

University of Massachusetts Boston

## ScholarWorks at UMass Boston

---

Graduate Masters Theses

Doctoral Dissertations and Masters Theses

---

5-1994

### From Italy to Boston's North End: Italian Immigration and Settlement, 1890-1910

Stephen Puleo

*University of Massachusetts Boston*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.umb.edu/masters\\_theses](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/masters_theses)



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Ethnic Studies Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Puleo, Stephen, "From Italy to Boston's North End: Italian Immigration and Settlement, 1890-1910" (1994). *Graduate Masters Theses*. 154.

[https://scholarworks.umb.edu/masters\\_theses/154](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/masters_theses/154)

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Doctoral Dissertations and Masters Theses at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@umb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@umb.edu).

*FROM ITALY TO BOSTON'S NORTH END*  
Italian Immigration and Settlement, 1890-1910

A Thesis Presented  
by  
STEPHEN C. PULEO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research of  
the University of Massachusetts Boston in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

MAY 1994

History Program

**c 1994 Stephen C. Puleo**

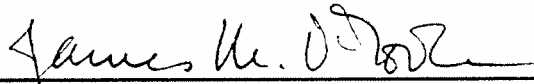
***FROM ITALY TO BOSTON'S NORTH END***  
**Italian Immigration and Settlement, 1890-1910**

**A Thesis Presented**

**by**

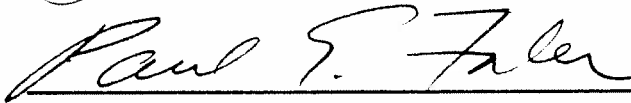
**STEPHEN C. PULEO**

**Approved as to style and content by:**



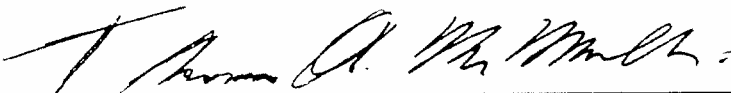
---

**James M. O'Toole, Associate Professor**  
**Chairperson of Committee**



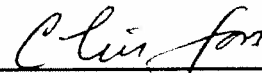
---

**Paul G. Faler, Associate Professor**  
**Member**



---

**Thomas A. McMullin, Associate Professor**  
**Member**



---

**Clive Foss, Program Director**  
**Department of History**

*This thesis is dedicated to my parents,  
who instilled in me pride in my heritage;  
and to my wife, Kate,  
who is the source of my inspiration.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Any historian who conducts research for a study of Italian immigration faces a number of challenges. The first is a matter of scale--more than four million Italians entered the United States during the peak immigration years in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The sheer size of the group is enough to intimidate a researcher, particularly when it comes time to draw conclusions about the collective whole. The second issue that presents problems is the notable lack of written evidence handed down by Italians themselves. Widespread illiteracy and difficulties mastering the English language meant that it was rare for an Italian immigrant to leave a diary or a collection of letters. What we know about the Italian immigration experience usually is gleaned in two ways: from oral histories, or--as in the case of this study--through evidence we can gather from official records and documents.

A number of patient and helpful people offered guidance and support as I worked my way through these and other issues. Professor James M. O'Toole of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, who directed this thesis, not only helped me focus on the overall historical context of the Italian immigrant experience, but drew on his archival expertise to assist me in developing sources for this work. Beyond that, I am deeply grateful for his continuous encouraging words (his "keep going" messages always came at the appropriate time) and his insightful recommendations as I progressed with the writing of this thesis.

Much of the research for this study took place at the National Archives New England Regional Office in Waltham, Massachusetts. Director Jim Owens and

Archives Technician Walter Hickey offered their assistance and expertise graciously as I made my way through naturalization petitions and passenger lists. Their efforts made for a pleasant research experience each time I visited their repository.

I am indebted also to others who extended their hands through the course of my research. Charles Longley, Curator of Microtext and Newspapers at the Boston Public Library, never ceased to amaze me with his breadth of knowledge about turn-of-the-century Boston. Phyllis Danehy, staff member at the Archdiocese of Boston Archives, directed me to correspondence between the chancery and Italian parishes during the peak immigration years. Joel Wurl, Curator of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota, provided me with insight and assistance in gathering information from *The George Scigliano Collection*, which is used extensively in this study. I am grateful also to Rev. Mario Tardivo, C.S., of Sacred Heart Church and Rev. Francis Walter, O.F.M., of St. Leonard's in the North End for permitting me to inspect marriage and baptism records, and for sharing with me their knowledge of the North End and its people.

The people closest to me also touched me with their contributions. The friends and relatives who inquired about my work provided me with much-needed energy. My parents, who instilled in me a sense of pride in my heritage, showed interest in this study every step of the way and made their memories of "growing up Italian" mine as well. I always have loved them and considered them friends--but I feel I came to know them even better during this project.

My final thanks goes to the person who is first in my life. My wife and my best friend, Kate, has been in her usual place--by my side--throughout the course of

this thesis. She has shared the highs and lows that inevitably accompany a work of this size, and it is her support, encouragement, and love that are the true sources of my strength and inspiration. This thesis would not have been possible without her. The added bonus from my standpoint is that she is the best proofreader I know.

The efforts of these people have served only to enhance the quality of this work and I am thankful to all of them. Any factual mistakes, errors of omission, or faulty analysis are mine alone.



**ABSTRACT**

***FROM ITALY TO BOSTON'S NORTH END***  
***Italian Immigration and Settlement, 1890-1910***

**MAY, 1994**

**STEPHEN C. PULEO, B.A.,**  
**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON**  
**M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON**

**Directed by: Professor James M. O'Toole**

More than four million Italian immigrants entered the United States between 1880 and 1920, a number greater than any other ethnic group during America's peak immigration years. From 1900 to 1910 alone, more than two million Italians flowed through American ports. This thesis examines the great Italian migration to and settlement in the United States, focusing on one of America's strongest and most vibrant ethnic communities, Boston's Italian North End.

The vast majority of Italian immigrants were peasants from agrarian Southern Italy, seeking refuge in America from nearly unbearable conditions in their homeland. They were mostly young, usually poor and unskilled, and the overwhelming majority were illiterate even in their own language. Only a fraction spoke or understood English. Many, perhaps more than a million, could not make the adjustment to a strange, increasingly urbanized, faster-paced America and repatriated to Italy permanently. Others, known disparagingly in America as "birds

of passage," traveled to America seeking seasonal employment during the warm weather and returned to Italy in the winter.

Nearly three million Italians eventually settled in America. They formed close-knit community enclaves, and became one of the country's major ethnic groups. However, because so many Italians returned to Italy, most Italian-American neighborhoods were in a state of flux right up until World War I, when transoceanic travel virtually ceased. This was not the case in Boston's North End, where the "process of settlement" began much earlier, and the neighborhood developed stability before 1910. Italians in the North End were marrying, having children, and purchasing homes during the first decade of the new century. Later, often many years later, they became citizens.

How did Italians fare in the New World? What settlement steps did they take after they arrived in America? What evidence supports the contention that the North End was a stable Italian community before 1910 and why was this so? This thesis makes use of naturalization petitions and other official government documents to answer these questions and offer insight into one of America's--and Boston's--largest and most important immigrant groups.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiv
 Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Return migration and the 'birds of passage'.....	5
Other North End studies.....	9
Sample and sources.....	10
Other important sources.....	15
More willing to sink roots.....	18
II. A LOOK AT WHO THEY WERE AND WHY THEY CAME.....	21
Demographic, occupational characteristics.....	28
Italian government's response to emigration.....	30
III. THE TUG OF HOME: THE 'BIRDS OF PASSAGE' AND ITALIAN REPATRIATION.....	38
Deciding to return even before leaving.....	44
Italian government stresses benefits of return migration.....	48
IV. COMING TO AMERICA: ARRIVAL, SETTLEMENT, DISCRIMINATION.....	55
Settlement: family, village, <i>campanilismo</i> , enclaves	61
Effects of illiteracy and the language barrier.....	67
Life in the enclave: saving money, buying property	81
Discrimination: words and deeds.....	95
V. BOSTON'S NORTH END, 1890-1910: AN ITALIAN NEIGHBORHOOD GROWS, STABILIZES.....	114
The struggle continues.....	124
The Scigliano Factor.....	132
The importance of individuals.....	143
The sample group: 125 immigrants who became citizens.....	149

(continued)

Table of Contents (cont.)

VI. CONCLUSION.....	172
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	182
APPENDICES	
A. Note on Methodology.....	190
B. Twenty-six provinces of Southern Italy represented in Boston's North End.....	192

## LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 1.1.	Italian immigration to the United States, 1880-1914.....	3
Table 2.1.	Remittances from Italian emigrants to the United States made through <i>Banco Di Napoli</i> (in thousands of lire).....	33
Table 3.1.	Average annual number of emigrants returning to Italy from the United States.....	40
Table 4.1.	Percent of foreign-born male heads of households who read and write, by general nativity of individual; summary of seven cities.....	68
Table 4.2.	Percent of foreign-born male heads of households who speak English by general nativity of individual; summary of seven cities.....	70
Table 4.3.	Naturalization status of foreign-born males in Boston who have been in the United States five years or more, by nationality.....	78
Table 4.4.	Average annual earnings of heads of households versus family income in Boston (includes income from boarders and lodgers).....	88
Table 4.5.	Percent of families owning homes by nationality in seven-city sample.....	95
Table 5.1.	Number and percent of immigrant family households in Boston which have spent whole time in the United States in the same neighborhood (large immigrant groups).....	146
Table 5.2.	Years of arrival for the 125-member sample group.....	154
Table 5.3.	Months of arrival for the 125-member sample group.....	154
Table 5.4.	Ports of arrival for the 125-member sample group.....	155
Table 5.5.	Leading occupations of sample group when filing naturalization petitions.....	157
Table 5.6.	Sampling of occupations from sample group from city directories versus naturalization petitions.....	158

(continued)

## LIST OF TABLES (Cont.)

	<b>Page</b>
Table 5.7. Average number of years after arrival that sample group waited before applying for citizenship.....	159
Table 5.8. Years sample population applied for citizenship.....	160
Table 5.9. Years children were born to sample group (260 children in total).....	162
Table 5.10. Average number of years sample group was in country before having first child versus average number of years before seeking citizenship.....	163

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 5.1. Major foreign population groups of North End of Boston, 1870-1930 (in thousands).....	117
Figure 5.2. Major North End ethnic groups, 1910.....	118

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Early in the first decade of the twentieth century a story was told in Italy of a trip made by Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli through one of the southern provinces which had experienced heavy emigration. The mayor and chief men of one town, Moliterno, met the minister at the train station and escorted him to the central square, where an enthusiastic crowd greeted the important visitor. The mayor mounted a platform that had been built for the occasion, looked down upon the crowd and delivered his welcoming remarks to the prime minister: "I welcome you in the name of the five thousand inhabitants of this town--three thousand of whom are in America and the other two thousand preparing to go."<sup>1</sup>

While the mayor's remarks exaggerated the situation somewhat, they served to highlight the magnitude of emigration from Italy at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Record-keeping was far from an exact science at the time, but government estimates and scholarly research indicates that between fourteen million and fifteen million people left Italy between 1880 and 1920.<sup>2</sup> More than four million of this number came to the United States--about 80 percent of these from Southern Italy and Sicily. From 1900 to 1910 alone, more than two million Italians flowed through American ports (see Table 1.1, Page 3). Nearly three times as many arrived in the first decade of the twentieth century as had in the preceding ten years. In 1900, Italians comprised less than 5 percent of the foreign-born population in the United States. By 1910, they made up about 10 percent of the foreigners. Between 1900 and 1910, when European immigration into the United States rose to its highest levels, the Italian inundation reached a crest higher than that from any



other nation, prompting one scholar to label the flood from Italy as "one of mankind's great voluntary movements of population."<sup>3</sup>

This study will examine the process of settlement of Italian immigrants in the United States during these peak immigration years, with a particular focus on Boston's North End Italian community between 1890 and 1910. Chapters II and III respectively look at why Italians decided to leave their homeland and their uncertainty about leaving permanently. Chapter II will include an examination of issues that caused these people to leave Italy, Southern Italy in particular, in the first place. These factors were a devastating combination of brutal economic conditions, geographic clashes between Northern and Southern Italy, demoralizing natural disasters, and debilitating diseases that ravaged the region. Chapter III will explain the "birds of passage" phenomenon. This referred to a practice followed by thousands of Italians of criss-crossing the Atlantic--coming to America temporarily during the warm weather months to earn money, and returning to Italy in the winter. The reasons for this, and the resulting effect the "birds of passage" label had on the Italian immigrant in America, are critical factors in understanding the overall Italian immigration experience. It was this repeated practice of sailing to America and back to Italy that hindered the development and stability of many Italian neighborhoods, and delayed the assimilation of Italian immigrants into the American mainstream.

Chapters IV and V examine the process of settlement of Italian immigrants in America. Chapter IV looks at the arrival of these immigrants to the United States, the general formation and importance of Italian communities and neighborhoods, and the discrimination Italians struggled with and overcame as they began to sink roots in America. Chapter V focuses on the North End in general, and in particular, on a sample group of 125 Italian immigrants who eventually became citizens. This

chapter examines the overall development of the neighborhood, and uses the sample group to analyze what I refer to as the "process of settlement" steps that occurred as the community formed. These steps included marrying, having children, purchasing homes, establishing businesses, and eventually, becoming citizens. Unlike many Italian immigrant neighborhoods in America--which did not stabilize until the outbreak of the First World War--the North End appears to have developed and stabilized as a strong Italian enclave between 1900 and 1910. Evidence shows that North End Italian immigrants made their decisions to remain permanently in America during the first decade of the twentieth century. The concluding chapter of this thesis reviews the evidence and seeks to offer some reasons why this North End stabilization occurred so early. It was during the years between 1900 and 1910 that Boston Italian immigrants laid the strong foundation of a neighborhood that would become one of America's most close-knit, vibrant, and colorful ethnic communities.

**Table 1.1**--*Italian immigration to the United States, 1880-1914*

<u>Years</u>	<u>Immigration from Italy to U.S.</u>
1880-1889	267,660
1890-1899	603,791
1900-1900	2,154,611
1910-1914	1,265,535
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,291,597</b>

Figures adapted from Betty Boyd Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914* (New York, 1973), 33, 38. Also based on U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (Washington, 1966), 56-57. At the end of the First World War, there were two to three more years of heavy Italian immigration before immigration restriction laws virtually shut the door to new immigrants by the mid-1920s.

The scholar who labeled as "voluntary" the decision of millions of Italians to emigrate could be criticized for his careless choice of words. The vast majority of these immigrants--mostly from Southern Italy, mostly young men, mostly illiterate, unmarried, and unskilled--came to America because they believed they had to, *not* because they wanted to. During this period, Southern Italy in particular became the land of *la miseria* to Italian residents, as a combination of economic, political, geographic and health-related forces pushed much of the population to the brink of starvation and made life nearly unbearable for the remainder.

The difficulties began in the 1870s, when the Italian government often forced the southern peasants to pay upward of 90 percent of their crops in taxes, and levied taxes on vineyards which were devastated by disease. The hardships continued through 1910, when Mount Etna erupted in Sicily and killed more than 10,000 people. In the interim years, the Southern Italian region--known as the *mezzogiorno*--experienced hardships whose cumulative effects drove millions of residents to seek a different life.<sup>4</sup> Said one Italian peasant: "It is either starvation or emigration. If America did not exist, we would have to invent it for the sake of our survival."<sup>5</sup>

When Italians arrived in America, more than 80 percent of them settled in urban areas, forming tight-knit communities or "enclaves" designed to replicate family and social life in Italy as closely as possible. Still, adjustment was difficult, since the vast majority of these Italian immigrants had been peasants in Italy who made their living through farming, raising livestock, or growing fruit trees. The move to a burgeoning, rapidly industrializing America represented a major cultural shift for the vast majority of these immigrants. Many could not adjust to the change and returned to their homeland. For those who stayed, the enclaves offered them a sense of Old World familiarity as the assimilation into American society took place. Major Italian colonies were established in New York, Chicago, San Francisco,

Philadelphia, St. Louis, Trenton, Buffalo, Providence, and Boston. By the outbreak of the First World War, Italians had established themselves in major cities and many small communities across the United States. Their presence literally changed the demographic face of America. Later, they made important contributions to the growth of America's cities and to the building of the country's infrastructure in the early part of this century. Their cultural contributions became a vital part of the American experience.

### **Return Migration and the "Birds of Passage"**

Any study of Italians who settled permanently in the United States during this period must also examine the phenomenon of return migration, which was more widespread among Italians than any other large immigrant group. Return migrants referred to two groups of Italians. There were those who came to America seasonally to work in the United States and then returned to Italy in the winter months--these people were referred to in America as "birds of passage." The other group of return migrants were those Italians who repatriated to Italy permanently, often unable to bridge the cultural gap between the peasant life they had known in Italy and the faster-paced lifestyle they encountered in America. Return migration kept many Italian communities in the United States from stabilizing and developing politically and economically until around 1914, when the beginning of the First World War slowed transoceanic travel to a trickle. Thus, those Italian colonies in America which stabilized prior to 1914 were exceptions, and even more worthy of study. My research indicates that Boston's North End was one of these stable communities.

To explain fully the concept of return migration of Italians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is important to emphasize the close-knit family structure in Southern Italy. Life in the *mezzogiorno* revolved around the family--many of these emigrants had no desire to leave Italy or their loved ones permanently. One leading immigration scholar suggests that the desire to return home was shared by virtually every Italian immigrant to the United States, even those who never did in fact go back to Italy.<sup>6</sup> Just as startling is the high percentage of Italians who--despite the brutal conditions in Southern Italy--apparently decided *before* they left Italy that they would return. America seems to have been viewed by most Italians as a temporary refuge from poverty, a place where they could earn money on a seasonal basis, and return to Italy to improve the financial conditions of their families. Many Italians made several trips back and forth across the Atlantic between America and Italy. As many as 1.5 million of these immigrants eventually returned permanently to Italy between 1900 and 1914.<sup>7</sup>

This figure seems staggering given the conditions in Southern Italy at the time. However, the Italian love of family and homeland was a powerful force to these immigrants, most of whom had never ventured more than a few miles from their homes in Italy. An Italian physician who resided briefly in the United States in 1910 reportedly asked a group of his countrymen, all seasonal laborers, why they insisted on sending money back to their families in Italy when they seemed to be barely subsisting on minimal necessities in America. One man in the group replied: "Doctor, we brought to America only our brains and our arms. Our hearts stayed there in the little houses in the beautiful fields of our Italy."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, the study of the "birds of passage" phenomenon and of Italian repatriation to Italy is a sub-specialty in scholarly immigration work. There is strong evidence that the temporary or permanent return to the homeland was more prevalent

among Italians than other immigrant groups. As early as 1919, noted immigration historian Robert Foerster said of the Italians: "The emigrants expect, in leaving Italy, not to develop ties abroad, but only to lay by dollars. And when the dollars cease to come, the return home begins."<sup>9</sup> In a study of Italians who emigrated to Buffalo, another researcher added that, "a lack of interest in remaining in the U.S. could be the key to the immigrant generation's undistinguished occupational achievement. Many Italians originally intending to return to their homeland saw no point in investing the amount of time required to establish a business."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, much of the Italian migration experience to the United States can be summed up in the observations of an Italian traveler on what he deemed the American impression of temporary migrants: "They come in the spring to escape poverty in Italy, they compete with our workers and accept minimal wages, and when winter comes, they leave like birds of passage." <sup>11</sup>

Yet, despite the number of Italians who returned to Italy, the remaining three million-plus eventually made the decision to settle in the United States. This was due both to improvements in their own economic fortunes and the realization that return migration could not, as many had hoped, overcome the desperate poverty nor resuscitate a moribund economy in Southern Italy. This latter point proved true even with a significant infusion of dollars earned in the U.S. and sent or carried back to Italy.<sup>12</sup> In short, Italians who had spent some time in America had achieved a level of sophistication and economic stability that would not allow them to tolerate the Italy they had left. Beyond that, when the First World War broke out in 1914, it profoundly affected both immigration to and re-emigration from America, as well as immigrant colonies *in* America. Noted Italian immigration scholar Humbert Nelli summed up the economic implications: "The virtual cessation of immigration ended the constant replenishment of labor reserves in the U.S. Combined with military

manpower demands in the period after the U.S. entered the war in April, 1917...labor shortages offered immigrants already in the country and their children wider job opportunities than ever before--and at higher wages."<sup>13</sup>

Evidence suggests, however, that even before the First World War Italians in a few cities already had taken steps that indicated they were planning to stay in the New World. An American immigration expert pointed out in 1912 that the rapid turnover in the U.S. was slowing down, that newcomers were more likely to stay, and that the immigrants arriving from 1910 on were generally better educated and had better skills than their predecessors. The *prefetto* of Palermo related in 1913 that the emigration of mechanics and artisans, as well as small landowners, was increasing.<sup>14</sup> In some places, Italians began before 1914 to take the "process of settlement" actions I outlined earlier. The most important of these steps was marrying and establishing families in America (this is particularly significant since nearly 80 percent of Italian immigrants crossing the Atlantic as birds of passage in either direction were single men traveling alone). The process of settlement also includes, eventually, obtaining citizenship. However, my research shows that Italians often took these other steps in the settlement process years before they became citizens. Applying for citizenship often was the final step in becoming an American.

In a handful of American cities, including Boston's North End, this process of settlement was taking place well before 1910. According to my research, and contrary to the conclusions of some historians and government agencies, the North End began to stabilize as an Italian neighborhood between 1900 and 1910. The North End became one of the strongest and most colorful Italian neighborhoods in the country by the early 1920s due in large part to the social foundation and sense of community that was established by those immigrants who had arrived during the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these immigrants eventually became citizens, but it is critical to point out that in the vast majority of cases, they already had become solid members of the community well before they sought citizenship. Many historians and contemporaries have interpreted the low naturalization figures of Italians living in the North End around 1910 as a sign that these immigrants had yet to make a commitment to their new country. This thesis will show that these interpretations are incorrect, and that they fail to analyze fully the other "process of settlement" actions that I have mentioned. These actions offer clear evidence of the North End's stability well before 1910.

