			

6. From which area in Europe did you come?

<u>Sicily</u>	<u>Southern Italy</u>	<u>Northern Italy</u>	<u>No Response</u>
28	0	1	0
96.6%	0%	3.4%	0%

7. Your trip to the United States was paid for by

<u>Self</u>	<u>Brother-Sister</u>	<u>Parents</u>	<u>Uncle-Aunt</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>No Response</u>
5	0	23	0	0	0
17.2%	0%	79.3%	0%	0%	0%

8. Which of the following best represents the reason you came to the United States?

to make money and remain in the United States.	1	3.4%
to better yourself economically.	3	10.3%
family difficulties in Italy.	0	0.0%
brought by parents.	23	79.3%
brought by relatives.	2	6.9%
no response.	0	0%

9. In coming to the United States, where did you land?

<u>New Orleans</u>	<u>New York</u>	<u>Boston</u>	<u>Other</u> (specify where)
17	10	2	0
58.6%	34.5%	6.9%	0.0%

10. Did you ever return to Italy once you came to the United States?

<u>Did Return</u>	<u>Did not Return to Italy</u>
21	8
72.4%	27.6%

11. If you did return to Italy, how long did you remain there?

<u>Less than 1 year</u>	<u>1 year</u>	<u>2-3 years</u>
8	11	1
27.6%	37.9%	3.4%

12. If you did return to Italy, which of the following reasons caused your return?

<u>Just wanted to visit</u>	<u>Family matter</u>	<u>Employment</u>
6	15	0
20.7%	51.7%	0.0%

13. What was the general location of the first place you lived?

<u>Algiers</u>	<u>French Market Area</u>	<u>St. Thomas St. Area</u>	<u>Morgan City</u>
7	91	10	2
3.8%	48.9%	5.4%	1.1%
<u>Houma Area</u>	<u>Other</u> (specify where)		
20	52		
10.8%	28.0%		

14. How long did you continue to live in this first location?

<u>1 year</u>	<u>2-4 years</u>	<u>5-10 years</u>	<u>11-20 years</u>
12	59	18	90
6.5%	31.7%	9.7%	48.4%

15. Was the first home in which you lived in the United States owned or rented?

<u>Owned</u>	<u>Rented</u>
93	75
50.0%	40.3%

16. If you moved
- more than once
- , check the number closest to the entire number of moves made.

<u>2-4</u>	<u>5-6</u>	<u>more than 6</u>
130	24	13
69.9%	12.9%	7.0%

## RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

17. What is your religious background?

<u>Catholic</u>	<u>Protestant</u>	<u>Jew</u>
184	1	0
98.9%	.5%	0.0%

18. As a Christian, do you attend church services. . .

<u>Daily</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>a few times a year</u>
9	122	4	31
4.8%	65.6%	2.2%	16.7%

<u>Hardly ever</u>	<u>Never</u>
19	0
10.2%	0.0%

19. If you are a Catholic, how many times a year do you have Masses said for relatives or friends?

<u>1-5 times/year</u>	<u>6-10 times/year</u>	<u>more than 10 times</u>	<u>Never</u>
107	5	4	68
57.5%	2.7%	2.2%	36.6%

20. How often do you have Masses said in honor of some saint?

<u>1-5 times/year</u>	<u>6-10 times/year</u>	<u>more than 10 times/year</u>	<u>Never</u>
32	1	0	145
17.2%	.5%	0.0%	78.0%

21. How often do you make use of the practice of lighting candles for a special intention?

<u>Every week</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Once a year</u>	<u>Hardly ever</u>	<u>Never</u>
45	20	21	46	48
24.2%	10.8%	11.3%	24.7%	25.8%

22. Do you believe in contributing to the support of your church?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
176	4
94.6%	2.2%

23. How often do you take part in novenas, either in public or private?

<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Once a year</u>	<u>Hardly ever</u>	<u>Never</u>
11	37	25	44	62
5.9%	19.9%	13.4%	23.7%	33.3%

24. Do you believe in wearing religious medals or in keeping statues of saints/Christ in the home?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
159	21
85.5%	11.3%

