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ITALIANS IN MIDDLETOWN, 1893-1932:  
THE FORMATION OF AN ETHNIC COMMUNITY

by

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the first things a newcomer to Middletown, Connecticut, notices is the town's ethnic Italian character. People with names like Marino, Cubeta and Garofalo dominate local politics while local businesses are run by Arescos, Milardos and Mazzottas. Older residents can be heard speaking Italian in downtown streets and stores, and pizza places abound.

Italian-Americans are indeed quite visible in Middletown life -- which is not surprising, considering that they make up nearly half of the town's population.<sup>1</sup> But Middletown's Italians are more than just a colorful and influential group of individuals; together they form what might be called a community within a community. Some 80% of them are the descendents of emigrants from a single Sicilian village named Melilli,<sup>2</sup> and are linked by an intricate web of family connections which stretch back for hundreds of years. Middletown's Italian-American community is held together not only by family ties, but by religious and social organizations as well. Ethnic Italians celebrate mass together at Saint Sebastian's church, Middletown's largest, and meet in activities and celebrations sponsored by the church. Two Italian-American clubs, the Sons of Italy and the

Garibaldi Society, enjoy a large membership and play an active role in community social life. Visits and continued migration between Middletown and Melilli also remind area Italians of their common origin and heritage. Thus, although Italian-Americans are now solidly in the mainstream life of the town, they continue to enjoy and profit from a sense of ethnic community.

Is this a paradox? Until fairly recently, it would have been thought so. In both scholarly and popular works there prevailed the belief that ethnicity and assimilation were mutually exclusive. In what were once the two most popular theories of assimilation, it was expected that new immigrant groups would gradually lose all feeling of separate identity and would blend indistinguishably into the mass of American society. The most popular of these two theories, which Milton Gordon and Stewart Cole have called "Anglo-conformity", also claimed that immigrants should abandon all elements of their native culture and replace them with corresponding Anglo-American customs.<sup>3</sup>

The other of these theories shared the same basic views, but predicted that alien customs would be absorbed rather than destroyed. Flung into the American "melting pot", immigrants from all over the world would feel their old traditions melt away, blend together, and form a distinctly New World culture. When the melting process was completed, one American would be identical to any

other, regardless of his previous ethnic background.<sup>4</sup>

Since the turn of the century, Gordon writes, there has existed a third view of assimilation: "cultural pluralism". This theory holds that immigrants never become fully assimilated, but continue to adhere to elements of their "ethnic heritage" for generations. This theory was at first fairly insignificant; it represented the wishful thinking of a Jewish writer who feared the consequences of the melting pot on his culture. But in recent years this theory has come to be the dominant one in popular culture and in academia. It has become apparent to many scholars that it is "cultural pluralism" which best describes the actual condition of American society.<sup>5</sup>

The modern version of the cultural pluralist position, which is exemplified in Glazer and Moynihan's Beyond the Melting Pot, does not view ethnicity and assimilation as starkly opposing forces. Ethnicity, in fact, is what remains after immigrants have been assimilated. Although the descendants of each immigrant group have accepted a code of beliefs, customs, and values which all Americans share, they retain enough vestiges of their past culture to give them a separate identity. As Americans are thought to be a nation of immigrants, every citizen supposedly owes his allegiance to some ethnic group. Thus, ethnicity is no longer abnormal, no longer a

pernicious influence to be stifled or absorbed. It is now an important part of being American.<sup>6</sup>

The primary significance of ethnicity, the theory implies, is structural rather than cultural. The unique customs of each group, such as they are, are not as significant for their own sakes as for their role in uniting an ethnic community. In and of themselves, culinary, musical, folkloric and religious traditions have only a personal value. But when individuals sharing these customs begin to think of themselves as members of a group, they may develop social, religious, and political institutions with much larger influence. This new community structure has its roots in a cultural difference inherited from the old country, but is itself a distinctly American creation. The very idea of ethnicity is based on a feeling of collective uniqueness which could not exist in a homogeneous European village.

Expanding on this implication, my own work focuses on the community rather than on the individual; it takes a sociological rather than a cultural approach. Immersed in a social structure which bore little resemblance to that of Melilli, Middletown's Italians found that they could not rebuild their old village here. Although they attempted to import religious and social institutions from the old country, these institutions always became more American than Italian. Essentially, they were based on a

class structure and an idea of unity which was wholly foreign to Southern Italy. Like nearly all American institutions, they were run by the middle class with the loyal support of the workers.

The community leadership was "American" not only because of its class orientation but because its members tended to be more assimilated than other members of the community. Chiefly because merchants and tradesmen had more solid financial roots in Middletown than did workers, the community leadership was made up disproportionately of established residents who spoke English and were American citizens. This undoubtedly made it easier for them to be elected to positions of political leadership and thus enter into the leadership circles of the town.

Working class resistance to this leadership crumbled during the early years of the colony. After the initial collapse of the Garibaldi and Marconi societies, Middletown's Italians did not maintain separate working-class organizations and hence did not divide along class lines. As the weakness of labor unionism and the failure of the 1912 Russell strike indicate, Italian workers failed to build connections with the non-Italian working class. Isolated from the larger community by their language, unassimilated Italian workers remained dependent on their assimilated, wealthier countrymen.

In the first few chapters of this study, I will give a brief description of life in Italy, the reasons for emigration, and the life of the early immigrants. I will distinguish among the various groups of Italians who came to Middletown, and emphasize the largest group, the immigrants from Melilli (the Melillesi). I will then discuss early Italian organizations, the effects of the Russell Strike, and the flowering of the ethnic community in the years 1913-1932. These chapters are arranged roughly in chronological order, and are told in the narrative style.

The final chapter spans the entire period under consideration in this study (1893-1932), and is offered as a partial explanation for the events related in the preceding chapters. Using information gleaned from city directories, I will trace the careers of some 455 persons of Italian surname over periods of 6 to 25 years. Of these "long term" Italian residents, I will demonstrate, a fairly high percentage showed signs of upward occupational mobility. For many immigrant workers, the period of assimilation coincided with an entrance into the middle class.

In its power structure and fluid class lines, Middletown's Italian community reproduced the conditions prevalent in the larger society. Each individual saw among the prominent men of the community men who had

managed to improve their lot, and found no reason why he might not follow their example. By remaining in town, working hard, and learning English, even a mere day laborer might be able to open a successful shop, and in his own way realize the American dream. With the encouragement and aid of his paesani, he could take another step and become fully American.

CHAPTER ONE  
Leaving Italy

-1-

Most of the Italians who came to Middletown during this period immigrated for economic reasons. Once a colony had been firmly established here, many came to be re-united with family members, but the earliest immigrants took the voyage primarily to escape from poverty.

Although a few of Middletown's Italians came from the industrial north, the vast majority were from the Mezzogiorno -- the poor, agricultural, southern part of the peninsula and the island of Sicily. As noted above, the largest number came from the village of Melilli, in the eastern Sicilian province of Siracusa.<sup>1</sup>

Melilli was fairly typical of the Mezzogiorno village at that time. It was a small, compact settlement perched on a ridge overlooking an agricultural valley. Most of its inhabitants derived their subsistence from working the land. At daybreak, the men of the village would descend the ridge to the fields below, where they would work until dusk, stopping at the hottest part of the day for lunch and a two hour rest. At the end of the day, they would return to their large families, eat dinner, and go to bed. This routine was repeated every day throughout the growing seasons, except for Sundays.<sup>2</sup>

As in the Mezzogiorno as a whole, the life of the Melilli peasant was not easy. Very few of these workers owned any land of their own. The fields generally belonged to wealthy absentee landlords, who entrusted the everyday business to hired overseers, and who did little themselves except collect the profits. Agricultural methods were primitive; modern machinery was unheard of, and most of the work was performed by hand with crude tools. Pay was low, and the work was highly seasonal. Between growing seasons, the peasants were forced to seek odd jobs or live on whatever money they had managed to save up.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, not everyone in Melilli was a farm laborer, nor even a member of a farm laborer's family. As Walter Sangree notes in his 1952 study, "Mel Hyblaeum", Melilli did have a small middle class. The most prestigious of this group, Sangree writes, were the landowners and skilled artisans. Teachers were also held in high esteem, as were well-to-do merchants such as butchers and bakers. Barbers, shoemakers, and tailors enjoyed less prestige, but were still quite a distance above the laborers.<sup>4</sup>

Not every boy in the village could aspire to these desirable bourgeois positions, for one's career was generally predetermined at birth. Each young male was expected to follow his father's trade, whether it be

merchant, shoemaker, or laborer. After completing whatever brief education he was to receive, he would begin work as an apprentice or would follow his father to the fields.<sup>5</sup> Land, of course, was hereditary also, and marriages seldom crossed class lines. For these reasons, and because of the low wages paid to laborers, social mobility within the community was almost unheard of. Only through the military or the priesthood could a young peasant improve his lot.<sup>6</sup>

Inherited status sharply divided the classes into what amounted to separate communities. Within one's own class one might make friends, marry, join social clubs, and even aspire to a more comfortable life. But anyone seeking to cross over the line in any way would find himself a stranger and an outcast. The class-communities were further broken down into many large, extended families, and finally down to the nuclear family. The individual devoted himself almost exclusively to the well-being of his family, even to the point of cheating or robbing opposing families.<sup>7</sup> The result, as Humbert S. Nelli writes, was that

although in most Southern-Italian and Sicilian villages most residents were related, little closeness, cohesiveness, or feeling of unity existed among the villagers. A sense of community simply did not exist. Southerners had a fierce loyalty to their town, the so-called spirit of Campanilismo (or localism), but this loyalty was not synonymous with a spirit of group cooperation or acceptance of responsibility for the need and interests of the community. Residents simply did not recognize

"the community", as the term is understood in the United States and elsewhere in Western Europe.

-2-

By the end of the nineteenth century, writes one historian, "conditions in the Mezzogiorno were every bit as bad as those that caused the great migration from Ireland in the 1840's".<sup>9</sup> The hopes raised by Garibaldi and the Risorgimento had been disappointed; the political unification of the country brought no relief from the plight of Southern Italian peasants. The unequal distribution of wealth and land remained largely unchanged under the new government, and heavy new taxes were imposed.<sup>10</sup> Economic conditions were exacerbated by an enormous population explosion. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the population growth of Italy far outstripped the meager increase in farmland. The oversupply of agricultural labor made it possible for the landlords to reduce wages to the level of bare subsistence.<sup>11</sup>

The population explosion also had disastrous effects on the environment, which compounded the economic woes of the peasants. As nutrients were leached out of the overworked fields, the fertility of the soil declined drastically. Overgrazing and extensive cutting of remaining woodlands removed necessary groundcover,

allowing water from the spring rains to run off of the hills, taking the topsoil with it. Some sections of southern Italy became wastelands of eroded, barren ridges separated by malarial marshes. As land became unproductive, more and more small farmers were squeezed into the already enormous agricultural proletariat.<sup>12</sup>

Conditions in Melilli were not as bad as in many other southern Italian villages, which may explain why the Melillesi did not begin to emigrate until somewhat later than many other Southern Italians. "The emigrations from eastern Sicily," writes Sangree, "were motivated less by dire necessity than those from the central and western part of the island, and from many parts of southern Italy."<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, says one emigrant, many Melilli peasants "found it hard to survive" on the low income they received.<sup>14</sup> Faced with the alternative of starving or leaving, many chose to leave, at least temporarily.<sup>15</sup> Many hoped to return and buy land after they had made some money.<sup>16</sup>

As in other parts of southern Italy, the Melilli emigrants were largely the tenant farmers and farm laborers, but a few came from middle class backgrounds.<sup>17</sup> The general poverty of their clientele affected merchants, barbers, and shoemakers adversely. Often young initiates in the skilled trades would find it impossible to start themselves in business after completing their

apprenticeship. For the ambitious tradesman or merchant, says Mike Marino, "there was no future in Italy."<sup>18</sup> Some young men left the village to raise some money so that they could continue their trade when they returned. Most of those who left, however, had no intention of coming back.<sup>19</sup>

Many Melillesi, and Southern Italians in general, planned to leave their village. The question was, where would they go? No place within Italy offered much hope for economic advancement. Even in the wealthy areas of northern Italy, conditions were such that many workers had chosen to leave.

South America had seemed attractive to many of these northern Italians. Millions had settled in Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina, where they found great opportunities, especially in agriculture.<sup>20</sup> But by the end of the nineteenth century, all these countries were undergoing severe economic crises. The opportunities which had earlier attracted northern Italians were now closed to their southern compatriots. Northern Italians continued to emigrate to South America to be reunited with family members, but the people of the Mezzogiorno had to look elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>

Many southern Italian workers, several Melillesi among them, went to north Africa to work on such projects as the first Aswan Dam, the Suez Canal, and the Tunisian

and Algerian railways.<sup>22</sup> But by far the largest number came to the northeastern United States, where they found jobs as day laborers and construction workers in the big cities, mill hands in industrial towns, and railroad workers in the countryside. Large colonies of southern Italians formed in New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Boston, and well as in the industrial cities of northern New Jersey and eastern Massachusetts.<sup>23</sup> Thousands settled in Providence, Rhode Island, and Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut. Starting around 1895, another colony began to form in the small Connecticut city of Middletown.

CHAPTER TWO  
Why Middletown?

-1-

Middletown at the turn of the century was an odd destination for Southern Italians seeking work. It was a "quiet but beautiful little town" in a heavily urban state,<sup>1</sup> an economic backwater in the nation's most industrial region.

The typical Italian immigrant of the time arrived in America with very little money, and wanted to find a job quickly. Even low-paying, backbreaking labor was acceptable, for he usually regarded such work as merely temporary; once he had saved enough, he hoped either to start himself in a trade or to return to Italy with his earnings.<sup>2</sup> With this intention, many Italian immigrants looked for heavy manual work in the port city in which they disembarked, usually New York, Boston, or Philadelphia. Others strayed farther inland if they were confident of finding a job at a particular point. Those who were hired by labor contractors went as far as the railroads of Canada or the South, while those seeking employment in factories made more modest journeys to nearby industrial cities.<sup>3</sup> Neither a port nor a mill town, Middletown seemed to have little in common with other centers of Italian settlement. It was hard to get to and

had few jobs in industry.

The historian Edwin Fenton suggests that Middletown, like many other places to which Italians migrated, was a "textile city" in which "jobs for unskilled workers were available."<sup>4</sup> This is, unfortunately, a rather inaccurate description. Although Middletown did indeed have several textile mills at the time, it could hardly be called a textile city. Middletown's various textile-related industries employed fewer than 1,500 workers, while some of the other "textile cities" Fenton cites employed more than ten times that number.<sup>5</sup>

In 1896, Middletown's largest industry, the Russell Manufacturing Company, employed some 900 people in the production of elastic suspenders. Other textile concerns included I.E. Palmer's Arawana Mills, with 200 loom operatives, L.D. Brown and Son's silk works, with 150 workers, and several smaller concerns, none of which employed over 100 workers.<sup>6</sup>

If textiles were the town's major industry, it was only by default. "Middletown," admitted a civic-minded publication, "has not been considered a great manufacturing center."<sup>7</sup> Middletown had never been very successful at developing its industries, and only in the 1880's and 1890's had it managed to convince out-of-town companies to build factories there.<sup>8</sup> By the turn of the century Middletown did have a few large modern factories,

but compared with other Connecticut cities it was of little industrial significance. The 1900 U.S. Census counted 2,916 industrial wage earners in the city -- a considerably smaller industrial labor force than other Connecticut cities of comparable size.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, of the comparatively few industrial jobs in Middletown, even fewer were open to unskilled European peasants. Middletown's hardware and machinery factories, including the W. and B. Douglas Pump Co., Wilcox Crittenden and Co., and the Worcester Cycle Manufacturing Co., employed mainly "skilled mechanics" at the time.<sup>10</sup> Of the other local non-textile industries, most were small enterprises which probably had slower labor turnover, although a few exceptions such as the Eastern Tinware Co. furnished many jobs for immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

-2-

Although Middletown did offer some jobs in industry, these opportunities were not so remarkable as to attract a large colony of immigrant workers. Yet earlier groups of immigrants had settled in Middletown under even less auspicious industrial conditions. Since the 1830's, Middletown's major attraction for immigrants had been its proximity to the Portland brownstone quarries. When the Irish came to the area, they settled in large numbers in

Portland, where work was plentiful and cheap housing was available. As they helped fill a great need for labor, they were accepted readily into the community.

Eventually, many of them found other jobs across the river, and hence Middletown's Irish community grew to be the larger.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1870's, the great boom in brownstone drew hundreds of Swedes to the area. According to an anecdote related in a history of Portland, a group of Swedes found work as scabs during a quarry strike and decided to stay.<sup>13</sup> Eventually a large Swedish immigrant colony developed and Swedes began to buy farms in the area. By 1900, seven or eight hundred were living in Middletown as well, where many worked in managerial and skilled industrial positions.<sup>14</sup> To a lesser extent, Poles also found work in the quarries. Many went there in the late 1880's and 90's, and later found other manual work across the river. The 1900 Census Schedules show several hundred Poles living in Portland boarding houses, which were probably company houses owned by the quarries.<sup>15</sup> Some worked at area textile mills, while many others worked at brickyards in Newfield.<sup>16</sup>

By the time Italians started coming to Middletown, however, the Portland quarries were suffering a severe reversal in their fortunes. At the turn of the century, brownstone was being replaced in urban architecture by

newer building materials such as steel, concrete, and terra-cotta.<sup>17</sup> For some unknown reason, the decline of brownstone hit Portland somewhat earlier than other quarry towns. Although the soft, easily-worked stone continued to be in great demand through the 1890's, business at the Portland quarries reached "its peak about 1880, at which time more than 1,500 men were employed and more than 25 ships were used in transporting the stone to New York, Boston, Philadelphia and other large centers of population."<sup>18</sup> By 1904, the quarry companies were in bad financial shape, and Portland residents could only look back nostalgically on "the palmy days of the 1870's and '80's."<sup>19</sup> As unemployed workers drifted away, the population of Portland plummeted.<sup>20</sup>

Although quarrying was dying in Portland, it was alive and well in the Maromas section of the Town of Middletown. Granite for foundation stone, flagging, and bridges was quarried and shaped at the Benvenue Granite Co. and the Fox-Becker Granite Co.<sup>21</sup> According to a Works Progress Administration book on that area, the Maromas quarries had begun to flourish right around the time when the Portland brownstone quarries went into decline. "A great many men were employed; laborers were brought in from outside, shacks sprang up. For a period of about twenty years the industry seemed very prosperous."<sup>22</sup> A somewhat similar industry was brickmaking. Three brickyards in Newfield, the Tuttle Brick Co., the J.C.

Lincoln Co., and the J.D. Johnson Co., employed hundreds of immigrant workers at this time.<sup>23</sup>

Heavy manual labor was also very much needed on Middletown streets. Perhaps realizing that outhouses and mud streets didn't do much for the city's image, Middletown councilmen decided to make a few improvements. In the 1890's the city constructed "a model system of sewers", which drained conveniently downhill into the river, where people swam.<sup>24</sup> Extensive work was done putting in new water mains, although these still piped in the same befouled water from the reservoirs.<sup>25</sup> "An unusually large expenditure" was made to pave sections of major streets, and outlying highways were also improved.<sup>26</sup> Other work included putting up electric and telephone wires, laying telephone cables under Main Street, and extending Middletown's trolley system.<sup>27</sup> As backhoes and bulldozers were unheard of at this time, and steamshovels were of limited practicality, most of this work was done by crews of day laborers with picks and shovels.<sup>28</sup>

A much larger, albeit temporary, demand for manual labor was created by the construction of the first Middletown-Portland highway bridge between August 1895 and April 1896. This ambitious engineering project must have demanded the services of hundreds of skilled masons and metalworkers, as well as their complement of hod-carriers, truckmen, and day-laborers. Although the stonework

contract went to the Bridgeport Construction Co., the steelwork was directed by the head contractor, the Berlin Iron Bridge Co., which employed many local workers.<sup>29</sup> The supporting piers of the bridge were built of brownstone, which was quarried in Portland.<sup>30</sup> This project created a demand for labor that the local market alone could not handle, as is evident from newspaper articles on injured workmen. One man, who had the misfortune of falling into the icy Connecticut River, had come all the way from Rhode Island.<sup>31</sup>

Another important project of the time was the improvement of the section of the Air Line Railroad between Middletown and Willimantic.<sup>32</sup> Since its completion in 1873, the Air Line had been the shortest route between New York and Boston, but its tortuously winding tracks had prevented it from competing successfully with the Shoreline Railroad.<sup>33</sup> The new improvements included grading, double-tracking, and "extensive elimination of curves".<sup>34</sup> That this demanded large numbers of workers is indubitable. The grading work included the blasting and removal of large quantities of rock from high points and the building of massive dikes or "viaducts" in low places.<sup>35</sup> Considering the scarcity of modern machinery, much of this work must have been done with picks, shovels, and draft horses; in December of 1895, the Hartford Courant reported that "much of the grading (along a particular stretch) has already been done and within a few

days a steam shovel will be set to work not far from Portland, which will materially hasten the work."<sup>36</sup>

-3-

At the end of the nineteenth century, it seems, Middletown did indeed have jobs to offer immigrants. Work in factories was not plentiful, but some jobs were available, particularly in textile mills. Manual labor, however, was very much in demand. Quarrymen were needed in Maromas and to a lesser extent in Portland, and anyone who could use a shovel could find work on the railroad as well as on the city streets. Other sources of employment included the Newfield brickyards and the Middletown-Portland bridge project. None of these jobs were very desirable, but they were better than nothing. For immigrant workers they could be at least a start.