### Other North End Studies

In 1973, historian Anna Maria Martellone published an Italian-language study of life in the North End, called *Una Little Italy nell'atene D'America (A Little Italy in the Athens of America)*, in which she touched briefly on patterns of emigration, dealing mainly with the origin in Italy of North End residents. In 1981, William DeMarco published the best complete English-language study of the area, entitled *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End*, in which he focused on the notion of "enclaves" as settlement patterns in the neighborhood. DeMarco studied marriage, housing, work, and church records to prove that Italians in the North End lived, worked, and entered into marriage predominantly with other Italians who hailed from the same province--even the same town--in Italy. Neither of these works focuses on the general "process of settlement" steps taken by the immigrants who stayed, the actions that provide evidence of their intentions to establish permanent roots in America. As I mentioned, these include having children in the United States, bringing their families over from Italy, establishing businesses, purchasing homes,



and--the ultimate decision to stay--becoming citizens. To my knowledge, no study currently exists that examines a group of North End Italian immigrants who later decided to become citizens. A portion of this study will focus on such a sample group, comprised of 125 people. By studying who these people were, and the process by which they settled in America--and by attempting to determine *why* they sunk roots so early--we can learn more about the development of the North End as an ethnic neighborhood and the overall experience of Italian immigrants in America. We also can infer, by examining their process of settlement actions, how soon after arriving in America these immigrants decided to remain in the United States, regardless of when they formally applied for citizenship. While it is always difficult to assess "intent", these actions surely were early signs of a decision on the part of these immigrants to remain in America, even though their decision to apply for formal citizenship would not come for years afterward.

### **Sample and Sources**

To establish the statistical sample, I selected 250 residents of the North End from the time period under study, using the *Boston City Directories* as the source of the names. I chose 50 people each from the years 1899, 1902, 1905, 1908, and 1911, which were some of the peak immigration years of the period (see my "Note on Methodology" in the Appendix for more detailed information on the selection of names and how I determined as completely as possible that the people chosen were immigrants).

Once my 250 names, addresses, and occupations were selected (these were all males, since women were not listed in the directories unless they were widowed and therefore "heads of household"), I matched the names and addresses against

naturalization petitions contained in the National Archives Regional Office in Waltham, Massachusetts. A total of 125 people--exactly 50 percent of my sample--had obtained their citizenship, most of them many years after their arrival in the United States. Six other people were denied citizenship, but continued to live in the North End. Another twenty-seven people of the remaining list continued to show up in city directories through 1920. This means that 158 of the 250 names in my sample (better than 63 percent) taken from the 1899-1911 city directories, appear to have settled permanently in the North End. Because the number of people in my sample population who obtained citizenship was significant, I chose to focus on this group for my study. The other thirty-three people clearly settled in the North End and there is little reason to think their patterns of settlement were significantly different. The remaining ninety-two people who "disappeared" are not the subject of this study.

Historians Dino Cinel and Gary Mormino, in their studies of San Francisco and St. Louis respectively, made wide use of naturalization petitions to determine neighborhood stability.<sup>15</sup> To my knowledge, my study is the first extensive use of naturalization petitions to study Italians in the North End, and actually is the first comprehensive look at specific Boston Italian immigrants who became citizens. DeMarco, whose work is the most definitive and complete on the neighborhood as a whole, does not utilize naturalization petitions, nor does he deal extensively with the process of settlement theme. His study, while comprehensively researched, is confined mainly to proving the settlement of regional enclaves in the North End.

The naturalization petitions are rich in information pertinent to this study. Prior to 1906, the process of becoming a citizen was overseen entirely by the federal courts, and the government did not require extensive records from people petitioning for citizenship. The information that was required simply included a name, a country of origin, an address, an occupation, date of birth, date of arrival into the country,

and concurrence from two witnesses that the petitioner had resided in the United States for five years. By the turn of the century, the steadily increasing flow of immigrants pouring into the United States each year presented a number of problems, among them the increasing burden placed upon the clerks of courts, who did most of the work related to naturalization procedures. To relieve this burden and to provide "a uniform rule for the naturalization of aliens throughout the United States," Congress passed an act on June 29, 1906 (32 Stat. 596), establishing the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization and put some of its officers, working under the direction of the Department of Justice, in charge of examining the petitions for citizenship filed at courts. The bureau was split into two divisions: the Division of Immigration and the Division of Naturalization. Immigration handled arrivals into the country and general immigration matters, while Naturalization was charged with all matters relating to the granting of citizenship to aliens. Judges kept their independence and continued to rule on naturalization petitions. However, from this point on, the findings and recommendations of the newly-established Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization formed the bases for the courts' determination as to whether a petitioner's request would be admitted, denied, or require further investigation. Although arguably only technical, the change to central, executive branch control over the examination process was a fundamental one.<sup>16</sup>

With this change came an explosion in the information that petitioners for citizenship were required to file with the government. To become American citizens after June of 1906, immigrants seeking citizenship were required to provide precise life history data, including such things as date and place of birth of the applicant and his wife and children; place and date of marriage; date and port of embarkation; port of entry; information on the period between immigration and naturalization; the name of the vessel upon which they arrived; information about occupations; information

about the length of time spent continuously in the United States and in the state in which they sought citizenship; and their home town, province, or region in Europe.

Immigrants seeking to become citizens had to be in the country for at least two years before filing a Declaration of Citizenship, and a total of five years to file an official Petition for Citizenship (Naturalization Petition). Information was often different between these two documents, especially if the petitioner had changed addresses or occupations; this enables further precise tracking of the individual. Beginning in March, 1909, copies of the declarations were attached to the petitions, and beginning in October, 1911, copies of certificates of arrival were included. These certificates detailed when an immigrant arrived in America, into what port, and on what vessel.

I used these records to work "backwards" to trace an immigrant's settlement patterns in the United States. Obviously, filing for citizenship is the ultimate indicator of wanting to remain permanently in America, but these records tell us a great deal about the immigrant's life well *before* he filed for citizenship. From these records, I was able to track when residents in my North End sample arrived in the country, whether they had families in Italy when they arrived, and when they decided to start families in the United States. Most Italian immigrant men traveled alone in their initial trip to the United States, presumably because they intended to return to Italy at some point. Therefore, incurring the expense of bringing a family over from Italy, or marrying and starting a family in America, were important steps in the process of settlement. This is especially true since we know from published studies that most Italians who re-emigrated to Italy returned home alone--entire families seldom re-emigrated.<sup>17</sup> In fact, an examination of when and how many children were born to my sample group will be a key element in my analysis.

The petitions also required an alien to swear under oath how long he had resided continuously in the United States and in the state in which he was seeking citizenship. This enables us to examine to what extent the "birds of passage" phenomenon was evident in this sample group, and offers clues as to the immigrants' intentions to remain in the United States. Since the dates of emigration and arrival in America are also included, we can chart whether the immigrants' arrivals coincided with any particular occupational seasons. In addition, the petitions list the current occupation of the person applying for citizenship, which means we can get an idea of a person's occupational mobility by comparing jobs listed in the city directory, on the Declaration of Intention, and finally, on the Naturalization Petition itself. We can also theorize on whether changes in occupation were a factor in a person's decision to seek citizenship. It is important to mention here, and it will be noted later in this thesis, that there were inaccuracies in the occupations listed in the *Boston City Directories*, particularly in the early years of the twentieth century. I do not consider this a crucial problem in this instance, mainly because I will be using occupations listed on the declarations and petitions to draw my conclusions. The information in the city directories will be used more for comparative purposes. I mention their shortcomings here only in the interest of methodological honesty.

An indication of how naturalization petitions can provide answers to an immigrant's settlement patterns, well before he decided to become a citizen, can be illustrated vividly using the example of my own paternal grandfather. Although he did not file for citizenship until 1930, his naturalization records paint a picture of a man whose desire from the beginning was to remain permanently in America. His petition shows that he first arrived in the United States on August 30, 1906, returned home, and then re-entered the country in June of 1907, this time with his wife and their first child, who was only six-months old. This alone is strong evidence that he

wanted to settle in America. Italian men rarely sailed to America with wives or children if they intended to stay only temporarily. The fact that my grandfather had a second child in 1909 (and eight more between 1911 and 1925) was further confirmation that he wanted to raise a family here. The point is, while applying for citizenship is an *indisputable* sign that an immigrant wants to remain in the country, the naturalization petitions also can provide information about his process of settlement patterns--and clues about his intentions--years before he formally applies for citizenship.

Finally, while only the naturalization petitions after 1906 provide the extensive kind of information I have outlined here, they still allow us to study Italians who arrived well before 1900. This is due to the fact that an immigrant had to be in the United States at least five years even to petition for citizenship, and it was not common for Italians to petition so quickly in the early years. In fact, fifty people in my sample arrived in America before 1900, some as early as 1882, yet none petitioned for citizenship before 1906.

### Other Important Sources

While the naturalization petitions are the most important source used in this study, there are others, primary and secondary, that are critical to an examination of the settlement of the North End.

Chief among the primary sources is the *1910 United States Senate Report of the Immigration Commission*, more commonly known as the "Dillingham Commission Report" (named after the United States Senator from Vermont who recommended the study). This massive 42-volume work studied the impact of immigration on American society, and any attempt at a demographic study of the

North End at the turn of the century should begin with an analysis of volumes 26 and 27 of this report, entitled "Immigrants in Cities". These volumes present an analysis of the immigrant populations of seven cities--New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Cleveland, Buffalo, and Milwaukee--and also study selective neighborhoods or "districts" in each city. Two of the Boston "districts" were in the North End.

The Dillingham Commission studied a total Boston sampling of 326 Southern Italian and 15 Northern Italian households, representing a total of 1,799 people. The two North End districts that were analyzed in the report included 278 Southern Italian and 12 Northern Italian households, totaling 1,487 individuals. The North End thus represented 85.7 percent of all Italians in the Boston survey. Much of the analyses and many conclusions of this immigration report have been criticized for their lack of objectivity and anti-immigration bias, mainly because of the undue influence immigration restriction organizations had with the members of the committee. However, its statistical data is generally presumed as accurate. It thus provides an important look at immigrant life in America in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> Again, while DeMarco refutes several of the anti-immigrant conclusions drawn in this report, its rich demographic data has yet to be fully examined in previous North End studies. Among other important statistics, it includes information on home ownership, long an indicator of stability in neighborhoods.

A second reservoir of primary source material which has yet to be fully utilized in any North End study is *The George Scigliano Collection*, housed in the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) at the University of Minnesota. Scigliano, who until now has remained a relatively obscure figure in Boston history, was literally a hero among North End Italians around the turn of the century. He was a prominent attorney and the first man of Italian heritage (he was born in Boston) elected to the Massachusetts Legislature. He vociferously and successfully argued

for the passage of bills that regulated so-called immigrant banks that had swindled hundreds of unsuspecting immigrants, and for clamping down on the *padrone* system of contract labor. After his premature death at the age of 32 in 1906, his funeral was the largest ever in the North End, and a year later, Scigliano's North End countrymen became embroiled in a major dispute with the city over whether to rename historic North Square to Scigliano Square.<sup>19</sup> Immigrant leaders existed in every major United States city during this period and among every major immigrant group, but Scigliano's energy and influence--heretofore unacclaimed in Boston history--played a compelling role in the development of the North End as a stable Italian neighborhood. This collection provides a rare view of one of the most interesting political ethnic lives in turn-of-the-century Boston.

Other primary sources that I consulted for this study include: the United States Census (1900, 1910, 1920); *Boston City Directories*; general correspondence and marriage records from the Sacred Heart and St. Leonard parishes in the North End and the Archdiocese of Boston Archives; *The James Donnaruma Collection* (he was owner and publisher of the major Italian language newspaper in the North End during this period) housed in the IHRC at the University of Minnesota; the *American Italian Historical Association Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference, November 17, 1973* (for a discussion of religion during this period); *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States with the annual message of the President transmitted to Congress, December 3, 1907*; and marriage and birth records stored in the Massachusetts State Archives. While none of these are used to the extent of the naturalization petitions, The Dillingham Commission study, or The Scigliano Collection, they must be considered as part of the overall effort to assemble information about Italian immigrants. Many of them also are useful in drawing conclusions about the growth and development of the North End. Secondary



sources included general important works on Italian immigration by historians Cinel, Betty Boyd Caroli, Foerster, Mormino, Humbert Nelli, and Loretta Yans-McLaughlin. These are important comparative works of other Italian communities during peak immigration years. I also have examined Boston and North End studies by Frederick Bushee, Oscar Handlin, Stanley Lieberman, Paula Todisco, and Robert A. Woods. All of these works are fully cited in the bibliography that accompanies this study, as are many other important immigration studies too numerous to allude to here.

### More Willing to Sink Roots

Historian James Crispino offered this perspective on Italian immigrants:

A sizable proportion of the immigrants, called "birds of passage", wended their way back and forth across the Atlantic as their economic fortunes dictated. Some of these discovered that they had become too Americanized and could not re-adjust to the way of life of a stagnant, agricultural society. As the realization that one would not be able to return to the Old Country and live comfortably, in an economic as well as a social cultural sense, sunk in, the immigrant reluctantly accepted his status as a permanent resident.<sup>20</sup>

My research indicates that the residents of the North End were not as "reluctant" as Crispino suggests to make their home in America. Rather than remaining "birds of passage" until the outbreak of the First World War, evidence indicates that North End Italians were, as DeMarco argued briefly, "less transient" than conventional historical wisdom has portrayed them, and more willing to establish roots in the neighborhood well before 1910. In addition to examining the general process of settlement for Italian immigrants in America during this period, this study will take a more focused look at Boston's North End Italian neighborhood. It will provide a quantitative look at the process of settlement for 125 Italian immigrants who later became citizens, suggest factors that may have led them to their

decision to remain in America, and discuss the effect those decisions had on one of the country's most important ethnic neighborhoods.

### Notes

1. Antonio Mangano, "The Effect of Emigration Upon Italy" (1907) in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed., *The Italian in America: The Progressive View, 1891-1914* (New York, 1972), p. 164.
2. Francesco Cordasco, *Italian Mass Emigration: The Exodus of a Latin People--A Bibliographical Guide to the Bollettino Dell'Emigrazione, 1902-1927* (Totowa, N.J., 1980), pp. 284-285.
3. Alexander DeConde, *Half Bitter, Half Sweet: An Excursion into Italian-American History* (New York, 1971), p. 77.
4. For a full discussion of these factors, see Chapter 2 in this study. Also see William DeMarco, *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End* (Ann Arbor, 1981), pp. 13-14.
5. Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, 1982), p. 41.
6. Cinel, p. 2.
7. Betty Boyd Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914* (New York, 1973), p. v.
8. Caroli, pp 6-7.
9. Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge, Mass., 1919), p. 41.
10. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), p. 48.
11. Cinel, p. 49.
12. For a complete discussion of remittances in Italian banks from immigrants, see Foerster, p. 374, in which Foerster quotes the Immigration Commission as saying that in 1907 alone, remittances of money to Italy totaled \$85 million. See also *International Migrations, Volume II, Interpretations*, edited on behalf of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc. (New York, 1969), which concludes that the "transfer of savings to Italy by Italian laborers in foreign countries (mostly from the United States) during this time period constitutes one of the principal credit items in Italy's balance of international payments," pp 466-467.

13. Humbert Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnic: The Italian Americans* (New York, 1983), p. 153.

14. Cinel, p. 57.

15. In his study of San Francisco, Cinel said in his bibliographical essay that his most useful sources of information were 2,000 records of naturalization petitions of San Francisco Italians. Mormino, in his St. Louis study entitled *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982* (Chicago, 1986), studied the papers of every Italian immigrant seeking citizenship in St. Louis between 1906 and 1930, a total of about 900 people. No other neighborhood study of which I'm aware makes extensive use of these petitions.

16. For an interesting discussion on the change from the judicial to the executive branch in controlling the naturalization process, see the Introduction of the *Petitions and Records of Naturalization of the United States District Court and the United States Circuit Court for the District of Massachusetts, 1906-1929*, stored at the National Archives Regional Office in Waltham, Massachusetts.

17. Caroli estimates that about eighty percent of the Italians who left America to return to Italy were men traveling alone. See *Italian Repatriation*, p. 16.

18. DeMarco points out that since its publication, the Dillingham Commission Report has received much criticism, most notably from Isaac A. Hourwich, *Immigration and Labor: The Economic Aspects of European Immigration to the United States* (New York), as early as 1912, and more recently from Oscar Handlin, *Race and Nationality in American Life* (Boston: Little Brown) in 1957. DeMarco himself criticizes the report for mis-identifying both "regions" and "provinces" in Italy and "neighborhoods" in the North End. The major criticism of the report has centered on the restrictionist bias of the commission and its interpretation of the data, while the statistical materials generally have been accepted as accurate.

19. This controversy is detailed in many publications contained in *The George Scigliano Collection*, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota. The controversy, as well as Scigliano's influence on the North End, will be discussed in detail in this study.

20. James A. Crispino, *The Assimilation of Ethnic Groups: The Italian Case* (New York, 1980), p. 24.

C H A P T E R II  
A LOOK AT WHO THEY WERE  
AND WHY THEY CAME

"Necessity is not only the mother of invention," an immigration scholar wrote in 1919, "but of a good many other children, including emigration."<sup>1</sup>

To put the North End Italian experience in context, it is important to examine who these Italian immigrants were and why they decided to emigrate from Italy in the first place. While there may have been a variety of reasons for leaving the Old Country depending on the circumstances of the immigrant, necessity certainly was the driving force. Specifically, the major causes of emigration were related to harsh economic realities, geographic issues between Northern and Southern Italians, and serious health-related problems. All of these led to apparent feelings of desperation among Italian emigrants, most of them from the south.

Of the more than four million Italians who came to the United States between 1890 and 1920, approximately 80 percent were from Southern Italy, and some 29 percent of these were from Sicily.<sup>2</sup> Slightly more than 80 percent of my North End sample population who became citizens came from the Southern provinces, generally identified as those located south of Rome (see Appendix B). Most of the men worked in Italy as peasant farmers, fishermen, shoemakers, barbers, craftsmen, or tradesmen. During this period, Southern Italy became known to the peasants who lived there as the land of *la miseria*. Like weather fronts colliding, a stunning combination of forces and events converged and exploded upon Southern Italy, producing hardships whose cumulative effects drove millions of residents to seek a different life. In the 1870s, for example, the Italian government forced Southern peasants to pay exorbitant taxes on diseased vineyards. In 1910, the eruption of

Mount Etna in Sicily killed 10,000 people. Sandwiched between these two events, residents of the Southern Italian region endured a litany of misery:

- In an effort to raise revenue in the late 1870s, the Italian government heavily taxed wheat, which had already fallen to a record low price, and salt, which Southern Italians used as a preservative, thereby creating overwhelming financial hardships for peasant farmers.

- In Avellino in 1880, virtually all of the province's agricultural crops suffered from disease, and its peasant population was expected to absorb the loss by absentee landlords who usually lived in the north.

- Bread riots broke out when nearly 65 percent of the Naples-Avellino population was without work and food in 1881.

- A cholera epidemic ravaged Naples in 1882, aggravating an already insufferable situation.

- The citrus crop, the pride of parts of Campania and Sicily, suffered several poor harvests in a row due to drought and diseased trees, enabling the U.S. citrus industry to gain a toehold in the world market in the late 1890s.

- Similar conditions destroyed vineyards and enabled the French wine industry to encroach on the Italian industry, which until the turn of the century had been dominant in Europe. The resulting loss of market share hurt the Southern Italian economy especially hard.

- Natural disasters also played a significant role in the Italian emigration decision, when in 1905, a series of earthquakes rocked the provinces of Calabria and Basilicata. As many as 30,000 were killed. The following year, Mount Vesuvius erupted, burying entire towns near Naples.