25. Did your parents believe in keeping statues of saints/Christ in the home?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
177	3
95.2%	1.6%

26. How much education did you receive?

<u>Some grade school</u>	<u>All grade school</u>	<u>Some high school</u>
21	14	23
11.3%	7.5%	13.4%
<u>High school graduate</u>	<u>Some college</u>	<u>College graduate</u>
51	34	38
27.4%	18.3%	20.4%
<u>None of the above</u>		
3		
1.6%		

## SOCIAL BACKGROUND

27. Check the activity in which you most often engaged as a youngster.

<u>Going to movies</u>	<u>Playing games</u>	<u>church related activities</u>
63	55	10
33.9%	29.6%	5.4%

Had little time for  
anything except work  
48  
25.8%

28. Did your family enjoy music?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
178	2
95.7%	1.1%

29. Did your family own musical instruments? If yes, which one/ones?

<u>Piano</u>	<u>Violin</u>	<u>Band instruments</u>	<u>Other</u>
113	26	49	18
60.8%	14.0%	26.3%	9.7%

30. Did your family belong to any of the following societies or organizations?

<u>Contessa Entellina</u>	<u>St. Joseph Society</u>	<u>Society of St. Bartholomew</u>
51	84	1
27.4%	45.2%	15%

<u>Society of Trento &amp; Trieste</u>	<u>Italian Political Society</u>
0	10
0.0%	5.4%

Other (specify what)  
15  
8.1%

31. If married, were you permitted to marry the person of your choice?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Does not apply</u>
163	3	9
87.6%	1.6%	4.8%

32. If married, is/was your spouse Italian?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
111	40
59.7%	21.5%

## ECONOMIC AND OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND

33. How old were you when you first went to work?

<u>Less than 9</u>	<u>9-11</u>	<u>12-14</u>	<u>15-17</u>	<u>older</u>
11	19	44	51	55
5.9%	10.2%	23.7%	27.4%	29.6%

34. Which of the following best describes your first job?

<u>Farming</u>	<u>Fruit peddler</u>	<u>Sugar cane fields</u>	<u>Lumber mill</u>
10	10	26	2
5.4%	5.4%	14.0%	1.1%

Other  
130  
69.9%

35. Which of the following amounts is closest to the sum of money you received each week in your first job?

<u>Less than \$1</u>	<u>\$1-3</u>	<u>\$3-5</u>	<u>\$5-8</u>	<u>More than \$8</u>
13	35	30	25	73
7.0%	18.8%	16.1%	13.4%	39.2%

36. Did you experience difficulties in obtaining a job because of being Italian?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
6	171
3.2%	91.9%

37. Did you ever own your own business?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
88	95
47.3%	51.1%

38. Did you ever feel that being Italian hindered you in business?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Does not apply</u>
0	132	45
0.0%	71%	24.2%

39. Did you ever feel that being Italian helped your business?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Does not apply</u>
63	70	37
33.9%	37.6%	19.9%

40. Check the answer which best describes your business situation.

<u>Work alone</u>	<u>Work with relatives</u>	<u>Work with friends</u>
40	36	95
21.5%	19.4%	51.1%

NOTE: If you are retired, this applies to the time before your retirement.

41. Did you ever invest in property?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
147	35
79%	18.8%

42. Have you ever taken an active part in politics?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
44	140
23.7%	75.3%



APPENDIX C

PARTIAL CHARTER OF THE  
ITALIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

CAMERA DI COMMERCIO ITALIANA  
May 1921

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
STATE OF LOUISIANA,  
Parish of Orleans.