In addition to its opportunities for employment, Middletown held another potential attraction for Italian immigrants: in the 1890's there were already some Italians living there. Some 10 or 12 Italian immigrants owned stores or businesses, and varying numbers of transient laborers drifted in and out of town.<sup>37</sup> The businessmen tended to be established members of the community who relied, by necessity, on a largely Anglo clientele. Fabio P. Bogani, a Florentine, had settled in

Middletown in 1861 and presently ran a clothing store.<sup>38</sup> Antoine Basile, who was first listed in the 1871 City Directory, operated a barber shop on Court Street.<sup>39</sup> And the Santangelo family, whose members were shoemakers, barbers, and carpenters, had been in Middletown since 1879.<sup>40</sup> Other established businessmen included Domenico Pettinato, a barber, and Stefano Bertucci, a shoemaker.<sup>41</sup> With the exception of Mr. Bogani, these men were from the town of Milazzo, Sicily, near Messina.<sup>42</sup>

To the new immigrant, such people could offer valuable advice, help, and friendship. Most importantly, they spoke both Sicilian dialect and English.<sup>43</sup> In the late 1890's, these white-collar Italians suddenly found themselves at the core of a growing immigrant colony. In the years to come they, and others like them, would guide the formation of Middletown's largest ethnic community.

CHAPTER THREE  
The First Wave of Immigrants

-1-

Despite the presence of a handful of Italian businessmen, Middletown never had a significant Italian colony before the mid 1890's. A few Italian laborers came and went in response to fluctuations in the job market, but never were there more than a few dozen living in town at the same time. Very few of these working class immigrants stayed in Middletown for any prolonged period. In fact, most were probably "birds of passage" who returned to Italy when autumn came.<sup>1</sup> Joseph A. DeCastro, a gardener, was the exception that proved the rule: he had been in Middletown since the 1870's.<sup>2</sup> No other Italian worker seems to have even approximated the length of Mr. DeCastro's residence.

The year 1894 marked the beginning of a critical break with this pattern. In that year, and in the two following, hundreds of Italian workers poured into town, probably drawn by the job opportunities discussed in the preceding chapter. Most of these also proved to be transient, but their presence had some lasting impact: in 1897 some 143 persons of Italian surname were listed in the city directory, nearly four times the number that had been listed in 1892.<sup>3</sup>

-2-

Most of these Italians can be identified as belonging to the working class. The majority, 93 in the year 1897, were listed in the directory as "laborers". To try to learn what this term meant, I compared the 1900 directory listings against the more precise information given in the 1900 U.S. Census Schedules. Under the catch-all phrase "laborer", I have found, are listed individuals shown in the census to have a wide variety of unskilled manual jobs.

In the census, the most numerous groups of working-class Italians are day laborers, brick workers, laborers, quarrymen, and railroad laborers, in that order. Significantly, I found not a single case in which anyone listed as a "laborer" in the directory appears as a factory worker in the census. Assuming that the reliability of the 1900 directory was matched by earlier directories, I can state positively that these early immigrants did not find jobs in factories. The three Italian men who are listed in the 1897 directory as holding industrial jobs were probably the only Italians employed in Middletown factories at the time, with the possible exception of unlisted women and children.

Furthermore, these three men appear in other respects to have been highly atypical of Italian immigrants at the time. One of them, Constantino Ciampaglia, had immigrated

in 1884, had married a German woman, and lived in a heavily German section of the township. Another one, John B. Pienovi, was not an Italian at all, but had been born to Italian parents in New York in 1842.<sup>4</sup>

Unable to find work in the factories, Italians became manual laborers. Based on the information in the 1900 census, I would guess that in the mid 1890's the largest number of working Italians were "day laborers". The defining characteristic of a day laborer, of course, was that he sold his labor on a short-term basis, accepting whatever jobs were available at the time. Railroad work and street work, for instance, were contracted on a daily or weekly basis, and so many "day laborers" must have lived by the shovel.<sup>5</sup>

From newspaper articles on work-related injuries and law suits, it seems that many Italians were indeed employed on local railroads, as I expected.<sup>6</sup> Railroad labor was difficult, to be sure, but to Italians it might not have been entirely undesirable. Although such jobs were very temporary, they paid decent wages. In 1895, a railroad laborer in Middletown could earn as much as \$1.50 a day, which was considerably better than what Connecticut textile mills were paying at the time.<sup>7</sup>

For alien workers planning to return soon to the old country, the lack of job security may not have been a problem. Working on the railroads, they could save a

couple of hundred dollars over the space of a few months and leave the country when cold weather came. Sometimes, employment on the railroads would be guaranteed for several months, thus giving the worker the double benefit of good wages and job security.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps those Italians listed explicitly in the census as railroad employees enjoyed positions such as these, or, more probably, they had secured permanent jobs as switchmen or flagmen.<sup>9</sup>

It is probable that many other "laborers" worked at brickyards. Far more brickworkers are listed in the census than in the directory, and several examples can be found of brickworkers being falsely listed as "laborers" in the directory.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, it is worth noting that many of the brickworkers listed in the 1900 census had immigrated to the United States during the period 1895-1897, and thus they themselves may have been among the first wave of Italian immigrants to Middletown.

Work in the brickyards was tough. Like railroad labor, it demanded a strong back and the ability to do boring, repetitive work for long hours. At least it was easy to gain employment in the yards, as the work required no skills which could not be learned in a few minutes. Also, there seems to have been a high turnover in the work force, perhaps because the wages were too low to hold workers for long: in the margin of one of the 1900 U.S. Census schedules, the enumerator wrote of the

brickworkers, "these have no steady occupation, changing work constantly."<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps for the reasons given in the previous chapter, few of the first wave of Italian immigrants found jobs in the Portland quarries. Not a single brownstone quarryman of Italian surname is listed in the 1897 Middletown-Portland directory, and none are mentioned in the 1900 U.S. Census schedules for Portland. In fact, Portland appears to have had only 21 Italian-born residents, including women and children, in that year; only two of these, both "day laborers" might conceivably have had any connection whatsoever with the quarries. Twenty-six Italian quarry workers and one "stone-cutter" are listed in the 1900 census schedules for Middletown, but all either lived in the granite-quarrying area of Maromas, or were explicitly said to be granite quarriers. Only one Italian is listed as a quarry worker in the 1897 directory, and he too worked in Maromas.<sup>12</sup>

Quarry jobs were generally of longer duration than railroad or street jobs, and the wages were comparable. In 1893, the standard pay for a day's work in the Portland pits was \$1.90., but by the less prosperous days of 1895 it may have diminished somewhat. Although I can find no evidence one way or the other, it seems likely that the granite quarries paid comparable wages. Most workers in both Portland and Maromas were hired for the entire

"season", from early April until late October.<sup>13</sup> Work continued at a slower rate through the winter. Many workers were dismissed in October, and those that remained were paid drastically reduced wages. According to one report, the winter quarrymen worked "only...eight hours a day, (at) ten cents an hour, and probably half time."<sup>14</sup>

Aside from the heavy physical demands of any menial job, quarrying had an added element of danger. Serious injuries and even deaths were frighteningly common both in Portland and Maromas. At least one Italian, Michael Gotta, lost his life in a Maromas quarrying accident.<sup>15</sup>

I can find no proof that Italians worked on street projects or on the Middletown-Portland bridge, but I would be very surprised if they didn't. These projects employed many local laborers at a time when many local laborers were Italian. Furthermore, a similar project around this time, the construction of the Bulkeley Bridge in Hartford, employed many Italian laborers.<sup>16</sup>

There is very little indication of how all these Italian laborers managed to converge on Middletown at the same time. Perhaps they simply heard of the job opportunities here, but it is more likely that many were brought here by labor contractors from Boston or New York.

It was common at the time for the directors of large construction projects such as railroads and highways to engage employment agents to supply them with workers. These labor agents, often immigrants themselves, would seek out their newly arrived countrymen in the major port cities and sign them up for the project. After a sizable crew had been enrolled, the labor agent would take the men to the worksite, where they would work under his direction until the job was done. This system gained a bad reputation because of numerous cases in which corrupt labor contractors exploited their workers, and eventually laws were passed which restricted the power of these "padroni". However, the system was at its height during the 1890's, and was heavily used by the railroad companies.<sup>17</sup>

There are references in the press to Italian railroad laborers working under the direction of labor contractors, but it is uncertain whether these contractors were local men or from the big cities. A man named Ferrieri was mentioned as directing a group of Italians in the cutting of railroad ties in East Haddam. Another contractor, by the name of Malloy, was in charge of a gang of laborers on the Air Line bed in Portland. Although the latter was probably an Irishman, he had a number of Italian workers in his crew.<sup>18</sup>

If the first wave of immigrants had indeed been conjured up by "padroni" in New York, this would suggest that the immigrants had little intention of staying in Middletown; having moved here only because they had signed up for a particular job, they would have had no reason to linger on after the job was completed. Quite probably, they would have followed their padrone to another job in another area, or would have returned to Italy. This speculation is strengthened by my research in the city directories, which I will further discuss in Chapter Eight. Of the hundred-odd laborers whose names first appeared in the directory during the period 1893-1897, only 17 stayed in Middletown through 1902. Many others may have been in Middletown for so short a time that they were never listed in the directory at all.

Clearly, this group of immigrant laborers did not itself make up an enduring Italian colony. Nevertheless, I feel, its presence in Middletown just before the turn of the century made the area much more attractive to permanent Italian settlers. The fact that many Italians already lived in Middletown may have been a seductive reason to stay here; Willimantic would have been a better place to find steady work, but it certainly would have been lonelier. Given the marked tendency of Italian immigrants to cluster in the same cities, neighborhoods and blocks, this possibility should not be slighted.<sup>19</sup>

On a more practical level, the growing number of Italian laborers seems to have attracted quite a few Italian businessmen to set up shop in Middletown. Able to speak the same language as their compatriots, and sensitive to their concerns and tastes, Italian merchants would certainly have the advantage over native born Americans. Even while charging higher prices than their competitors, Italian merchants could establish a much closer rapport with their Italian customers, and could offer them a more attractive line of products.

Perhaps for these reasons, Middletown's Italian bourgeoisie grew considerably during the decade of the 1890's. Whereas only nine Italians owned businesses in 1890, some twenty-five did so in 1900. The largest increase coincided with the arrival of the unskilled immigrant laborers. Between 1892 and 1897, three Italian confectioners, two grocers, two barbers, two tailors, a shoemaker, a fruit dealer, and a milk dealer went into business in Middletown. All were newcomers to the area. Several skilled tradesmen, who were later to buy their own shops, also came to town during this time.<sup>20</sup> Just as the majority of the first businessmen were from the same town -- Milazzo -- the majority of this group was from the same province -- Abruzzi, near Naples.<sup>21</sup>

Even at this early date, Middletown's Italian middle class was beginning to assume the role of leadership within the ethnic community. Domenico Pettinato, who owned a barber shop, was frequently mentioned in the newspaper as defending Italian workers from exploitation. With his help and legal support, immigrant laborers could bring their grievances to the attention of their employers, and if necessary could sue for back wages or present their cases before the commissioners of the state labor bureau.<sup>22</sup> As these cases occasionally involved suits against "labor contractors", it seems unlikely that Mr. Pettinato himself was merely a "padrone" protecting his own interests. Furthermore, Mr. Pettinato was usually referred to in these articles as "the Italian labor agent", which appears to have been at least a semi-official position. He also took an interest in other matters relating to the Italian community, such as raising money for the relief of Sicilian earthquake victims.<sup>23</sup>

Antoine Basile, also a barber, was similarly active in the community. In 1895, he was already being requested to provide legal aid for his compatriots.<sup>24</sup> In November of that year, he organized Middletown's first "Italian League", for the mutual aid and protection of the Italian residents of the city. Mr. Basile was obviously very influential in the organization; he was not only the president, but the vice president and secretary as well. His brother Matthew, also a barber, was the financial

secretary. Among the members of the "executive committee" were several other prominent Italian businessmen: Stefano Bertucci, Leo Santangelo, and Michael Santangelo, from the town of Milazzo, and Giuseppe Grippo and Stefano Micari, from the province of Abruzzi.<sup>25</sup> When Mr. Pettinato left town in 1901 or 1902, Mr. Basile took over his position as "Italian Labor Commissioner of the State".<sup>26</sup>

Thus, even when immigration had barely begun, Middletown's Italian businessmen were already showing themselves to be the permanent, powerful mainstays of the community.

CHAPTER FOUR  
The Immigrants From Melilli

-1-

Of all the Italians who came to Middletown in the mid 1890's, only one, Angelo Magnano, was from Melilli. Magnano, a restless young man, first came to Connecticut in 1886, probably to avoid being drafted into the Italian Army. His wealthier brother Vincenzo was living in Bridgeport at the time, but Angelo decided to look for work elsewhere. After a brief stay in Middletown, he moved through various other Connecticut cities before finally returning to settle here. His name first appears in the city directory of 1895, where he is listed as the owner of a barber shop.<sup>1</sup>

In 1897, Mr. Magnano returned to Melilli and told his friends and relatives about his good fortune in America. Unsatisfied with conditions in Sicily, many of the villagers had been considering going to South America, but Magnano convinced a few to join him in Middletown.<sup>2</sup> The first group of Melillesi included Antonio Amenta, Luigi Annino, and Luigi LaRosa, who arrived in Middletown in the spring of 1898. They were followed that fall by Antonio and Sebastiano Marino, as well as by Vincenzo Magnano.<sup>3</sup> Several other Melillesi accompanied these two groups of pioneers. Most of these first immigrants had

belonged to the tradesman class in Melilli. Most would become permanent residents of Middletown, and some would later become community leaders or found influential families. Within a few years, there followed hundreds of other young men from Melilli. Some were tradesmen like the first group, but an increasing number were ordinary farm workers.<sup>4</sup>

The voyage of the average Melilli immigrant led him first to Naples, or some other port in the Mezzogiorno, where he would apply for a passport. If he passed the required physical examination and was granted permission to emigrate, he would buy a steamship ticket to New York. (Many later immigrants had their tickets mailed to them by relatives in Middletown). Upon arriving in America, he would be briefly detained at Ellis Island. Afterwards, he would take another steamship through Long Island Sound, and up the Connecticut River to Middletown.<sup>5</sup>

Any idyllic illusions of American utopia were dispelled from the immigrant's mind shortly after arriving in Middletown. Unable to speak English and desperately in need of money, he found himself quite helpless. In this situation, most immigrants relied on established family members to assist them in finding housing and jobs, and if necessary to lend them money. These favors could also be asked from the leading men of the colony, but this often entailed undesirable obligations. As Walter Sangree

writes in his 1952 Masters Thesis, some established immigrants "lent money for passage and acquired jobs for new arrivals under terms which were about as exploitative as an indenture."<sup>6</sup>

Family members could offer help with fewer strings attached, but they could hardly be accused of pampering the newcomer. According to Sangree,

A new arrival from Melilli, whether alone or with other members of his family, usually first found lodging in one of the packed tenement houses in the north end of town down near the railroad tracks. Very likely he shared a room with four or five others, perhaps sleeping across the foot of a bed occupied by three relatives, just one of five or six similarly jammed rooms sharing the same little cook stove and the same broken toilet.

-2-

An immigrant's first job was little better than his first home. Tradesmen as well as farm workers took the same backbreaking jobs that earlier Italian immigrants had. Because of their inability to speak English, writes James Annino, the Melillesi "were forced to seek work in occupations which didn't require much speech, but needed strong muscles and the willingness to work and meet [sic] the bosses' approval."<sup>8</sup> For most of the members of this initial group, with the exception of the Magnanos, this meant starting out as "laborers". Other early immigrants also found laboring jobs.<sup>9</sup>

Many of these laborers worked on street repair crews or with building contractors such as A. Brazos and Sons, and Mylchreest and O'Brien. According to Louis LaBella, "many of them worked on the railroad, and some who could read and write became bosses and helped the contractor exploit these people."<sup>10</sup> Others are said to have found jobs at the Tuttle Brickyard in Newfield, the brownstone quarries and the Hale and Goodrich Tobacco farm in Portland, and the A.N. Pierson Florist Co. in Cromwell.<sup>11</sup> Many others just took whatever temporary work was available at the moment. "The (Italian) immigrant population is of a shifting character," wrote the Penny Press. "Wherever large contracts are being undertaken and many laborers needed, these men gravitate."<sup>12</sup>

With the exception of greenhouse work, all these jobs were seasonal. "When you work outside at that time," said one former laborer, "before the winter come you were stuck...maybe two, three months. And then it start in the spring again." During these long idle periods, the laborers would live off their savings from the summer before.<sup>13</sup> Not yet enamoured of New England winter weather, others would prefer to spend the season in Italy. "The men who go are mostly the younger and unmarried ones," wrote the Penny Press. "They take advantage of the low rates to Italy which run from \$12.50 to \$20."<sup>14</sup> Thus, the lives of some of the first Melilli immigrants were remarkably similar to those of the "birds of passage" of

the 1890's.

Unlike the first Italian immigrants, however, some Melillesi were able to get jobs in local industry. The most important early employers were the Russell Manufacturing Co., the New England Enamelling Co., and the Arawana Mills, where Italians were welcome "because they were cheap labor."<sup>15</sup> In the 1900 directory, Vincenzo Magnano is listed as an employee at the Russell Co.. By 1902, he had been joined by Antonio Amenta, Concetto Augeri, Michele Barone, Joseph Bartesto, Domenico Fasalari, and Zimberto Moni.<sup>16</sup>

The men listed in the directory, however, represented only a very small proportion of the total number of industrial workers. During the early years of the colony, women and children comprised the majority of the Italian industrial workers, but were only rarely listed in the directory. Even though factory work lasted the whole year round, it paid so poorly that men could actually make more money in seasonal laboring jobs. In 1911, the Russell Company was paying only \$3.50 a week to some employees, which was roughly half what a railroad laborer could make.<sup>17</sup> By 1912, there were reports of some Italian women working for as little as \$3.00 a week.<sup>18</sup> Most men preferred to stick to heavy manual labor while their wives and children worked in the mills to supplement the family income.<sup>19</sup> Thus, as late as 1917, the majority of all

working Italians in the directory were unskilled manual laborers.<sup>20</sup>

But whatever the sex of the typical worker, Middletown's textile mills would be important employers of the Melillesi. The total number of Italians at the Russell Manufacturing Company would steadily climb until the 1930's, when some 700 worked there.<sup>21</sup>

To get work at the Russell Company, a recent immigrant would ask the help of a friend who already worked there and could speak some English. The friend would then tell the division foreman, who was in charge of hiring.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the former peasant would get to work a power loom making suspenders, or brake linings for automobiles. "The peculiar thing about that," says one former Russell employee, "was that these persons had never seen a loom in their lives. Because in those little towns in Italy there were no looms... So some guy working there would teach them and in no time he would be a weaver."<sup>23</sup> This learning process was made easier by the fact that Italians were generally assigned to do "the lowest grade of work at the mills, work on coarse goods that do not require skilled help," as the Hartford Courant wrote.<sup>24</sup>

Although it was easy to acquire the necessary skills, it was somewhat more difficult to get used to the steady, mechanical pace of the work. Factory work usually demanded 55 to 60 hours a week - about the same as farm

return to Melilli.<sup>27</sup> For the majority, however, the presence or absence of family members made the difference between staying or leaving. According to Sangree, "once a man's wife and children were here, or once a man and a woman got married over here and children were on the way, the balance was usually tipped in favor of staying."<sup>28</sup> This generalization seems to have been confirmed by the lives of the immigrants whom I interviewed. Luciano Campisi expressed a common attitude in saying "no, I never went back...I didn't have any family back there."<sup>29</sup>

Many reached the decision quite early. Among the first group of immigrants, Luigi Annino, Antonio Marino, Salvatore Pandolfo and Giuseppe Bartolotta all brought their wives with them, while the Magnano brothers had already married Italian-American women and had been granted American citizenship. Francesco Faraci, another 1898 immigrant, brought three of his children.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Middletown's Italian colony was never just a number of transient male workers. Of the 472 Italians listed in the 1900 census schedules, only 270 were men over the age of ten, while 93 were women and 109 were children. Of the 251 Italian men who worked, 87 lived with female family members or with children.<sup>31</sup> As more and more Melillesi brought over their families, or returned from visits to Melilli with their newlywed wives, the numbers of men and women balanced out.<sup>32</sup>

Economics were another important factor in the decision to stay. Even after several years of hard work, Italian immigrants still lacked the money to buy a farm in the old country. However, many found that they could afford to buy a tenement or a store in Middletown to accumulate money faster. If such enterprises were successful, as they usually were during the colony's period of rapid growth, their owners would eventually come to regard them as attractive alternatives to farming in Melilli. Other immigrants who saw their compatriots grow rich in this fashion would become convinced of the superior opportunities that America offered, and would decide to remain here also.<sup>33</sup>

From the very beginning, houses and tenements were popular investments. "A home - real estate - was almost invariably the first large investment a Melillose made in this country," writes Sangree. "Families endured all sorts of skimping and hardship in order to be able to buy their own homes."<sup>34</sup> In 1898, Vincenzo Magnano bought "The Lighthouse", a large tenement at the foot of Court Street. Within the next few years, Sebastiano Marino, Giuseppe S. Annino, Luigi Rosano, and Giuseppe Pagano would all buy houses of their own.<sup>35</sup>

By 1912, the Melillesi had bought up an estimated \$137,000 worth of Middletown property, which at the time was quite a bit.<sup>36</sup> Some of the Italians who had preceded

the Melillesi had bought property too, but only the middle class. The merchants from Milazzo and Abruzzi had set down financial roots in the city's shops and tenements, while the anonymous masses of laborers quietly drifted out of town. Among the Melillesi, however, no such class division existed. Although merchants and grocers owned the most valuable property, several mere laborers owned modest homes.<sup>37</sup> Considering the low wages on which many subsisted, it is nothing short of amazing that they were able to do this. Clearly, these people considered it extremely important to own their own homes.