• In 1908, one of the worst disasters in Italian history occurred when an earthquake devastated Messina in Sicily. More than 100,000 people were killed and an additional 20,000 died across the straits of Messina in Regina di Calabria.<sup>3</sup>

Distinguished Italian immigration historian Robert Foerster, writing just after the end of the First World War, also cited another major ongoing reason for the intolerable conditions in Southern Italy during this period--disease, especially malaria. "It stands forth, in truth, as one of the prime forces that have made for emigration," he wrote. He explained that malaria, in order to flourish, requires the presence of stagnant water. With six months of heavy rain and six months of almost no rain, numerous small pools formed in Italy that allowed the disease to thrive, according to Foerster. As late as 1887, he noted, 21,000 people died of malaria in Italy.<sup>4</sup> All of these factors, Foerster said--poverty, natural disasters, disease--had a devastating overall effect on the Italian economy, but, "of all the consequences, the most serious is probably psychological, the creation of a mood of helplessness, or even worse, of apathy, restraining at once the impulse to progress and the energies needed for accomplishment."<sup>5</sup>

This mood of helplessness seemed to permeate Southern Italy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and was noted by several Italian officials and writers. In a widely publicized essay in Italy in the 1880s, one writer described the harsh conditions in the South:

Our peasants there are in worse conditions than the serfs of the Middle Ages. The landlords treat them like slaves. Peasants live like beasts. Their sense of dignity seems to have died centuries ago. They have two equally hard choices before them--submission and work until an untimely death, or rebellion and a violent death--unless they are willing to escape to somewhere else.<sup>6</sup>

At the turn of the century, Giustino Fortunato, the representative in the Chamber of Deputies of one of the poorest districts of the south, described to his

colleagues, "the sadness of the physical and social landscape of the provinces of Calabria and Basilicata and the tragic reality of regions where peasants live months and years without ever seeing a happy face...It is unlikely that these people will learn to smile as long as they stay in the deep South."<sup>7</sup> The prolonged agricultural depression from the mid-1880s through the 1890s pounded the region so fiercely that one official reported: "The cost of oil and other items is so high that people are forced to leave for overseas to avoid starvation." In the spring of 1894 he added: "People are leaving in large numbers; they think they have no alternative, and they are unwilling to face another winter here. Poverty seems to have broken their will to fight. Their departure is like the flight of people who have nothing to lose by going."<sup>8</sup> Financial capital to develop industry and commerce was also lacking, as interest rates on loans usually ranged from 50 to 120 percent per year. Even fishing was hurt by the depression. In 1895, the mayor of Santa Flavia reported: "The fishermen of this town are forced to leave. The basic reason is that they cannot sell their catch. There is simply no cash in the region, and commerce has come to a standstill."<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps most debilitating of all to the Southern Italian economy, however, were the crushing taxes levied upon its residents--most already desperately poor--by virtually all levels of government. By the end of the nineteenth century, taxes in Italy were the highest in Europe and weighed especially heavily on those least able to pay, the *contadini* (peasants) and the *giornalieri* (day laborers) of the south. Excise taxes were placed on salt, sugar, tobacco, liquor, flour, bread, macaroni, and other items over which the government exercised a monopoly. Not only did the central government tax heavily, but so did the provinces and the communes.<sup>10</sup> "Some calculations put overall taxation at 30% of income," wrote one scholar, "as against 12% in France, 8% in Germany, and 6% in England...And in Italy, the taxes fall

heaviest on the poor. It is progressive taxation topsy-turvy; the less a man has, the more he pays...54% of taxes fall on the poor or working class...When the individual emigrant is considered, two words may describe the forces which drive him from his native land, and these two words are poverty and taxes. Perhaps the formula may be reduced to one word--poverty--for his poverty is in no small measure the result of the direct and indirect taxes he has to bear."<sup>11</sup>

Historians Luciano Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello have suggested that this heavy tax burden levied on the South not only helped virtually bankrupt the region, but also bred resentment among Southern Italians against the central government and the Northern Italians who held the most powerful positions in Rome. This exacerbated a feeling that had existed in the South since Italy's reunification in 1860--that Northerners viewed their Southern countrymen as inferiors. These feelings continued well after Italians emigrated to America. The usurious taxes imposed by Rome also heightened the Southern Italians' general distrust of authorities and government, feelings which also carried over to the New World. "Reaching out in all directions," Iorizzo and Mondello wrote, "the government's attempts to add to its coffers even touched upon every living animal the *contadino* had--his ox, his ass, and his pig...In 1868, Rome provided for graduated taxes on the grinding of grains. Southern Italians considered this grist tax as discriminatory, since it provided for graduated taxes on the grinding of wheat, the major grain in their diet. They believed that Northern Italians, who relied predominately on corn, were favored. Moreover, the poor throughout the country felt burdened by this legislation because, unlike the well-to-do, they depended heavily on flour products for sustenance."<sup>12</sup>

While a stagnant economy made jobs scarce, even those who had work received virtually unlivable wages for their efforts. For example, carpenters in Italy received a pitiful thirty cents to \$1.40 per day, or, for a six-day week, from \$1.80 to



\$8.40. Their counterparts in the United States made about \$18 for a 50-hour week. The general laborer, who toiled for less than sixty cents a day throughout most of Italy (about \$3.50 per week), received about \$9.50 per week in America. In fact, in some of the poorest regions of the south, laborers earned no more than twelve to twenty cents per day.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout this period, the birth rate in Italy continued to rise, placing an additional strain on a nation lacking national resources and a strong economy. Italy in the late nineteenth century was the fourth most densely populated country in Europe. Between 1881 and 1901, the population of Italy increased from around 29 million to nearly 33 million, *despite* the emigration of nearly four million Italians to other countries. All the provinces--the richest in industry and agriculture as well as the poorest and most backward--saw their population figures increase. The Italian peninsula, with an area of about 110,000 square miles, had a population of 293 people per square mile around 1890, as compared to 189 in France and only twenty-one in the United States. The high birth rate and resulting overcrowding became another factor in the decision by Italians to emigrate. Conversely, emigration became a necessary safety valve that helped offset the ever-rising birth rate and even greater population increases that would have made conditions worse. "Considering the small area of the country, together with the fact that one-third of this consists of barren mountains which produce absolutely nothing, and large sections are virtually abandoned owing to the prevalence of malaria, it is quite evident that emigration must continue; otherwise the country will not be able to support its inhabitants," wrote a journalist in 1907.<sup>14</sup>

Given all of these conditions, it is no surprise that Italians looked elsewhere--first to other European countries, then to South America, and finally to America--to overcome the poverty and desperation that filled their lives. "Purely economic causes

were responsible for practically all emigration from Italy," according to one historian. "The emigrants were driven by a desire to escape abject poverty and a vicious system of taxation, the burden of which fell almost exclusively on poor peasants. At the same time, they were attracted by the hope of bettering their miserable conditions through seasonal or temporary labor elsewhere in Europe and overseas."<sup>15</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, interest in America had reached amazingly high levels, especially in Southern Italy. An American visitor to the region wrote: "There was constant talk of America on the trains, on the road, and in towns. In a small southern town I saw a great throng of people. Upon inquiring, I was told that they had been to the station to say goodbye to 120 of their townsmen who had just left for America."<sup>16</sup> Even in the most isolated communities, emigration to America was the topic of discussion. There were many people who could name the president of the United States but not the King of Italy.<sup>17</sup> In 1896, the *prefetto* of Palermo reported: "America seems to have an irresistible attraction for these people. Sicilians have traditionally been unwilling to leave the island, even to go to Italy. But America seems to be different. Or is it that they have no alternative, and anything is an improvement over their present condition in Sicily?"<sup>18</sup>

After the first emigrants who had gone to America returned to Italy and told other peasants they could earn money, Southern Italians became convinced that emigration was a way out of their desperate situation. "America has become a disease, but out of necessity," wrote the president of an Italian agricultural society. Or, as a Southern Italian who had traveled back and forth between the United States and Italy answered when asked the difference between the two countries: "The main difference was bread. There was always bread in America."<sup>19</sup>

### Who the Emigrants Were: Demographic, Occupational Characteristics

To draw intelligent conclusions about North End Italians who made their decision to remain in the United States and later become citizens, it is important to understand the demographic and occupational characteristics of the people who decided to leave Italy and travel to America. Understanding these characteristics enables us to draw inferences about the decisions they made along the road to permanent settlement in America.

Besides being predominately from the south, the Italians who traveled to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were mostly male and young, usually unmarried or traveling without families, and largely illiterate and without job skills. Perhaps most importantly, they were usually without a desire to leave Italy permanently, despite hardships in their native country. Family, marriage, and job characteristics of these immigrants are particularly important to examine as part of their process of settlement in America.

Both Italian and U.S. statistics show that anywhere from 75 to 83 percent of all Italian arrivals to America between 1895 and 1914 were men in the 14 to 44 age bracket.<sup>20</sup> A study on international migrations conducted on behalf of the National Bureau of Economic Research concluded: "For the most part, Italian emigrants prefer to go abroad alone. The family ties that bind them to the mother country form the chief reasons for repatriation, and the remittances from Italians abroad are an important element in the balance of international payments."<sup>21</sup> Commenting on the large proportion of men traveling alone among Italian immigrants to the United States, historian Robert Foerster wrote: "(This) is a proportion not nearly approached

by any other important group in the country, and reflecting better than any other circumstances the fact that they had come to earn."<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps Foerster could have lengthened his sentence to say "earn and return." Italian statistics corroborate the notion that most Italians, when leaving Italy, considered their emigration to the United States only temporary. For instance, of all those who left Italy in 1906, only 20 percent said that they intended to stay abroad indefinitely--all the others indicated that they would return within one year. Moreover, about 80 percent of the Italians who arrived in the U.S. in 1907 were between the ages of 16 and 45, and almost all those who were married had left their families in Italy.<sup>23</sup>

Historian Dino Cinel, in his study of San Francisco, indicates that on the average, less than 25 percent of the emigrants from Italy declared upon leaving that they intended to stay abroad. "The Italian Bureau of Statistics had two categories of emigration: temporary and permanent," he wrote. "By temporary, the bureau meant emigration for less than a year; by permanent, it meant emigration of several years' duration. There was no word to indicate the definitive departure for another country; in Italy, the concept did not exist (This concept will be discussed further in Chapter III, "The Birds of Passage")."<sup>24</sup>

As for occupational demographics, as pointed out earlier, most Southern Italians who emigrated to America were peasant farmers or fisherman. They generally lacked skills that could be transferred from the rural agricultural economy of Southern Italy to the urban Italian settlements in the U.S. This factor, coupled with high illiteracy rates, combined to assure that Italians disembarking at American ports would be largely unprepared for the life they faced in the New World. According to statistics collected by the U.S. Immigration Commission for the period from 1899 to 1910, Southern Italians had among the highest illiteracy rates for all

immigrants. Some 1.7 million Italians entered the United States during these years, of whom 911,000 were illiterate, or about 54 percent. Only Turks and Portuguese exceeded the Southern Italian figure.<sup>25</sup> As a result of these factors, Southern Italians arriving in the United States generally had little choice but to take jobs as unskilled laborers.

### **The Italian Government's Response to Emigration**

It is worthwhile to look at the Italian government's response to the ever increasing number of people leaving the country during this heaviest period of emigration from Italy. Government decisions and proclamations, while certainly not as important as economic and health-related factors in the overall emigration picture, did have some influence on the levels of emigration at various times. The government response can essentially be divided into two periods.

Prior to 1890, when many single Italian males left mainly on a temporary basis to earn money abroad, the government encouraged emigration for two major reasons. First, it provided a safety valve to the overcrowding and poverty-stricken conditions in Italy. People who spent time abroad would not have to compete for scarce resources in Italy. Secondly, dollars earned by emigrants were either sent back or brought back to Italy to be spent. In either case, a cash-poor Southern Italian economy benefitted.

However, between 1890 and 1910, when Italians left in greater numbers and often permanently, the official Italian response changed markedly. During this period, both the government and Italian community leaders expressed concern that America was siphoning Italy's youngest, strongest, hardest-working men--in essence, the future of the mother country. Beyond that, entire families were now leaving Italy to join fathers, husbands, or sons in America. There was still a large

enough volume of return migration, meaning that financial remittances remained strong (one Italian immigration scholar points out that when Italians settled permanently in another country, remittances decreased or stopped entirely).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the Italian steamship business boomed as ships carried emigrants to America. Despite these positives, however, there was a feeling that it would take a long time for Italy to recover from the loss of so many of its young families.

Immediately after reunification, the new Italian government had deplored, been indifferent to, or had ignored the exodus from the countryside. Slowly, despite the influence in parliament of landowners who opposed emigration (and the loss of low-paid labor), the attitude of the government changed. Seeing positive advantages in emigration, Italian officials even encouraged it. A law of December, 1888, designed to control emigration, also declared that Italians could freely emigrate from the kingdom. Italian immigration scholar Alexander DeConde explains this policy:

In immigrating to a richer land, such as the United States, Italians often helped themselves and their country by relieving the economic pressure at home. The mere act of leaving helped because it reduced the number of mouths to be fed in Italy. They continued to help by sending home some of the money earned abroad. These emigrant remittances gave the Italian government badly needed cash and became important in Italy's effort to balance her economy. Immigrants in the United States, like those in South America, bought Italian foods and other products, so by creating a demand for Italian goods, they also helped in building Italy's foreign markets.<sup>27</sup>

Although it is impossible to be completely accurate about the total amount of money which entered Italy each year from its sons working in other countries, estimates are that it was many millions of dollars each year (See Table 2.1, Page 33). A member of the Italian parliament estimated that 500 million lire, or about \$100 million, had entered Italy in the period 1897 to 1902. The Italian government estimated that between 1902 and 1914, more than 600 million lire in remittances entered Italy.<sup>28</sup> As late as 1904, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Tommaso Titoni encouraged emigration from Italy: "Emigration is a necessity for our country. It

would be terrible if this safety valve did not exist, this possibility of finding work elsewhere."<sup>29</sup>

In 1901, Italy passed an Emigration Act, which signified awareness on the part of the Italian government of the need to regulate and report on migration from its borders. The legislation provided for the establishment of a *Commissariato dell'Emigrazione*, which was to operate within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This group was responsible for regulating various matters connected with emigration, such as the dissemination of publicity by shipping companies, conditions in ports, and the prices of voyages.

In connection with its duties, the *Commissariato dell'Emigrazione* published at various times during each year after 1901 a *Bollettino dell'Emigrazione*, which provided information to observers and potential emigrants. The number of bulletins, their size, and content varied from year to year. Sometimes as many as twenty-two pamphlets totaling thousands of pages came out in a twelve-month period. Their contents covered a wide range of materials--from mining conditions in Pennsylvania to land prices in New Zealand, from sleeping arrangements available to emigrants in ports of departure to specifications of what they should be fed during the journey.<sup>30</sup> It is important to mention the *Bollettino* because it is one of the key sources of material on the emigration of Italians during this period and because it provides a framework for studying the Italian government's attitudes toward emigration at this time. Numerous passages refer to the benefits to be derived from temporary emigration, for example.

After 1900, however, some of the feelings among Italian government officials and other influential leaders began to change. Emigration thinned out the population, but it often emptied whole villages of able-bodied men. "The young men

**Table 2.1**--Remittances from Italian emigrants in the United States made through Banco Di Napoli (in thousands of lire)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Amount (in 000s of lire)</u>
1902	7,441
1903	18,567
1904	22,022
1905	27,775
1906	18,440
1907	24,695
1908	18,599
1909	22,253
1910	37,261
1911	48,476
1912	56,558
1913	62,934
1914	66,040

Compiled from Betty Boyd Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914* (New York, 1973), 59; adapted from Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione, *Annuario Statistico della Emigrazione Italiana dal 1876-1925* (Rome, 1925), 1647-1648.

have all gone to America," said one villager in 1908. "We are rearing good strong men to spend their strength in America."<sup>31</sup> The emigration of these young men changed the very character of scores of small communities in Southern Italy. For example, the town of Amalfi was a thriving town of 10,000 people. By 1901, it was reduced to 6,681 and by 1907 it contained about 3,000 people. "America has all the rest," one journalist wrote in 1907. "This explains why the factories cannot run and why the vineyards are going to decay. In fact, so serious has this depopulation become that an effort has been made to colonize the southern provinces with workingmen from the north, but...this cannot be carried out with success because the



laborers from the north will not put up with the primitive conditions of life and work in the south. When emigration had not assumed such enormous proportions as the present time, the Italian government looked upon it with favor, for it served as a kind of balance wheel to the economic equilibrium of the country. The laborers would leave home when they had no work and return at the end of the season with money to spend. This kind of emigration is fostered by the Italian government...but the great bulk of the emigration today is a very different sort. It is the permanent tendency in the tide of emigration which is occupying the attention of those most keenly interested in the welfare of the country as a whole." <sup>32</sup> In 1904, in a magazine interview, Adolfo Rossi, a regional inspector for the *Commissariato dell'Emigrazione* lamented the fact that "the character of the emigration has changed in recent years...this excessive emigration is working a harm to the nation at large in that it takes from us the flower of our laboring class."<sup>33</sup>

Through policy and persuasion during the early emigration years, then, the Italian government helped feed the fever of many of its people to travel to America. It encouraged temporary emigration in the early years to reduce the pressure of poverty and encourage fresh capital to be infused into Italy. In so doing, it gave poverty-stricken Italians a taste of better things in the Americas. By 1905 or so, the government was forced to take the opposite side of the issue, desperately urging Italian citizens not to emigrate permanently for the good of the mother country. By then, though, it was too late. Too many Italians, many of them Italy's "good strong men," had either been to America at least once or had received word from loved ones that the United States, though in many ways so foreign and difficult, was still an improvement over the deplorable economic and health conditions in Italy. By the first decade of the twentieth century--although many Italians continued to travel back

and forth across the Atlantic as "birds of passage"--the permanent exodus from Italy had begun in earnest.

### Notes

1. Francis E. Clark, *Why Italians Emigrate: Our Italian Fellow Citizens in Their Old Homes and Their New* (Boston, 1919), p. 75.
2. Silvano M. Tomasi, *Piety and Power, The Role of Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area, 1880-1930*, (New York, 1975), pp. 16-18.
3. Accounts of these economic and natural disasters are discussed in a variety of sources on Italian emigration. For the best general account, see *William DeMarco, Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End* (Ann Arbor, 1981), pp. 13-14. The 1908 earthquake in Sicily, in fact, was so devastating that it aroused sympathies in many Americans, including President Theodore Roosevelt, who sent a telegram to the King of Italy saying he was "appalled by the dreadful calamity which has befallen your country. I offer my sincerest sympathy. American National Red Cross has issued special appeal for contributions for the sufferers and notified me that they will immediately communicate with the Italian Red Cross." See more correspondence on the earthquake in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1908*, pp. 499-501.
4. Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge, Mass., 1919), p. 59.
5. Foerster, p. 63.
6. Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, 1982), p. 38.
7. Cinel, p. 39.
8. Foerster, p. 40.
9. Foerster, p. 40.
10. Humbert S. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans* (New York, 1983), pp. 23-23.
11. Francis E. Clark, *Why Italians Emigrate*, p. 74.
12. Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian Americans* (Boston, 1980), p. 59.

13. Iorizzo and Mondello, p. 60.
14. Antonio Mangano, "The Effect of Emigration Upon Italy (1907)," in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed., *The Italian in America: The Progressive View, 1891-1914* (New York, 1972), pp. 110-111. For further information on the population of Italy, see also Charlotte Erickson, ed., *Emigration from Europe, 1815-1914* (London, 1976), pp. 96-97.
15. Nelli, p. 31.
16. Foerster, p. 40.
17. Foerster, p. 40.
18. Foerster, pp. 40-41.
19. Betty Boyd Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914* (New York, 1973), p. 86.
20. Tomasi, p. 21.
21. Walter F. Wilcox, ed., *International Migrations, Volume II, Interpretations, Edited on Behalf of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., Demographic Monographs, Volume 8* (New York, 1969), pp. 453-454.
22. Foerster, pp. 327-328.
23. Cinel, p. 2.
24. Cinel, p. 66.
25. Tomasi, p. 22, and he adds: "The illiteracy of the immigrants was universal in terms of knowledge of the English language, and it was extremely high with regard to the Italian language. The local dialect, in most cases, was the only linguistic equipment of the immigrant and it confined his culture to the isolated *paese* from which he had come."
26. Caroli, p. 57.
27. Alexander DeConde, *Half Bitter, Half Sweet, An Excursion into Italian-American History* (New York, 1971), p. 81.
28. Caroli, p. 57.
29. Caroli, p. 56.
30. Caroli, p. 53.
31. DeConde, p. 81.

32. Antonio Mangano, "The Effect of Emigration Upon Italy" in Tomasi, ed., *The Italian in America*, p. 172.

33. "The Effect of Emigration on Italy: An interview with Adolfo Rossi, Regional Inspector of the Emigration Commission", in Tomasi, *The Italian in America*, p. 99.

C H A P T E R III  
THE TUG OF HOME:  
THE 'BIRDS OF PASSAGE'  
AND ITALIAN REPATRIATION

Giovanni Florenzano, a student of migration in Italy, wrote in the 1870s: "Our emigrants carry their mother country in their hearts and maintain a political tie with it, and they return as soon as they have put together a small nestegg. In this respect, they are different from the English, Irish, and Germans who go to America to become citizens."<sup>1</sup> Florenzano examined sixteen provinces in the Naples area for an eighteen-month period that included 1872 and the first half of 1873. His work emphasized the extent of emigration to America and attempted to fill what he considered to be a gap in information on those leaving Italy.

Florenzano conducted his research during the earliest period of Italian emigration to America. However, the migratory behavior of his countrymen who left Italy would continue for decades to come. The entire phenomenon of return migration from the United States would continue to be an important part of the entire Italian emigration experience during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some Italians were known disparagingly by Americans as "birds of passage", as they traveled back and forth across the Atlantic, driven by both the economic and meteorological climates. They arrived in America in springtime to take advantage of outdoor seasonal employment, and returned to Italy when the weather turned colder. Many of these people ended up settling in the United States eventually, though a significant number returned to Italy permanently. Other Italians stayed in America for a short time before repatriating to Italy. Often they were unable to make the cultural and sociological adjustment from the largely pastoral setting in Southern Italy to what must have been for them a frenetic urban pace in America. Others simply

missed family and loved ones at home. Whatever their reasons, the number of Italians who left the United States and returned to Italy during the height of immigration is certainly large enough to warrant examination. By acknowledging the significant number of Italians who left--and theorizing about their motives for doing so--we can heighten our appreciation and awareness of those who stayed. By examining the concept of return migration in general, we can also better place in context the Italian North End experience.

Records for the early years of immigration are sketchy, but return-migration scholars have determined as surely as possible that of the approximately 4.2 million Italians who arrived in the United States between 1880 and 1920, as many as 1.7 million returned permanently to Italy. The greatest population movement between the United States and Italy occurred in the period 1900 to 1914. Statistics of both countries concur that mass emigration and repatriation took place in these years. Italian records indicate that more than 3 million nationals left for the United States during a time when the total Italian population ranged between 32 million and 36 million. The U.S. Census showed that Italy had contributed less than 5 percent of the foreign-born persons residing in the United States at the time of the 1900 census, but the figure had risen to nearly 10 percent by 1910. However, during this same period of 1900 to 1914, passenger lists of ships arriving in Italian ports from America indicate that more than 1.5 million Italians returned to their home country after a period of temporary residence in the United States. This means that nearly one in twenty of the inhabitants of the Italian peninsula deserved the name *Americano*, as those who returned were called.<sup>2</sup>

Further, about 60 percent of the Italians who arrived in the United States between 1908 and 1923 returned to Italy within a few years, and in some years the returnees far outnumbered the arrivals. In 1908, for example, during an economic

recession in the United States, some 130,000 Italians arrived in America while 240,000 returned to Italy.<sup>3</sup> In 1904, for every ten Italians who left for the United States, nine returned. From 1912 to 1915, the number of returnees to Italy from the United States fluctuated between 110,000 and 150,000 each year--that was about sixty percent as high as the total number of people departing from America.<sup>4</sup> Certainly immigrants of other nationalities left America also--indeed, for every 100 immigrants of *all* nationalities who entered the U.S. from 1908 to 1924, thirty-eight returned to their homelands. However, of all the larger groups of immigrants, the Italians showed a much greater tendency to return home (see Table 3.1).<sup>5</sup>

Put another way, one scholar said that as immigration increased in absolute numbers, so did repatriation. He estimates that between 1891 and 1900, 34

**Table 3.1**--Average annual number of emigrants returning to Italy from the United States

<u>Year(s)</u>	<u>Returnees from United States</u>
1887-1891	5,371
1892-1896	20,075
1897-1901	26,992
1902-1905	88,012
1906	109,258
1907	176,727
1908	240,877*
1909	73,806
1910	104,459
1911	154,027
1912	129,649
1913	122,589
1914	156,274

Adapted from Betty Boyd Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914* (New York, 1973), 11.