BE IT KNOWN, that on this 11th day of the month of May, in the year of our Lord, 1921, and of the Independence of United States of America One Hundred Forty-fifth, before me, THEODORE COTONIO, a Notary Public in and for the Parish of Orleans, State of Louisiana, duly commissioned and qualified and in the presence of the witnesses hereinafter named and undersigned, personally came and appeared several persons whose names are hereunto subscribed all above the lawful age of majority who severally and mutually declare unto me, said Notary, that availing themselves of the Law of this State relative to the organization of Corporations and more especially of the statute of this State pertaining to the organization of non-trading corporations for the purpose of fostering trade and commerce, particularly Act No. 254 of 1914, page 487, of the Legislative Acts of the State of Louisiana, providing for the incorporation of Exchanges, Boards of Trade and Commerce Associations as set forth in said act, they have covenanted and agreed and by these presents do covenant and agree for themselves, their successors and assigns to form themselves into a non-trading corporation and body politic in Law for the purpose of fostering Trade and Commerce pursuant to said Act, for the object and purposes, and under the stipulations hereinafter set forth.

I

The name and title of this corporation shall be:

ITALIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

and as such it shall have and enjoy succession and existence by its corporate name for a period of fifty (50) years from the date hereof. It shall have the power and authority to contract, sue and be sued, to have and use a corporate seal with such device and inscription as they shall respectively deem proper and the same to break, alter and amend at their pleasure, and shall be authorized to do everything needful for their good government and support not repugnant to the Constitution of the United States, to the Constitution of Laws of this State or to the instrument upon which this corporation is formed and established; to receive and hold all manner of lands, tenements, rents and hereditaments, and any sum of money and any manner and portion of goods and chattels given and bequeathed unto them or acquired by them in any manner respectively; to be employed, disposed of according to the objects, articles and conditions of the instrument upon which this corporation is formed and established or according to the articles and By-Laws, or of the will and intention of the donators.

## II

The objects and purposes for which the Camera Di Commercio Italiana is organized, and the nature of the business to be carried on by it, are stated and declared to be

- (1) To foster trade and commerce between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Italy, and between the United States of America and other nations, particularly the Central American governments, Venezuela, and the West Indies Islands, also for the purpose of protecting such trade and commerce against unjust and unlawful exactions, to reform abuses in the said trade, to diffuse accurate and reliable information concerning the same among its members, to settle differences among its members, and to promote a more enlarged and friendly intercourse between them.
- (2) To circulate through bulletins and through the Italian and American Press and by any other suitable means reliable and accurate information concerning the conditions of the Italian-American Trade and legislative or such administrative measures as may effect its normal course or its future developments.
- (3) To supply Italian and American merchants and manufacturers with the names of the particular firms in United States and in Italy, as are interested in the trade of either country and also supply names of responsible persons or firms to act as representatives of commercial or manufacturing concerns in the United States or in Italy.
- (4) To appoint a Committee of Arbitrators and surveyors whenever requested, in case of commercial controversies, and to act as a guide for its members in selecting counsels and attorneys as the case may be to represent and protect the interest of any member individually or of members collectively before the Courts and other public authorities in the United States, Central America, Venezuela, The West Indies Islands and in Italy.
- (5) To supply the members with information of public, financial and statistical character and concerning Laws, regulations, custom tariff, transportation rates in the United States, Central America, Venezuela, The West Indies Islands and Italy. Also supply members with information concerning the moral, financial and business responsibility of firms with which the members of the Camera Di Commercio Italiana may desire to engage in trade relations.
- (6) To conduct a translation department for the purpose of facilitating the correspondence and the interpretation of contracts and other documents of commercial character relative to the Italian-Spanish-American trade.
- (7) To legalize commercial signatures, issue certificates of origin or of market value declarations, etc. To defend and protect the interest of members in Italy, Central America, Venezuela, West Indies Islands and the United States, against unjust exactions or

unlawful measures on the part of custom authorities, railroads, steamship lines, etc.

(8) To arrange with any University for the use of its Chemical Laboratory for essays and analysis of merchandize and products of any nature whatsoever and for consultation and advice by competent persons on technical matters and problems connected with the trade.

(9) To edit and publish a weekly official bulletin containing commercial news of interest for the Italian-Spanish-American trade and the advertisements of the particular firms engaged in the said trade.

### III

The domicile of this corporation shall be in the City of New Orleans, Parish of Orleans, State of Louisiana where all citation or other legal process shall be served upon the President or in his absence upon the General Manager.