It is unclear why this ambition was so prevalent. Mike Marino suggests that "that was just a tradition that they came over here with."<sup>38</sup> In Melilli, where land ownership was limited to the wealthy, it was prestigious to own even a small piece of property.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps buying a house was the closest these former peasants could come, in an urban environment, to realizing their dream of owning farmland. Whatever the motives that lay behind it, this eagerness to buy property showed Middletown that the Melillesi were here to stay.

For the entire period that concerns this study, nearly all the Melillesi lived in Middletown's "East Side". This area, which lay between Main Street and the Connecticut River, "was the working class neighborhood," says Max Corvo. "That was where the poorer inhabitants

lived." The Melillose immigrants settled there because it was the only neighborhood in which they could afford to live.<sup>40</sup>

At the time of their arrival, the East Side was already filled with immigrants. In the southern part, along South, Union, William, and College Streets, lived many Poles, Russians and Austrians. The Irish were scattered throughout the East Side, with many of them concentrating on Rapallo Avenue and Gilshenan Place.<sup>41</sup> The earlier groups of Italians inhabited separate neighborhoods on the East Side. The barbers and merchants from Milazzo owned shops and houses on lower Court Street. The immigrants from Abruzzi generally lived near the Portland bridge, where they owned houses and tenements on St. John's Street, Portland Street, and Bridge Street.<sup>42</sup>

When the Melillesi arrived, many of them took apartments in these established Italian neighborhoods. Vincenzo Magnano's tenement on Court Street was a particularly popular place to live.<sup>43</sup> Most Melillesi, however, seem to have started out in still another part of the East Side: in the tenements around Green Street. After a while, there formed two separate Melillose neighborhoods distinguished by class. Merchants lived in the business district of lower Court Street, while workers clustered around Green Street. As more and more Melillesi poured into town, these two neighborhoods expanded,

merged, and finally engulfed the earlier two Italian areas. Except for the southern part, the entire East Side became one solid Italian quarter. Nevertheless, merchants and their families continued to concentrate on Court Street.<sup>44</sup>

The sudden influx of immigrants created a severe housing shortage, and probably drove up rents.<sup>45</sup> To immigrants intent on saving money, overcrowding seemed the only solution. From the U.S. Census schedules, it appears that many renters sublet space in their apartments to other tenants. Most commonly, a family of renters would take in an extra boarder or two, but a few Italians seemed to have turned their apartments into veritable barracks. In 1900, Antonio DeRomanio was living with his wife in a tenement apartment on Portland Street, and splitting the rent with five fellow brickmoulders.<sup>46</sup>

Among the Melillesi, it was a common practice to share one's apartment with friends and extended family members, at least until they were able to find housing of their own.<sup>47</sup> In 1910, Luigi Carta was living in a rented apartment with his wife, son, brother, and an unidentified female relative. Also in their cozy home was Sebastiano Bardolla and his wife and son.<sup>48</sup> Those Italians who bought houses would often partition them into separate apartments, thus perpetuating the problem of overcrowding.<sup>49</sup> These traditions died hard among the

frugal Melillesi, and as late as the 1930's there were rumors of people sleeping four to a bed.<sup>50</sup>

Even more profitable than renting apartments was running a business. According to Sangree, "in most cases families that later grew comparatively well-to-do, started their economic climb by becoming small shopkeepers, their patrons lying within the circle of the Italian community. Often the husband worked as a laborer while the wife ran the store."<sup>51</sup> In 1902 or 1903, Giuseppina Marino, the wife of Antonio Marino, became the first Meliliese to open a grocery. This store is first listed in the 1904 directory, under her husband's name. In the same directory, Luigi LaRosa is also listed as a grocer and Antonio Amenta as a confectioner. By 1908, Concetto Augeri had opened another grocery, and Joseph S. Annino had entered business as a "real estate agent, insurance broker, and steamship ticket agent".<sup>52</sup>

Men who had learned a trade in Melilli frequently chose to open a business in Middletown. Some ran groceries, and some opened shoe repair, tailor, or barber shops, depending on their skills.<sup>53</sup> Angelo Magnano, Natale Puglisi, and Joseph Ciaburri established themselves as barbers quickly after their arrival in Middletown. Others worked as laborers or as skilled craftsmen until they had saved up enough money to open their own shops. In this way, Joseph Pagano and Philip Puglisi became merchant

tailors, and Giuseppe DiCrosta a shoemaker.<sup>54</sup> Like the grocers, many tradesmen supplemented their income by selling steamship tickets back and forth between Middletown and Melilli.<sup>55</sup>

As I shall demonstrate in Chapter Eight, Italian laborers entered the bourgeoisie so easily that the traditional, hereditary class structure was radically altered. Men whose families had been peasants for generations united with the established bourgeoisie to form a new, larger middle class in America. By the First World War, Middletown had 83 Italian businessmen, most of them Melillose. 18 were grocers, 9 barbers, 9 shoemakers, 7 saloonkeepers, 5 butchers, and 4 tailors. Others maintained such diverse enterprises as theatres, jewelry stores, and cheese shops.<sup>56</sup>

Of course, there were limits to the growth of the middle class; a town the size of Middletown could only support a finite number of barbers, regardless of how often Italians liked to get their hair cut.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, Middletown offered opportunities that had never been seen in impoverished, stagnant Melilli.

The promise of wealth proved irresistible to the Melilli immigrants. In the long run, most of those who came decided to become Americans. Between 1897 and the closing of immigration in 1922 some 2,500 Melillesi came to Middletown, and all but 20% chose to stay.<sup>58</sup> The peak

of immigration is said to have been in the years immediately following the First World War, but between 1900 and 1910 alone, Middletown's Italian population rose from under 500 to over 2000.<sup>59</sup> The Melillesi had quickly formed a large and permanent colony in Middletown. Over the next twenty years, they would transform that colony into a true community.

CHAPTER FIVE  
Early Community Organizations 1895-1912

-1-

As I have shown, the Melillesi gave every indication of settling in Middletown for good. Unlike earlier groups of Italian immigrants, the Melillese colony was never just a handful of transient male laborers; some of the first immigrants brought their wives with them, and others sent for their families shortly afterwards. Most Melillesi took temporary laboring jobs, but some, especially women, chose more secure positions in local industry. Workers as well as merchants showed their intentions of staying by buying property. Thus, despite the fact that the two classes settled in different neighborhoods, they shared at least a common desire to stay in America.

Within fifteen years of Angelo Magnano's arrival in Middletown, the Melillesi had already begun to establish community organizations. In the first years of this century, there arose two mutual aid societies, a marching band, and what appears to have been either a social or political club. Each of these groups had a definite socio-economic character. Although they would all appear to have been made up largely of workers, the workers in some clubs had been tradesmen in Melilli and continued to think of themselves as such. Common workers, whether

originally tradesmen or farmhands, had little control over other aspects of community life. All of the Italians who became involved in politics during this period were solidly of the middle-class, and the only Italians in labor unions were skilled tradesmen. Like political and union activity, early Italian religious life involved association with other ethnic groups. Most church-going Italians celebrated Mass at the Irish Catholic church, although some who preferred to worship in Italian attended the services given by Protestant missionaries. Adult education and citizenship classes were also run by non-Italians, with the help of middle-class Italians. In general, the Italian community remained weak and divided throughout this period.

To understand the significance of Italian community organizations, it is useful to compare them with those of earlier immigrant groups. As Barry Wilder shows in his 1980 essay "Different Shades of Green," Middletown's Irish immigrants were divided along class lines during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Working class Irish joined labor unions with non-Irish workers, and frustrated bourgeois Irish attempted political leadership.

In 1883, middle class Irishmen formed the "Knights of Columbus Forest City 3," an ethnic social club which they hoped would unite the Irish community under their control.

But after a brief period of membership in this organization, the working class Irish split off and formed their own "Diego" chapter of the Knights of Columbus. Other working class Irish organizations, such as the St. Aloysius Temperance Society and the Ancient Order of the Hibernians also arose, widening the split between the classes. Irish workers continued to reject bourgeois Irish leadership in politics and community affairs. Eventually, however, the two classes were reunited by what they perceived as the threatening presence of the Italians, who were by then beginning to take over Irish neighborhoods, jobs, and the church.<sup>1</sup>

-2-

In Italy, nearly every man belonged to one of the social clubs in his village. Which club one belonged to depended on one's socio-economic class. According to Sangree, there was a social club or "cabinette" for each of Melilli's four major classes. Landowner and professionals belonged to one club, shopkeepers to another, artisans to another, and lowly farm workers to another.<sup>2</sup> In the early years of Middletown's Italian colony, social clubs appeared to take on similar class overtones.

The Melilllese were not the first to form Italian societies in Middletown. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, Italians from Milazzo and Abruzzi had united and in an "Italian League" in 1895. Most of the members of this league seem to have been barbers or merchants.<sup>3</sup> This club organized celebrations to express Italian and American patriotism, helped promote the celebration of St. Sebastian's Day, and was present on ceremonial occasions such as laying the cornerstone of St. Francis' Church.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently after the demise of the "Italian League," some of the immigrants from Milazzo formed a "Young Italian American Society," which lasted from 1909 through 1914. Not surprisingly, it was made up almost entirely of the middle class; or at least, its officers were from that background. The only exception to this rule was Raffaele Di Giandomenico, a gardener, who led the organization during its first two years.<sup>5</sup>

Around the turn of the century, the immigrants from Abruzzi are said to have formed a "Madonna del Carmine" society to promote the feast of the Lady of Mt. Carmel, their patron saint.<sup>6</sup> Mention of this feast appears in the 1904 Penny Press, and it is later said that the "Italian League" also helped out.<sup>7</sup> The "Madonna del Carmine" society is not listed in the directory until 1908, when it appears along with four other Italian societies, none of which had been listed before. Previous directory editors

apparently did not think Italian clubs worth listing. Certainly the societies were in existence before then.

I have come across no list of the members of this society, but given the fact that most of the Abruzzesi were merchants or tradesmen, it seems likely that the society was dominated by the middle class.<sup>8</sup> In the list of officers given each year in the directory, a few laborers appear, but they were in the minority. In 1908, the president and the treasurer were both grocers, and for the next eight years another grocer was the treasurer. Other officers included a carpenter and a stonecutter.<sup>9</sup> The Madonna del Carmine society lasted until 1928, when it was absorbed into the Garibaldi society.<sup>10</sup>

The first Melilllese club was the "Figli d'Italia" (Sons of Italy), which was organized in 1902 as a mutual aid society.<sup>11</sup> Its early membership was seemingly eclectic: It included such prominent Melilllese merchants as Salvatore Adorno, Antonio Marino, and Giuseppe Pagano along with many laborers and factory hands.<sup>12</sup> Appearances were deceptive, however. To these early immigrants, one's occupation in America was irrelevant to one's socio-economic status, which was inherited from one's father in Melilli. Although many of them dug ditches alongside common laborers, nearly all had been tradesmen in Italy and continued to think of themselves as such. Thus, the first Melilllese club in America was, to some

extent, a continuation of the old tradesmen's "cabinetti" of the old country.

The "Agricola Garibaldi Society" began in 1905 as a splinter group of the Sons of Italy.<sup>13</sup> According to Joseph Passanisi, "a few disruptive members got together and they formed the Garibaldi's."<sup>14</sup> The cause of the dispute, Mike Marino tells me, was "a sort of class distinction". Those members of the Sons of Italy who were not "tradesmen" were unhappy with their treatment in the club and decided to form their own.<sup>15</sup> According to Sangree, the people who founded the new society "were very eager to see the old class distinctions dissolve."<sup>16</sup> During this period, the officers of the Garibaldi society held only unskilled jobs. Antonio Cannata, a construction laborer, was its president from 1908 through 1911.<sup>17</sup> The club folded in 1912, probably because of financial difficulties.<sup>18</sup>

The basic function of both these "mutual aid" societies was to offer a limited form of life insurance. At regular intervals, their members would pay a set fee to the treasury, and in return would be assured of having their funeral expenses paid. This was a great help to the families of poor laborers, who would otherwise find it difficult to bear the sudden expense which a proper funeral demanded. Some money was also paid to cover hospital expenses. Besides offering these benefits, "The Sons" and "Gari's" became popular social centers where

friends could meet, drink, play cards, and shoot pool.<sup>19</sup>

The "St. Sebastian's Band" was a somewhat different organization which served a few of the same purposes. It was organized around the same time that the Sons of Italy was, but it had its roots back in the original village band of Melilli. The Melilli band had been a prestigious social club in which membership and instruments were passed from generation to generation. Nearly all the members were tradesmen or merchants. When these people came to Middletown, they attempted to set up an identical band here. Many of the old members played in the new band, and most of the new members were also "tradesmen" or the sons of tradesmen. The leader of the band was Antonio Amenta, the grocer. At the time the band was formed, however, most of the "tradesmen" were occupied as laborers or factory hands. Eventually the absurdity of class restrictions under such circumstances became apparent, and membership was opened to all Italian musicians.<sup>20</sup> This band played for all kinds of celebrations, including political rallies and the feast of St. Sebastian.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the Sons of Italy, the Garibaldi Society, and the St. Sebastian's Band, there was a fourth Melillese club in Middletown during these early years. This was the "Guglielmo Marconi Society". To judge from the lists of officers given in the city directories, it would appear that this club, like the Garibaldi Society,

was made up heavily of workers, and probably not just "tradesmen" down on their luck. From 1908 through 1911, the president was Carlo Amato, who would lead the 1912 I.W.W. strike at the Russell Manufacturing Company. Sebastian Moscatello, who also worked at the Russell Company, was treasurer from 1908 through 1912. The two other people who were officers during these years were listed in the directory as laborers. In the summer of 1912, Carlo Amato returned to Italy, leaving the club without a president. By the following year the Guglielmo Marconi Society had folded, never to be revived.<sup>22</sup>

As I have no other information concerning the activities of the Marconi Society, it would be a mistake to jump to the conclusion that it fostered the growth of class consciousness or working class political views. It may have been no more than a social club for fun-loving workers. Nevertheless, the presidency of Carlo Amato arouses my suspicions. In 1908, the Penny Press wrote that "among the Italians it is said that in some of the organizations views are taught which border on the anarchistic," and it may have been this club to which it was referring.<sup>23</sup> However, the Garibaldi Society is not above suspicion either. Paolo D'Emanuele, its treasurer from 1909 through 1911, was also involved in the Russell strike, and was arrested for rioting.<sup>24</sup>

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Whether or not ideas of class were instilled in the members of these clubs, such ideas found scant expression in daily events, at least until the Russell strike. Prior to that strike, there was little sign of union activity among the Italian proletariat. Skilled tradesmen were practically the only ones to join unions during this time.

Organized labor was very weak in Middletown. During the period under consideration in this chapter, there were far fewer unions here than in other parts of Connecticut. In 1900, there were some 270 unions statewide, but only one in Middletown, the Bricklayers' Union No. 11. By 1912, Connecticut had 517 unions and Middletown only ten. Among other cities the same size as, or smaller than, Middletown, Derby, New London, Norwich, and Stamford all had more unions.<sup>25</sup> Strikes were also rare here, and those few which did crop up were generally broken.<sup>26</sup>

As one might expect, Middletown's Italians were most active in the Barbers Union or Barbers Association, which lasted off and on throughout the pre-war period. In 1905, Matthew Basile was the president and Leo Santangelo was the vice president.<sup>27</sup> Charles Napoli led the local in 1916.<sup>28</sup> Since most of the barbers in Middletown at this time were Italian, it is almost certain that many of the members of the union were also Italian.<sup>29</sup>

Building tradesmen were fairly well organized in Middletown, but only those in skilled positions. After the Bricklayers' No. 11 appeared solidly established, there arose the Carpenters' No. 1512, the Painters' No. 207, and the Plumbers' No. 383.<sup>30</sup> With changes in name or number, these would all continue throughout the period, presumably under the authority of the Connecticut Federation of Labor.

Some of Middletown's Italians were indeed employed in such trades. In 1910, there were six Italian masons, five painters, and a plasterer listed in the city directory.<sup>31</sup> If Middletown was at all like other cities, which is debatable, then one would expect that these tradesmen would have joined the unions. As Edwin Fenton shows in his Immigrants and Unions, Italian building tradesmen, especially bricklayers and masons, were quick to join unions in Northeastern cities, and eventually came to dominate their trades.<sup>32</sup> But there is no proof that this was the case in Middletown. All I can say is that Italians were never elected to lead the building trade unions.<sup>33</sup>

Most Italians who worked construction at this time did not hold such skilled positions. To the early Melillese immigrant, a job with Brazos or with Mylchreest and O'Brien meant moving heavy rocks, bricks, or earth. Strength, not skill, was required. Workers in such jobs

were extremely difficult to organize into unions, writes Fenton. Most instances of collective action were simply "strikes against padroni (which) began without planning and almost without warning. Since crews dissolved at the end of the construction season, no organizations continued from strike to strike... The strikers had no formally elected leaders; they merely made their demands, heard the boss refuse concessions, and walked off the job."<sup>34</sup>

Such strikes were not unheard of around Middletown. I earlier mentioned a small one which occurred among railroad laborers in 1896.<sup>35</sup> I have found evidence of another, in which ninety Italian laborers employed

constructing a system of water supply at Chester, struck on July 1, 1901, against a proposed reduction in the daily wage rate from \$1.50 to \$1.35 per day. The strike resulted in a stoppage of work for 1 day, when fifty of the whole number accepted the reduced wage rate. The others secured situations elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to these fruitless outbreaks of discontent, there was an effort to organize a "Building Laborers' No. 14" in 1909 or 1910, under the leadership of one F. Granaldi. This union was an exception to Fenton's generalization about laborers' organizations: it survived until 1914.<sup>37</sup> Other than this I have not found out anything about it. Mr. Granaldi was not even listed in the directory.

The only other Italian laborers who might have belonged to a union were the quarrymen. At least some of Maromas' quarryworkers belonged to the Granite Cutters' Union during this period. However, the bargaining power of the union was undoubtedly limited by the fact that it was split into three separate locals operating concurrently and probably in competition.<sup>38</sup>

Few of Middletown's factory workers belonged to unions during this period. A year after its organization, the Iron Molders' No. 373, Middletown's first industrial union, had a membership of only 28 of the 75 iron molders in the area.<sup>39</sup> As this union survived throughout the pre-war period, it must have offered its members at least the possibility of achieving desired benefits. Almost no Italians worked in foundries, however, and there were no comparable organizations in the industries in which they did work. Irish-American workers at Middletown's textile mills organized a few unions there, but these were so short lived that they had no practical importance. In 1903, Richard Dempsey headed a "Silk Weavers Union" at L.D. Brown and Son Co., and perhaps at the Portland Silk Co. also. Margaret Kenefick led a "Suspender Workers' No. 10628", at the Russell Manufacturing Co., and F.G. Gilpatrick directed a "Garment Workers' 247," perhaps at the Arawana Mills. By 1905, all three of these locals had dissolved.<sup>40</sup>

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In addition to forming social clubs and joining labor unions, some Italians also became involved in local politics during this period. Since most Melillesi had not yet become citizens and therefore could not vote, Middletown's first Italian politicians were the merchants from Milazzo and Abruzzi.