\* Major economic recession year in United States

percent of those arriving went back to Italy, and from 1901 to 1910, a full 57 percent returned. "About 15 percent of all immigrants arriving from Italy between 1899 and 1910 had been in the U.S. previously," he concluded. "In this way, the Italians became known as the 'birds of passage' in the new world. They were slow to sink their roots in a foreign soil and to convince themselves that returning to Italy was a dream they simply did not want to fulfill."<sup>6</sup> The Industrial Commission on Immigration reported: "The newer immigrants of this class are mainly men without families, either unmarried or having left their families at home, and many of them return year by year to Italy in the dull season with the money they have earned here."<sup>7</sup> In rather convoluted prose, the New York Bureau of Labor Statistics observed in its 1898 Annual Report that the number of Italians, "who go to work in the United States, who leave their families in Italy, who send them all their earnings, nearly, and who are in the United States only temporarily for the purpose of making money with the ultimate design of returning to Italy, is very great."<sup>8</sup>

Not surprisingly, Italians were vilified for their tendency to visit the United States only temporarily. Many Americans resented the fact that this group of foreigners, most of them illiterate and desperately poor, not only competed for jobs with natives, but also sent the money they earned out of the United States. One citizen warned: "The American *race* will eventually be wiped out by these *alien hordes* . Even now every city has its Little Italy or Little Bulgaria, in which the people do not learn the English language, do little business except among themselves, and send all the surplus earnings back whence they came (my emphasis)."<sup>9</sup> Testifying before The Dillingham Commission on Immigration, a representative of the Junior Order United American Mechanics criticized Italian migrant workers and the Italian government for "encouraging" such behavior: "Fully 500,000 (Italians) emigrate to the various countries in a year, and to facilitate this



gigantic movement the Italian government has established an emigrant department, which differs from our immigrant bureau, whose chief object is to look after those who come to us. The object of the Italian bureau of emigration is to send them out, and at the same time they are urged not to become American citizens; to remain loyal to the mother country, make all the money they can, save all they can, live just as cheaply as they can, and with their surplus return to their native land and put it in circulation for the betterment of the country, so as to make a larger resource for the nation and increase its taxable property. The reports of the Commissioner-General show that this fact is true; that the vast majority of Italians do not come to stay, only so long as they can accumulate a good bank account, and then they depart."<sup>10</sup> A magazine writer in 1914 declared: "Among the foreign-born, the Italians rank lowest in adhesion to trade-unions, lowest in ability to speak English, lowest in proportion of naturalized after ten years' residence, lowest in proportion of children in school, and highest in proportion of children at work. Taking into consideration the innumerable 'birds of passage', without family or future in this country, it would be safe to say that half, perhaps two thirds of our Italian immigrants are *under* America, not *of* it." (writer's emphasis)<sup>11</sup>

Some scholars and contemporaries noted that, particularly after 1900, the return to Italy was especially heavy during bad economic periods in the United States. Robert F. Foerster, the distinguished Harvard historian, was one of the first American scholars to consider in depth the temporary nature of Italian emigration. According to Foerster, between 300,000 and 400,000 Italians returned home each year between 1902 and 1914. Using reports of the Italian Ministry of Marine for the years before 1901 and of emigration inspectors afterwards, Foerster concluded that the peak year for repatriation from America occurred in 1908, after two years of severe industrial depression in America.<sup>12</sup> In what would surely be labeled a

minority viewpoint, one official in 1912 saw benefits to this temporary migration: "The so-called bird of passage, instead of being a menace to our industrial conditions, is their greatest help. He gives flexibility: comes when there is a demand for his work and departs when the demand is over."<sup>13</sup> This reverse migration, he said, served as a safety valve for depressed industrial towns and cities in the United States.

Despite the departure of workers during the depression years, Italian immigration after the turn of the century became more stable as women and children increasingly joined the men who came seeking their fortunes. As early as 1901 the United States Industrial Commission recognized that after a few years of travel back and forth to Europe or Latin America, "either the family was brought over, or, if the man was single, he marries and settles down here, becoming a permanent member of the community."<sup>14</sup> But it also must be recognized that this increased number of Italians who settled permanently was due in large part to the sheer numbers who came to America--by no means did the "birds of passage" aspect of Southern Italian immigration disappear after 1900. For example, only 31 percent of the immigrants who arrived during the period 1897-1901 returned to Italy. For those arriving between 1902 and 1906, the figure grew to 38 percent. Yet, for those arriving during the next five-year period--1907 to 1911--an estimated 72.6% of Italian immigrants who arrived returned to Italy, primarily because this period included the years 1907 and 1908, a time of severe industrial crisis in America.<sup>15</sup> These facts are important because we can contrast them with the situation in the North End after 1900. My research indicates that, despite the high numbers of Italians overall who continued as "birds of passage" after 1900, Boston's North End achieved a remarkably high level of stability between 1900 and 1910.

### Deciding to Return Even Before Leaving

What is perhaps most remarkable about the Italian immigration experience is not necessarily the number of people who traveled across the Atlantic several times before finally settling on one side or the other. Nor is it the number who repatriated to Italy after experiencing life for a short time in the United States. While both of these phenomena are noteworthy, what is more startling is the high percentage of Italians who--despite brutal conditions in Southern Italy--apparently decided *before* they left Italy that they would return.

Historians Robert Foerster, Betty Boyd Caroli, Silvano Tomasi, and Dino Cinel have all looked at return migration and the intent of immigrants before they left Italy. We have already looked briefly at Foerster's analysis of this issue in the section about why Italians traveled to America alone. Cinel points out that most reports on return migration by *prefetti* and others stressed three points: 1.) that almost all emigrants, regardless of their destination, planned to return; 2.) that the goal of the emigrants was to save money abroad in order to solve economic problems at home; and 3.) that most returnees to Italy had improved their economic position while abroad.<sup>16</sup> When peasants cross the ocean, Cinel quoted one Italian writer, they have only one goal: to come back and buy land in Italy.<sup>17</sup> One Italian peasant living in Italy said: "This is the only true land. We can live somewhere else for a while, but we can only buy land here."<sup>18</sup>

On the average, less than 25 percent of the emigrants from Italy declared that they intended to stay abroad during the first part of the twentieth century--more than 75 percent of the Italians who left declared their intention of returning.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, every year between 1896 and 1913, for every two emigrants who declared their intention to stay abroad permanently, one emigrant who had made the same

declaration before departing re-established his domicile in Italy after a residence of one or more years abroad.<sup>20</sup> That Italians viewed their initial emigration to America as only temporary may be reinforced by the fact that those arriving at Ellis Island during the peak immigration years brought an average of only thirteen dollars each, making them the most impoverished group to enter the country.<sup>21</sup>

Historians differ somewhat on this idea of intent. Both Foerster and Tomasi, while acknowledging that many emigrants who left Italy desired to return, said those situations were exacerbated upon arrival in the United States. Wrote Foerster:

Far from being an eager patriot in the land of his birth, seeking his Italy in whatever country will give him his bread, not fervid in his patriotism abroad, the Italian, like no other emigrant, aspires to return to his home. His affections (with his homeland) are warm and deep, attaching him to his family and the scenes of his childhood. When he breaks from these tugging intimacies it is conditionally, not absolutely; he must live in them again, and he departs only that he may live in them more richly than before. Life abroad is a strange and difficult thing to the unsheltered Italian, who tolerates it only for the promise of the return to Italy. Where contrasts glare upon him from every angle, a homesickness appears and he becomes restless and impatient. Yet he stays and sacrifices, rounds out his purgation, putting aside as many lire as he may to realize his master passion, the assurance of a house and land and comfort for his family in his native *paese*.<sup>22</sup>

Tomasi expressed a similar sentiment: "The demographic profile of the Italian immigrants reveal the inevitable difficulties for communal action in a transplanted community fragmented by the instability of family life, psychologically committed to return to Italy and suddenly relegated to the lowest rung of the host society. The picture of marginality and uprootedness of Italian immigrants would not be complete, however, without adding to their disadvantages the lack of essential instruments of social mobility in an urban environment--lack of education and professional training."<sup>23</sup>

Caroli and Cinel approach this issue somewhat differently, however. "Those returned laborers who consented to interviews with me spoke enthusiastically of their years in America," Caroli wrote of repatriated Italians. "The new country gave them

jobs, they pointed out, when Italy could not. Temporary emigration was their own solution, they said, to economic problems which they faced as individuals."<sup>24</sup> As a result she said: "American historians have another chapter to add to the melting pot controversy, for the millions who settled in the U.S. only temporarily, the question was not how to be accepted in the new country, but whether to adapt to it or not. While the Americanizers were preaching the easiest routes to assimilation, and their opponents were suggesting the advantages of a culturally pluralistic society, the emigrants were raising their own questions about the desirability of either."<sup>25</sup>

As for those people who traveled several times between the United States and Italy, Caroli wrote: "Without exception, the repatriates I interviewed listed economic reasons for going back to the United States and emotional attachments drawing them back to Italy. They praised the industrial system which furnished work paying as much as ten times what they had formerly earned in their home country, but they criticized the chaos and confusion of the cities in which the jobs were located."<sup>26</sup> Edward Corsi (who later became President Franklin Roosevelt's commissioner of immigration), pointed out that his mother was despondent from her arrival in America until her departure. She hated the "dingy tenement house" in Harlem in which she and her family lived. It stood in such contrast to the open fields outside her Italian village. Corsi recalled of his mother:

She loved quiet and hated noise and confusion. Here she never left the house unless she had to. She spent her days, and the waking hours of the nights, sitting at one outside window staring up at the little patch of sky above the tenements. She was never happy here and, though she tried, could not adjust herself to the poverty and despair in which she had to live.<sup>27</sup>

Cinel argued that "Italians were not the nostalgic people Foerster made them out to be. In Calabria in the early 1900s, a large number of returnees were polled, including many contemplating emigration for a second and third time. Nostalgia was

seldom mentioned as a reason to come back to Italy. Most returnees said their decision to return to Italy had been based on economic plans made before they had departed for the first time. Emigration and return, then, were not decisions Italians took lightly. *The returnees were for the most part neither rejected by American society nor spurred on by nostalgia. Rather, they were individuals actively pursuing goals they had set before departing* (my emphasis).<sup>28</sup> When asked, for example, what effect his years in the United States had had on him and how they had changed his life, Italy's Giuseppe Moscarolo tapped the wall of the house behind him and said: "America bought this house, something I never could have owned if I had remained here."<sup>29</sup> Rinaldo Molina, who founded a club in Italy of returned *Americani*, reflected on the changes in his life as a result of his stay in America: "America changed my life only economically and anyone who is looking for great political or social or religious conversions in those of us who came back will not find them. We went to America to make money and that objective kept us outside politics, religion, and the family life of most Americans. We simply were not interested in any of that and since we were not interested, America could not change us."<sup>30</sup>

Still, America clearly changed millions of other Italians. What historians need to ask, Cinel said, is: "Why and how did these Italians who remained in the United States change their minds? We can speculate that the returnees failed by and large to achieve their goal of a good life in Italy, and that this failure discouraged others from going back to Italy. Perhaps too, life in the New World changed the immigrants' goals...Immigrants were realistic enough to compare the opportunities in the New World with the deprivations of the old. In any event, a study of the Italians who remained in the United States must take into account the phenomena of return

and re-emigration--as well as immigration itself--and the desire of virtually all Italians to go back to Italy."<sup>31</sup>

In San Francisco, Cinel reported, later immigrants were more likely to be permanent than the earlier ones. "The combination of confidence in the American economy after the recession of 1907, concern over the Italian economy, which was recovering at a much slower pace, and the disillusionment of returnees unsuccessful in Italy, helped change the long-range plans of Italians."<sup>32</sup> In addition, Cinel pointed out, "the immigrants who arrived before 1910 were generally less prepared to compete in an urban environment, and probably more committed to going back to Italy than the later immigrants. Possibly an important reason the post-1910 immigrants were less likely to return was that they had witnessed in Italy the general failure of return emigration to solve the problem of poverty."<sup>33</sup> Writing in 1919, Robert Foerster described this decision-making process as a constant struggle for Italians. "There is strife between the desire to continue to earn (in the United States) and that to return to Italy...there arises a contest between the old home and the new--the one calling, the other seducing. How deeply the trouble stirs must vary much from individual to individual. Discontented in America, the emigrant may go back to Italy only to find it less beautiful than it appeared in the gleaming delineation of his memory, and the experience may send him definitively forth."<sup>34</sup>

### **Italian Government Stresses Benefits of Return Migration**

In addition to the internal decision each immigrant struggled with, the Italian government generally stamped its imprimatur on temporary emigration and repatriation in the publications of the Commissariat of Emigration between 1902 and 1914. The benefits thought to be derived from return migration, particularly the remittances from America, far outweighed any problems it brought. Deputy Paolo

Falletti, speaking in the lower house of Parliament, voiced the opinion which predominated in many discourses of his colleagues when he said: "Repatriation is certainly an advantage for us, because it represents what permanent emigration does not...Because of this, I maintain that we must preserve ever stronger the ties of the mother country with our emigrants in order to facilitate their return."<sup>35</sup> Falletti specifically recommended that his government appropriate 200,000 lire for schools in the United States to teach nationals better Italian and strengthen their attachment to the mother country. Although other members of Parliament made similar suggestions, institutions for the specific purpose of preserving emigrants' ties with Italy were never established in North America.<sup>36</sup>

Much of the work that would have been done by such schools was already being accomplished by emigrant aid societies which operated in major cities in the United States. Some established hospitals and ministered to the sick; others gathered information on jobs and gave advice on family problems to Italians living abroad. The director of one of the societies summarized its objectives: "The purpose of the Society of San Raffaele is to keep alive in the heart of Italians the Catholic faith and with it the sentiment of nationality and affection for the mother country." The Italian Council on Emigration appropriated regularly to these societies a share of the Fund for Emigration, which was derived mainly from a tax on the passage tickets of emigrants.<sup>37</sup> The Council also encouraged repatriation in more direct ways. After 1906, for example, reduced train fares were available to both emigrants and repatriates between their homes in Italy and port cities.<sup>38</sup>

The Italian government continued to seek new ways to encourage repatriation. In a long speech before Parliament on the effects of emigration, Senator Edoardo Pantano summed up the response of his government to repatriation from America: "The great current of returning emigrants represents an economic force of



the first order for us. It will be an enormous benefit for us if we can increase this flow of force in and out of our country...if we can increase this temporary emigration."<sup>39</sup> The Italian foreign minister reminded emigrants: "We sincerely advise Italians who go to search for work in the United States that, if they return, the mother country will never refuse to recognize them as her sons."<sup>40</sup>

This struggle between remaining in America and returning to Italy, of course, delayed the Italians' assimilation into American society. This factor, coupled with the Italians' general distrust of government, was in many ways responsible for their lack of political and economic clout during the first several decades of the twentieth century. "The transient nature of much of the Italian population in the years before 1914 delayed or prevented large numbers of the newcomers from becoming citizens," wrote one historian.<sup>41</sup> Dino Cinel pointed out that only when this trend began to change did Italians in San Francisco begin to make strides. "The immigrants at the turn of the century were satisfied with temporary seasonal employment as common laborers. The immigrants of the 1910s and 1920s sought better, more permanent jobs, recognizing that they were likely to remain in San Francisco for a long time, and probably for the rest of their lives."<sup>42</sup>

Although there continued to be heavy repatriation from the United States through 1914, there were neighborhoods which achieved stability earlier. As mentioned earlier, according to my research, Boston's North End appears to be one of these enclaves and the arguments supporting this contention are outlined in full in Chapters V and VI. In "The Hill" neighborhood of St. Louis, and to some extent in Chicago, Italians also seem to have decided earlier to remain in the New World. Historian Gary Mormino, who studied The Hill, reports that, "every social indicator, from 1900 to 1982, verifies the exceptional permanence of The Hill and its residents. Fully 96 percent of the Italians who emigrated there between 1900 and 1920 and who

later petitioned for citizenship could be found residing in the same house or within the old neighborhood during the three-to-five year period required for naturalization. Only 5 percent moved to other areas of St. Louis."<sup>43</sup> In Chicago, Humbert Nelli points out that occupational mobility for Italians seemed to be improving around the turn of the century: "After 1900, Italians moved into public employment in ever-increasing numbers...in the years after the turn of the century, hundreds of Italians found Civil Service jobs as laborers or supervisory personnel in the bureaus or departments of streets, playgrounds, electricity, parks, and engineering, and in the Board of Education."<sup>44</sup> These types of jobs are useful to look at because they are traditionally associated with some form of political patronage. They provide evidence that runs counter to the traditional view, justifiable in most cases, that Italians had not acquired much political clout by the first decade of the twentieth century.

The issue of Italian repatriation and the study of the "birds of passage" are critical to our overall understanding of the Italian immigration experience in America. These factors help explain a great deal about the Italians including: their love of homeland despite excruciating hardships, their commitment to financially assist those left behind in the old country, their desire to settle in closely-knit neighborhoods in the United States, and their resulting slow social assimilation and economic progress within American society. The temporary nature of much of Italian emigration also offered many Americans an excuse to fan the flames of discrimination against "birds of passage" from Southern Italy who competed for American jobs.

Evidence suggests that Italians made their decision to remain in America sooner in some areas of the United States than in others. Regardless of when the decision was made, however, the change in attitude seems to make a difference in the economic and political fortunes of Italian immigrants living in the United States.

Wrote Robert Foerster: "When the immigrant once converts the presumption of future return to Italy into the presumption of permanent residence in his new country, his step is likely to signify that the change to new ways has already gone far."<sup>45</sup> In the following chapters of this study, we examine the settlement patterns, social adjustment, economic challenges, and assimilation process of those Italians who carried the "presumption of permanent residence" to its logical extension--by making America their home.

### Notes

1. Betty Boyd Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914* (New York, 1973) pp. 32-24.
2. Caroli, pp. 39-41.
3. Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, 1982), p. 1.
4. Cinel, p. 47.
5. Cinel, p. 49.
6. Silvano M. Tomasi, *Piety and Power: The Role of the Italian Parishes of New York* (New York, 1975), pp. 18-20.
7. Tomasi, pp. 20-21.
8. Humbert S. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans* (New York, 1983), p. 43.
9. Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982* (Chicago, 1986), p. 101.
10. *From Reports of the Immigration Commission*, vol. 41: *Statements and Recommendations Submitted by Societies and Organizations Interested in the Subject of Immigration* (1911), (61st Congress, 3rd sess., Document no. 764), pp. 15-20.
11. Edward Alsworth Ross, "Italians in America", *Century Magazine*, vol. 87 (July, 1914), pp. 443-445.
12. Caroli, p. 10.

13. Nelli, p. 44.
14. Nelli, p. 45.
15. Nelli, pp. 46-47.
16. Cinel, p. 50.
17. Cinel, p. 65.
18. Cinel, p. 65.
19. Cinel, p. 46.
20. Cinel, p. 47.
21. Mormino, p. 92.
22. Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge, Mass., 1919), p. 428.
23. Tomasi, p. 22.
24. Caroli, p. v.
25. Caroli, p. 5.
26. Caroli, p. 90.
27. Andrew Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled Roots* (New York, 1980), p. 50.
28. Cinel, p. 48.
29. Caroli, pp. 85-86.
30. Caroli, p. 87.
31. Cinel, p. 2.
32. Cinel, p. 141.
33. Cinel, p. 161.

34. Foerster, p. 429.
35. Caroli, p. 71.
36. Caroli, p. 71.
37. Caroli, p. 71.
38. Caroli, p. 71.
39. Cinel, p. 72.
40. Cinel, p. 72.
41. Nelli, p. 107.
42. Cinel, p. 141.
43. Mormino, p. 65.
44. Humbert Nelli, *The Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility* (New York, 1970), p. 114.
45. Foerster, p. 443.

## CHAPTER IV

### COMING TO AMERICA: ARRIVAL, SETTLEMENT, DISCRIMINATION

By the late 1890s, the Italian ports of Genoa, Naples, Messina, and Palermo literally had become great human expatriation centers as peasants traveled from small villages across Southern Italy to await passage to America. Between twelve and fourteen steamship companies at various times offered direct service between Naples and New York City. Steamship companies were forbidden by the Italian government from advertising more than the bare details of sailing dates in order to discourage crowds from gathering at the docks. Shortly after the turn of the century, Naples emerged as the leading *European* port in the number of emigrants embarking for America, according to The Dillingham Commission. Because of the heavy demand among Italian citizens for travel to America, the price of passage increased from about fifteen dollars in 1880 to twenty-eight dollars in 1900, though the higher price did nothing to slow the demand.<sup>1</sup>

Journalist Erik Amfitheatrof graphically caught the sense of this extraordinary phenomenon: "The exodus of southern Italians from their villages at the turn of the twentieth century has no parallel in history," he wrote. "Of a total population of 14 million in the South at the time of national unification in 1860, at least five million--more than a third of the population--had left to seek work overseas by the outbreak of World War I...The land literally hemorrhaged peasants."<sup>2</sup> One Italian writer described the scene as peasants departed from a rural town in Sicily, bound for Palermo: "The locomotive whistled fitfully with a laboring hiss, but the disorder was so great that the engineer did not move the train. Despite the requests and the reprimands of the police, the crowd still clutched the train, embraced by the final grasps of good-bye. When the train moved, there was a heartbreaking cry like the

anguished roar that bursts from a crowd at the instant of a great calamity. All the people raised their arms and waved handkerchiefs. From the windows of the cars the leaning figures of the young men and women strained; they seemed suspended in air and kissed the hands of old people as the train departed."<sup>3</sup> That scene, repeated again and again in small villages and towns throughout Southern Italy, represented a decision of epic proportions by tens of thousands of Italian peasants, most of whom had never traveled more than a few miles from home.