### IV

All the corporate power of this corporation shall be vested in and exercised by the Board of Directors or Trustees composed of not less than eleven full paid members nor more than twenty-five full paid members, five or whom shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The following named persons shall constitute the Board of Directors of this Corporation:

NAME	ADDRESS
U. Marinoni	2719 Coliseum St. N.O.
Comm. G. Ferrata	2624 Prytania Street N.O.
C. Giacona	1721 Esplanade Avenue N.O.
G. Rossi	3045 St. Philip St. N.O.
G. Vestri	Queen & Crescent Bldg. N.O.
Joseph Ariatti	2522 Barracks N.O.
Albert Bruno	1228 Dumaine Street N.O.
Chevalier C. Papini	711 Howard Avenue N.O.
N. Ricciuti	2316 Marengo Street N.O.
Eugene S. Hayford	805 St. Charles Street N.O.
Theodore Cotonio	2309 Palmer Avenue N.O.
Marco Pizzati	2413 Ursuline Street N.O.
Amedo Saracco	Shreveport, Louisiana
L. Marasso	Pensacola, Florida
John Galella	Memphis, Tennessee
F. Milano	Port Arthur, Texas
V. Giglio	4520 S. Carrollton Ave. N.O.

THEREAFTER, the Directors or Trustees shall be elected annually on the first Monday of January, beginning with the year 1922.

Any member of the Association holding a full paid membership to said Association may be eligible for membership on the Board of Directors. All elections for Directors shall be by ballot, each member shall be entitled to one vote for each certificate of membership standing in his or her name on the books of the corporation, this vote should be cast either in person or by proxy, and it shall require a majority of members present or represented to elect. A failure to elect a Board of Directors on the first Monday of January, 1922, or annually thereafter shall not work a forfeiture of this charter but the old Board of Directors shall remain in office until their successors are elected and qualified.

## V

The Board of Directors shall hold regular meetings at stated intervals at such times as shall be fixed in the By-Laws of this Corporation. These meetings shall be held at the domicile of the Corporation, but the President may call special meetings of the Board at such times as he may deem advisable and he shall be required to call such special meetings whenever requested to so do by three or more directors. Three days notice of such special meeting shall be given in writing by mail to the Directors address unless a waiver of notice is signed by the Directors.

## VITA

Roselyn Boneno was born September 23, 1938, in New Orleans, Louisiana. She received a B.A. degree in English and History in 1962 from Our Lady of Holy Cross College in New Orleans. From 1958 through 1969 she was an Instructor in English and History in junior and senior high schools throughout Louisiana. During these years she pursued studies in philosophy, English, and secondary school administration at Loyola University and Tulane University in New Orleans. From 1970-78 she served as the Assistant Principal in charge of academics at Vanderbilt High School in Houma, Louisiana. She received an M.A. in History in 1971 from St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. In 1972 she began her Ph.D. studies at L.S.U. in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, receiving graduate assistantships during the 1973-74 and 1977-78 sessions. From 1980-86 she worked as an independent executive for a major insurance company. In 1986 she re-entered L.S.U., completed her dissertation, and received a Ph.D. in History in the fall of that year.


**DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT**

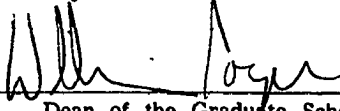
**Candidate:** Roselyn Bologna Boneno

**Major Field:** History

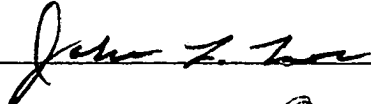
**Title of Dissertation:** FROM MIGRANT TO MILLIONAIRE: THE STORY OF THE  
ITALIAN-AMERICAN IN NEW ORLEANS, 1880-1910

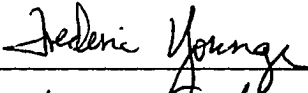
**Approved:**


  
Major Professor and Chairman

  
Dean of the Graduate School

**EXAMINING COMMITTEE:**

  
Thomas C. Owen

  
Mark P. Galletta



**Date of Examination:**

APRIL 4, 1986