For the election of 1904, Antoine Basile, Leo B. Santangelo, James Galanto, Felice Micone and Berry Cerbo organized an Italian Republican Club. Basile and Santangelo were barbers and had come from Milazzo. The other men were all grocers and were probably from Abruzzi.<sup>41</sup> This group held rallies of the Italians in an effort to win votes for local Republicans.<sup>42</sup> They also campaigned among Italians in other Connecticut cities.<sup>43</sup> This organization continued throughout the pre-war period.<sup>44</sup> An effort was also made to organize Italian Democrats, but was not as successful.<sup>45</sup>

Italians were free to campaign for the politicians of their choice, but their own political aspirations were limited. The small size of the Italian electorate, as well as prevailing attitudes of prejudice, ensured that Italian candidates would stand little chance of being elected. During this period, Leo Santangelo rose to some prominence within the Republican party organization, but even he was not exempt from ethnic hostility. In 1908, he

was forced to resign his position as chairman of the town committee after a brawl with another important Republican. The fight had begun when the other man, Mr. Santangelo's political rival, had called him "a damn dago."<sup>46</sup> Apparently the only Italian to run for office during this period was James Galanto, a member of the Italian Republican club, who was defeated in his 1910 attempt to become a justice of the peace!<sup>47</sup>

In religious affairs, as in politics, Italians were forced to defer to the leadership of non-Italians. But unlike the political parties, religious organizations allowed Italians no influence whatsoever. Religion was something which Italians passively received in a hostile Catholic church, or which was imposed on them by Protestant missionaries. In this case, at least, the bourgeoisie was in the same position as the working class: both were powerless and looked down upon.

For the entire period with which this study is concerned, most Italians attended St. John's Catholic Church, at the north end of Main Street. At first, this was the only Catholic church in town. Later, after the construction of St. Francis' and St. Mary's, it remained the closest -- a short walk from any home on the Italian East Side.<sup>48</sup> The Italians found St. John's convenient, but they did not find it friendly. By 1904, the minister of St. John's noted that "My long time parishioners are

quite disturbed over the entrance of large numbers of new members."<sup>49</sup>

To the Irish parishioners, the entrance of Italians into "their" church was just another sign of the growing menace posed by the Italian colony. Because of their willingness to work for lower wages, the Italians had already taken over many laboring jobs which the Irish had previously held. They were also taking over the old Irish neighborhoods in the northern part of the East Side. Some Irish feared that they would be driven out of the church too, and began to work for the construction of another church, St. Francis', at a healthy distance from the Italian quarter. Other Irish decided to take their stand at St. John's. They grudgingly allowed the Italians into services, but made it clear that they were not welcome and forced them to sit in a special section of the church.<sup>50</sup>

In the fall of 1906, Middletown's Protestants began offering the Italians an alternative to the unpleasant treatment they were receiving at St. John's. Members of the Middletown's six English Protestant churches feared that many Italians had "entirely lost the habit of church attendance, and it was in view of this fact, as well as from a desire to help toward the speedy Americanization of this element of our foreign population" that the churches formed and funded a missionary committee. Under the sponsorship of this committee, Protestant church services

were held every Sunday afternoon in the chapel of the South Congregational Church. The priest was Vincenzo Esperti of the Italian Church in New Britain. But even though these services were given in Italian in a friendly environment, few Italians attended, and even fewer converted.<sup>51</sup>

Wesleyan professors had taken an early interest in this program, and had contributed money. Gradually, the Wesleyan community would warm to the task of Americanizing and Protestantizing the benighted Italian. In January of 1907, a Wesleyan student named Rosa Palladino started a Sunday school for Italian children, and in 1908 began to give night classes to young Italian women. She was assisted by the Daughters of the American Revolution.<sup>52</sup> In September of 1907, another Italian Wesleyan student, Constantine Panunzio, was hired to do extra missionary work and to give Bible classes at Wesleyan's Y.M.C.A.. Mr. Panunzio eventually expanded his priestly duties to include teaching citizenship to his flock. In 1911, he got the Y.M.C.A. to print a guidebook for Italian immigrants, which gave information that one would presumably have to know in order to become a citizen. The guidebook also gave the immigrant some moral advice, and closed with urging "be a good and faithful Christian. Acquire a U.S. citizenship as soon as possible."<sup>53</sup>

After Panunzio's graduation in 1911, other Wesleyan students set up night classes "to educate the Italians and to ground them in the principles of our government."<sup>54</sup> But as the Wesleyan students were unable to speak Italian and few of their Italian pupils could speak English, the classes were not very successful. By the end of 1911, "the attendance was so light that it was voted not to conduct a night school again."<sup>55</sup> Thus, the Italians' early experiences with religion, education, and Americanization were not encouraging.

CHAPTER SIX  
The Russell Strike

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Although one might expect the class divisions of Middletown's Italian colony to cause some class tension, there is no evidence of overt conflict within the Italian community during the early years. Yet in the late spring of 1912, Italian textile workers defied the wishes of middle class community leaders and led a large and violent strike against the Russell Manufacturing Company.

Apparently disturbed by the presence of radical I.W.W. organizers, and irritated by the Italians' domination of the union local, the American, Polish, and German workers refused to join in the fight for higher wages. Within a week, the general strike at the Russell Co. was broken and the Italian community faced a backlash of harsh resentment.

1912 saw a good deal of industrial violence, thanks to the efforts of the Industrial Workers of the World. The ideology of this labor union has been the subject for much discussion, into which I do not intend to enter.<sup>1</sup> Suffice it to say that this organization preached social revolution, desired worker control of industry, and believed the primary benefit of strikes lay in developing a proletarian class consciousness. Arising first among

radical western miners, the I.W.W. later gained influence among the semi-skilled industrial workers of the east coast.

On January 2, 1912, began what was to be the industrial heyday of the I.W.W.. On that day, fifty Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile workers left their looms to protest what amounted to a daily wage reduction. Over the next few days, the strike grew in strength and extended to other mills. On January 12, considerable vandalism broke out, and the state militia was called in to protect the mills.<sup>2</sup> I.W.W. leaders such as Joseph Ettor and Bill Haywood soon arrived to help organize a major strike. As many of Lawrence's workers were recent immigrants and could speak little English, the Union leaders wisely chose to put them in separate locals according to language and nationality.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, 23,000 of the city's 35,000 textile workers joined the strike.<sup>4</sup>

The strike proved to be long and occasionally bloody. Despite the insistence of the I.W.W. that the strikers should resort to violence only in self-defense, there were numerous reports of assaults against scabs, sabotage against the mills, and clashes with the militia.<sup>5</sup> Tempers ran high on the other side too. In its zeal to keep the peace, the militia killed two strikers and wounded several others.<sup>6</sup> More violence erupted when strikers attempted to send their children out of the city to be cared for by

families who could better afford it. In accordance with the wishes of city officials, the police broke up the planned exodus at the train station, using clubs against the young emigres and their mothers.<sup>7</sup> Such activities only incensed the workers and strengthened their morale. On March 12, the mill owners finally gave in to the strikers' demands, and granted their workers wage increases of 5 to 25 percent.<sup>8</sup>

The Lawrence textile strike gave the I.W.W. its greatest industrial victory, yet its practical significance was dwarfed by its propaganda value. The crude strike-breaking activities of the mill owners played right into the hands of "wobbly" agitators elsewhere, who could point to such brutality as evidence of ruling-class oppression. The mill owners' attempt to pin a trumped-up dynamite conspiracy on the strikers, and the city's imprisonment of two I.W.W. leaders on a false murder charge, helped underline the same point. As these two leaders, Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovanitti, remained in jail through the summer of 1912, they made excellent martyrs for the I.W.W.'s cause.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the events in Lawrence demonstrated to many workers not only the wobblies' ability to win strikes, but also the validity of their ideas. After the victory in Lawrence, the I.W.W. quickly spread its version of class struggle to the mills of Clinton, Massachusetts, and

Willimantic, Jewett City, and Putnam, Connecticut.<sup>10</sup> On May 22, 1912, another strike began in Middletown.

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According to one former worker at the Russell Manufacturing Company, the Middletown strike was connected to the one in Lawrence only by the fact that "the same agitators came. The agitators over there came over here too."<sup>11</sup> The two strikes were led by the same union, to be sure, but the connection seems somewhat closer than this. First of all, Italians played an active role in both strikes. In Lawrence, Italian workers had been among the first to organize an I.W.W. local and go on strike.<sup>12</sup> The success of their compatriots in Lawrence undoubtedly helped convince Middletown's Italians to throw in their lot with the I.W.W.. Furthermore, the jailing of Ettore and Giovanitti may have played on their feeling of Italian nationalism and led them to support the oppressed union.<sup>13</sup>

Even more importantly, some of the participants in the Lawrence strike were from the same village as most of the Russell Company's Italian help. At the worst point of the economic recession of 1907-1908, nearly two thirds of Middletown's Italians had been out of work.<sup>14</sup> The situation was most acute among the outdoor laborers, but textile workers had found themselves in trouble as well;

I.E. Palmer's Arawana Mills cut back wages sharply, prompting a futile strike.<sup>15</sup> Local construction also slacked off, forcing many skilled building tradesmen into the already glutted manual labor market.<sup>16</sup> Many Italians chose to return to the old country at least until the economy improved, but others seem to have sought their fortune in other towns in America.<sup>17</sup>

By the winter of 1912 "probably about ten families" of Melillesi were working in the woolen mills of Lawrence, and all of them had lived in Middletown first.<sup>18</sup> Among these people were probably Emilio Scamporino, Michele Misenti, Luigi Germano, and Sebastiano Salafia.<sup>19</sup> Eventually Lawrence would be home to the largest Melillese colony in America besides Middletown itself.<sup>20</sup> There is every reason to believe that the Melillesi joined the other Italians in the strike that spring.<sup>21</sup> After the strike was over, a few Melillesi appear to have come to Middletown to spread the I.W.W. gospel. When the Russell employees voted to join the union, wrote the Penny Press, "some of the men present had been through the strikes at Lowell and Lawrence, Mass., and frequent references were made to the labor troubles there."<sup>22</sup>

It seems likely that the success of their paesani in the earlier strike, rather than the ideology of the I.W.W. itself, was the most convincing reason for Middletown's Melillesi to join the radical union. Except for the

suspicious doings of the Marconi society, there is little evidence of earlier revolutionary activity among these people. As Edwin Fenton explains in his Immigrants and Unions, very few immigrants from southern Italy had ever had any exposure to radical politics before coming to the United States, and fewer took any serious interest in revolution after arriving here. "Transplanted to the new world, the peasant was led by his fatalism to accept things as they were. He was a conservative by instinct; although he sometimes followed radicals, he was rarely in accord with their spirit."<sup>23</sup> Fenton believes the I.W.W. gained control among Italian textile workers largely "by default", as no other union would organize them.<sup>24</sup>

This appears to be a fairly accurate explanation of the I.W.W.'s success in organizing the Russell Co. workers. Except for the fleeting presence of the I.W.W., Middletown's textile workers belonged to no union in 1912.<sup>25</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Five, Some workers at the Russell Company may have earlier belonged to an A.F.L. local, the "Suspender Workers' 10628", but this lasted only two years.

I have found no other mention of this union, nor of any union or strike at the Russell Co., in either the 1904 Penny Press or the Report of the Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics. Quite probably the union remained small and powerless and eventually expired because of a lack of

interest. The fact that Margaret Kenefick's 1905 departure from the Russell Company coincided with the demise of the union suggests to me that her leadership alone kept the organization going.<sup>26</sup> The other plausible explanation -- that the company broke the union and fired its secretary -- is highly unlikely. There seems to have been nothing to incite the Russells and Hubbards to such an action, and it is improbable that the company would have taken such a harsh step without provocation; Ms. Kenefick appears to have been the daughter of John Kenefick, who, like the members of the Russell family, was a prominent local businessman and a leader in city politics.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, by the time the Italian employees of the Russell Company decided to press for higher wages, earlier worker apathy, and possibly the A.F.L.'s own lack of interest in organizing mill hands, had deprived them of respectable union affiliation. Their best alternative was the I.W.W., with which other Melillesi had won a victory under similar circumstances, and which was eager to help. Therefore, it was almost certainly pragmatism and solidarity with their compatriots, rather than revolutionary fervor, which induced Middletown's Italians to join the Industrial Workers of the World.

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Like the Lawrence strike, the one in Middletown started small, with a peaceful walkout by several discontented workers. On May 22, 1912, the Penny Press reported that "some of the girls in the calendar room at the factory of the Russell Manufacturing Company asked for certain changes and the overseer, instead of referring the matter to the office of the company, let the girls go home."<sup>28</sup> The problem, as would later be explained, was that the workers "were unwilling to accept the schedule of wages offered to them."<sup>29</sup> This "calendar room" was apparently in the Sanseer Mill.<sup>30</sup>

As mentioned in the previous chapter, strikes were rare in Middletown. Usually they remained small and ineffectual, collapsing quickly after they began. There seemed no reason why the latest disturbance would be any different, and so after discussing the matter with the Russell Co., the paper reported "it is expected that the difficulty will soon be adjusted."<sup>31</sup> But by the following day, more calendar room workers had walked out and the weavers were threatening to join them. Salvatore Corio, a spokesman for the weavers, then went to Boston "on business connected with the matter."<sup>32</sup> Although it is not explicitly stated what Mr. Corio's business was, I would imagine that he went to ask the help of the I.W.W. in organizing a strike. Two days later, the Penny Press

noted that

unrest among laborers of foreign birth, about town, is becoming evident. This feeling of dissatisfaction is being fostered by labor representatives from other cities who are here talking to those who are employed in local mills and factories, and the indications are that labor troubles are in store for the town -- something heretofore almost unknown.

"It is said that representatives of the I.W.W. have been here for some time," the paper added, yet the earlier activities of such organizers must have been ineffectual; at least, they never made it into the paper. It is quite unlikely that Middletown, with its small industrial workforce, would have been a choice target for professional agitators. These earlier "representatives", if they were not a figment of T. McDonough Russell's imagination, were probably just Lawrence workers who had friends or relatives in Middletown, and who "agitated" in the unofficial manner described above. The desire of the Russell Co. to present the strike as the result of outside influence rather than of legitimate worker discontent would explain the exaggeration.

In any event, Mr. Corio's trip to Boston was followed by the arrival of several bona fide "wobbly" agitators, and the outbreak of a large, I.W.W.-directed strike. On the night of Saturday, May 25, hundreds of Russell workers met at the Town Hall to discuss forming a union. I.W.W. representatives were there in force, distributing propaganda and making speeches. Perhaps

foreseeing that the workers might divide along ethnic lines, the wobblies decided to emphasize solidarity and to appeal to each ethnic group in turn. The I.W.W. circulars, printed in both English and Italian, told its readers that "work unites us all together, without deference to nationality, Italians, Americans, Germans, Poles, French, etc. We are all brethren, and we shall in this solemn hour be all together if we want to win our cause, we shall be all together." Speeches were given in Italian by Delfino Masnero and Raimonda Fazio, and in English by Walter Eggman, all of New York. And "John Bush, of Willimantic, who has been active in the recent labor troubles there, spoke in Polish." The speakers called for worker solidarity and said that the victory in Lawrence could be repeated in Middletown. By the end of the meeting, 300 Middletown residents had joined the Industrial Workers of the World, and united to send telegrams of support to Ettore and Giovanitti.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the efforts of the I.W.W., it was apparent from the beginning that ethnic divisions would hamper any large-scale strike. Even at the first meeting, reported the Penny Press, "the audiences seemed to be largely made up of those of Italian birth or descent."<sup>35</sup> Clearly, the I.W.W. had yet to establish ample support among native-born American workers. The Russell Company sought to exploit this weakness by calling the strike "Italian", and suggesting that native-born workers had no cause for

unrest. In a newspaper interview, a spokesman for the Russell Company

stated there has been no dissatisfaction of any kind among its employes, as regards compensation or conditions, and that the present unrest is caused entirely by outside influence. It appears that owing to this outside influence some of the Italian workers have been rendered more or less unsettled. The Italians comprise only a small portion of its help, and it is not anticipated any trouble will result.<sup>36</sup>

To forestall any remaining possibility of "trouble", the company fired 65 striking workers at the Sanseer Mill, and closed down the mill itself.<sup>37</sup>

On the night of the Sanseer Mill lockout, the Russell workers packed into an Italian theatre on Court Street and formally established an I.W.W. local under the leadership of Carlo Amato. Italians were again the predominate group in attendance, although "a considerable number" of Poles were also present. Following the precedent set by the Lawrence strike, I.W.W. organizer Walter Eggman proposed to divide the local into ethnic branches: American, Polish, and Italian. Mr. Eggman then gave a speech denouncing the long hours and low pay at the Russell Company. Women in the "finishing room" fared the worst, he said, working nearly 12 hours a day without even a lunch break.<sup>38</sup> It was later announced that the local would be called the "Textile Workers' Industrial Union, No. 203, I.W.W.," and that its officers would be Joseph Camillieri, Sebastiano Cianci, Salvatore Salonia, Carlo Amato, Gaetano Garofalo, and "Miss Capello".<sup>39</sup>

Drawing the union leadership entirely from the Italians was a serious mistake in a situation already rife with ethnic tension. As the I.W.W. organizers must certainly have known this, I can only conclude that the Italian workers ignored their advice and overwhelmed the minority opposition of Polish and American workers.

This action seems to have alienated many non-Italian workers, for when the general strike began at the Russell Company on June 4, only 400 of the approximately 1150 workers went out. On the day they stopped work, the strikers confidently gave the company a list of sweeping demands, including a fifty hour work week, with a one hour lunch break for everyone, the resumption of work at the Sanseer Mill, and wages set at a minimum of \$7.25 a week. Yet the strike was so weak that the company did not feel forced to negotiate at all. The Company told the Press that "work is going along in the mill steadily," and refused to talk to the workers except on an individual basis.<sup>40</sup> At the other major textile mill, the I.E. Palmer Company, all the workers remained at their looms.<sup>41</sup>

For all the attention focused on the subject, it remains unclear how many Italians were employed at the Russell Company at this time.<sup>42</sup> As noted above, the Russell Company first claimed that Italians "comprise only a small portion" of its work force. After the strike was in progress, however, the company's continued desire to

present the strike as a foreign threat led it to the contradictory position that "nearly all of those who went out this morning were Italians and that a great number of them went out because they were afraid to do otherwise."<sup>43</sup> Striking a compromise between these two distorted claims, I would estimate that somewhere around 300 Italians were working at the Russell Company in 1912, and that nearly all of them joined the strike.

One consequence of the Italian domination of the strike was that young women continued to make up a large portion of the picketers. As noted in Chapter Four, more Italian women than men worked in the factories, as the men preferred to take more lucrative positions as day laborers. Thus, although only one woman was on the strike committee, some seventy five percent of the rank and file members were female.<sup>44</sup> On June 6, the Penny Press reported that "the strike is being run by women, it might be said, for they are much more demonstrative than the men and seem more enthusiastic. They wear their badges, on which is printed in red letters 'don't be a scab,' with considerable pride."<sup>45</sup>

On the first few days, the strikers seem to have been optimistic and in good spirits. Mass meetings were held in Italian for the benefit of those who spoke that language, and in English for the Americans, Germans, and Poles. Speakers protested such matters as child labor,

the unpleasantly hot workrooms, and the \$3.00 a week wage.<sup>46</sup> Three times a day the strikers paraded from their downtown headquarters to the mills in the South Farms, where they would try to convince the scabs to join them.<sup>47</sup>

Middle class Italians did not share the enthusiasm of the strikers. In fact, they seem to have been quite opposed to the whole thing. In response to their urging, the Reverend Dr. Donovan of St. John's Church went to a rally of the Italian workers on the afternoon of June 6 to address his parishioners. He told them in Italian that they were being misled by socialists, anarchists, and disturbers of the public order. Such outsiders, Dr. Donovan felt, had no interest in the welfare of the workers; the best thing the strikers could do in this situation would be to return to work quietly. The Penny Press reported this speech and also noted that "some of the influential Italians of the city are to talk to the strikers and try to induce them to desist from further striking."<sup>48</sup> The workers refused to take this advice, and seem to have sought to change the minds of the "influential Italians". Implying that the problem was one which affected the entire colony, the Italian workers claimed that they were not only paid low wages but were also "treated with discourtesy".<sup>49</sup> The strike went on.

By this time, the activity in the South Farms had captured the interest of many local citizens. As the Penny Press reported, "the plant of the Russell Manufacturing Company was the Mecca of the young people and bids fair to become a popular excursion point if the strike lasts."<sup>50</sup> Adding to the crowds of strikers and spectators were several members of the local police force and 14 reinforcements from Hartford assigned to keep the peace.<sup>51</sup> Also present were a group of Wesleyan students, who were temporarily acting as "deputies".