The vast majority of these immigrants were young men, who usually travelled with a brother, son, or friend of working age. Some had borrowed money for their passage, others worked aboard ship to pay their way. Still others were advanced funds by a *padrone*, an Italian agent in America who acted as a go-between for Italian laborers arriving in the United States and the companies that would eventually employ them.

Life in steerage was grim, lasting from a minimum of two weeks to nearly a month. Conditions were crowded, filthy, and uncomfortable. Lice, scurvy, and seasickness added to the misery of passengers. Italians brought along knapsacks full of cheeses and salami to supplement the wretched soup doled out to passengers by the steamship companies. Those who could read studied books "guaranteed" to teach English within the time of the voyage; others consulted guidebooks that explained the strange American money system. One Italian author, who decided to prepare a firsthand report of the experiences of emigrants on board the *Galileo*, a ship bound for America, described the boarding scene: "Some sat down wherever it might be, dazed and exhausted; others wandered about vaguely, looking with uneasiness at all those unknown travelling companions who were as uneasy as they; and, like them, confused and frightened in this disorderly throng. Some who had come down one ladder, and saw others leading still on, down into the dark, refused to go any farther.

Through the open hatchway I marked a woman with her head in the berth and sobbing violently. I soon learned that her young child had died suddenly an hour or two before, and that her husband was forced to leave its little body with the police to be taken to the hospital...It was an odd enough scene. The huge steamer, seen by most of them for the first time, must have been like a new world, full of strangeness and of mystery; and yet not one looked about him or aloft, or paused to examine any of those many wonderful objects never seen before. The greater part showed nothing but apathy or fatigue. At last the sailors were heard shouting fore and aft, '*Chi non e' passeggero, a terra*'--'All ashore that's going ashore.' These words sent a thrill from one end of the *Galileo* to the other. In a few minutes, a whistle sounded and the ship began to move. Then women burst out crying and bearded men hitherto stolid were seen to pass a hand across their eyes. A few were talking in low tones. From the forecastle a voice called out in a sarcastic tone, *Viva L'Italia!* and looking up I saw a tall thin man who was shaking his fist at his native country."<sup>4</sup> Another emigrant saw the voyage as an extension of the hardships he had faced in his native land: "The passage across the ocean seemed to have been so calculated as to inflict upon us the last, full measure of suffering and indignity, and to impress upon us for the last time that we were the 'wretched refuse of the earth' and to exact from us a final price for the privilege we hoped to enjoy in America."<sup>5</sup>

On the other side of the ocean, more than 15,000 Italians were being processed each day through the Ellis Island immigration center, through which 97 percent of Italians passed during the peak years. The number of Italians arriving in the United States continued to swell. Between 1891 and 1900, 651,893 Italians arrived. Between 1901 and 1910 alone, more than two million Italians arrived in America. The Italian population of New York rose from 39,900 in 1890 to 145,400 in 1900 and 340,765 by 1910. In Boston, the Italian population swelled from 4,700



in 1890 to 13,700 by 1900 and 31,380 by 1910. During peak years, a staggering number of Italians entered America: 316,797 in 1905; 358,569 in 1906; 298,124 in 1908; and 280,351 in 1909. Of the more than two million Italians who arrived in the first decade of the new century, approximately three-quarters went to the heavily urbanized states of New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Ohio.<sup>6</sup>

Italy cooperated with the United States government in keeping criminals from emigrating to the United States, and tried to make sure that most people emigrating were healthy. Italy permitted American officials to give emigrants medical examinations at their port of departure. This concern over the "quality" of her emigrants brought Italy some benefit. In comparison to nationals from any other immigrant group, Italians had the lowest percentage of rejections upon landing in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Still, the Italian government was criticized in the United States for the role it played in working with the shipping companies to encourage emigration to relieve economic pressure in Italy. "Doubtless the 7,000 steamship agents scattered throughout Italy have succeeded in persuading many thousands to come who would otherwise have remained at home," asserted an American magazine writer in 1904.<sup>8</sup>

Arriving in America, Italian immigrants--most of whom were illiterate--were often besieged by unscrupulous opportunists looking to cheat them out of the meager amounts of money they had brought with them from Italy (The average Italian immigrant during this time arrived in America with between thirteen and seventeen dollars).<sup>9</sup> These could include certain *padroni* or agents who would make promises about work that they could not keep<sup>10</sup>, or loan sharks who would offer unsuspecting Italians money at exorbitant interest rates. Often, disembarking immigrants were approached by boarding house swindlers who took money from the immigrants for room rent, only to inform them when they arrived that there were no rooms available.

Italian immigrants were victimized so frequently that in 1901 the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants was organized by American philanthropists and Italian-Americans who had arrived in the United States earlier and were able to speak English. Operating with money from the Italian government and with contributions from people in New York, the society watched over Italians arriving in Boston and New York and those returning to Italy. The society performed a variety of services, such as providing room and board at moderate prices for arriving immigrants, and helping new arrivals find relatives and friends. Through a labor bureau, the society placed immigrants in jobs, and it formed schools to teach them English and the essentials of American citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

The first secretary of the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants was Gino C. Speranza, who provided the organization with most of its initial energy and credibility. In 1904 he traveled to Italy to gain both moral and financial support from the Italian government for the Society. Through words--extensive articles in publications of the day--and action, Speranza's name became synonymous with the Society's work. He took newcomers into New York and provided them with temporary living quarters. His organization inspected living accommodations weekly, prompting landlords to improve their properties. The Society investigated labor camps throughout the country and publicized abuses, which eventually led to remedial measures. Writing as late as 1910, Speranza described some of the hardships Italian immigrants faced when they arrived in New York: "The immigrant arrives at the Battery. He is immediately and violently besieged on all sides by tricksters, and thieves in the persons of porters, hackmen, 'runners' for employment agencies, many of whom speak his language. They profess friendliness and advise him about his lodgings, employment, transportation to his destination and the many things in which he needs help. Licensed city porters wear badges and pretend thereby

to be city officials, and get large fees for taking the mute stranger and his bundles to a lodging or agency. A case is known of an immigrant to whom five dollars was charged for a five-cent elevated ticket, which was represented to be a 'railroad ticket'. The loss of such amounts of money is a serious matter to a man without employment and the road to dependence and deportation may be short if work is not immediately obtained."<sup>12</sup>

Even after immigrants were settled in the United States, Speranza's organization did its best to provide protection when necessary. This included warnings to unregulated immigrant banks which often would make a practice of skimming funds intended by immigrants for relatives back home. The Society also singled out those turn-of-the-century scalpers who sold fraudulent steamship tickets to immigrants who hoped to bring their relatives over to America. In the case of the banks, Speranza wrote, "much of the money sent to the people at home by the immigrant does not reach them. There is no guarantee whatever to the immigrant that his savings will reach his family, and in cases of fraud the banker pleads delay and unavoidable loss in transmitting, and waives all responsibility. In case of loss, how can the alien isolated in the labor camp, or isolated among his fellows, prove that the money did not arrive while his witness is across the ocean?"<sup>13</sup> Speranza saved his strongest language for those who would sell false steamship tickets: "One of the most profitable mediums of revenue to the vampires of immigrant ignorance is the sale of worthless steamship tickets. As soon as the immigrant has taken a foothold here and begins to plan to bring his family or brother or sister or parent to his new-found home, he becomes fair game for the bogus ticket seller. The steamship companies have authorized agents in the foreign quarters of the city who are empowered to conduct a legitimate ticket for selling business, but around these centers, both within their knowledge and outside it, many other agents and peddlers have sprung up who

reap a livelihood from the sale of worthless pieces of paper purporting to be steamship tickets."<sup>14</sup>

The need for Speranza's organization waned as Italians began to assimilate more fully into American society, and as Italian immigrants developed savvy about the daily workings of life in the United States. However, it served as a critical bridge between the Old World and the New World for thousands of Italian immigrants as they attempted to sink roots in America.

**Settlement:  
Family, Village, *Campanilismo*, Enclaves**

The people who emigrated from Genoa, Avellino, Naples, Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries were referred to as "Italians" by Americans, who perceived and identified them as belonging to or having a single national origin or language. However, this identity was not--at least initially--a perception of the emigrants themselves. The political unification of Italy (1861-71) could neither wipe out centuries of separation, nor could it instantly supply a common identity for those who believed themselves to be different. Through the years, people from Italy had learned to define themselves by their association with their parents and their immediate neighbors. They belonged not to Italy but first to their families and then to their villages. In short, Italians harbored no sense of nationalism--no *national* pride in being "Italian"--until, ironically, they settled in America and found strength in such unity as a way to battle both economic hardship and discrimination.

It is true that for the most part, people from Avellino, Calabria, Abbruzzi, and Sicily came to America sharing a common identification as "Southern Italians". On the other hand, Romans, Venetians, Piedmontese and Genoese considered themselves "Northern Italians." From their perspective they were very different from the

southerners--in most cases, they felt no closer in their relationship to one another than an American might feel to an Australian or a German. In fact, beyond feeling they were different, there was a strong and pervasive prejudice held by northern Italians against southerners.

This background is necessary to understand several elements of the Italian immigration experience and settlement process in America. It helps explain why Italians, especially southerners, settled in enclaves in the United States that were virtual replicas of their towns and villages at home. It illustrates the Southern Italians' nearly exclusive alliances with and reliance on family and close friends--a strength in helping them cope with financial hardships and loneliness in America, but a weakness in their efforts to assimilate and develop political clout. Finally, it enables us to understand some of the reasons for the intense and often violent discrimination by Americans against Southern Italians, whom they perceived as vastly "different" from the northern Italians who had arrived earlier. Some of this discrimination, in fact, was fueled by the attitude of the Northern Italians themselves.

The Italian immigration process in America was characterized most dramatically by the development of Italian enclaves in large urban centers in the United States. Italians from the same area--often the same village--relocated to America through a process called "chain migration" and settled on the same block, or even the same street in places like New York, Boston, Buffalo, and Philadelphia. Knowing little of the country to which they were migrating, immigrants from all countries generally followed the pathways laid down by those who preceded them. However, in the case of the Italians, this tendency was more pronounced by the general importance of family and village ties, especially to the Southern Italian culture. Most often, men would come first, and once settled successfully, would

bring over their wives and children, while encouraging other relatives and village neighbors to come as well. Thus, virtually every block in the "Italian" sections of cities was inhabited by people who were *paesani*, or, from the same village or town in Italy. "In the 'Little Italys' of large cities, blocks were divided into sections of Sicilians, Genoese, or Calabrians," one historian noted. "Italians were surrounded, thus, with others speaking their own dialects. In New York, Neapolitans and Calabrians composed most of the Mulberry Bend district; Genoese grouped themselves along Baxter Street; Sicilians were on Elizabeth Street. Each colony sought to preserve its folkways, demonstrating a slight distrust of persons from different sections of Italy."<sup>15</sup> In his study of Boston's North End, William DeMarco wrote: "The North End, as small as it is, has always been a community of neighborhoods. Persons were and are identified as being lifelong residents of 'North Street', 'near Saint Mary's', 'lower Prince Street', 'down on Salem Street'. These and other such designations not only identify a section of the North End, but usually tell the part of Italy from which a family came, which church it frequents, what its social status is, and what clubs its members belong to. From the Italian community's earliest days in the North End these designations were determined by 'regional enclaves'."<sup>16</sup>

To understand fully the reasons Italians clustered almost exclusively in enclaves in the cities, it is necessary to examine the concept of *campanilismo*. For centuries, people from Southern Italy had learned to define themselves by their association with their parents and their immediate neighbors. They belonged not to Italy, but first to their families and then to their villages. Decades of exploitation by landowners coupled with the harsh realities of daily life led to a rejection by Southern Italians of the traditional social institutions of the larger society--churches, government agencies, fraternal organizations. These *contadini*, or peasants, came to

rely on family and close friends. *Campanilismo* derives from the word *campanile*, meaning a church steeple or belfry. Central to each of the scattered villages in the Italian countryside was the local church with its bell tower. The attachment the villagers felt for the bell was symbolic of their loyalty to their village and their neighbors. The sound of the bell defined the boundaries of the villages; those who lived beyond--those who could not hear the bell--were strangers not to be trusted, since the interests of these outsiders too often conflicted with those of the villagers.

These village communities, in their isolation, developed their own distinct customs, manners, and dialects. Even villages that were only a few miles apart were often worlds apart in many of these characteristics. It is not surprising, then, that when Italian villagers migrated to America, they sought out their *paesani* who had come ahead of them, and as soon as possible began to re-establish many of the village's customs and social relations. "*Campanilismo* was the notion that the true *patria*, the native land, extended only as far as the sound of bells in the local *campanile*, or bell tower," one historian wrote. "In line with this view of the world, Italian immigrants, even in large American cities, tried to reform village and small town clustering."<sup>17</sup> Added DeMarco: "In terms of subcultural neighborhoods, the North End resembled the Italian countryside...A community which had once been home to a variety of nationalities became home to a cross-section of Italian subcultures. By the creation of these new villages, the old world *campanilismo* had been brought to Boston."<sup>18</sup> In his study of Boston's North End, DeMarco delves deeply into the "enclave effect" in Italians' selection of marriage partners, churches at which to worship, and occupations. For example, he wrote: "The study of North End marriage records illustrate the significance of Italian provincial loyalties in Boston. It shows that Italians in Boston consistently preferred marriage with individuals from their own province or region. They usually married individuals

from a place as close to their old-world village as possible."<sup>19</sup> This concept will be examined more fully in the next chapter of this work.

In most other major American cities too--notably New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and San Francisco--strong Italian *enclaves* developed within so-called "Italian" quarters of the city. "Chain migration was important in the movement of Italians to America," wrote Dino Cinel in his study of San Francisco. "It affected the geographical distribution of Italians in American cities, their occupations, and their social organization."<sup>20</sup> In his examination of the Italian immigration experience in New York, Patrick J. Gallo offers this description of chain migration and the enclave effect:

When the immigrants of the mass immigration settled in New York or in the many industrial communities around the city, they tended to congregate with others from the same province or village. This became the basis of the Italian neighborhood which existed almost as a small semi-independent universe of its own. Sometimes, physical lines separated the Italians from the rest of the population. There were also the invisible lines of separation. The family chain of immigration tended to reinforce the formation of the ethnic enclave. In addition, there was the Italian attachment to the town--*campanilismo*. The importance of coming to live with relatives and *paesani* from the same town took on new meaning in a strange environment. The immigrant was accustomed to identifying himself with others of the same village while in Italy, and now he found an increased desire for the same surroundings. In the crowded cities, one could see the transfer of an entire village within a three or four block area.<sup>21</sup>

While these individual enclaves eventually transformed into cohesive "Italian sections" in most places--especially after the First World War--there was initial tension in some areas within the Italian neighborhoods *between* the different enclaves. On "The Hill" in St. Louis, for example, the arrival of Sicilians by 1900 began a generation of bitter ethnic quarreling between the newcomers and the Lombards, who had settled there much earlier and for whom The Hill had become their exclusive domain.<sup>22</sup>



Nevertheless, despite early tensions, the enclave offered Italians a chance to make the transition from the Old World to the New. For those who were coming to America only temporarily, the enclave provided a secure, familiar setting without requiring returning Italians to make a heavy investment in assimilation. For those Italians who eventually decided to stay, enclaves provided a buffer against a harsh and strange American society. Enclaves helped ensure the survival of *la via vecchia*, "the old way", which dictated a host of Italian family mores and social customs. These ranged from the responsibility of Italian men to provide for their families to the strength of the Italian wife and mother at home--she usually managed all financial affairs, arranged for the marriage of her children, and held a position of respect unparalleled in the family. While the Italian husband and father was the organizational or "political" head of the household, it was the Italian mother to whom the family looked for emotional and spiritual strength and guidance.<sup>23</sup> This Old World concept of *la via vecchia* was able to continue in America for a time due to the existence of enclaves, which helped insulate Italian families from other immigrant groups and Americans. One historian said the importance of the enclave was as, "a 'decompression chamber'--shielding its inhabitants from the uncomfortable pressures of a strange environment and allowing them to adjust gradually to its demands."<sup>24</sup>

However, the enclave also had its drawbacks, many of them damaging to the Italians' assimilation into American society. It slowed the efforts of illiterate Italians--most of them from the South--to learn to read, since the enclave provided them with a safe and comfortable haven in which to live and work. In the same way, the enclave delayed the Italians' desire to learn English in great numbers, since Italians saw no need to learn English when they were dealing with *paesani* almost exclusively. These two issues, illiteracy and inability to speak English, adversely affected Italians in a whole host of ways: delaying occupational mobility, forcing them to work through a

*padrone* to find jobs, and slowing the Italians' pursuit of American citizenship. Moreover, illiteracy and language problems prevented Italians from amassing the political clout that is an outgrowth of both economic advancement and having the power to vote. Finally, but no less importantly in the Italian immigration experience in America, the existence of these closed enclaves inhibited contact between Italian immigrants and Americans. This perpetuated and strengthened the myth among many Americans that Southern Italians, especially, were strange and different people whose living habits and social customs were detrimental to the "American way of life." They therefore could not be trusted and needed to be feared. This attitude, coupled with the general xenophobia that existed during this period of heavy immigration, fueled intense discrimination--much of it violent--against Italian immigrants in many areas of America. The discrimination factor will be examined later in this chapter.

From both a positive and negative standpoint, then, the existence of neighborhood enclaves in American cities had a profound effect on the growth and development of Italians in the United States. This happened in two ways. First, the establishment of enclaves affected the adjustment period and defined the overall behavior of Italians, who were unfamiliar with America, her people, and her way of life. Secondly, the existence of enclaves affected American attitudes toward Italians by exacerbating prejudices that continued for years, and in some cases, to the present day.

### **Effects of Illiteracy and the Language Barrier**

One writer described the Italian immigrants' existence in America as, "a sort of purgatory, in slums in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, or Chicago. What prevented their rapid exit (from these neighborhoods) was not merely the language barrier, but the fact that so many laborers from Southern Italy reached America

illiterate or semiliterate. These men, who crossed and re-crossed oceans to find work could not even read a steamship ticket in their native Italian. Only those with exceptional energy were able to return home from a ten-hour day of ditchdigging or plastering and sit down with a grammar book to learn English. This kept them tied to the Italian slum neighborhoods, where they could at least make themselves understood."<sup>25</sup>

Illiteracy and an inability to speak English, taken together, significantly hampered the development and assimilation of Italians--mostly from Southern Italy--into American society. The Dillingham Commission reported that Southern Italians ranked among the lowest in literacy rates of foreign-born people during the period from 1899-1910 (see Table 4.1). The Commission's report shows that only about 55 percent of Southern Italians could read and write in their native language, compared to about 97 to 98 percent for Germans and Swedes. Lithuanians (62 percent) and Poles (70 percent) were the two ethnic groups with the next lowest literacy rates to Italians.

**Table 4.1**--*Percent of foreign-born male heads of households who read and write, by general nativity of individual; summary of seven cities*

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Percentage who read and write</u>
German	98.5%
Swedish	97.0%
Irish	88.7%
Jews	87.5%
Polish	70.0%
Lithuanian	62.3%
South Italian	54.3%

*Compiled from The Dillingham Commission Report on Immigration, vol. 26: Immigrants in Cities: Summary. Cities summarized were Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, New York, Philadelphia.*

In its interpretation of these statistics, the Commission reported in the thinly-veiled discriminatory language that it uses at various points in its analysis: "The fluctuations in (literacy) percentages, when considered by race, suggest that such variations may be due quite as much to *changes in the character of immigration* as to influences brought to bear upon immigrants in this country (my emphasis)."<sup>26</sup> The Italians' illiteracy and the inability to speak English, in fact, heightened tensions between the immigrants and a native population that already viewed Italians as a strange people. Like the enclave, many Americans argued, these shortcomings in language proficiency and literacy were symbolic of Italians' unwillingness to assimilate into American society and adopt American ways. In fact, the relationship between the enclave itself and the illiteracy factor is an interesting one. Italians most likely stayed in their enclaves longer than they would have due to their inability to read and write and speak English. On the other hand, *because* they remained isolated in enclaves, it took them longer to become proficient in these areas since their exposure to the large society was limited.

Immigration restrictionists writing at the time used the illiteracy issue as an argument to close the country's borders to "undesirable" immigrants, because their illiteracy and inability to speak English would prevent America from coalescing into a unified nation. "No argument is necessary to convince any American that the hope of this country lies in the assimilation of our foreign-born population," said one restrictionist magazine writer in 1904. "But this most necessary process of assimilation, which is of such vital importance to national unity, is becoming increasingly difficult every day because of the wide gulf which separates the majority of our latest immigrants from ourselves; and furthermore, and very largely, because so many of these immigrants are illiterate, and because of their unfortunate, albeit

perfectly natural, tendency to settle in communities of their own in our large cities."<sup>27</sup>

This same writer even blamed illiteracy among the "new" classes of immigrants for the spread of certain diseases: "It is worth noting doctors have estimated that 23,000 tuberculous immigrants were landed in New York in 1902, and have pointed out the impossibility of making these persons take proper care of themselves because they cannot read the directions printed in almost all known tongues and distributed throughout the city."<sup>28</sup>

Questionable conclusions like this notwithstanding, illiteracy and the inability to speak English did indeed prove to be enormous obstacles to Italian immigrants. Again The Dillingham Commission reported Southern Italians as the group with one of the lowest percentages of those who spoke English (34.3 percent, see Table 4.2), about the same as Poles (36.3 percent) and slightly better than the Servians and Magyars (32.1 and 25 percent respectively).<sup>29</sup>

**Table 4.2**--*Percent of foreign-born male heads of households who speak English by general nativity of individual; summary of seven cities*

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Percentage who speak English</u>
German	71.2%
Swedish	91.5%
Syrians	61.0%
Jews	51.0%
Polish	36.3%
<b>South Italians</b>	<b>34.3%</b>
Servians	32.1%
Maygars	25.0%

*Compiled from The Dillingham Commission Report on Immigration, vol. 26: Immigrants in Cities: Summary. Cities summarized were Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, New York, Philadelphia.*

The Commission pointed out that the ability to speak English correlated directly to factors like age and length of time in the United States, and improvements came fast among the newer immigrants. For example, by 1910, an estimated 77 percent of Italian immigrants living in the United States could speak some English.

In the early days, however, widespread illiteracy was one of the most severe handicaps Italians had to overcome. "If I could read," one peasant said in explanation of his difficulties, "I should have four eyes, but now I see naught."<sup>30</sup> First-generation Italian immigrants seldom overcame this crushing burden. Only two in ten immigrants succeeded in making just moderate educational gains. This illiteracy, when coupled with the language barrier, made it difficult for many Italians to compete in America's industrial society. "The illiteracy of the immigrants was universal in terms of knowledge of the English language and it was extremely high with regard to the Italian language," noted one historian. "The local dialect, in most cases, was the only linguistic equipment of the immigrant and it confined his culture to the local *paese* from which he had come."<sup>31</sup> A guide for the Italian immigrant published in 1911 urged Italians to learn English quickly as a way of overcoming both the language and illiteracy barriers: "English is absolutely indispensable to the workman. He needs it in order to find work. He needs it to take directions and have his work explained. He needs it unless he is willing to work for the smallest wages with no hope of increase. He needs it to understand words of warning and keep out of danger, for every year hundreds of Italians are hurt or killed in America, because they do not understand the shouts of warning, or do not know how to read danger signals, when a few English words might have saved their lives. You cannot be in America a single day without understanding the necessity of speaking the same language that all other men in America speak."<sup>32</sup>

Within the enclaves, though, Italians continued their day-to-day lives without recognizing this necessity, at least in the early days of immigration. "In the homes and on the streets, no English language was spoken save by the children," wrote one immigrant in 1902. "On the newsstands a paper in English could scarcely be found; here were scores if not hundreds of societies, national, provincial, local and sublocal, in which English was not usually spoken and in which other than American interests were largely represented."<sup>33</sup> Instinctively, many Italians seemed to know that their lack of language and reading skills hurt them--as did, by extension, an over-reliance on the enclave as a familiar place during their transition. Yet they clung to the old ways to cope in a land they viewed as very foreign and often hostile. In 1910, Pascal d'Angelo, an immigrant who came to be called the "Pick and Shovel Poet", explained some of these feelings: "We fellow townsmen in this strange land clung desperately to one another. To be separated from our relatives and friends was something that frightened us, old and young. So we were ready to undergo a good deal of hardship before we would even consider breaking up the gang."<sup>34</sup> Some also saw their language or dialect as a way to preserve a sense of identity in a land where Italians (and other immigrant groups) were viewed as a homogenous ethnic group. Former Yale President A. Bartlett Giamatti, in an introductory commentary to a study of Italian immigration, analyzed the issue of language this way: "Language was a barrier. Because spoken English was difficult. Because language written, language read--any language--was unknown territory, a new world to which no passage was available. And because the native language one spoke--whatever language it was, whatever they might be--was so necessary to retain, as shield, as security blanket, as proof of identity."<sup>35</sup>

This inability to read or speak English meant that Italians in general, and Southern Italians in particular, came to the United States primarily as unskilled laborers. "During the last 40 years, laborers have been a higher proportion of Italian immigrants into the United States than of any other important immigrating people," wrote Robert Foerster in 1919. "The unspecialized farm and day laborers have given to Italian emigration an all but unique character in the world's history. The same individuals, had they lived two thousand years ago, would not have been harnessed to tasks materially different from those they toil at today."<sup>36</sup> In 1890 and 1900, Italian laborers accounted for 33 percent of all Italian immigrants to the United States. This marked a rate then twice that of the Irish and nearly four times that of the Germans, both of whom had made strides in occupational mobility by the turn of the century. Between 1876 and 1919, the percentage of Italian immigrants classified as day laborers or unskilled workers ranged between 45 and 60 percent.<sup>37</sup>

The Dillingham Commission, in its seven city study (Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, New York and Philadelphia), reported that nearly 32 percent of South Italians were classified as "general labor", higher than any other immigrant group. In its analysis, the Commission again cites the language barrier as an issue: "The inability to use the English language is a handicap on foreigners who might otherwise set out independently to improve unsatisfactory conditions...Non-English-speaking persons, even in large industrial centers, are restricted to a narrow field of employment. Inability to communicate with fellow-workmen of other races and reluctance to travel about in a city where English is used in oral and other directions to the stranger limits their knowledge of industrial possibilities to the sections where they live. The necessity of being directed in their work restricts them to employment with a "boss" whom they understand. The Polish carpenter, for



example, who with an English-speaking contractor could earn \$4 a day has no choice but to work with a Polish contractor at \$3.50."<sup>38</sup>

In William DeMarco's analysis of the North End, the author conducts an occupational sampling of North End Italians in 1899, 1909, 1919, and 1929. In each of these four years, laborers made up 36.5 percent, 23.5 percent, 30.4 percent, and 22.7 percent, for an average of 27.2 percent for the four years, and far and away the highest percentage of workers (barbers are second with a 9 percent average for the four years).<sup>39</sup> In my own research a full 20 percent of those North End residents who became citizens still listed "laborer" as their occupation on their petitions for naturalization (see Chapter V).

It is important to remember that because of the nature of the work Italians performed, the great majority of the lives of Italian immigrants were not financial success stories. They lived in poverty while working at whatever jobs were available, even when working conditions were dangerous or unhealthy. Their determination to work, however--at whatever the salary--created a demand for their services, particularly in the large cities. Nearly 90 percent of the labor force employed by New York's Department of Public Works in 1890 was Italian. "We can't get along without the Italians," observed a city official. "We want someone to do the dirty work; the Irish aren't doing it any longer."<sup>40</sup> This "dirty work" included a variety of unskilled jobs such as sewer construction, tunneling, subway construction, street grading, general construction, and street cleaning. The American historian who wrote, "The greatest metropolis in the world rose from the sweat and misery of Italian labor," may well have had in mind, among others, the four thousand Southern Italians who burrowed their way through Manhattan rock and soil to build the Lexington Avenue subway.<sup>41</sup>

Ignorance of the language and of American life also caused many Italians to become victims of unscrupulous company foreman, hiring agents, or their own *padroni*, who acted as brokers between employers and immigrants. Agents representing American industries visited Italy regularly to entice workers with false promises of steady jobs, good pay, and good housing. Once in America, some Italian immigrants, after long journeys, found themselves dumped in lonely and remote locations, abandoned, minus the money they had paid for supposed jobs. Employment agencies often worked in collusion with the employers, who after a few weeks would fire the workers in order to hire a new crew and share in the agencies' new "fees." Still, those who were abandoned and swindled were often the fortunate ones. Many men who were taken to real jobs never forgot the experience. Camille Tornatore remembered his early days in Louisiana as "the slaving times." He recalled seeing "a man harnessed to a plough like a mule, working for 85 cents a day." Such instances of peonage were not uncommon and will be explored further in the *Discrimination* section of this chapter.<sup>42</sup> These instances eventually led to the heavy involvement of Italians in labor unions and became the genesis of the Italian Socialist movement in America. While both issues are outside the scope of this study, they are important topics that have received much attention in the historiography of the Italian immigration experience.

While illiteracy and an inability to speak English were in large part responsible for the menial jobs most Italian immigrants filled, some historians have pointed to another important factor: the desire of many immigrants to return to Italy. In her study of Buffalo Italians, for example, Virginia Yans-McLaughlin points out that, "a lack of interest in remaining in the U.S. could be the key to the immigrant generation's undistinguished occupational achievement. Many Italians originally

intending to return to their homeland, saw no point in investing the amount of time required to establish a business."<sup>43</sup>

Yet, those Italians who did stay most often used the safety and familiarity of the enclave as a haven to begin small businesses. This included opening barber shops, establishing small grocery stores, and becoming fruit peddlers. One historian wrote, in seeming contradiction to Yans-McLaughlin: "Italians also yearned for the security of their own businesses, and as soon as they were able, they bought pushcarts or opened small stores. In New York City, they dominated the fruit business in all its phases, from produce market to retail outlet. They opened shoe repair shops, restaurants, groceries, and bakeries. Some made spaghetti, others made candy, many cut hair, and by 1910, more than half the barbers in New York City were Italian."<sup>44</sup> In my North End sample, barbers were the second largest occupational group next to laborers. Still, even as they began to establish small businesses, few Italians ventured outside the enclave. Said one: "When I arrived in New York, I went to live with my *paesani*. I did not see any reason for learning English. I did not need it--for everywhere I lived, or worked, or fooled around, there were only Italians."<sup>45</sup> Another joked that learning English proved a liability to his father: "My father's first factory boss was a noisy Irishman whom he disliked. My father wanted to learn enough English so that he could talk back to him. He was quite successful; the boss fired him the first time he understood what he was saying."<sup>46</sup> Humor aside, this lack of language skills had an effect on Italian immigrants that was adequately summed up by social historian Silvano Tomasi: "Even allowing for the uncertainty of immigration statistics, there can be no doubt of the absolute lack of technical preparation of the immigrants for their new social environment."<sup>47</sup>

If illiteracy and an inability to speak and understand English adversely affected the Italians' occupational mobility in America, it also slowed the acquisition of another important assimilation tool: citizenship. This was especially true in the early years. For example, in 1885, Italians ranked last in the percentage of "naturalized foreigners" in the city of Boston, with only 16 percent of Italians naturalized. It is interesting to note that by 1900, a full 36 percent of Italians in Boston were naturalized--Italians were then second lowest (to the Portuguese) in percentage of people naturalized, but the percentage *increase* in naturalizations was the highest of any ethnic group.<sup>48</sup> It should also be pointed out that most of the Italians in the country in 1900 were from the north.

With the influx of Southern Italians during the first decade of the twentieth century, the overall naturalization percentage figures for Italians in Boston dropped significantly by 1910, to about 25 percent. (The numbers were about the same in Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Syracuse, and slightly better in Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh).<sup>49</sup> The figure for Southern Italians alone was low also. The Dillingham Commission reported that of the sampling of Southern Italians in Boston twenty-one years of age or older who had been in the country more than five years--the amount of residency time required to become a citizen--only 17.2 percent had been fully naturalized (see Table 4.3, Page 78), well behind the Irish (69.8 percent) and slightly behind Russian Jews (23.9 percent).<sup>50</sup> "The Italians thus far have made little progress toward assimilation," one sociologist wrote. "Ignorance keeps a large number from exercising the (voting) franchise; however, even the better educated take little interest in political life."<sup>51</sup> Southern Italians in Boston did have a higher percentage of people naturalized than some of the other "newer" immigrants: Syrians (10.5 percent), Lithuanians (8.3 percent), Poles (6.3 percent) and Greeks (2.1 percent).

Other factors aside from language and literacy roadblocks most likely contributed to the low Italian naturalization percentage figure. Chief among these were the Italians' penchant for returning home, which would have made citizenship superfluous; their general mistrust of government agencies and officials; and--because of the buffer of the enclave--a failure to understand the benefits of citizenship. Taken together, all of these issues severely hampered the Italians' ability to develop political clout. "The Italians without doubt take the least interest in politics of any nationality. They are at the foot of the list by every mode of calculation," one author wrote in an analysis of Italians in Boston. "Even after deducting more than half of the total number of males on the single ground of illiteracy, they still show the smallest percentage of voters. Migration of single men helps to break up organized political work among the Italians, but the chief reason is that Italians themselves have developed little interest in politics, and Irish politicians have no great influence over them."<sup>52</sup> Even as late as 1919, Robert Foerster noted that Italians' political achievements were limited to the ward, and occasionally, the city level, but rarely were they elected or appointed to a state office. "In national affairs," he said, "the Italians have so far been all but negligible."<sup>53</sup>

**Table 4.3**--*Naturalization status of foreign-born males in Boston who have been in the United States five years or more, by nationality*

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Percent fully naturalized</u>	<u>Percent with first papers only</u>
Irish	69.8%	7.5%
Russian Jews	23.9%	30.6%
<b>South Italians</b>	<b>17.2%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>
Syrians	10.5%	28.9%
Lithuanians	8.3%	12.0%
Polish	6.3%	3.1%

*Compiled from The Dillingham Commission Report on Immigration, vol. 27 Immigrants in Cities: Boston*

This lack of political power helped institutionalize both prejudicial governmental policies and overt discrimination against Italians. The arguments of nativists and restrictionists were bolstered by the fact that so many Italians were not naturalized and could not vote. Indeed, these factors helped encourage Congress in 1907 to authorize President Theodore Roosevelt to appoint The Dillingham Commission itself. This commission was made up of senators, representatives and economic experts to study the problem of immigration. Headed by Senator William P. Dillingham of Vermont, himself a restrictionist, this special United States Immigration Commission, "was weighted with men who favored the restriction of the new immigrants."<sup>54</sup> In December of 1910, the Dillingham Commission made its report to Congress. Claiming to be objective and scientific, the commission announced that since 1880, "the character of immigration had undergone a fundamental change for the worse." It classified all immigrant groups by race, implying that old-stock Anglo-Saxon Americans were basically superior to others, and that newcomers, such as the Italians, were generally inferior, prone to crime, and would eventually become paupers and therefore a burden to society. The Commission favored restriction of immigration and recommended the literacy test as the means of keeping alleged undesirables out.

The Italian government, Italian-American newspapers and societies in America, and various other immigrant organizations all opposed the literacy test, pointing out its discriminatory intent. But since Italian-language newspapers were weak editorially and seldom exerted influence outside their own communities, their opposition did not have much effect on lawmakers. Neither did the efforts of the few Italians who organized themselves to oppose the restrictionists. "At this time, Italians had no real political muscle," one historian wrote.<sup>55</sup> In February of 1913, despite

protests from proponents of free immigration, Congress passed a bill calling for a literacy test. The bill was vetoed by President William Howard Taft, who said that immigrants were illiterate because they had been denied the opportunity for education, the very opportunity they sought in the United States. Italian newspapers praised Taft's action, but restrictionist sentiment was deeper and more widespread than ever. Beyond that, Woodrow Wilson, a restrictionist and a man most Italian newspapers had opposed, had just won election to the presidency.<sup>56</sup>

Illiteracy among Italian immigrants, then, had its own chain reaction effect, not only on the Italians' ability to assimilate, but on the attitudes of Americans and official American policy. Illiteracy helped delay citizenship, which prevented Italians from voting, and thus from wielding any political power. This led to political decisions that were often discriminatory against Italians. Moreover, political leaders were often reluctant to denounce bigoted attitudes and pronouncements made by other American citizens--including many prominent ones--against Italians. In the long run, this may have been even more damaging to Italians as they tried to find their place in American society. Gino Speranza wrote in 1904: "It is true that, as a nationality, Italians have not forced (political) recognition. Though numerically strong, there is no such 'Italian vote' as to interest politicians. They have founded no important institutions; they have no strong and well-administered societies as have the Germans and the Irish. They have no representative press, and well-organized movements among them for their own good are rare."<sup>57</sup>

All this is true, but Speranza also points out that "the Italian in America as an individual is making good progress."<sup>58</sup> My own research confirms this. While it is difficult to dispute that Italians were *hurt* politically and economically by their widespread illiteracy and low naturalization rates (especially in the early years), it would be a mistake to say that these factors *stifled* their growth and progress in the

United States. Using the familiarity of the enclave as a home base, Italians worked, saved money, purchased property, and raised families in America. In other words, while they were slow to acquire American citizenship, in many communities they were taking other critical settlement steps that made it clear they would become permanent residents of America. Boston's North End, for example, was one place where this settlement process was taking place during the first decade of the new century. It was the enclave that offered a protected haven for Italians to sink roots and adjust to life in a strange new country.

### Life in the Enclave, Saving Money, Buying Property

At the age of fifteen, the "pick-and-shovel poet", Pascal D'Angelo, was startled, then entranced, by the spectacle of a New York City elevated train rumbling around a curve. "To my surprise not even one car fell," he reported. "Nor did the people walking beneath scurry away as it approached." Minutes later, while riding a trolley, the immigrant was distracted by the sight of a father and son moving their mouths in continuous motion, "like cows chewing on cud." Never having known of chewing gum, he assumed, "with compassion, that father and son were both afflicted with some nervous disease." Later, just before he and his immigrant companions reached their destinations, he was surprised to note signs at streets with "Ave., Ave., Ave." printed on them. "How religious a place this must be that expressed its devotion at every crossing," he mused, though he could not understand why the word was not followed by "Maria".<sup>59</sup>

The fact is that few Italian immigrants were prepared for the sights that awaited them in America. The new arrivals were awed by skyscrapers, elevated trains, and bridges. Most of these immigrants had spent their lives in pastoral settings, as farmers or fishermen. Their first encounters with America were bound to



clash with their hopes and expectations. "Noise is everywhere," wrote one immigrant. "The din is constant and it completely fills my head." Others were shocked by the dirty cities: "New York was awful," said one. "The streets were full of horse manure. My little town in Italy was much more beautiful. I said to myself, 'How come, America?'"<sup>60</sup> Bartolomeo Vanzetti wrote upon his arrival in 1908: "Until yesterday I was among folks who understood me. This morning I seemed to have awakened in a land where my language meant little more to the native (as far as meaning was concerned) than the pitiful noises of a dumb animal. Where was I to go? What was I to do? Here was the promised land. The elevated rattled by and did not answer. The automobiles and trolley speed by, heedless of me."<sup>61</sup> It was the Italian neighborhood enclave that eased the culture shock that immigrants experienced upon their arrival in American cities. In many ways, it was the adjustment to urban life that was more difficult than the adjustment to American life. "Adjustment would have been necessary had the villagers migrated to a European city rather than across the Atlantic," one historian wrote. "Americans of rural background who moved to urban areas faced many of the same problems."<sup>62</sup> Of course, language problems that have been discussed already helped compound these problems for Italian immigrants.

The mass arrival of Italians coincided with the spectacular growth of American industries and cities, when cheap and unskilled labor was in great demand. By 1911, there were Italian urban enclaves throughout the country, an estimated 3,000 of them, with as many as seventy in the New York metropolitan area alone. Nearly three-quarters of all the arriving Italians wound up in the nation's most industrialized northeast states.<sup>63</sup> Even while Italians were still arriving in large numbers, the claim made by demographers--which later became an alarm sounded by proponents of restriction--was that there were more Italians in New York City alone than in Rome, Milan, or Naples.<sup>64</sup>

Inside the enclaves, streets pulsed with vitality, as hacks, pushcarts, delivery trucks, and people competed for right of way. "Above the streets," one report described, "the fire escapes of tenements were festooned with lines of drying laundry, while housewives exchanged news and gossip with any neighbor within shouting distance. The roofs became the remembered fields of Italy where residents could visit one another on summer Sundays while the young played in the tar-filled air."<sup>65</sup>

But the vibrant character of the enclave was belied by the mostly miserable housing conditions endured by thousands who lived in the congested sections. City investigators found the tenements adjoined so closely together that sufficient air and light could not enter outside rooms; except for those on the top floors, none of the inside rooms had access to air or light. Addressing a Tuberculosis Congress in Washington D.C., one investigator said: "If we had invented machines to create tuberculosis, we could not have succeeded better in increasing it." Alarmed by such reports, a committee acting on behalf of the Italian government conducted its own investigation and found that 18 percent of Italian families in these enclaves lived in a single room.<sup>66</sup>

In his study of Boston-area Italians, Dr. Frederick Bushee wrote: "In some of the large tenement houses of the principal streets of the North End, as well as in the smaller tenements of the back alleys, the Italians lived in a more crowded manner than any other people in the city." In 1891, he reported, when the tenement house census of Boston was taken, two precincts of the North End occupied almost exclusively by Italians contained a stunning 259 families, or one-fourth of the total population. A full 154 of these families were occupying single rooms.<sup>67</sup> William DeMarco, in his North End study, said: "So great did overcrowding and its concomitant misery become, that the North End rivaled Calcutta, India, in density of population by 1900."<sup>68</sup>

Congestion and lack of air were not the only health hazards. The tenements were cold and dark. In one sample block there was only one family with a hot-water range. These conditions made Italians susceptible to tuberculosis in the United States, even though they were among the least likely to contract the disease in Europe. "And how could it have been otherwise?" asked Dr. Antonio Stella, a physician member of the Italian Committee on the Prevention of Tuberculosis. Dr. Stella cited the infectious nature of the disease, the overcrowded conditions of tenements inhabited by a people, "made up chiefly of agriculturalists, fresh from the sunny hills of Tuscany and Sicily, abruptly thrown into unnatural and dark sweatshops, a population overworked, underfed, poorly clad, curbed with all the worries and anxieties of the morrow and only free, thank God! from the worst ally of consumption--alcoholism."<sup>69</sup> Stella disputed statistics that claimed that Italians in the United States were among the least afflicted of the foreign-born groups, arguing that many cases went unreported, often because Italians were likely to return to their native villages, preferring to die there. The numbers of Italian men and women who contracted tuberculosis was so large that the Sicilian town of Sciacca built a small sanitarium on its outskirts to receive the stricken who came home to die. Contrary to the general impression that the large percentage of Italians who contracted tuberculosis were the children of immigrants, Stella found that it was usually the parents themselves. Usually these were people who came from rural areas of Italy and were unaccustomed to "the poisoned atmosphere" of city life. "Six months of life in the tenements are sufficient to turn a sturdy youth of Calabria, the brawny fisherman of Sicily, the robust women from Abruzzo and Basilicata, into the pale, flabby, undersized creatures we see dragging along the streets of New York and Chicago," Stella observed.<sup>70</sup> Apart from unsanitary housing conditions, which were considered mainly responsible for the spread of the disease, Stella's committee found

that certain occupations popular among Italians were particularly hazardous to the lungs--including bootblacks, plasterers, marble and stonecutters, and cigarmakers.