This latter group appears to have been somewhat overenthusiastic in the execution of its duties, to judge from the events of Friday, June 7. Since the beginning of the strike, the strikers had met the scabs at the factory gates each morning and evening to try to convince them to stop work. On this morning, however, the scabs were brought to the plant in special trolley cars, and then passed through two lines of police and deputies into the factory compound. According to the police, the strikers rushed this line in an attempt to prevent the scabs from entering the mills. It seems from the strikers' side of the story that one of the student deputies then hit or shoved a woman striker, and a melee broke out. "The officers were unable to control the crowd with the numbers they had and drew their clubs which they used freely at times," reported the Press. The Wesleyan students enjoyed themselves too, allegedly swinging iron pipes and baseball

bats against the strikers. Some of the Italians fought back with pickets torn from a nearby fence and stones taken from the road. At least one police officer fired some shots, but did not hit anyone. The riot was then broken up with fire hoses.<sup>52</sup>

By the time the fight ended, five policemen and a number of strikers were wounded, and at least three Italians were under arrest.<sup>53</sup> Thirty police were sent to guard the factories, extra ammunition was brought to the police station, and the Governor called out the Militia. By the following morning, thirty five state troopers were on guard, with instructions to "shoot to kill, if at all."<sup>54</sup> More students also leaped to the aid of law and order, bringing the total number of deputies to fifty. These students, wrote the Hartford Courant, came "garbed in all sorts of fighting togs, some even in the football clothing made infamous by the Trinity defeat of last fall. These, with typical undergraduate carelessness, were 'simply aching for a good roughouse,' as one expressed it."<sup>55</sup>

Seeing over a hundred agents of justice arrayed in such formidable opposition to violence, the strikers became noticeably more subdued. The non-Italian strikers seemed to have been chastened by the experience, and soon returned to work. Despite the efforts of the Reverend Stanislas Musiel of St. Mary's Church, some Polish

workers had stayed on strike until the day of the riot.<sup>56</sup> Afterwards, however, the strike was simply "among the Italians".<sup>57</sup>

After the riot, the Russell strike took on an entirely new meaning. Previously seen as a misguided local effort to get higher wages, it was now clearly a foreign threat -- a vicious attack on Middletown's peaceful tradition. On that afternoon, the Penny Press broke its editorial silence on the matter, and came down hard against the strikers. It stated that both striking and violence were foreign to Middletown, and urged the police to "nip it in the bud."<sup>58</sup>

By Tuesday, June 11, it was obvious that the strike had been broken. I.W.W. organizer Jean Spielman returned to New York, leaving the shattered local in the hands of an Italian underling. Several of the Militia had departed also, and the strike headquarters were deserted.<sup>59</sup> Some Italians adamantly remained on strike, but many went to the company office to ask for their old jobs back. "Some others have apparently come to the conclusion that it is a hopeless struggle they are waging and are beginning to leave," wrote the Penny Press. "It is estimated that at least a dozen have gone to Lawrence, Mass..<sup>60</sup> In addition to Lawrence, many Italians went to Ansonia and Derby, Connecticut, which later developed small Melillese colonies of their own.<sup>61</sup> The strike leader, Carlo Amato,

returned to Melilli with several other fired strikers.<sup>62</sup>

The Italian workers' defiance of the middle class had been a dismal failure.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
Community Organizations, 1912 and Beyond

-1-

One may well wonder why I have devoted so much attention to the disputes at the Russell Company. After all, the trouble involved only a fraction of the Italian colony, lasted no longer than three weeks from beginning to end, and accomplished nothing whatsoever. Be that as it may, I feel that it is helpful to view the events of the strike as examples of an ongoing trend within the Italian colony, and to interpret the strike itself as provoking the development of a stronger, more unified, Italian community.

In the strike, previously muted class tensions swelled into a bitter confrontation. Workers who had previously grumbled ineffectually in their social clubs now openly defied the wishes of the Italian middle class, their priest, and of course their employer. Following the class conflict model so dear to the I.W.W. leadership, the Italian strikers allied themselves with fellow workers rather than with fellow Italians. But even at this extreme point, the pull of ethnic allegiance remained stronger than new feelings of working class solidarity: at the expense of American, Polish, and German workers, the Italians took full control of the strike committee.

This shortsighted action, as well as language barriers and the odium attached to the I.W.W., alienated the non-Italian workers from the Italians. When the general strike went into effect, the Italians found that they had the support of only a few dozen of the other workers. After the riot, even these returned to the looms. The attempt to form an alliance of the various ethnic working classes was a failure. The strikers remained Italians first and workers second.

The strike can be seen as the culminating expression of a conflict earlier expressed in the development of separate neighborhoods and the founding of separate clubs; the events which followed the strike can be seen as throwing the classes back together again, strengthening their ethnic solidarity, and giving them further incentive to dissolve the old Melilllese class system.

-2-

The strike had not yet ended when Italians began to sense a new feeling of hostility from among Middletown's other residents. Following the riot, the Russell Company had announced its decision to fire all Italian workers.<sup>1</sup> The Italians were not happy with this decision, and instead of collecting their pay and leaving, some of the most despairing ones began to cross the picket lines to

beg for their old jobs back. That Sunday, a group of Italians were said to have gone from door to door asking American employees of the Russell Company to sign a petition that they be rehired. This effort was not successful. The Italians met with an unpleasant response and even had doors slammed in their faces.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually the company said it would rehire some of the strikers, but the other employees remained hostile. Many of them objected to working alongside Italians, and some even threatened to walk out if the Italians were allowed back into the mills. The Russell Company proposed to resolve this dispute by segregating the Italians into the Sanseer Mill, but the Italians objected to this. Many had previously held semi-skilled positions in the other mills, and did not want to be moved down to the low-paying unskilled jobs which were available in the Sanseer Mill.<sup>3</sup>

The dispute interfered with the planned rehiring. By the end of the month, many Italians were still out of work, and non-Italian workers still barred their return. This feeling of hostility seems to have spread throughout the community. When the Italians sought employment at the I.E. Palmer Co., the second largest textile concern, they were blocked by the same objections from the employees there.<sup>4</sup> As late as August, the Russell weavers still opposed the rehiring and threatened to strike.<sup>5</sup>

The continued animosity began to alarm the Italian middle class. The antagonism of Middletown's Irish, Poles, and Americans had obviously acquired overtones of ethnic prejudice which could harm merchant as well as mill-hand. In mid-July, a group of Italian businessmen belonging to the "Columbus Club" held a special meeting to discuss the problem.<sup>6</sup>

On July 19, a "committee" composed of Stephen Puglisi, Joseph Pagano, Angelo Caiazza, Gerardo Roccapriore, and Joseph Annino issued their report on the subject. All were members of the middle class.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, their report, which was published in the newspaper, was very sympathetic to the troubles of the Italian working class. It called the strikers

energetic and faithful workers, of generous dispositions and good hearted. For many years they suffered the criticisms of other nationalities, including some of the Irish employed at the same factory. Some of the Italians employed by the Russell Company, after a month of struggle, have decided to return to their native land; some have left town and others are still in town and they have decided to return to work quietly and without molestation of anyone...

As soon as some of these Italians returned to work they were shown hostility by the foreman and some other nationalities, especially the Polish...[We] can not understand why members of the poor, laboring classes should be threatened while peacefully pursuing their work and subjected to criticism and to be addressed in indecent and vile terms, which are sometimes used by individuals with weak brains and hot temper.

The report then went on to discuss the merits of Italians in general and Middletown Italians in particular. It concluded with a plea for "justice and clemency for the Italian laboring people. And remember for the sake of Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci (and others)...that these men have played a part in the history of the United States and in the history of the world."<sup>8</sup>

The non-Italian workers apparently read this and were unimpressed. One who responded in print showed an extraordinary amount of anger toward the Italians. He claimed that the Italians had always enjoyed good treatment at the Russell mills, but that they had acted rudely toward the other help, pushing them off sidewalks and committing other misdeeds. "Only a short time ago, a chum of the writer had a knife stuck in him because he ran into one of them coming out of the gate. The writer last night spoke of Columbus and Marconi, and says nothing of the patriots who came to the (South) Farms and spat on and struck and threatened to kill our women and girls."<sup>9</sup>

Two days later, the Columbus Club responded with another letter, which essentially reiterated the ideas of the earlier one. It also defended the strikers as "honest and fair" in their intentions, blamed the riot on "educated incompetents" from Wesleyan, and accused the other workers of being "the loudest in urging on the strike, but (refusing) to follow." It closed again with an

appeal for fair treatment, and called for an end to "prejudice and discrimination".<sup>10</sup>

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As far as I can tell, the Italian middle class had never before taken such a protective interest in the problems of the workers. Individual merchants had earlier aided individual workers in finding homes, assisted them in buying property, and frequently lent them money, but never had the middle class organized to aid the working class.<sup>11</sup> As the split widened between the Italian colony and the rest of Middletown, merchants and tradesmen would begin to assume the roles of community leaders.

In the aftermath of the strike, the new enmity between the Italians and the Wesleyan community made it impossible for the old citizenship and missionary programs to continue. "As an echo of the recent strike at the factory of the Russell Manufacturing Company," wrote the Penny Press, "it is feared that there may be an interruption of the process of the education of the Italians of the city." The paper explained that "during the recent strike many Wesleyan students acted as deputies with the result that the Italian residents of the city felt very bitter about it and it was feared... that it would mean the end of the work so auspiciously begun."<sup>12</sup>

Despite the efforts of Rutilio Corvo, a barber, the Wesleyan classes were never re-opened. Of all the missionary activities, only the Protestant church services survived, and no longer with Wesleyan guidance.

To fill the gap left by the Wesleyan classes, Middletown's Italians started their own citizenship programs. In 1913, a barber by the name of Sebastian LaBella "began teaching Americanization classes to Italians at the Y.M.C.A. on Main Street," writes Paul Breidenbach.<sup>13</sup>

The classes were designed specifically to assist people who wanted American citizenship. They were in Italian, and consisted of facts and principles that one needed in order to pass the final examination at the Naturalization Court. LaBella taught these classes for forty-six years, at the Y.M.C.A.,<sup>14</sup> the Sons of Italy, and the Garibaldi Society.

After World War I, the Garibaldi Society is also said to have started citizenship classes, mainly for the benefit of club members.<sup>15</sup> This may seem surprising, considering that workers generally took less interest in citizenship than the middle class. (From scanning the 1900 and 1910 U.S. Census Schedules, it appears that middle class Italians were generally naturalized while workers were not). But after the war, the Garibaldi Society and the Sons of Italy were not the class-oriented organizations they had been earlier. The fluidity of class lines had made the class snobbery of Melilli an anachronism. When the Sons of Italy was reorganized in

1918, it differed little from the Garibaldi Society, also being revived at the time. Membership was now less exclusive, and, in fact, some people belonged to both clubs.<sup>16</sup> The only difference was that the Garibaldi Society had more members and was better off financially.<sup>17</sup>

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Several years after the Russell Strike, Italians began to gain importance in local politics. This was primarily because of the increase in the number of Italian voters, but would certainly not have been possible had not the Italian colony united as a bloc to vote for Italian candidates. Both of these developments, in turn, arose from a new feeling of community among the Italians: had not the Italian middle class taken an interest in the working class, not as many workers could have become citizens, and had the classes remained as divided as in earlier years, the few voting workers would not have felt an obligation to elect Italian merchants.

Without exception, the earliest Italian political candidates belonged to the new middle class. Most were also members of the "old" middle class, having been "tradesmen" back in Italy. As I mentioned Chapter Five, the first Italian to run for office in Middletown was James Galanto, an Abruzzi-born grocer. Mr. Galanto was

defeated in his 1910 candidacy for Justice of the Peace, but a tailor named Peter Terragna was successful in November of 1916.<sup>18</sup>

To be elected Justice of the Peace was admittedly not a great honor, but Mr. Terragna's success proved that Italians could win elections in Middletown. The following January, both the Republican and Democratic Parties nominated Italian candidates for seats on the Common Council. The Republican candidate was Angelo Caiazza, the Abruzzi-born president of the Columbus Club.<sup>19</sup> The Democrat was Gerardo Roccapriore, a native of Melilli and a former member of the Italian Republican Club.<sup>20</sup>

Both these candidates based their election hopes on the support of the Italian colony. A political advertisement for Mr. Caiazza showed him to be involved in an impressive array of ethnic community activities. The advertisement presented Caiazza as "tireless in his efforts on behalf of the community welfare and the benefit of the Italian citizens. His election would be a substantial recognition of his ability and integrity and of the importance of the Italian population as a factor in our municipal affairs."<sup>21</sup>

Caiazza was defeated in the election, but Roccapriore won. The Hartford Times interpreted his victory as the result of "a decided swing to the democratic fold" among Italian voters.<sup>22</sup> Some Italians were certainly switching

to the Democratic Party. Roccapriore himself was an example. By 1924, there were enough Italian Democrats to organize a successful ethnic political club.<sup>23</sup> The political shift of the Italians, however, is a poor explanation for Roccapriore's election. His victory was but part of a clean Democratic sweep of all city positions; he probably won because a large number of non-Italians voted the straight Democratic ticket. It was obvious that Mr. Roccapriore was one of the least popular of the Democratic candidates. The only Democratic councilman with fewer votes was Israel Mittelman, who got one less. Apparently, some Democratic voters chose Republican "Americans" over the Italian and the Jew.<sup>24</sup>

Italian bloc voting could help make up the votes a candidate lost to prejudice, but only the support of party-line voters could ensure his victory. By 1919, when ethnic prejudice was near its height in Connecticut, and when fewer people voted the straight Democratic ticket in Middletown, Roccapriore was voted out of office.<sup>25</sup> In 1920, Giuseppe Annino was soundly defeated in his candidacy for the Common Council, receiving the fewest votes of any of the Republican candidates.<sup>26</sup> In that year's election, the Penny Press explained, "the outcome was largely a personal matter, with little or no party feeling involved".<sup>27</sup>

The growing strength of the Italian bloc vote was proven in the election of 1923, in which Joseph P. Wrang (formerly Giuseppe Terragna) was elected councilman with the most votes of any of the candidates. Salvatore Mazzotta also won that year, and Guy Cambria the next. William E. Wrang, one of Middletown's first Italian physicians, was narrowly defeated in 1924 as the Democratic candidate.<sup>28</sup>

Without exception, all of the candidates during this period belonged to the middle class. The vast majority of their constituents, on whose support they depended, belonged to the working class. Clearly, Middletown's Italians were overcoming their earlier divisions to further the influence of their community.

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The political involvement of the Italian middle class could be interpreted as a sign of their increasingly close relationship with the larger Middletown community. Other indications of this link were the appearance of cross-ethnic business ventures in the 1920's, and the membership of prominent Italians in non-Italian social clubs. But the middle-class leadership was not just trying to lead the Italian community into the bland mass of American society. In the twenty years following the

Russell Strike they would actively promote a feeling of Italian separateness by organizing the feast of St. Sebastian and the building of St. Sebastian's Church.

Since the turn of the century, the immigrants from Melilli had held small celebrations on the day of their patron saint.<sup>29</sup> As the colony grew, the celebrations became neighborhood affairs, with lots of free food and drink, and music by the St. Sebastian's band. At first Antonio Amenta, a grocer, paid for the feast, but it grew too expensive for him. The Sons of Italy then assumed the responsibility.<sup>30</sup>

Back in Melilli, the statue of St. Sebastian had been an important part of the festivities. At the end of the seven day feast, young men would parade through the streets of the village, carrying the statue above them. Everyone would pin money to the dress of the statue as a sign of their devotion. This money would then go to the church. In 1908, an immigrant stonemason by the name of Sebastiano Marchese made a plaster replica of the St. Sebastian, which he gave to the feast here. After this, the custom of pinning money was added to the Middletown festivities. This money was sent back to the church in Melilli. The feast became larger, filling all of Ferry Street, and collections were taken to pay for the cost of the food and lighting.<sup>31</sup>

In 1913, a group of Court Street residents formed a "St. Sebastian's Festa Committee" with the intention of relocating the feast to their neighborhood.<sup>32</sup> The chairman of the committee was Santo Cannata, a grocer, who offered the use of his storefront window for housing the statue during the feast.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in the year following the Russell strike, the feast was moved from the working class neighborhood to the middle class neighborhood, where it remained for a long time.

The feast was not celebrated during World War I, but it grew enormously afterwards as the Melillese colony itself was swelled by new migration. In 1921, the Court Street businessmen reorganized the Festa Committee, and turned the feast into a huge attraction. The new committee was made up of Santo Cannata, Sebastiano Marchese, Mike Marino, Carmelo Miceli, Rosario Morello, Joe "Fish" Ruggeri, and others. All except Morello belonged to the middle class.<sup>34</sup>

To raise money for the feast, canvassers would go from door to door in the Italian neighborhoods taking collections. They would not only go through the East Side, but also to Portland, Cromwell and nearby cities, for Italians from all over would come to the feast. The celebration would last a whole weekend and would include music, food, fireworks, and an auction of the gifts which people had offered to the saint. The money which was

raised from the offerings would not be used to pay expenses, since it was felt to have religious significance. For a while, the money continued to be sent to the church in Melilli, but later the feast committee began to put it into a bank account in Middletown, with the hope that one day it would be used to build a St. Sebastian's Church in Middletown.<sup>35</sup>

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"If we didn't have the Feast of St. Sebastian, there wouldn't have been a St. Sebastian's Church," says Mike Marino.<sup>36</sup> In the 1920's, the annual feast became the focus of fundraising for the construction of an Italian Catholic Church in Middletown. Just as importantly, the celebration gave the immigrants a new feeling of devotion to their community. "We didn't have any Italian priest that came to Middletown to organize us to build an Italian church," Mr. Marino told me. "But through the feast of St. Sebastian, through that devotion that they had, from the Feast Committee they organized a Church Committee to raise funds to build the church."<sup>37</sup> The immigrants began to shift their loyalties from Melilli to Middletown, and hoped that some parts of their old way of life could be brought here.

In Melilli, St. Sebastian's Church had been the common meeting ground for all the diverse families and classes of the village. It had been there for generations and in a sense belonged to no one in particular, except maybe the clergy.<sup>38</sup> In Middletown, however, the church would be the gift of the bourgeoisie to the Italian community at large. The church committee, like the feast committee, was composed heavily of Court Street merchants. These people had already shown themselves worthy of responsibility in their involvement with the feast, the city government, and the citizenship programs. For building the church, they were still more qualified, obviously having control over the most money.

By the spring of 1927, some \$5000 had been raised by the feasts. Perhaps realizing that at this rate the church would never be built, the Italian bourgeoisie decided to take more dramatic steps toward beginning construction. On May 10, 1927, Salvatore Mazzotta called together a group of fifteen prominent Italians to discuss plans for building the church.<sup>39</sup> The Italians organized themselves into an "Executive Building Committee", and elected Mr. Mazzotta as their president, Salvatore Adorno as vice president, and Sebastiano Muscatello as treasurer.<sup>40</sup> A few days later, this committee went to Hartford to ask Bishop John J. Nilan for permission to build the church. The Bishop demurred, saying that as long as St. John's Church had a priest who spoke Italian,

there was no need for a separate Italian church.<sup>41</sup>

It was true that Dr. Donovan, the priest of St. John's, could speak Italian, but his Italian parishioners remained convinced that they needed their own church. Despite being rebuffed by the Bishop, the executive committee went ahead with their plans. On June 5, they held a mass meeting at the St. Aloysius Hall, and won the support of the Italian community at large. At this meeting, they raised \$23,000 in pledges.<sup>42</sup>

The committee kept the Bishop informed of their desire to build the church. They told him that the Italian colony was growing too large to be served adequately by the Irish Catholic church and warned him that some Italians might be converted by the Protestant missionaries if action was not taken. In 1930, the Bishop finally approved the idea of an Italian church, and appointed a priest to oversee the project.<sup>43</sup>

Immediately, the Italians started a fundraising campaign, which was headed by Antonio Marino, Andrea Pinto and Salvatore Cannata.<sup>44</sup> Within a short time, the original pledges were collected. By soliciting money from door to door in Middletown and Portland, another \$50,000 was raised. With this money, the church committee bought the land on Washington Street and hired an architect to design a replica of the St. Sebastian Church of Melilli.<sup>45</sup>

Ground was broken on January 28, 1931. The contractor was Salvatore Mazzotta himself, who offered to do the job at a very low price. On top of this, he donated much of his own time and money, so that he ended up doing the job for quite a bit less than what it cost him. Following Mr. Mazzotta's example, other Italian contractors and businessmen contributed funds and building supplies.<sup>46</sup>

According to James Annino and others, tradesmen and workers contributed their labor in honor of the saint.

Since in those days...the great depression of 1929 was still in progress and building construction was virtually at a standstill, many Italian tradesmen such as carpenters, stonemasons, bricklayers, laborers, mechanical and electrical workers gave their time to work at the church for two weeks gratis. Some gave more time because they were still unemployed and received<sup>47</sup> two packs of cigarettes for their labor.

Workers who were employed elsewhere did their part by donating small sums of money. "I no work, but I put a little money to it," says Luciano Campisi. "I help them out. We all help out."<sup>48</sup>

When the church was completed, in the fall of 1932, Middletown's Italian-Americans had created a powerful and enduring monument to their solidarity. The building of the church had demanded, and had brought out, a remarkable unity of purpose. Under the leadership of their wealthiest paesani, Middletown's individual Italians had

been melded into a true community.

CHAPTER EIGHT  
Opportunity

-1-

The growth of middle-class influence, in the fifteen years leading up to the construction of the church, may seem a matter of course. Shouldn't the most successful men of the community also be chosen as leaders?