In its seven-city study, The Dillingham Commission found that the "degree of congestion" was greatest among Slovenians (the average number of people per 100 rooms was 172), followed by the Southern Italians who averaged 166 people for every 100 rooms. By contrast, Germans and Swedes lived at a rate of 99 and 93 people per 100 rooms respectively.<sup>71</sup> "Congestion of immigrants in large cities has long been considered one of the most unfavorable features of the modern problem of immigration," the commission reported. "The search for immigrant races in congested districts revealed the fact that the population of such districts consists predominantly of races representing *recent immigration*. In all seven of the cities studied, the Russian Hebrews and South Italians are among the principal races in congested districts (my emphasis)."<sup>72</sup> The following description by The Dillingham Commission of the "Hanover Street District" in Boston's North End offers an example of both conditions in the area and the commission's general biased language:

The characteristic of the locality is not its four main streets (Hanover, Commercial, Henschman, Charter), but the alleys which honeycomb the block. Off Commercial Street run Globe Alley, Greenough Lane and Luther Place, at the rate of one alley for every two houses on Commercial Street. Globe Alley is made up altogether of lodging houses. The whole alley is packed with people, and is generally looked upon in the neighborhood as "low down". It has so frequently been the subject of Board of Health investigations that the people there have a wholesome fear of anyone bordering on the official. Greenough Lane has a much more "home and family" population than Globe Alley; it is very dirty, dark, and narrow--barely three feet wide at the entrance. Luther Place, while wider, is made up of dilapidated houses, and looks more like a dump heap than a place where people with children actually live summer and winter. Off Hanover Street are four small alleys. Fountain Place (is) the worst of the alleyways. Its four old wooden houses are tottering, the whole yard is filthy, and the basement living rooms, half underground, are very bad in all respects.<sup>73</sup>

In the early days of Italian immigration, before most single males had sent for their families, Frederick Bushee discussed the "most objectional feature" of overcrowding as "the mode of life of the single Italian men. Ten or twelve men together will rent one room of a tenement, each paying 25 or 30 cents a week. They are entitled to a fire for the cold winter days, and the woman occupying the tenement agrees to have some care of their clothing. This is their home for the time being."<sup>74</sup>

It is necessary to understand these basic living conditions within the enclave to comprehend fully the Italian immigrant's struggle upon arrival in America. More to the point, it is important to remember that despite these conditions, Italian communities grew and eventually thrived in the cities. The cities were congested and lacked fresh air, but more important than housing conditions was the need to be with family and friends, and most important of all, to be where jobs were more plentiful. With the strong support of *la famiglia* and other *paesani*, and by working at virtually any job they could land, Italians were able to earn and save money, purchase property, and build communities.

An Italian immigrant who first lived in New York described the attitude toward work in his enclave: "Everybody went to work upon arrival, women, children, old men. If school was obligatory there were ways of avoiding it. A boy would tell the principal of his school that his family was moving to another school district. The principal would fill out the transfer papers, telling the boy: 'You must present these papers to your new school.' Of course the boy never did and he was free to get a job as wagon driver, delivery boy, bootblack, anything that would contribute to the family income."<sup>75</sup> Contributing to the family income was seen as a priority in most Italian families. Income earned by young adult children or lodgers was not considered the individual's to keep, but part of the overall family income.

Italian immigrants have been criticized, often justifiably, for removing children from school as soon as they were able to work. By not placing a priority on education, first-generation Italian-Americans played a role in delaying the academic, economic, and political progress of their children. This was not done by design, of course; it was simply expected that everyone in the family would work to assure that food, clothing, and housing needs were met.

This emphasis on work proved beneficial to Italians in other ways. Despite working at low-paying jobs, they were among the best money-savers of all immigrant groups. This enabled them to send money back to relatives in Italy, and later--after many Italians decided to make America their permanent home--allowed them to buy property in the community. Italian families were able to supplement their heads-of-household incomes with the contributions of working children, and from the high percentage of boarders who lived in Italian households. Usually, boarders were *paesani* who had arrived in America to work on a temporary basis.

Statistics from the period illustrate the difference between heads-of-household and total family income. The Dillingham Commission reported that Southern Italian heads-of-households earned approximately \$360 annually, according to data collected between June of 1907 and June of 1909--well into the period when Italians had begun to settle permanently in the United States. This was far below German and Swedish immigrants, who averaged approximately \$600, the Irish who earned about \$550, and Russian Jews who earned nearly \$460 annually. The income of Italians jumped to more than \$400, however, when total family income was taken into account--a percentage increase greater than any other immigrant group in the comparison between head-of-household and total family earnings.<sup>76</sup>

In Boston, where Italian families took in more boarders than any other city, the difference between head-of-household and total family income is even greater.

South Italians earned an average of \$338 per year during this period in Boston, and a full 29 percent earned less than \$200. Yet, when family income was taken into consideration, South Italians earned an average of \$534, greater than any other immigrant group except the Irish (see Table 4.4).<sup>77</sup>

**Table 4.4**--Average annual earnings of heads of households versus family income in Boston (includes income from boarders and lodgers)

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Head of household income</u>	<u>Total family income</u>
Irish		\$730
Lithuanian	\$402	\$515
Russian Jews	\$396	\$543
Polish	\$389	\$504
Syrian	\$352	\$377
<b>South Italians</b>	<b>\$338</b>	<b>\$534</b>

*Figures compiled from The Dillingham Commission Report on Immigration, vol. 27 Immigrants in Cities: Boston*

While income remained low, Italians were never high on the so-called pauper lists compiled by social workers. In New York in 1904, for example, the Irish had the highest percentage of indigents among all foreign nationalities in the United States. The low Italian percentile is due possibly to the fact that men frequently came into the country specifically to work at a job which had been promised before departure from Italy. The 1904 records also revealed that the Italians did not, in any large numbers, become inmates of charitable institutions, such as orphanages, rescue missions, or old-age homes. In 1904, the United States Bureau of Immigration listed the origins of "foreign-born paupers" in the following percentages: Irish (30.2 percent), Germans (19.5 percent), English (8.5 percent), and Italians and Jews (8.1 percent each).<sup>78</sup>

Despite their low wages, Italians were able to save money. This was due to their willingness to subsist on a small amount of money, the fact that they rented apartments and rooms in low-rent areas in the cities, and because of their strong desire to send money to poverty-stricken relatives in Italy, and later, to purchase homes in the United States.

In 1903, Walter Weyl wrote a vignette for *Outlook* entitled "The Italian who lived on twenty-six cents a day." Weyl's piece featured a former peasant named Pacifico who, "secured his dollar and fifty cents a day, minus railway fare, minus the arbitrary charge for the doctor, minus the padrone's fee, minus the exorbitant sums extorted for the rotten food Vincenzo sold him. Pacifico, born in a bottomless poverty, was not spoiled, and he shrugged his shoulders at the hard work, the bad food, and the ceaseless extractions. The essential fact remained: he earned a dollar-and-a-half a day; he lived on twenty-six cents a day." When Pacifico began to earn more than \$1.50 per day, Weyl maintained, he was released from the bonds of the padrone. He married, sent his children to school, and finally became economically independent. "A bank account today is what a log cabin and a hundred-acre lot were a hundred years ago," Weyl wrote.<sup>79</sup> Statistician Eliot Lord noted in 1905: "The thrift of the Italian is so exceptional that even bootblacks and common laborers can sometimes save enough to figure as tenement landlords."<sup>80</sup> In his generally favorable study of the *padrone* labor system, historian Luciano Iorizzo credits the *padrone* with distributing Italian labor to where the work was, where companies would provide transportation, food, clothing and lodging, thereby enabling Italians to save more. "When all was done," he wrote, "the Italians saved more than any other immigrant group. From a monthly salary of \$35, the Italians could save \$25 or more. Other immigrant groups were reported as saving \$20. The difference saved by the Italian was due generally to his utilization of the *padrone's* services."<sup>81</sup>



The lower cost of rental housing also enabled Italians to save a proportionately large amount of money. Italians rented in the poorer sections of the cities, sometimes due to discrimination, but often because their original intent was to return to Italy and they saw it as imprudent to expend a larger percentage of their precious income on housing. When these Italians decided to stay in America, they found that they could save at a greater rate by remaining in the lower rent areas (This did not hold true in Boston, incidentally. Because of the location of the North End--close to the business center of the city--Italians paid more than the Poles, Lithuanians, and Irish who lived in outlying South Boston, where rents were much cheaper.<sup>82</sup> In fact, the geographic location of the North End was a key factor in its early growth and stability, a point that will be expanded upon in the conclusion of this study.).

Italians basically handled any disposable income they had in two ways--they saved money to purchase homes or they sent money back to families in Italy. The latter practice is discussed briefly in Chapter II as part of the analysis of the Italian government's reaction to temporary emigration to America. Still, the practice of remitting funds to Italy is worth expanding upon here. For example, a study on behalf of the National Bureau of Economic Research concluded remarkably that between 1902 and 1920, "the transfer of savings to Italy by Italian laborers in foreign countries constitutes one of the principal credit items in Italy's balance of international payments."<sup>83</sup> In 1907 alone, noted Robert Foerster, remittances of money to Italy from the United States totaled \$85 million.<sup>84</sup> Another Italian immigrant study concluded: "The impact on Italy of this additional money was considerable. This infusion of fresh capital helped bolster the Italian economy and encouraged the development of agricultural and industrial improvements which created jobs for many peasants and laborers. It spurred the continuing flow of immigrant workers to the United States...*Some areas of Italy owed almost their entire economic development to*

*remittances*, and the Italian merchant marine was virtually built upon them. Without a doubt, money from abroad had become a potent factor in the economic and social life of Italy (my emphasis)."<sup>85</sup> What is interesting about these remittances is that the money flowing from America entered regions and sections of Italy in amounts that corresponded proportionally to the number of their *paesani* who had come to the United States--that is, as additional *Avellinesi* poured into America, a corresponding amount of money traveled back to the Avellino region of Italy. Between 1905 and 1920, noted the National Bureau of Economic Research study, "money orders of the Bank of Naples paid by the post offices of the kingdom clearly indicate a progressive increase sent to southern Italy, in comparison with those to the central and northern sections...Though forced to seek work and a permanent home in foreign lands, the Italian emigrants continue to aid their families and their country with their remittances."<sup>86</sup> One writer estimated that by the First World War, Italian immigrants in America had sent nearly \$750 million to their relatives in the mother country: "The enormous amounts they sent back to their relatives in Italy in the form of postal remittances are staggering when one recalls what they were earning, many of them \$1.00 per day."<sup>87</sup>

When Italians were not sending money abroad, they were doing their best to purchase property in the United States, most often homes within their enclaves. In fact, the rate of real estate ownership in the United States despite the low wages and near poverty level of Italians is a good indicator of stability in some neighborhoods and an overall intention to remain in the United States. While Italian home ownership did not reach its height until just after the First World War, the importance Italians attached to owning property was documented much earlier. Moreover, the rate of property ownership in the early years was surprisingly high. "Nothing embodied the essence of community more than a home," wrote historian Gary Mormino in his

study of St. Louis Italian immigrants. "Home ownership became the great trade-off, a capstone to the immigrants' relentless labors. No home, no community; no property, no dignity." Mormino pointed out that the "quantum gains" in property mobility among Sicilians and Lombards in St. Louis underscored the immigrant promise, "He who crosses the ocean, buys a house."<sup>88</sup> For Italians in America, owning a home had many meanings. It was an important step in the assimilation process--of becoming American. It was a source of pride for Italians, a tangible sign that they had overcome hostility and discrimination in a strange land and had begun to sink roots. It was evidence that if you worked hard in the United States, anything was possible. For Italian immigrants home ownership *was* The American Dream, decades before the phrase became the symbol of a growing, economically vibrant middle class.

Prior to 1900, home ownership among Italian immigrants was rare. After the turn of the century, however, rates increased dramatically, peaking in most enclaves around 1930. For example, in 1900, census takers found *no* Italian homeowners on The Hill, a situation that improved by 1910. By 1930, however, an incredible 59 percent of the 1,341 homes in the virtually all-Italian community were occupied by their owners. In fact, Italians had the highest percentage of home ownership in St. Louis by 1930. Italians had also made great home ownership strides in other cities by 1930, including Philadelphia (69 percent), Syracuse (52 percent), Buffalo (45 percent), Chicago (41 percent), and Boston (31 percent).<sup>89</sup>

Still, it would be misleading to suggest that Italians did not make inroads in home ownership until 1930. Even in the first decade of the new century, they were beginning to make progress that indicated clearly their commitment to their new country. As early as 1904, Gino Speranza reported: "In New York City, the

individual holdings of Italians in savings banks is over \$15 million, and they have some four thousand real estate holdings of the clear value of \$20 million. About ten thousand stores in the city are owned by Italians at an estimated value of \$7 million and to this must be added about \$7.5 million invested in wholesale business." From a per capita standpoint, the value of property owned by Italians in New York was *"much below that of the Italian colonies of St. Louis, San Francisco, Boston, and Chicago, but a fair showing for the great 'dumping ground' of America (my emphasis)."*<sup>90</sup> As early as 1900, more than \$2.3 million in real estate was owned by Italians in the North End of Boston alone. "Even microscopic incomes do not forbid to the Italians the practice of thrift," said one writer in a study of Boston written in 1903. "Italians save to go back to Italy or to bring friends over. Some save and become landholders and small businessmen."<sup>91</sup> In New York in 1905, Italians owned a quarter of the Elizabeth Street properties--the Sicilian section of the neighborhood--and by 1925, they owned one-half of the property on the street.<sup>92</sup>

The Dillingham Commission also showed that Italians were making progress in home ownership before 1910 (see Table 4.5, Page 95). Statistics gathered between 1907 and 1909 showed that South Italians were fifth among foreign-born immigrants in home ownership among the seven cities studied (see Table 4.5, Page 91). Their average rate of 6.1 percent was significantly lower than the Germans (25.8 percent), Swedish (19.4 percent) Polish (17.2 percent), and Irish (12.5 percent), but Italians purchased property at about the same rate as Russian Jews and Lithuanians.<sup>93</sup> "The owning of a home does not necessarily indicate a high economic condition of the family...but it is an indication of thrift and shows the intention on the part of the family of remaining permanently in the present location," the Commission concluded.<sup>94</sup>

Generally, historians agree with the Commission, citing the Italians' desire to purchase homes as an important step in assimilation. Home ownership was more important to Italians in this context than occupational mobility, education for their children, or political power. "Italians preferred to invest their futures in property rather than career advancement," asserted Gary Mormino of St. Louis Italians. "Housing represented a means to an end, an investment for family in community."<sup>95</sup> In her study of Italians in Buffalo, historian Virginia Yans-McLaughlin pointed out: "The Buffalo Italians apparently believed that family interests were better served by property ownership and financial security than by children's leisure and education. The desire to own a home can be seen as the wish of former peasants to possess--even at great sacrifice--something which had been denied to so many for generations. Land--a tangible asset--could proudly be passed on to the younger generation."<sup>96</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia stated in her study of Sicilians on Elizabeth Street in New York: "When Sicilians chose a home, they were not so much guided by their social ideas as by their notions of desirable housing and by their own limited resources. Sicilians had simple housing standards: They wanted above all else to own a house ("As little as it is, so long as it's mine. ")."<sup>97</sup>

For Italians, then, earning and saving money and purchasing homes were priorities, even in the early years of settlement. Despite performing menial jobs, earning low wages, and settling in some of the worst sections of the city, Italians already were beginning to gain a toehold in American society around 1900--albeit from relatively insulated enclaves. Their struggle was made more difficult, however, by the intense discrimination they were subjected to from nearly all quarters in the United States. This is the one other major factor that must be examined to understand fully the Italian immigration experience in America.

**Table 4.5**--*Percent of families owning homes by nationality in seven-city sample*

---

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Percentage of home ownership</u>
German	25.8%
Swedish	19.4%
Polish	17.0%
Irish	12.5%
South Italian	6.1%
Russian Jews	6.0%
Lithuanians	6.0%

---

*Figures compiled from The Dillingham Commission Report on Immigration, vol. 26 Immigrants in Cities: Summary*

### Discrimination: Words and Deeds

The period of the great Italian influx into the United States was bracketed by two celebrated cases that had worldwide implications and raised major questions about discrimination against Italian immigrants.

The first was the mob lynching of eleven Sicilian immigrants in New Orleans in 1891 in retribution for the murder of nationally-prominent police chief David Hennessy. Two of the Italians were awaiting trial. A mistrial had been declared in the cases of three others. The remaining six already had been acquitted of all charges. In a fateful decision by the trial judge, the nine men whose cases had been adjudicated were ordered returned to their cells until the other two came to trial. All were murdered by a mob--organized by some of the most influential citizens of New Orleans--that stormed the prison and either shot, beat to death, or hanged eleven innocent men who were helpless to escape. This affair produced enormously serious repercussions, leading to the near-impeachment of President Benjamin Harrison and bringing the U.S. to the brink of war with Italy.<sup>98</sup>

Some thirty years later, the trial, conviction, and execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti--the shoemaker and the fish peddler--became arguably the most famous and controversial case in American legal history. Convicted of murdering a payroll clerk in South Braintree, Massachusetts, both men were certainly less than honest with police after their arrest. But when they finally were electrocuted on August 23, 1927 after seven years of imprisonment, millions of people around the world had been convinced that they were innocent. Millions more believed that they had not received a fair trial or impartial justice both because they were self-proclaimed anarchists and because they were Italian immigrants.<sup>99</sup>

In between these two cases, historians agree that Italian immigrants--especially those from Southern Italy--suffered intense discrimination in America, including many instances of violence. What the overall effects this discrimination had on the Italian immigration experience is a source of some disagreement among historians. Some argue that it influenced Italians to return to Italy. Others say it delayed assimilation and led Italians to keep to themselves longer within the enclaves. Still others say discrimination served as a means to strengthen the enclaves, and galvanized Italians to become productive Americans--by raising families and purchasing homes, for example--despite the odds they had to overcome. Most likely there is truth in each of these theories. Presumably, discrimination affected different Italians in different ways. The facts, however, are indisputable. Italians were among the most discriminated-against immigrant groups to arrive on America's shores. The scope and breadth of this discrimination was remarkable. It ranged from physical mob violence to less overt, yet extremely damaging, discriminatory pronouncements and writings from politicians and journalists. It needs to be examined as part of the settlement process Italian immigrants went through as they became Americans.

The New Orleans incident was the culmination of several violent incidents against Italians in the early years, and it seemed to mark the beginning of more acceptable forms of institutional bigotry towards Italians. Historians Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello argued that discrimination was a critical factor in the Italians' decision to stay in America or return home. They vigorously maintain that nativist discrimination "mocked the South Italians' confidence in their future well-being and acceptance in America."<sup>100</sup> They concluded: "Treated as inferiors in America, many immigrants decided to return to Italy."<sup>101</sup>

Mondello and Iorizzo outlined a series of events, from mob rule to police action to discriminatory writings, that they claim caused many Italians to return to their homeland discouraged and saddened by their treatment in America:

The June, 1886 lynching of an Italian immigrant in Vicksburg, Mississippi, on suspicion of having molested a 10-year-old girl was an isolated occurrence and brought no nationwide reprisals against the foreign-born. It was the Haymarket (Chicago) Riot of the previous month which proved to be the touchstone for the suspicion of immigrants.

On March 4, 1888, the Buffalo superintendent of police ordered the arrest of virtually the entire Italian population of the city following the killing several days earlier of one Italian immigrant by another. The dragnet led to the detention of 325 Italians, each of whom was searched for concealed weapons. This hasty police action was an indicator of public hysteria rather than of the presence of numerous Italian criminals, for only two of the 325 suspects had weapons in their possession.

Hysteria gave way to violence during the 1890s and Italians were counted among the victims. In Denver, Colorado, an Italian was lynched in 1893; of the nine Italian American miners under suspicion of murdering an American saloon-keeper in Walsenburg, Colorado two years later, one was found guilty and six others were executed by mob; two hundred Italians were driven out of Altoona, Pennsylvania in 1894; three Italians were lynched in Hahnville, Louisiana in 1896, and five met a similar fate in Tallulah, Mississippi three years later.<sup>102</sup>

Mondello and Iorizzo also said the New Orleans-Hennessy violence "marked a turning point in nativist thought against Italians, for it encouraged the conviction that



Sicilians had at last established in America their centuries-old criminal conspiracy, the Mafia, which now threatened to disrupt American society."<sup>103</sup>

The mob violence in New Orleans led to some bizarre commentary by "respectable" voices in America that clearly indicated an anti-Italian bias. Writing in the *North American Review* in May of 1891, Henry Cabot Lodge used the New Orleans incident as an argument against unrestricted immigration. In so doing, he made excuses for the mob that killed the Italians: "What are the true causes of the events of the 14th of March at New Orleans? One, certainly, was the general belief that there had been a gross miscarriage of justice in the trial of the accused Italians. Whether the jury rendered their verdict against the evidence or not, it is certain that the people of New Orleans pretty generally thought they had done so...I believe that the underlying cause is to be found in the utter carelessness with which we treat immigration to this country. The killing of the prisoners at New Orleans was due chiefly to the fact that they were supposed to be members of the Mafia...These dangerous secret societies spring up and commit murders...They come not from race peculiarities, but from the quality of certain classes of immigrants of all races."<sup>104</sup> Even the *New York Times*, in editorializing on the lynchings in New Orleans, expressed particularly vicious xenophobia against the Sicilians. While denouncing the mob that lynched the Italians, the *Times* remarked that the citizens of New Orleans were compelled to use force to inspire, "a wholesome dread to those who had boldly made a trade of murder...These sneaking and cowardly Sicilians, the descendants of bandits and assassins, who have transported to this country the lawless passions, the cut-throat practices, the oath-bound societies to their native country, are to us a pest without mitigation."<sup>105</sup> Other editorials expressed similar sentiments, as did magazine writers at the time. It must be remembered that not a single accused Sicilian

in the New Orleans case was convicted of any crime, yet most of the writing at the time leveled only cursory criticism against the mob that killed them.