Middle-class community leadership may seem natural to Americans, but this is one important respect in which American and Sicilian cultures differed. In Southern Italy, as I suggested in Chapter One, no such thing as a community existed. Despite the loyalty a Sicilian may have had to the abstract idea of his village, he placed little trust in his fellow villagers. The village was divided into smaller communities based on class, which in turn were broken into individual families. Part of the problem was undoubtedly economic; especially in the late nineteenth century, there was not enough wealth to go around and the peasants found themselves competing for survival. The distance and distrust between the classes also had its roots in the lack of economic mobility. In such a situation of conflict and mistrust, it would be impossible for true community leadership, middle class or otherwise, to emerge. Workers might have respected or even feared members of the middle class, but they would be

unlikely to give them their loyalty.

Life in America was considerably different, the immigrants found. Most obviously, the first Italians who came found themselves isolated in a strange land, far from their friends and family. Unable to speak English, and having no one else to whom to turn for help, they occasionally asked the aid of other Italians who had been in this country longer. In Middletown, at least, these were the merchants. Even when more immigrants began coming, and a sizable colony developed, the immigrants' continued isolation from native-born residents helped them think of themselves as members of a special group. Whereas in Sicily it was the family which stood alone against the untrustworthy village, in America it was the colony which stood against the unfriendly city. And although immigrants no longer needed as much help from the established merchants, it was to these experienced and educated individuals that workers still turned when they needed assistance.

Nevertheless, the colony once again split along class lines. Instead of four classes there were now only three or even two -- with workers on the one hand and tradesmen and merchants on the other -- but these classes still remained in their own particular social clubs, neighborhoods, and of course jobs. After class tension reached its height in the Russell strike, the Italian

community was pushed back together by the hostility of the larger community. The merchants and tradesmen, whom Middletown citizens may have seen as the "better class" of immigrant, began to act as liaisons between the mass of Italian workers and the native-born residents. They asked for an end to the "race prejudice" currently being directed against their countrymen, and began to take over the citizenship programs. The fact that many middle-class Italians had already been naturalized contributed to their qualifications.

The pressures of isolation and prejudice certainly helped Italians overcome their differences, but they don't explain everything. Even after prejudice began to subside, the Italian community continued to grow more united and more influenced by the middle class. The old class divisions of the social clubs dissolved, and working-class Italians became an important voting bloc in the support of middle class Italian candidates. Through the feast of St. Sebastian, Italian businessmen further developed community spirit, which they then directed toward the building of St. Sebastian's church. Such developments would have been nearly impossible in the old, divided society of Sicily. There could never have been enough external pressure to force the various classes together into such a tight community. Clearly, things had changed.

The classes were not just held together by necessity, but were actually blurring together. Families which had stayed for generations in the peasantry were now beginning to move into the middle class. The new promise of socio-economic mobility now made it possible for a poor Italian laborer to sympathize with a wealthy Italian merchant. The laborer now saw no hard and fast distinction between himself and the powerful community leader. By working hard and saving his money, he might one day imitate the success of that self-made man he admired. To the laborer, merchants and tradesmen were no longer hostile, alien forces; they were, in a sense, visions of his future self.

-2-

All of the Italians whom I interviewed spoke of America as the land of opportunity. Luciano Campisi, a laborer all his life, told me that he came to America "to be better man. I mean, I'm coming over here, you know, for the opportunity, to be better man."<sup>1</sup> In response to my questions about discrimination in Middletown, Max Corvo told me "you could say Middletown has been good to the Italians, but that's not the real question. The real question is -- did it give them opportunities? And it did."<sup>2</sup>

Such answers tended to be short and vague.

"Opportunity" seems not to be anything which needs to be defined or supported with examples. It is something of a creed which everyone accepts without question.

Owning one's own home, earning a good wage, and being able to retire comfortably are definitely important aspects of "opportunity", according to what I have read into what people have told me. Another part is certainly occupational mobility. Max Corvo emphasized the accomplishments of the Melilllese in business and in the professions. Dr. LaBella and Mike Marino spoke of themselves and their families as examples of American opportunity. And Luciano Campisi and Joseph Passanisi, who themselves never rose out of the working class, proudly told me of children and relatives who did.

In this final chapter, I have attempted to determine whether the hope of upward occupational mobility was realistic. I have adapted the methods Stephan Thernstrom used in his Poverty and Progress to fit the Italian community and the available sources. Using information taken from the Middletown city directories, I have traced over four hundred individuals over periods of six to twenty five years. My method, of which further particulars are given in the Appendix, was as follows: I first compiled lists of the name and occupation of every person of Italian surname listed in the city directories

at five year intervals from 1887 to 1922. Then, beginning with the 1897 list, I checked the names against those appearing in the two preceding lists. Those who had not been listed before formed my subject group for that year. I made four subject groups, for 1897, 1902, 1907, and 1912. I then traced each group through the next two directory lists. Those who appeared in either of the two lists were taken to be "long-term" immigrants. I then traced these long-term immigrants forward through my next two directory lists, and backwards through the yearly directory volumes preceding their appearance on my lists. I thus found the occupation of each individual upon his first arrival in Middletown, and his occupation at five-year intervals beginning with the year of my closest following list.

In so doing, I got an overview of the careers of the great majority of adult male Italians who immigrated to Middletown during the years 1893-1912 and established themselves as residents of this city. In many cases, my evidence was supported by information taken from the directories of 1900 and 1910, the U.S. Census schedules from the same years, and the biographies given in James Vincenzo Annino's Arrivederci Melilli, Hello Middletown.

To aid me in interpreting the evidence, I grouped jobs into three categories, which I feel roughly corresponded to perceived class differences. These were

the "working class", the "tradesman class", and the "managerial class". The working class, which includes both Thernstrom's unskilled and semiskilled manual groups, is ranked the lowest. <sup>3</sup> Workers, whether factory hands or common laborers, were generally paid low wages. Their jobs could be filled by immigrants fresh off the boat, since they required no skills which could not be learned within a few days. There was little chance for advancement within these jobs: the most that could be hoped for was that one would move up to a more skilled position or be made a foreman.

The next group, tradesmen, is essentially an intermediary category, in which the jobs demanded neither mindless physical work nor the investment of capital. It is made up of men whose jobs required skills which were difficult to acquire, or who held positions which exempted them from manual labor. Among its members are masons, salesmen, tailors, and clerks. Such jobs generally paid fairly well; sometimes as much for a day's work as a mill hand could make in a week. Furthermore, they offered much greater opportunities for advancement.

The highest class consists of businessmen and professionals. Its members either had invested significant amounts of capital or had been highly educated in a particular skill. Many of the members were tradesmen such as barbers and shoemakers who had bought their own

shops. I have also included farmers in this group, since they could be said to own their own businesses, and because land ownership was quite prestigious.

When I speak of an individual as upwardly mobile, I mean that over the period in question he moved from a low prestige position to a higher prestige position. My data do not concern mobility within a class, nor are they influenced by fluctuations in an individual's career. Although I may mention such fluctuations, I am mostly interested in comparing where an individual ended up with where he started out.

I must stress that my work covers only a small part of the ground which Stephen Thernstrom covered. I am examining only the occupational mobility of individuals, almost all of them first generation immigrants. I will not attempt to document their accumulation of property, or the progress of their children or other family members. Further research would have been forbiddingly time-consuming.

I must also repeat that "opportunity" in Middletown meant more to Italian immigrants than occupational mobility. But although my discussion may not adequately represent opportunity, it will certainly not exaggerate its true extent. In fact, it will greatly understate it. As far as the accumulation of property is concerned, I feel confident in saying that nearly all truly permanent

immigrants were upwardly mobile. From the biographies given in James Annino's book, it is obvious that the vast majority of laborers, as well as tradesmen and merchants, were eventually able to buy homes in Middletown. Inter-generational mobility also seems very high. Although I have no concrete evidence to support this, Max Corvo has assured me that large numbers of second generation immigrants rose into the middle class.

Admittedly, most property accumulation and inter-generational mobility came after the community had already been solidly established, but a few workers did buy houses during the early years of the colony, as I mentioned in Chapter Four. The individual occupational mobility which I will now discuss coincided with the formation of the community. While middle class Italians were trying to gain influence over the working class, many Italian workers were ascending into the bourgeoisie.

-3-

The most noticeable thing about the Italian men who came to Middletown during the period 1893-1912, is that few of them stayed here for long. Of the 116 Italians who first appeared in my 1897 list, only 29 appeared on either of the two following lists. 75% had left town, probably for good. The disappearance rates for the other three

groups were slightly less, but still high, at 58%, 49%, and 65%, respectively. As the census schedules show few Italians even fifty years old, it is unlikely that many of these were deaths.

Thernstrom also noticed a high rate of departure among his laborers, and interpreted this as a sign of their economic failure in Newburyport. "Laborers like these were not lured to leave Newburyport by the prospect of investing their savings and skills more profitably elsewhere; they left the city when the depressed state of the local labor market made it impossible for them to subsist where they were."<sup>4</sup>

To some extent, this is also true of Middletown Italians. I earlier mentioned two large migrations out of town, one during the recession of 1907-1908, and another following the firing of the strikers at the Russell Company. Obviously, these emigres were driven by economic necessity. Other Italians drifted in and out of town in response to smaller changes in the job market. Such was the case with Giuseppe Fiducia, who according to James Annino, "was a weaver and worked at the Russell Manufacturing Company and also at the Starr Mill in Rockfall. When work was slack there he would go to Lawrence, Mass., and work there as a weaver."<sup>5</sup> Mr. Fiducia was not unusual. Most "permanent" Italian residents of Middletown tried their luck elsewhere at some

point.<sup>6</sup>

Other immigrants made occasional trips to Italy and back. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, some of Middletown's Italians took advantage of the low steamship rates and spent the winters in Melilli. Others, it is clear, spent a few years there before returning to Middletown.<sup>7</sup>

Among the Italians whose careers I have studied, there seems to have been a lot of migration. Of the total of 1,111 individual Italians who appeared in my four groups of new immigrants, only 453 stayed long enough to be considered "long term" immigrants. The others left Middletown too soon to appear in two separate directory lists. Of these 453 residents, only 170 appeared in five consecutive directory lists, while 182 left town before the period was over, and 101 left briefly but later returned.

Thernstrom decided that the high geographic mobility of his laborers biased his study towards overestimating upward class mobility. "To analyze the social adjustment of workmen who settled in a particular city long enough to be recorded on two or more censuses," he wrote, "is to concentrate on laborers who were most resistant to pressures to migrate, and these tended to be men who had already attained a modicum of economic security in the community."<sup>8</sup>

In Middletown, working class Italians were slightly more likely to leave town than tradesmen or merchants. In the combined 1897, 1902, 1907, and 1912 groups of new immigrants, 925 Italians were listed as working class. Of these, 360 (39%) eventually became long term residents of Middletown. Also in aggregate, 78 of the 157 immigrants belonging to the "tradesmen" and "managerial" classes, or 50%, became long term residents.<sup>9</sup>

There was a class difference here, but not an overwhelming one. Whether first arriving as grocers or ditch-diggers, a large number of Italian immigrants left Middletown too soon to appear in two of the directory years I have chosen.

Since half of even the most "successful" Italians soon left, I suspect that Thernstrom's connection of mobility to failure is not valid in this case. Although, as I just mentioned, some Italians did leave because of economic necessity, it seems probable that the most common reason for departure was simply to return to Italy. It is by no means certain that those who returned did so because they were failures. As I mentioned in earlier chapters, many had come here to raise money with which to start a farm or a business in Italy. Perhaps some returned precisely because they had been successful in realizing their original dream.

Partly for this reason, I feel that the unavoidable "bias" of my research is not terribly damaging. More importantly, the entire question of geographic mobility is irrelevant to what I am seeking to prove. Since this thesis is a study of the development of a community, rather than of social mobility, I am really not interested in everyone who happened to pass through town. I am mainly concerned with those Italian immigrants who stayed long enough to be considered members of the community. Although it is useful to keep in mind that most Italian men were transients, such people are not the subject of this thesis.

-4-

The typical Italian immigrant to Middletown spent his first few years working as a laborer. Of the 116 immigrants who first appeared on my 1897 list, 90 were laborers and four held other working class jobs. This situation changed little over the period of early immigration. Of the 542 immigrants who first appeared in my 1912 list, 491 were working class; 348 of these were laborers. These working class immigrants included men who had been tradesmen in Italy, as well as ones who had been farm workers.<sup>10</sup>

Class distinctions were leveled, but not for long. The immigrants soon found that the process of mobility differed for men of different backgrounds. Men who had practiced trades in Italy found more opportunities for advancement than did unskilled farm workers. Although some tradesmen remained within the working class, many others resumed their trade shortly after their arrival. Some of them later opened businesses, such as barber shops or building contractorships, which were based on their skills. For peasants, on the other hand, the way to enter the middle class was to open a saloon or a grocery; others first worked as bartenders or store clerks. These two methods of mobility were not strictly confined to their respective classes. Some tradesmen opened businesses which had no connection to their trades, while some workers learned a trade after coming to America.

A few of the old tradesmen began to follow their calling immediately after arriving in Middletown. Such was the case with Giuseppe (Joseph) L. Pagano, who had trained as a tailor in Melilli, and who arrived in Middletown in 1900.<sup>11</sup> According to the U.S. Census schedules for that year, "Joseph Pacanno" could neither read, write, nor speak English; nevertheless, he had already gained employment as a tailor. In the city directory for that year, he was listed as a tailor at Harry Press' clothing store. Shortly afterwards, he is said to have opened his own tailor shop on Main Street,

where he also sold steamship tickets and handled money orders.<sup>12</sup> He is listed this way in the 1907 directory, and in all the subsequent directories in which I looked. Most tradesmen took somewhat longer than Mr. Pagano to get their old jobs back.

It is impossible to give precise figures, but it is clear that there were many "tradesmen" who never made it out of the working class after coming to Middletown. Sebastiano Amato is said to have been "a mason by trade, but he didn't follow it in this country."<sup>13</sup> Mr. Amato is first listed in the 1906 directory as a laborer, and later as an employee at the Russell Manufacturing Company.

Some tradesmen never followed their trades in Middletown, but still managed to rise out of the working class. Mike Marino has informed me that many of the immigrants who later opened groceries and meat markets on Court Street had been barbers, tailors, and carpenters back in Melilli. He cites his father, Antonio Marino, as an example.<sup>14</sup> For such people, their old status and skills had little to do with their economic advance in this country. They had no greater chance of success in business than did common peasants, except, perhaps, because of their stronger desire to succeed.

Although it is again impossible to give exact figures, it is clear that many former peasants rose out of the working class after arriving in Middletown. As I

mentioned in Chapter Four, the most common way was to open a small shop in one's home, which the wife would run while the husband continued to work as a laborer. Michael Matteo, a native of Abruzzi, tried to do this but was not successful. Matteo's name first appeared in the 1897 directory, and his job was said to be laboring. By the time of the 1900 census, he was still a day laborer; he was thirty-eight years old, spoke English, but was illiterate. He had a wife, Teresia, and an infant daughter. By 1907, he was working at Tuttle's Brickyard in Newfield, but was also listed as running a grocery in his home. Most likely, his wife managed the store while he was busy making bricks. This store was not a success; by 1910 it had folded and Matteo was out of work. By 1912, he was back in the working class, as a quarryman with the Fox-Becker Granite Co. in Maromas. After that he worked on the railroad.

Sebastiano Greco was more fortunate. He is said to have arrived in Middletown in 1899 at the age of 18 years, but was apparently not the head of a household until 1908; he is first listed in the directory of that year, as a laborer. By 1917 he had found work in a local saloon, and supplemented his income by growing vegetables on his Pease Avenue property. Prohibition probably ended his saloon job, but by 1922 he had managed to open a business of his own, as a "florist and market gardener". His florist shop was later named "Greco the Florist" and finally "Greco's

Flower Shop".<sup>15</sup>

A few workers learned trades after arriving in Middletown. Such was the case with Salvatore Mazzotta, who was later to be influential in the building of St. Sebastian's Church. Mazzotta is said to have immigrated in 1900, at the age of 21 years. He is first listed in the 1907 directory as a laborer, a probably worked with Mylchreest and O'Brien Construction. While with this job, Mazzotta is said to have "learned the masonry trade." According to the directories of 1910 and 1912, he briefly ran a grocery on Cherry Street, possibly while continuing to work as a mason. By 1917, he had become a building contractor and sold building supplies. He operated this business throughout the period in question, and employed many other Italian immigrants.<sup>16</sup>

Upwardly mobile workers were not uncommon, but neither were they in the majority. The typical resident worker would have been one who never opened a grocery or started a trade. Sebastiano Fazzino was a good example. He was probably born in Melilli in 1865, and immigrated in 1908.<sup>17</sup> He is listed in the 1908 directory as a laborer and in the 1910 Census schedules as a laborer in a coal yard. At that time, he lived with his wife and sixteen-year old daughter, who worked in a silk mill. Also in their rented home were two families of boarders, one of four members and one of three. Fazzino is listed

in both the 1912 and 1917 directories as a laborer, but does not appear in either the 1922 or 1927 directories. Most probably, he had returned to Melilli after the First World War, although it is possible that he died. Many other Italian workers, such as Luigi Aresco, Mario Cavalieri, and Salvatore LaBella, stayed in Middletown throughout the period without any sign of mobility.

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It is unfortunate that I cannot supply numerical data concerning the mobility rates of peasants and tradesmen. The sources available (the directories and the census) simply do not say anything about individuals' backgrounds. But while it is not possible to differentiate between the two old classes, it may be useful to lump them together and examine them as a whole. Given that members of both classes started out roughly equal (as laborers) and were then distributed through all the available positions in the colony, it seems likely that whatever helped one immigrant advance helped another. If peasants could become grocers, there was no reason why tailors couldn't do the same. If immigrants who had been trained as masons in Italy could work their way back up to that position in Middletown, there was at least the possibility that inexperienced fellow-laborers could learn the trade here.

Counting all four of my subject groups, I have traced a total of 378 Italian men who were first listed in the directory as holding working class jobs.<sup>18</sup> Of these 378 workers, 267 (71%) were still in the working class at the end of the period over which they were studied, or, if they left town during this time, in the last directory list in which they appeared. Thirty (8%) had moved into the tradesman class, and 58 (15%) had moved into the managerial class. In 23 cases (6%), I could not discern any pattern, either because their jobs were not specified at later dates or because it was impossible to distinguish their careers from those of relatives with the same name. Of the 355 workers whose careers I could trace with reasonable certainty, 75% stayed in the working class, and 25% rose into the other two classes.

The rate of mobility varied somewhat among the four subject groups. The 1897 group was the least mobile -- only three (16%) of the nineteen workers made it out of the working class. The most mobility was in the 1902 group, in which 12 of the 25 workers whose careers are traceable (48%) took up trades or opened businesses. These differences may be statistical flukes, or they may reflect the fact that between 1898 and 1902 many upwardly mobile Melilli tradesmen came to town. The 1907 and 1912 groups show more equal rates of mobility. In 1907, 30 of the 149 workers whose careers are traceable (20%) moved into the other two classes, while in 1912, 43 of 162 (26%)

of such workers were mobile.

Of the total of thirty workers who became "tradesmen", only fifteen practiced what could truly be called trades. Of these fifteen, thirteen became building tradesmen; eight became masons, two carpenters, one a bricklayer, one a plasterer and another a painter. The other two were a tailor and a blacksmith. Of the fifteen other people who rose into the tradesman class, eight worked in various stores and businesses, and seven had worked their way up within their laboring or industrial jobs; three were foremen, two machinists, and two molders. Significantly, only two of these "tradesman" jobs -- tailor and blacksmith -- were restricted to men who had actually completed an apprenticeship. The remaining twenty-eight jobs were open to ambitious workers in construction crews, laboring gangs, and factories. Therefore, many of these favored individuals may well have been peasants back in Italy.

Part of the reason why so few workers became "tradesmen", and even fewer entered the truly skilled trades, is that such skills eventually helped most tradesmen rise higher, into the managerial class. Of the 58 workers who made it into the highest class, thirteen opened businesses which were based upon manual skills. Five of these opened shoe repair shops, three opened barber shops, one opened a tailor shop, and one a jewelry

and watch repair store. Three others, all of whom had worked as building tradesmen, became contractors. Most of these men undoubtedly based their economic ascent on skills they had learned in Italy.

Most of the workers who rose into the bourgeoisie, however, opened businesses which demanded no knowledge of a trade. By far the most common enterprise was selling food. Twenty workers opened groceries, three started meat markets, two opened bakeries, and four ran other kinds of food stores. It is quite possible that many of the proprietors of these stores had been mere farm workers before coming to America. Other nouveau-riche peasants included four florists, two saloonkeepers, two farmers, two macaroni manufacturers, an oil-burner salesman, the secretary-treasurer of an importing company, a real estate agent, an insurance agent, a steamship ticket agent, and one man who sold real estate, insurance, and steamship tickets. Clearly, Middletown offered many opportunities to unskilled laborers.

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Nearly all of the Italians who came to Middletown had started out as workers. Of the 455 long-term residents whom I traced, only 42 had entered into the trades immediately upon their arrival, and only 22 had entered into the managerial class.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, not all of these distinguished men remained within the middle classes:

five tradesmen (12%) and two merchants (9%) eventually sank down into the working class.

As a result of the downward mobility of a few tradesmen and merchants, and of the upward mobility of many workers, there was a reshuffling of the immigrant middle class in the first thirty years of the colony. Of the 46 Italians who were listed as tradesmen at the end of traceable careers, 30 (65%) had been workers at the time of their arrival in Middletown. Fourteen (31%) had been tradesmen from the beginning, and two (4%) had started out in the managerial class. Of the 97 Italians who belonged to the managerial class at the end of traceable careers, 58 (60%) had started out as workers, 22 (23%) as tradesmen, and 17 (17%) had stayed in the managerial class. Thus although the majority of workers never made it into the middle class, most of the middle class was composed of men who had once been workers.

Admittedly, many of the upwardly mobile "workers" may have been tradesmen or merchants back in Italy. However, a larger number were probably farm workers whose families had stayed within the peasantry for generations. As noted above, many of the upwardly mobile workers took positions which were not dependent on difficult manual skills. Most of these men had probably been unskilled laborers.

While these laborers were rising into the middle classes, some of the tradesmen and merchants who had looked down upon them in Italy remained within Middletown's pool of day laborers. The old class lines of Italy no longer corresponded to the economic reality of the New World.

## CONCLUSION

The high rate of occupational mobility undoubtedly relaxed class tensions and strengthened the influence of the middle class. Since learning English, acquiring industrial habits and becoming a citizen greatly increased one's chance of success, assimilation was certainly a part of the process of mobility. For these reasons, Middletown's Italian merchants were able to gain control over a unified community and lead it into mainstream life.

To a large extent, my work simply supports the cultural pluralist position described at the beginning. The formation of the ethnic community, it seems, contributed to the assimilation of Middletown's Italians. Not only did this community literally help immigrants become American citizens, but more importantly it taught them a distinctly American style of social relations; it introduced them to the idea of cross-class consensus and accustomed them to middle class leadership of workers. By organizing their ethnic community, the Italians modeled themselves after all the other groups which make up America's heterogeneous society. They had found their appropriate niche.

Although my emphasis on class structure and relations is used to support a cultural pluralist position, it distinguishes my work from that of others who ascribe to the same theory. The failure of other works to emphasize class can be seen, to some extent, as a sign of provincialism. American society may be built on a coalition of ethnic groups, but most other societies are built on a hierarchy of economic classes. To present assimilation as a process resulting in ethnic consciousness ignores what the immigrants may have thought the more important part of becoming American. While immigrants were gaining a new identity as Hungarian-, Russian-, or Italian-Americans, they were losing their old identity as peasants, artisans, or merchants.

This suggests that the cultural pluralist position may retain some of the assumptions of the earlier, less sophisticated theories. In discussions of the experiences of new immigrants, some cultural pluralists still heavily emphasize the acquisition of a new culture. By doing so, they focus on a process which is central to the earlier conformist theories but, I would argue, incidental to a theory based on diversity. Obviously, "assimilation" involved a lot of cultural adjustment, but when we are talking about emigrants from nineteenth century (or even twentieth century) Europe, we should not ignore the importance of class.

An intriguing extension of this work would be to continue it up through the present. In particular, it would be interesting to see how the ethnic community changed when it grew far beyond the dimensions of the original oppressed enclave. Clearly, it was still possible to maintain an identity separate from the rest of the town, but how was this accomplished, and how successfully?

Perhaps the most important questions deal with the future, and on a national scale: is the ethnic community a permanent part of American life, or is it just a passing phenomenon? Other studies have noted the importance of the third generation in perpetuating ethnicity, but what of the fourth and the fifth? Will the descendants of past immigrants become so Americanized that they lose their separate identity? If so, will there be a resurgence of class consciousness, the evolution of a more complicated, confused identity, or, perhaps, the decline of group identity as such? Close examination of present day events may reveal some answers, but only if scholars ask the right questions.

APPENDIX  
Notes on Method

The task of distinguishing Italian names from other names involves a fair amount of subjectivity, which was fortunately not very damaging in the case of my work in Chapter Eight. During the early part of this century, Middletown had very few residents of Spanish or Hispanic extraction, which would have lowered the accuracy of my decisions. Occasionally French, Polish, or Greek names sounded somewhat Italian, but these cases were rare. Before I compiled my results, I went back and crossed off the people of whose origin I was uncertain.

I also did my best to get rid of third generation immigrants like the younger Pienovis, as I felt they were more American than Italian. I eliminated the Costellos for the same reason. Both these families were upwardly mobile. My data include the Terragnas but not the Wrangs, mostly because I forgot to add the latter until it was too late. Always, I erred on the side of shutting out suitable subjects rather than including unsuitable ones.

I chose to start with the 1892 directory instead of the 1890 mainly because no directory was issued in 1920; I felt it was more important to keep the intervals even than to have the numbers of the years be divisible by

five. Furthermore, I hoped that the information compiled about the years 1907, 1912, and 1922 would be useful for other purposes, as these dates were significant in the history I was telling. I also had expected that it would be useful to have one of my subject groups represent only the Italians who came before the Melillesi. Since the Melillesi started coming in 1898, the preceding year was the obvious cut off point.

The reason I traced people for only twenty years was that the longer someone is traced, the greater the chance that his career may become confused with that of someone else. I was sensitive to the possibility of getting people confused, and for this reason I scratched some people off my list and put others in the "uncertain" category, depending on when the possible confusion occurred. Nevertheless, I made every effort to trace as many careers as possible, and I accepted variant spellings if they seemed plausible. When possible, I distinguished the careers of individuals with identical names by comparing their addresses.

I continued to trace the careers of individuals even if they were missing in one of the directory lists. If I didn't do this, my sample would have been very small, since most Italians left Middletown at some point. The sample would not only be small, but would show an exaggerated amount of upward mobility, since aspiring

shopowners would probably not leave town. Furthermore, I didn't want anyone reappearing in a later group, which might happen if I assumed that a brief absence was the same as a permanent departure. However, I did not continue to trace their careers if they were missing from two consecutive directory lists, even if they were listed in the Portland part of the directory.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

- 1) Marino, Mike, personal interview, Feb. 26, 1984.
- 2) Corvo, Max, personal interview, Nov. 30, 1983; according to Mike Marino, there are now 16,000 people of Melilllese descent in Middletown.
- 3) This theory is discussed in Gordon, Milton M., Assimilation in American Life, pp. 88-114; an example of this way of thinking is Fairchild, Henry Pratt, Immigration.
- 4) Gordon discusses the melting pot theory on pp. 115-131; an example is Handlin, Oscar, The Uprooted.
- 5) Discussed in Gordon, pp. 132-159; the latter observation is my own.
- 6) Glazer, Nathan, and Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, Beyond the Melting Pot, preface, pp. xcvi-xcviii; pp. 288-292.

Chapter One

- 1) See also Sangree, Walter H., Mel Hyblaeum, p. 33.
- 2) Ibid., p. 11.
- 3) Ibid., p. 23; Iorizzo, Luciano J. and Mondello, Salvatore, The Italian Americans, pp 56-57; Nelli, Humbert S., From Immigrants To Ethnics; Corvo, Max, personal interview, Nov. 30, 1983].
- 4) Sangree, p. 22.
- 5) LaBella, Louis O., personal interview, Dec. 19, 1983.
- 6) Nelli, p. 26.
- 7) Nelli, pp 134-135; Glazer, Nathan, and Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, Beyond the Melting Pot, p. 195.
- 8) Nelli, p. 29.

- 9) Ibid., p. 22.
- 10) Ibid., pp 22-23.
- 11) Iorizzo and Mondello, p. 57.
- 12) Ibid., pp 56-58.
- 13) Sangree, p. 24.
- 14) Corvo, Max, personal interview, Nov. 30, 1983.
- 15) See also Sangree, pp 24-25.
- 16) Sangree, p. 25; Corvo.
- 17) Corvo
- 18) Marino, Mike, personal interview, Feb. 26, 1984.
- 19) Ibid
- 20) Glazer and Moynihan, pp. 182-183; Iorizzo and Mondello, p. 62.
- 21) Glazer and Moynihan, pp. 182-183; Iorizzo and Mondello, p. 62.
- 22) Glazer and Moynihan, p. 182; Sangree, p. 25.
- 23) Fenton, Edwin, Immigrants and Unions, p. 37.

## Chapter Two

- 1) Chafee, Grace Irene, "Middletown", The Connecticut Quarterly, Vol. IV, 1898, No. 1, p. 29.
- 2) Fenton, Edwin, Immigrants and Unions, pp. 30, 44; Koenig, Samuel, Immigrant Settlements in Connecticut, p. 24; Iorizzo, Luciano J., and Mondello, Salvatore, The Italian Americans, p. 64; Sangree, Walter H., "Mel Hyblaeum", p. 25.
- 3) Nelli, Humbert S., From Immigrants to Ethnics, p. 79; Fenton, p. 37.
- 4) Fenton, p. 37, footnote, p. 37.
- 5) This was the case with Lawrence, Massachusetts, which had 35,000 workers, and Patterson, New Jersey, which had 25,000 workers. (Dubofsky, Melvyn, We Shall Be All, pp.

249, 264.

6) "Middletown Tribune Souvenir Edition", p. 45-46, 55-56, 44; Middletown and Portland Directory, 1896.

7) "Tribune", p. 20.

8) For information about Middletown's industrial history, consult Gross, R. Barrett, and Engstrom, David, "The Development of Industry In Middletown"; Engstrom, David W., "A Tale of Two Cities"; Druker, Michele, "Weighed, Counted, and Measured"; Hennigan, Anne, "Railroads and Economic Development in Middletown"; Beers, J.B., History of Middlesex County; and "Tribune".

9) Abstract of the 12th Census: 1900, pp. 136-137, 363, 368, 372, 374, 379-381.

10) "Tribune", p. 20; pp. 62-63.

11) Ibid., p. 102; Sherrow, Doris, "Jews In Portland", e.g., p. 16.

12) Krakaur, Keith, "The Ideology of Mobility", pp. 42-43, 46, 56-57; Loether, Paul, "The Brownstone Quarrying Industry In Portland, p. 9.

13) Centennial Celebration of Portland, Connecticut, p. 43.

14) 1900 U.S. Census Schedules, Middlesex County, Town of Middletown and Town of Portland; see also Beers, p. 519; see also Abstract of the 13th Census of the United States: 1910, With Supplement For Connecticut, p. 590.

15) For information about worker housing, consult Loether, pp. 9-10.

16) 1900 U.S. Census Schedules; Raczka, Theodore J., "Polish Immigration To New England", pp. 151-152; also familiarity with city directories of the time.

17) Fenton, p. 432; Centennial Celebration, p. 59.

18) Centennial Celebration, p. 59.

19) Penny Press, March 24, 1904, "Vote To Reduce Stock".

20) Between 1890 and 1910, the population of Portland dropped from 4,687 to 3,425. (1910 Abstract, p. 573); see also Loether, pp. 18-19.

21) Directory, 1900.

22) Works Projects Administration, Sketch of Maromas, pp.

8-9.

23) Directory, 1900; U.S. Census Schedules, 1900; From the Census Schedules, it appears that the most numerous ethnic group was Poles, although it is difficult to say for sure, as persons were listed by nationality rather than by ethnicity. Poland did not exist as a nation at the time.

24) Middletown City Reports, 1900, p. 10; Greenberg, David, and Joel, Ira D., "Health Survey of Middletown, Conn.", pp. 15-17.

25) City Reports, e.g. 1896, p. 29; Hartford Courant, July 25, 1895; Grenberg and Joel, p. 13.

26) City Reports, 1899, p. 52; also Courant, e.g. July 30, Aug. 30, 1895.

27) Courant, Nov. 25, Sept. 17, Dec. 2, 1895.

28) City Reports, 1900, p. 67.

29) Courant, Aug. 24, Sept. 12, 1895; "Tribune", p. 113.

30) Courant, July 2, 1895.

31) Ibid., Feb. 29, 1896.

32) Ibid., Sept. 18, 1895.

33) Hennigan, p. 9.

34) Courant, Dec. 14, 1895.

35) To get a sense of the sheer dimensions of the work, consult a later article, "Improvements on the Air Line", Penny Press, July 30, 1912.

36) Courant, Dec. 14, 1895.

37) Directories, e.g., 1890, 1892, 1895.

38) "Tribune", p. 65; Directory, 1892.

39) Directories, 1871, 1890, 1897.

40) Ibid, 1879, 1880, 1892, 1897.

41) Ibid, 1878, 1884, 1890, 1897.

42) Marino, Mike, personal interview, Feb. 26, 1984.

43) Ibid.; Bogani, Basile, and Pettinato are listed as

English speakers in the 1900 U.S. Census schedules, as are Leo (B.) Santangelo, Leo (E.) Santangelo, and Frank Santangelo. Mr. Bertucci appears to have left Middletown before this time, so no information can be found concerning his fluency in English.

### Chapter Three

1) Middletown and Portland Directories, 1868, 1872, 1876, 1880, 1886, 1890, 1892; for a discussion of the transitory nature of early Italian immigration, consult Nelli, Humbert S., From Immigrants To Ethnics pp. 43-45, Koenig, Samuel, Immigrant Settlements In Connecticut, p. 25.

2) Directory, 1876.

3) Ibid., 1892, 1894-1897.

4) Ibid., 1897; U.S. Census Schedules, Middlesex County, Town of Middletown, 1900; Ciampaglia worked at the Russell Manufacturing Company, Pienovi at the Goodyear Rubber Company, and Gustave Ambrosino, not listed in the Census, at the Worcester Cycle Manufacturing Co.

5) Hartford Courant, e.g. Oct. 2, Dec. 2, Dec. 9, 1895, Feb. 17, 1896; Middletown City Reports, 1900, p. 67.

6) Occasionally, Italian railroad workers would have payment disputes with their contractors or employers, and would take them to court. The names of Alfonzo Chiafala, Leonardo Alegreti, and Carmine DeLuca are mentioned in this respect, as are "Ranzoni" and "Rigshrigi" [sic], but none of them appear in the directories of the time. (Courant, Oct. 2, 1895, Jan. 30, Feb. 17, Feb. 22, Feb. 27, 1896) Most of these men were probably day laborers.

7) Courant, Oct. 17, 1895; unskilled mill hands could earn as little as \$2.00 a week, although wages from \$3.50 to \$5.00 were more common. (Annual Report of the Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1897, pp. 94-95).

8) Courant, Oct. 17, 1895.

9) From my work compiling the results given in Chapter Eight, I have found that some Italians were continually listed in the directory as railroad employees over a period of many years.

10) Lorenzo Aldoine and Pasquale Domenico seem almost certain to have been listed in this way, and Luciano Marinelli may also have been. Most other names of brickworkers are so grossly misspelled in the census that they are impossible to identify. Comparing the 1900 Directory against the 1900 U.S. Census schedules, I find a sharp divergence between the two on the subject of brickworkers. The census schedules explicitly list fifty-two Italian born men as "brickmoulder", "laborer, brickyard", etc.. The directory, which was almost certainly compiled within six weeks of the census, lists only four brickyard employees of Italian surname. (U.S. Census Schedules, 1900; Directory, 1900). The Census represents June 1, 1900, while the directories were usually compiled in late June or early July. (See Penny Press, Aug. 19, 1904, "The Population is Now 19,058") Part of the blame for the contradictory information must rest with the different ways in which the two documents were compiled. The census enumerators, of course, were required to list everyone, even if they could not spell their names. The casualness with which many enumerators approached their task resulted in such glaring distortions as calling Felice Miconi "Felix McGonia". Other Italians were given such unlikely names as "Waltear", "Dicermore", and "Joneshie", probably because they themselves had no idea of how to spell. The directory canvassers, on the other hand, seem to have placed much more emphasis on accurate spelling; in some cases they may have thrown up their hands in despair when they encountered an Italian immigrant who could neither speak English nor spell his bizarre name. Given the widespread illiteracy of these laborers, this would explain why the directory listed only 125 laborers while the census listed 277.

11) See also Druker, Michele, "Weighed, Counted, and Measured," p. 17.

12) This was Ercole Mafeola, who worked for the Benvenue Granite Co.. Three other Italians were listed as stone cutters. I believe this meant that they performed more intricate carving or shaping than did the unskilled quarry workers. This work could have been done at either of the two quarry areas, or with a Middletown building contractor.

13) It appears that some of the work in Maromas was also performed by "day laborers", although these day laborers had enough confidence in their job security to have moved to boarding houses near the quarries. On Portland, consult Courant, April 2, 1893, Oct. 17, 1895; on Maromas, consult Press, March 15, 1904; U.S. Census Schedules, 1900.

14) Courant, Oct. 17, 1895; Another report put wages at a dollar a day, but noted that even this was insufficient

to attract many workmen. (Courant, Nov. 5, 1895).

15) Press, Dec. 7, 1899; see also Courant, Nov. 18, 1895; Middletown Press, "75th Anniversary Section", Sept. 29, 1895, "Area Brownstone Quarries Were Busy".

16) Pawlowski, Robert, How The Other Half Lived, no page numbers.

17) For information on the "padroni" system, consult Iorizzo, Luciano J., and Mondello, Salvatore, The Italian Americans, Chapter 10; Nelli, Chapter 5; and Fenton, Edwin, Immigrants and Unions, Chapter 2.

18) Courant, Jan. 30, Feb. 17, 1896.

19) This tendency is discussed in Koenig, pp. 25-27; Glazer, Nathan, and Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, Beyond The Melting Pot, p. 186; Nelli, pp. 59-60.

20) Directories, 1890, 1892, 1895, 1897, 1900; see Chapter Eight.

21) Marino, Mike, personal interview, Feb. 26, 1984.

22) Courant, Aug. 28, Oct. 2, 1895; Feb. 15, 17, 22, 1896.

23) Ibid., Sept. 4, 1895.

24) Ibid., Sept. 20, 1895.

25) Penny Press, Nov. 9, 1895, "Italian League"; Nov. 12, 1895, "Officers Elected"; Giovanni (John) Grippo was also a member, but he had apparently retired. For the precise occupations of the other people, consult the 1895 Directory, More information on some of these men is given in the preceding chapter, and in the footnotes.

26) Courant, April 28, 1904; Directories, 1900-1902.

#### Chapter Four

1) Middletown and Portland Directory, 1895.

2) Sangree, Walter H., "Mel Hyblaeum", pp. 26-28; Middletown Press, Sept. 13, 1978, "Court Street 'Family' Reunion Saturday".

3) Marino, Mike, personal interview, Feb. 26, 1984.

- 4) Annino, James Vincenzo, Arrivederci Melilli, Hello Middletown, pp. C-D, 3-12; Marino; Corvo, Max, personal interview, Nov. 30, 1983.
- 5) LaBella, Louis, personal interview, Dec. 19, 1983; Press, Oct. 15, 1976, "The South End: Middletown's Melting Pot".
- 6) Sangree, p. 29.
- 7) Ibid, p. 56.
- 8) Annino, p. D.
- 9) Directories, 1898-1900.
- 10) LaBella.
- 11) Annino, p. D.
- 12) Press, April 1, 1908, "High Tide of Immigration Reached And Passed".
- 13) Campisi, Luciano, personal interview, Feb. 24, 1984.
- 14) Penny Press, Nov. 30, 1904, "Italians Going Home".
- 15) Corvo.
- 16) Directories, 1900, 1902.
- 17) LaBella; on railroad laborers' wages, see the previous chapter.
- 18) Penny Press, June 7, 1912, "The Priesthood Attacked By Organizer Spielman".
- 19) Penny Press, April 1, 1908, "High Tide of Immigration Reached and Passed"; May 22, 1908, "Many Out of Employment".
- 20) Some 323, out of a total of 595, were listed in this way. Almost all were men. 287 of these were laborers, 27 were brickworkers, and the remaining nine were scattered among a variety of menial jobs. It is also worth noting that I have no proof that the listings were as reliable as they had been in the directories of the 1890's. In fact, I suspect that some mill hands may have been listed as laborers.
- 21) Cooney, William Walter, "Middletown, Connecticut", p. 57; By the Second World War, Max Corvo told me, nearly 1000 people worked at the Russell Company; see also chapter on the Russell Strike.

- 22) Sangree, p. 29; LaBella.
- 23) LaBella; Sangree, p. 29.
- 24) Hartford Courant, June 8, 1912, "Sight of Militia Quells Strikers".
- 25) LaBella; Penny Press, Oct. 1, 1908, "Fine New Factory".
- 26) See Sangree, p. 29.
- 27) Corvo; LaBella.
- 28) Sangree, p. 30.
- 29) Campisi.
- 30) Annino, pp. 1-12.
- 31) U.S. Census Schedules, 1900.
- 32) Marino.
- 33) Sangree, p. 30.
- 34) Ibid., p. 32.
- 35) Ibid, p. 29; Annino, pp 2, 10, 15, 28.
- 36) Penny Press, Jan. 2-25, 1912, "New Assessment of Town and City Property"; Italians not from Melilli had some \$192,000 worth of property. I distinguished the Melilllese from the non-Melilllese by checking the family names against those listed in Annino.
- 37) Penny Press, Jan. 2-25, 1912, "New Assessment of Town and City Property."; Directory, 1912.
- 38) Marino.
- 39) As Sangree shows, small landowners in Melilli enjoyed the same esteem as merchants and artisans. (p. 22).
- 40) Corvo.
- 41) U.S. Census schedules, 1900; see also Middletown Press, Oct. 15, 1976, "The South End, Middletown's Melting Pot".
- 42) Marino.
- 43) Sangree, p. 29
- 44) Marino.

- 45) Penny Press, April 29, 1904, "Rents Are Scarce"; June 15, "Tenements Scarce".
- 46) U.S. Census schedules, 1900.
- 47) Corvo; this was confirmed by the experiences of Luciano Campisi and Joseph S. Passanisi, among those to whom I spoke.
- 48) U.S. Census Schedules, 1900.
- 49) Sangree, p. 33.
- 50) Cooney, p. 36.
- 51) Sangree, pp. 33.
- 52) Marino; Directories, 1902-1908.
- 53) Marino.
- 54) See Chapter Eight.
- 55) Directories, 1900, 1902, 1907, 1910; LaBella; Marino.
- 56) Directory, 1917.
- 57) Between 1912 and 1917, the number of Italian barber in Middletown declined from 12 to 9. (Directories, 1912, 1917).
- 58) Sangree, pp. 30, 33.
- 59) I counted 472 persons of Italian birth or parentage in the 1900 Census schedules for the town of Middletown. The 1910 Census Abstract counts 1700 persons of Italian birth alone, and several hundred American born children are listed in the census schedules for that year.

#### Chapter Five

- 1) Condensed from Wilder, Barry, "Different Shades of Green".
- 2) Sangree, Walter H., "Mel Hyblaeum", p. 16.
- 3) See Chapter Three.
- 4) Penny Press, Jan. 20, 1904, "Italians Celebrate"; April 25, 1904, "Society To Celebrate"; May 16, 1904,

"Laying of Cornerstone".

- 5) Middletown and Portland Directory, 1909-1914.
- 6) Marino, Mike, personal interview, Feb. 26, 1984.
- 7) Press, July 16, 1904, "Celebration This Evening"; July 20, 1908, "In Honor of Our Lady".
- 8) This generalization about the class status of the Abruzzisi comes from Marino.
- 9) Directories, 1908-1916.
- 10) Date from Directories, 1917, 1928; explanation from Passanisi, Joseph S., personal interview, March 3, 1984.
- 11) Marino.
- 12) "50th Anniversary Banquet and Dance"; Directories , 1902, 1907.
- 13) Marino.
- 14) Passanisi.
- 15) Marino, Mike, personal interview, March 9, 1984.
- 16) Sangree, p. 117.
- 17) Directories, 1908-1911; Annino, James Vincenzo, Arrivederci Melilli, Hello Middletown, p. 53.
- 18) Directory, 1912; Sangree, p. 117; Marino, Feb. 26.
- 19) Passanisi.
- 20) Marino, Feb. 26; Annino, pp. F-G; Directories, 1902, 1907.
- 21) Press, Jan. 20, 1904, "Italians Celebrate"; Oct. 27, 1904, "Democratic Italian Rally"; Oct. 13, 1906, "Columbus Day Parade"; May 3, 1912, "St. Sebastian's Day".
- 22) Directory, 1912; See also Chapter Six.
- 23) Press, March 11, 1908, "Anarchists are Few".
- 24) See Chapter Six.
- 25) Annual Report of the Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1900, pp. 231-233; 1912, pp. 43, 47, 49, 51, 53.

- 26) Ibid., 1900-1906, 1907/08-1917/18.
- 27) Press, Dec. 30, 1904, "Election of Officers".
- 28) Labor Statistics, 1916, p. 90.
- 29) Directory, 1910.
- 30) Ibid., 1902, p. 424; 1903, p. 368.
- 31) Directory, 1910.
- 32) Fenton, Edwin, Immigrants and Unions, pp. 378-429.
- 33) Labor Statistics, 1900-1906, 1907/08- 1917/18.
- 34) Fenton, p. 199.
- 35) Hartford Courant, Feb. 17, 1896.
- 36) Labor Statistics, 1901, p. 169.
- 37) Ibid., 1909/10, p. 226; 1911/12, p. 47; 1913/14, p. 69.
- 38) Ibid., 1904, pp. 380-381.
- 39) Ibid., 1902, p. 424.
- 40) Ibid., 1903, 368-369; 1904, p. 381; 1905, p. 74; Directories, 1902-1905.
- 41) Directory, 1902; Marino, Feb. 26.
- 42) Press, Oct. 25, 1904, "A Big Italian Rally".
- 43) Ibid., Oct. 28, 1904, "Attended Rally".
- 44) Ibid., Oct. 23, 1912, "Italian Republican Rally Held at Town Hall".
- 45) Ibid., Oct. 27, 1904, "Democratic Italian Rally"; Nov. 2, 1904, "Italian Democrats"; Oct. 28, 1912, "A Rally That Failed".
- 46) Ibid., April 9, 1908, "Heated Argument Results in Unpleasantness"; "Mr. Santangelo Resigns"; "Mr. Santangelo Makes Explanation".
- 47) Ibid., Nov. 7, 1910, "Official Ballot"; Nov. 9, 1910, "Election".
- 48) Passanisi.
- 49) Wilder, p. 32.

- 50) Ibid., pp. 32-33; Sangree, p. 99.
- 51) Press, Oct. 8, 1906, "Churches Interested"; January 20, 1908, "What Has Been Done"; Sangree, pp. 109-110.
- 52) Press, Oct. 8, 1906, "Churches Interested"; January 20, 1908, "What Has Been Done"; Jan. 17, 1908, "School For Italian Girls"; Sangree, pp. 109-110. According to the Alumni Record, Ms. Palladino was a member of the class of 1909.
- 53) Sangree, p. 110.
- 54) Press, July 1, 1912, "Education of Italians May Be Interfered".
- 55) Press, Sept. 4, 1912, "Wants Night School".

#### Chapter Six

- 1) This discussion has been summarized in Dubofsky, Melvyn, Industrialism and the American Worker, pp. 102-105.
- 2) Fenton, Edwin, Immigrants and Unions, pp. 331-333; Dubofsky, Melvyn, We Shall Be All, pp. 228-229.
- 3) Brooks, Thomas R., Toil and Trouble, p. 120; Brissenden, Paul, The I.W.W., p. 286.
- 4) Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, p. 249.
- 5) On the union's pacifist position in this strike, consult Brissenden, pp. 286-288, Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, p. 248; on the violence, see Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, pp. 246-249.
- 6) Fenton, pp. 335, 346, 349.
- 7) Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, pp. 250-252; Brooks, p. 121.
- 8) Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, p. 253; Fenton, pp. 252-253.
- 9) Fenton, pp. 358-362; Brissenden, p. 293; Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, pp. 259-262.
- 10) Brissenden, p. 368; Penny Press, May 23, 1912, "Strike in Putnam"; June 5, 1912, "The I.W.W. Lose Their Strike in Jewett City".

- 11) LaBella, Louis O., personal interview, Dec. 19, 1983.
- 12) Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, p. 228; Fenton, pp. 354-355.
- 13) Fenton, pp. 361-362; Press, May 27, 1912, "Textile Workers in Local Mills to Form New Union".
- 14) Press, May 28, 1908, "Many Out of Employment".
- 15) Ibid, July 6, 1908, "Girls to the Number of 125 on Strike"; July 11, "Center Street Factory to be Started Monday"; July 13, "Operations Resumed at Palmer's Mill".
- 16) Ibid, July 29, 1908, "No Work For Bricklayers".
- 17) On the return to Italy, consult Press, April 1, 1908, "High Tide of Immigration Reached and Passed"; August 14, "Middletown Shows an Increase in Population"; The 1907 and 1908 directories list several dozen Italians as moving to other towns, but these represent a very small fraction of the total number who moved.
- 18) LaBella.
- 19) Annino, James Vincenzo, Arrivederci Melilli, Hello Middletown, pp. 19, 41-43, 94.
- 20) Some five or six hundred people of Meliliese descent live in that area today. (Corvo, Max, personal interview, Nov. 30, 1983).
- 21) Louis LaBella tells me that his family was involved in another I.W.W. strike in Lawrence that fall. They had not yet moved there in the spring.
- 22) Press, May 27, 1912, "Textile Workers in Local Mills to Form New Union".
- 23) Fenton, pp. 15-22; quote on pp. 24-25.
- 24) Ibid., p. 320.
- 25) Report of the Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1911/12, p. 47; Hartford Courant, May 27, 1912, "Organize Labor Union Over Night".
- 26) Middletown and Portland Directory, 1905.
- 27) Press, Oct. 26, 1904, "Local Dems. Are Ready"; March 21, 1908, Obituary, "Mrs. John Kenefick"; Mr. Kenefick was co-owner of "Wigmore and Kenefick", a clothing store. (Directory, 1904).
- 28) Press, May 22, 1912, "Girls Walked Out".

- 29) Ibid, May 23, "Girls Are Still Out at the Russell Manufacturing Company".
- 30) Ibid, June 17, "Local Strikers Still Out and May Continue So".
- 31) Ibid, May 22, "Girls Walked Out".
- 32) Ibid., May 23, "Girls Are Still Out at the Russell Manufacturing Company".
- 33) Ibid, May 25, "Meetings for Organization".
- 34) Ibid, May 25, "Meetings For Organization", May 27, "Textile Workers in Local Mills to Form New Union".
- 35) Ibid, May 27, "Textile Workers in Local Mills to Form New Union".
- 36) Ibid., May 31, "Mill Closed Indefinitely".
- 37) Ibid.
- 38) Ibid, June 1, "Dominant Note of Union: Fewer Hours, More Wages".
- 39) Ibid., June 3, "Charter is Granted to New Local Textile Union".
- 40) Ibid, June 4, "400 Persons on Strike at Local Mill"; "Russell Company Not to Recognize Textile Union"; the 1150 estimate comes from an article in the Courant, June 5, "Industrial Workers Precipitate Strike". The Courant said that only 300 of these were on strike.
- 41) Courant, June 8, "Sight of Militia Quells Strikers".
- 42) The directories are of little use in resolving this question, as most of the women and even some of the men would not be listed. (See Chapter Three). Of the Italians whom I interviewed, none was able to give me a more precise estimate than "some". (Marino, Mike, personal interview, Feb. 26, 1984; LaBella). I asked the present owners of the Russell Manufacturing Company to be allowed to examine their files, but was informed that "the older records were either lost or destroyed." (Correspondence, Julia V. Bigden, Vice President, Engineered Products, Fenner America, Ltd., to Peter Baldwin, Oct. 25, 1983). The 1910 Census schedules would be of some assistance, but upon learning that over 2000 Italians were listed therein, I was overawed by the magnitude of the task, and gave up.
- 43) Press, June 4, 1912, "Russell Company Not to Recognize Textile Union". The Courant later wrote that "the strike

is confined entirely to Italians, 350 in number". (June 8, "Sight of Militia Quells Strikers")

44) Courant, June 5, "Industrial Workers Precipitate Strike"; Press, June 4, "400 Persons on Strike at Local Mill".

45) Press, June 6, "Local Strike Situation Remains About The Same".

46) Ibid., June 5, "Two More Mass Meetings For Striking Workers"; June 6, "Local Strike Situation Remains About The Same".

47) Ibid., June 5, "Parade of Strikers"; June 6, "Local Strike Situation Remains About the Same".

48) Ibid., June 8, "Was Asked to Go"; June 6, "Local Strike Situation Remains About The Same".

49) Ibid., June 6, "Local Strike Situation Remains About the Same".

50) Ibid., June 7, "The Priesthood Attacked By Organizer Spielman".

51) Ibid., June 5, "Few More Strikers Out"; June 6, "Local Strike Situation Remains About the Same".

52) Ibid., June 7, "1st Act of Violence Since Local Strike Began"; June 8, "Breach of Peace Cases Adjourned"; June 10, "Wesleyan Students Called Intellectual Thugs"; Courant, June 8, "Sight of Militia Quells Strikers".

53) Press, June 7, "1st Act Of Violence Since Local Strike Began"; Courant, June 8, "Sight of Militia Quells Strikers". The arrested strikers were Paolo DiEmmanuele, Mario Sudano, and Giuseppe Salafia (Press, June 8, "Breach of Peace Cases Adjourned").

54) Press, June 7, "1st Act of Violence Since Local Strike Began"; June 8, "Quiet Morning Follows Day of Riot at Farms".

55) Courant, June 8, "Sight of Militia Quells Strikers".

56) Press, June 7, "The Priesthood Attacked By Organizer Spielman"; Courant, June 8, "Sight of Militia Quells Strikers".

57) Press, June 8, "Few Strikers Reported"; June 10, "Modified Demands Made By Strikers' Committee"; June 10, "Wesleyan Students Called Intellectual Thugs".

58) Ibid., June 7, "Nip It In The Bud".

59) Ibid., June 11, "Strike Has Passed Into the Hands of G. Gianinni"; June 12, "Local Strikers Refuse to Return to Work"; June 11, "Headquarters Deserted"; Courant, June 11, "Backbone of Strike Undoubtedly Broken"; See also Labor Statistics, 1911/12, pp. 58-59.

60) Press, June 11, "Looks As If Local Strike Is Now Practically Over".

61) LaBella.

62) Marino.

### Chapter Seven

1) Penny Press, June 7, 1912, "To Pay Off Italian Employees.

2) Ibid., June 10, "Wanted Consent of American Employees".

3) Ibid., June 17, "Local Strikers Still Out and May Continue So".

4) Ibid., June 28, "Girls in Need".

5) Ibid., Aug. 9, "Employing Some Italians".

6) This "Columbus Club" is somewhat mysterious to me. It does not appear in the Directory along with all the other clubs in Middletown, nor have any of the people I interviewed mentioned it. It is possible that it was the same as the "Italian Republican Club". Whatever its history and purpose, the club seems to have been largely a businessman's association, made up of prominent Abruzzesi and Melillesi.

7) Puglisi and Ranno were merchant tailors, Caiazza was a skilled carpenter, Roccapriore was the son of a Middlefield farmer, and Annino ran a variety of enterprises, including selling real estate. (Directory, 1912; Annino, James Vincenzo, Arrivederci Melilli, Hello Middletown, p. 19).

8) Press, July 19, 1912, "Italians Issue Statement Regarding Their Positions".

9) Ibid., July 20, "Open Counsel: From The Other Side".

10) Ibid., July 22, "Public Statement Made For the Columbus Club".

- 11) From my Feb. 26, 1984 interview with Mike Marino, and from reading Sangree, p. 28, I learned about the personal assistance which merchants offered.
- 12) Press, July 1, 1912, "Education of Italians May Be Interfered With".
- 13) See also Middletown and Portland Directory, 1913.
- 14) Breidenbach, Paul, "Americanization of Polish and Italian Immigrants in Middletown", pp. 14-15.
- 15) Passanisi, Joseph S., personal interview, March 3, 1984.
- 16) Marino; LaBella, Louis O., personal interview, Dec. 19, 1983.
- 17) Passanisi.
- 18) Mr. Terragna had been born in Milazzo and presently owned a tailor shop on Court Street. (Press, Nov. 8, 1916, "Middletown Gives Majority to Wilson"; Marino; Directory, 1916).
- 19) Mr. Caiazza was a skilled carpenter and was beginning to establish himself as a building contractor. (Passanisi; Directory, 1917).
- 20) I earlier called Roccapriore middle class, and will stick by that definition even though the 1917 directory lists him as a Russell employee. At the earlier date, he had worked on his father's farm in Middlefield, but now he was probably working to raise money to buy more land. As the eldest son of Middletown's first Melillose farmer, he could be expected to inherit a position which ranked high in community esteem. (Annino, p. 19). But instead of waiting to start farming, Roccapriore became an insurance agent in 1919. (Directory, 1919).
- 21) Press, "Republican For Councilman" (adv.), Jan. 11, 1917.
- 22) Hartford Daily Times, Feb. 6, 1917, quoted in Breidenbach, p.16.
- 23) The founders of the Italian Democratic Club were Roccapriore, Guy Misenti, a druggist, and Sebastian LaBella, a barber. (Sangree, Walter H., "Mel Hyblaeum", p. 82; Directory, 1924).
- 24) Press, Jan. 16, 1917, "Complete Details of Democratic Victory".
- 25) Evening Press, Jan. 21, 1919, "City Election Was No

Real Surprise"; on ethnic prejudice around this time, consult Janick, Herbert F., A Diverse People, pp. 32-36. Mike Marino agrees that prejudice influenced early election results. He told me of elections in which all the candidates of one party would be elected, except the Italian. I have no confirming evidence of this.

26) Mr. Annino was born in Melilli and was listed in the 1921 directory as a "Contractor, real estate, and steamship ticket agent". (Directory 1921, Annino, p. 15) He was also a member of the "Columbus Club", as mentioned above.

27) Middletown Press, Jan. 19, 1920, "James F. Connery Elected".

28) Ibid., Jan. 16, 1923, "Republicans Stage Big Comeback in Election"; Jan. 22, 1924, "Republicans Make Clean Sweep in City Election"; Joseph P. Wrang worked as a secretary, Salvatore Mazzotta as a building contractor, and Guy Cambria as a clerk. (Directories, 1923, 1924).

29) Marino.

30) Sangree, p. 99; Penny Press, May 4, 1904, "St. Sebastian Festival".

31) Annino, pp. I-J; Marino.

32) I do not know who was on the committee at this time, but most were probably middle class, as Court Street was where the merchants lived and worked.

33) Annino, p. K., Directory, 1912.

34) Cannata ran a meat market, Ruggeri sold fish, Marino's father was a grocer, Miceli was also a grocer, and Marchese was a mason. Rosario Morello was the only laborer. (Directory, 1922; Marino).

35) Marino.

36) Ibid.

37) Ibid.

38) Sangree, pp. 88, 94.

39) Mr. Mazzotta was a Melilli-born building contractor and had served as a councilman in 1923-1924. (Annino, p. 27; Directories, 1923, 1924, 1927).

40) Mr. Adorno was involved in a variety of enterprises, including the Adorno Motor Car Co., the Grand Theatre, and various real estate holdings; Mr. Muscatello worked at

the Russell Company. (Directory, 1927; Annino, pp. 49, 11).

41) Sangree, pp. 103-104; Middletown Press, May 12, 1927, "Italian Americans Seeking Own Church"; Marino.

42) Sangree, p. 104.

43) Marino.

44) Marino and Cannata were grocers, and Pinto a retired grocer. (Directories, 1922, 1927, 1930).

45) Marino; Annino, p. Q.

46) Sangree, p. 104; Annino, p. Q; Marino.

47) Annino, p. Q.

48) Campisi, Luciano, personal interview, Feb. 24, 1984.

#### Chapter Eight

1) Campisi, Luciano, personal interview, Feb. 24, 1984.

2) Corvo, Max, personal interview, Dec. 6, 1983.

3) I have decided not to further differentiate within the working class primarily because I feel it is unnecessary. Mobility from Thernstrom's "unskilled" to "semi-skilled" groups would have been meaningless in the context of the Italian colony. It was so easy that anyone who wanted to could do it. Furthermore, I have nagging doubts about the accuracy of the directory listings in distinguishing between these two groups. I fear that in the directory volumes following the turn of the century, some mill hands may have been listed as laborers.

4) Thernstrom, Stephan, Poverty and Progress, p. 87.

5) Annino, James Vincenzo, Arrivederci Melilli, Hello Middletown, p. 22.

6) Annino; this is confirmed by examination of the Middletown and Portland Directories.

7) Annino, pp. 5-6, 3-4, 17, 23, 27, 37.

8) Thernstrom, p. 89.

9) Keep in mind that at this point I am not tracing people

back to their first arrival in Middletown, but am merely looking at the jobs they held at the time of their first appearance on my five-year lists.

- 10) Annino, e.g. pp. 6, 9, 11, 11-12.
- 11) Ibid., pp. 27-28.
- 12) Ibid., p. 28.
- 13) Ibid., p. 30.
- 14) Marino, Mike, personal interview, Feb. 26, 1984.
- 15) Annino, p. 16.
- 16) Ibid., pp. 27, E.
- 17) The dates are taken from the 1910 U.S. Census Schedules, Middlesex County, Town of Middletown. I have no proof that Fazzino was born in Melilli, but two other immigrants by that name, Nicolo Fazzino and Salvatore Fazzino, were Melilllese. They were probably all related. (Annino, pp. 67, 159).
- 18) I also counted in this group several people whose jobs were not listed in their first year here, but who were listed as working class at the end of the first five-year interval. For example, Giuseppe DiBenedetto first appears in the 1908 directory, but his job is not specified. In the 1912 directory, however, he is listed as a laborer, so I have counted him as such.
- 19) In thirteen cases, no occupation was listed.

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