Violent incidents against Italians continued into the twentieth century, with mob actions and lynchings in Erwin, Mississippi (1901), Marksville, Louisiana (1901), Marion, North Carolina (1906), Tampa, Florida (1910), Willisville, Illinois (1914), and Johnson City, Illinois (1915).<sup>106</sup> My research also turned up repeated incidents in 1906 of Italian laborers being mistreated by a North Carolina construction company, which recruited labor from among immigrants arriving at New York. Mistreatment of Italians by the Spruce Pine Carolina Company set off a barrage of correspondence between the Italian charge C.G. Montagna and U.S. Secretary of State Elihu Root. The Italians were "deprived of their liberty and reduced to a state of peonage," according to official documents. "The condition in which they appeared was the most pitiful, their bodies being broken down by the hardships of the long journey made in great part on foot and by lack of food, and they being stripped of their goods and demoralized...the treatment all these Italians received was practically that of slaves. They were guarded day and night by armed guards and were not allowed to leave the premises. They were compelled to do underground work when they had contracted to work above ground...When they refused to do this work, which under the contract they could not be compelled to do, they were whipped and suffered other abuses." Because of pressure from the federal government, the Spruce Pine Carolina Company agreed to pay indemnities to injured Italians, and to dismiss "and never again to employ those agents whom the judicial proceedings thus far have shown to be guilty of ill treatment and abuse of laborers."<sup>107</sup>

Most of this discriminatory activity was directed toward Southern Italians, who were viewed as inferior to the people of the North. The U.S. Bureau of Immigration reinforced these entrenched biases, classifying Italian immigrants as two

different races--northern and southern. Indeed, as late as 1917, a study on immigration concluded: "The inclination of Italians to congregate by race groups tends to perpetuate racial customs and characteristics, and thus retard assimilation. The North Italians, however, show more inclination to fuse with the older white population than the South Italians do. The former also evince a keener desire to mingle with the Americans, to learn English, and to get educational facilities for their children."<sup>108</sup> Southern Italians were viewed as a different race entirely, perhaps for many reasons--because of their darker complexions, inability to speak the language, general illiteracy, unusual Catholic religious customs. In fact, implicit in much of the contemporary criticism was the comparison between Southern Italians and blacks. There were striking similarities in the way each was viewed during this time period. In many communities, in fact, blacks and Southern Italians developed friendships, lived near each other, and worked together doing much of the same kinds of physical labor. One of the reasons Sicilians were so despised in New Orleans around the time of the lynchings was because of their fairly close relationship with blacks. Discrimination against Southern Italians during this time was as much *racism* as xenophobia. "Because of their swarthy complexions, Southern Italians were not considered members of the white race in some parts of the South," wrote one immigrant. "One Southern employer was quoted as saying: 'it makes no difference to me whom I employ--Negro, Italian, or white man.'<sup>109</sup>

This separation between Northern and Southern Italians actually was encouraged by Northerners, who were embarrassed to be associated with peasants and farmers from the south. There were two major reasons for this. First, the years of feuding between the North and the South in Italy--far from being mended by unification--simply carried over to the United States. Northerners who generally felt superior to Southerners in Italy held similar feelings in the United States. Secondly,

by the time of the great emigration from Southern Italy, Northerners were beginning to establish themselves in the United States. Many had established small businesses or were professionals. They resented the fact that literally hundreds of thousands of unskilled laborers from the South arrived in the United States each year and "represented the 'typical Italian' in the American mind."<sup>110</sup> One historian describes a *pizza versus polenta* rivalry that developed in America between Southern and Northern Italians.<sup>111</sup>

Other writers and government officials seized upon this North-South split to support their own prejudices against Southern Italians and Sicilians. After the New Orleans lynchings in 1892, Henry Cabot Lodge was prompted to dwell on the different classes of the Italian in his writings. He thereafter excepted from his harsher criticism "the northerners who had German blood and belonged to a people of Western civilization." In the future, this "Teutonic Italian, with his higher standard of living and capacity for skilled work, was a racial entity, not to be confused with his southern relative."<sup>112</sup> This view was also articulated by Arthur Train, an assistant district attorney in New York, who believed that a distinct dichotomy existed within the Italian character. "Northerners, *molto simpatico* to the American character, displayed many national traits...singularly like our own and resembled Americans in being honest, thrifty, industrious, law-abiding, and good natured," he wrote. On the other hand, Southerners exhibited "few of these good qualities" and were "apt to be ignorant, lazy, destitute, and superstitious. In addition, a considerable percentage of those from the cities are criminal."<sup>113</sup>

Official government reports also stereotyped Northern and Southern Italians. The Dillingham Commission reported that "North Italians are held in higher estimation by the natives than Italians from the Southern part of Italy...The South Italians are slow in becoming Americanized...They live in colonies, have very little

association with natives, are suspicious of Americans, do not trust their money to the banks, and trade at American shops as little as possible....While industrious, they are said to be impulsive, erratic, and quick to leave their job if they see apparent advantage elsewhere...It seems generally agreed that the Sicilians are less steady and less inclined to stick to a job day in and day out than other races."<sup>114</sup>

Writers and historians of the day even used the words of America's chief executives to support anti-Southern Italian sentiment. "I think we must agree with President (Theodore) Roosevelt, who in his message to Congress noted the need of distributing the desirable immigrants throughout the country and of keeping out the undesirable ones altogether," wrote Robert DeC. Ward. "Most writers on this question have emphasized the need of scattering the undesirable, who, as President Roosevelt points out, should not be admitted at all."<sup>115</sup> In 1902, the five-volume *History of the American People*, written by Woodrow Wilson, gave this bias against Southern Italians the status of a scholar's judgement. These immigrants, he wrote, came from the "lowest class of Italy...They have neither skill, nor energy, nor initiative, nor quick intelligence. The Chinese were more to be desired."<sup>116</sup>

There were other hurdles Southern Italians faced. Their religious practices, for example--outside processions, festivals, etc.--were not only considered bizarre by anti-Catholic forces at the time, they were also frowned upon by the mostly-Irish Catholic hierarchy. That Southern Italians were criticized by their own Church leaders only added to the discrimination fervor of non-Catholics.<sup>117</sup> Americans also feared criminal organizations such as The Black Hand and the Mafia, which they believed to have been brought over from Southern Italy and Sicily and established in the United States. Consequently, when crimes were committed in an Italian neighborhood or by an Italian, they were often sensationalized as the work of one of these organizations. In reality, the rate of crime among Italian immigrants and in

Italian-American neighborhoods was generally lower than the crime rate overall.<sup>118</sup> The effect of Italian religious practices and the impact of organized crime on the view held by Americans of Italian immigrants are both outside the scope of this study, but they are major topics in the overall discussion of Italian immigration, with implications to the present day.

Discrimination against Italians continued well into the new century. Even as late as 1920, a University of California master's thesis offered a hint of popular attitudes: "The idea that Italian immigrants come from an inferior race is not merely a matter of popular opinion, but one which has received substantial corroboration from careful investigation."<sup>119</sup> And historian Silvano Tomasi, in his study of New York ethnic parishes wrote: "The Italian immigrants were described as intensely ignorant, with an intelligence of such low order to do more harm than good to the United States. In fact, they were looked upon as being of such a stupendous ignorance unequaled by any other class of people found in the civilized world."<sup>120</sup>

Perhaps the essence of the Italian immigration experience was summed up best by historian Leonard Covello, one of the foremost pioneers in the study of Italian-American history. In 1944, Covello wrote:

Mass emigration to America, which brought hundreds of thousands of Italian immigrants into the United States, changed all previous concepts of Italians as far as Americans were concerned. It was indeed difficult to associate the incoming Italian immigrants of the period between 1880 and 1910 with the glories of the Renaissance or what may be conveniently called Italian culture. To Americans, watching Southern Italian immigrants as they disembarked by the thousands at ports of entry, or observing them at work or in their every day activities, there was nothing about them that would make the previous concepts of Italy and Italians applicable to them. This contrast between the previously held concept of Italians and the appearance of an unexpectedly strange group of people resulted in antagonism toward them. Conflicts, which were unavoidable at the first contact, grew in intensity and in frequency as interaction between Italian immigrants and the American environment increased.<sup>121</sup>

We have seen that historians Iorizzo and Mondello believed discrimination like this forced many Italians to return to Italy, but not all historians agree. Dino Cinel, for example, acknowledging that discrimination against Italians "reached its peak" between 1900 and 1915, said it played a larger role in the evolution of Italian settlements and in the ability of Italians to assimilate, rather than in the decision of Italians to stay or leave. "That is," he wrote, "immigrants who became aware of discrimination were less likely to move out of the settlement."<sup>122</sup> Gary Mormino indicated similar findings on The Hill in St. Louis, suggesting that the cohesiveness of the neighborhood solidified even more because of discrimination. This fact, he argued, actually hurt mobility and assimilation. "One of the cruelest ironies of Italian-American history may be that the very strength and cohesiveness of the ethnic neighborhood arrested the occupational prospects of its sons and daughters."<sup>123</sup>

Still, it was the very cohesiveness of the enclave that enabled Italians to begin the process of settlement in the New World. The enclave offered familiarity, housing, work, a common language and culture, and served as a buffer against discrimination. The existence and strength of the neighborhood enclave was the single most important element in the Italians' transition from immigrants to Americans. In a few cities, this transition began well before the First World War, often between 1900 and 1910. Despite the "birds of passage" phenomenon, despite the common belief before 1920 that Italians came to America simply to earn money and then return home, Italians in certain neighborhoods were beginning the process of settlement shortly after the turn of the century. We turn our attention now to one of those Italian neighborhoods--Boston's North End.

## Notes

1. For complete descriptions of the chaos at Italian ports during peak immigration years, as well as a discussion of steamship companies, see Humbert S. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans* (New York, 1983), pp. 33-34, and Andrew F. Rolle, *The American Italians: Their History and Culture* (Belmont, California, 1972), p.3.
2. Francesco Cordasco, *Italian Mass Emigration--The Exodus of a Latin People: A Bibliographical Guide to the Bollettino dell'Emigrazione, 1902-1927* (Totowa, New Jersey, 1980), xv.
3. Angelo Mosso, "The Trauma of Departing from a Sicilian Village" in Allon Schoener, ed., *The Italian Americans* (New York, 1987), p. 57.
4. Edmondo DeAmicis, "Conditions Endured by Emigrants Aboard Ship" in Schoener, *The Italian Americans*, pp. 62-63.
5. Humbert S. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans* (New York, 1983), p. 72.
6. See Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics*, p. 62, and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Part 1*, pp. 105-106.
7. Alexander DeConde, *Half Bitter, Half Sweet: An Excursion into Italian-American History* (New York, 1971), p. 82, and Rolle, *The American Italians*, p. 58.
8. Robert DeC. Ward, "The Immigration Problem: Its Present Status and its Relation to the American Race of the Future" (1904), in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed., *The Italian in America: The Progressive View, 1891-1914* (New York, 1972), p. 30.
9. Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982* (Chicago, 1986), p. 92. In addition, my own examination of passenger lists indicate that this range is essentially accurate. Many Italians, particularly in the early days of immigration, did not feel the need to bring more money with them since their intention was not to settle in America permanently.
10. The best discussion of the padrone system is Luciano J. Iorizzo, "The Padrone and Immigrant Distribution", in Silvano M. Tomasi and Madeline H. Engel, eds., *The Italian Experience in the United States* (New York, 1977), pp. 43-75. *Padroni* are alternately portrayed by many historians as either corrupt opportunists who sought--for their own financial gain--to take advantage of immigrants, or as benevolent, savvy countrymen who assisted their fellow Italians. Iorizzo concludes that, overall, the padrone played a vital role in "stimulating and directing Italians to America." The vast majority, he maintains, provided the immigrants with work opportunities and represented security for them. The padrone's decline was ensured by the Americanization of Italians, and the successful move to organize Italian labor.
11. See Rolle, *The American Italians*, p. 58, and DeConde, *Half Bitter, Half Sweet*, p. 83, for discussions of the work performed by The Society for the Protection of



Italian immigrants. It is also important to note that Speranza wrote extensively during this period (see notes following), as well as petitioned government officials on behalf of Italian immigrants.

12. Gino C. Speranza, "Handicaps in America" (1910), in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed., *The Italian in America*, p. 67.

13. Speranza, "Handicaps", p. 69.

14. Speranza, "Handicaps", p. 69.

15. Rolle, *The American Italians*, pp. 59-60. For a full-fledged treatment of the enclave phenomenon, see William M. DeMarco, *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1981). Another insightful analysis of this concept of enclave can be found in Richard D. Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity* (Englewood, N.J., 1985), pp. 48-51.

16. DeMarco, *Ethnics and Enclaves*, p. 21.

17. Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York, 1990), pp. 196-197. DeMarco also discusses the notion of *campanilismo* in *Ethnics and Enclaves*, p. 4. Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of this concept can be found in Francis X. Femminella and Jill S. Quadagno, "The Italian American Family", in Charles H. Mindel and Robert W. Habenstein, eds, *Families in America: Patterns and Variations* (New York, 1976), pp. 63-64.

18. DeMarco, p. 24.

19. DeMarco, p. 44.

20. Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, California, 1982), p. 28.

21. Patrick J. Gallo, *Old Bread, New Wine: A portrait of the Italian-Americans* (Chicago, 1981), p. 261.

22. Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill*, p. 58.

23. There has been a great deal of analysis about roles in Italian families, especially the considerable power and influence wielded by the wife and mother in a structure that was supposed to be highly patriarchal. See Femminella and Quadagno, "The Italian American Family", pp. 78-80. See also Paul J. Campisi "Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family in the United States" in *American Journal of Sociology*, (May, 1948), pp. 443-449. In both Italian oral folklore and in writings of numerous authors, the story is often told of the different family reactions to the death of either parent. A father's death is considered sad, yet the role of head-of-the-family is quickly assumed by the eldest son. The death of the Italian mother is considered much more devastating, since she most often provided the spiritual and emotional leadership in the family.

24. Richard Alba, *Into the Twilight of Ethnicity*, p. 51.

25. Erik Amfitheatrof, *The Children of Columbus: An Informal History of Italians in the New World* (Boston, 1973), p. 168.
26. From *Reports of the Immigration Commission, vol. 26: Immigrants in Cities: Summary* (1911), (61st Congress, 3rd sess.), p. 152. This will be referred to hereafter as The Dillingham Commission.
27. Robert DeC. Ward, "The Immigration Problem," p. 30.
28. DeC. Ward, p. 30.
29. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 26: Immigrants in Cities: Summary, p. 146.
30. DeConde, *Half Bitter, Half Sweet*, p. 108.
31. Silvano M. Tomasi, *Piety and Power: The Role of the Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area* (New York, 1975), p. 22.
32. John Foster Carr, *Guide for the The Italian Immigrant in The United States of America* (New York, 1911), pp. 14-15. This guide was published under the auspices of the Connecticut Daughters of the American Revolution, who opened night schools and held classes in English for immigrants. The Daughters also sponsored lectures on American history given in Italian. The guide was published, "to help the immigrant adjust himself quickly to the living conditions and social customs of the United States of America."
33. A. Bartlett Giamatti, "Commentary", in Allon Schoener, ed., *The Italian Americans* (New York, 1987), p. 18.
34. Andrew Rolle, *The American Italians*, p. 4.
35. Giamatti, "Commentary", p. 17.
36. Robert E. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge, Mass., 1919), p. 343.
37. Foerster, p. 343.
38. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 26, page 129.
39. DeMarco, pp. 72-74.
40. Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: 1992), p. 138.
41. Mangione and Morreale, p. 139.
42. Mangione and Morreale, pp. 272-273.
43. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, New York, 1977), p. 48.

44. Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration* (New York, 1988), p. 50.
45. Dinnerstein and Reimers, p. 55.
46. Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, p. 160.
47. Tomasi, *Piety and Power*, p. 23.
48. Frederick A. Bushee, *Ethnic Factors in the Population of Boston* (New York, 1903), p. 122.
49. Stanley Lieberson, *Ethnic Patterns in American Cities* (New York, 1963), p. 209.
50. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27, "Immigrants in Cities: Boston," pp. 504-505.
51. Bushee, *Ethnic Factors in the Population of Boston*, pp. 158-159.
52. Bushee, p. 132.
53. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics*, p. 100.
54. DeConde, *Half Bitter, Half Sweet*, p. 117.
55. DeConde, p. 118. One key editor who fought fervently against the literacy bill was James A. Donnaruma, founder of *Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Boston's North End Italian newspaper. The entire collection of the *Gazzetta*, which has been published continuously since 1903 by James and later, his son, Cesar Donnaruma, can be found in the *James V. Donnaruma Collection*, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota. Interesting items in the collection include correspondence between the elder Donnaruma and Henry Cabot Lodge on the literacy issue.
56. Interestingly enough, Wilson opposed the literacy bill--Congress finally passed the bill in 1917, but over Wilson's veto.
57. Gino Speranza, "How It Feels to be a Problem" (1904), in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed., *The Italian in America*, pp. 91-92.
58. Speranza, "How It Feels to be a Problem", page 92.
59. Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, p. 125.
60. Mangione and Morreale, p. 124.
61. Mangione and Morreale, p. 130.
62. Humbert S. Nelli, "Italians in Urban America: A Study in Ethnic Adjustment", in *The International Migration Review* (Summer, 1967), vol. 1, no. 3, p. 44.
63. Mangione and Morreale, p. 131.

64. Mangione and Morreale, p. 133.
65. Mangione and Morreale, p. 135.
66. Mangione and Morreale, p. 143.
67. Bushee, *Ethnic Factors in the Population of Boston*, p. 28. See also Mangione and Morreale, p. 143.
68. DeMarco, *Ethnics and Enclaves*, p. 16.
69. Antonio Stella, M.D., "Tuberculosis and the Italians in the United States" (1904), in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed., *The Italians in America*, p. 117.
70. Stella, "Tuberculosis and the Italians in the United States," p. 118.
71. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 26, p. 5.
72. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 26, p. 3.
73. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27, pp. 429-430.
74. Frederick Bushee, *Ethnic Factors in the Population of Boston*, p. 29.
75. Mangione and Morreale, p. 145.
76. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 26, p. 137.
77. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27, pp. 480-481. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the *number* of boarders per Italian households in Boston versus Italian neighborhoods in other cities. The Boston ratio is significantly higher, which is an important indicator of neighborhood stability. Since most boarders were either blood relatives or very close family friends, the high ratio of boarders in the North End is an indication that the "chain migration" process in the North End was stronger than in other Italian enclaves.
78. For an analysis of these records, see Andrew Rolle, *The American Italians*, pp. 58-59.
79. Rolle, *The American Italians*, p. 63.
80. Humbert S. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans*, p.63.
81. Luciano J. Iorizzo, *The Padrone and Immigrant Distribution*, p. 57.
82. See The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27, p. 469, for statistics to support this geographic thesis.
83. Walter F. Wilcox, *International Migrations, vol. II, Interpretations, edited on behalf of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., Demographic*

*Monographs, Volume 8* (New York, 1969), pp. 466-467. Wilcox's full discussion on remittances covers from pp. 466-470. For two other good, complete discussions of remittances in Italian banks from immigrants see Betty Boyd Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914* (New York, 1973), pp. 57-62, and Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge, Mass., 1919), pp. 373-375.

84. Foerster, p. 374.

85. Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian Americans* (Boston, 1980), p. 65.

86. See Wilcox, *International Migrations, vol. II*, p. 470.

87. Erik Amfitheatrof, *The Children of Columbus: An Informal History of Italians in the New World* (Boston, 1973), p. 168.

88. Gary R. Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill*, p. 112.

89. Mormino, pp. 114-117.

90. Gino C. Speranza, "How It Feels to be a Problem," (1904) in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed. *The Italians in America*, p. 92.

91. Robert A. Woods, ed., *Americans in Process: A Settlement by Residents and Associates of the South End House--The North and West Ends*, Boston (Boston, 1903), pp. 120-121 and p. 144.

92. Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Americans, 1880-1930* (Albany, 1984), p. 74. Gabaccia argues that home ownership was very common in Sicily, more common than land ownership, for example. She cites the 1901 census in Sicily as revealing that the ratio of building owners to households ranged from one-third in the province of Trapani to a high of three-quarters in the mountainous Caltanissetta. Homeowners in Sicily included artisans and petty merchants, all landowning peasants, and the vast majority of sharecropper families. By contrast, only 12 percent of peasant families owned their own land. The concept of home ownership in Sicily at the time differed from that in the United States. In Sicily, "owning a home" did not translate necessarily into "owning the land" as well. Homes and land plots were owned separately. In the United States, owning a home extends to owning the land upon which it rests. The fact that home ownership was fairly common in Sicily was a key reason Sicilian immigrants desired to own homes in the United States.

93. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 26, pp. 106-107.

94. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 26, p. 103.

95. Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill*, p. 118.

96. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigration in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 177.

97. Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street*, p. 12.

98. For the most thorough treatment of this entire affair and the resulting repercussions, see Richard Gambino, *Vendetta: A True Story of the Worst Lynching in America, the Mass Murder of Italian-Americans in 1891, the Vicious Motivations Behind It, and the Tragic Repercussions That Linger to This Day* (New York, 1977). Gambino suggests that the white power elite and the labor unions in New Orleans saw the Hennessy murder as an opportunity to thwart the economic progress Italians had been making in the city by discrediting them and labeling them as a violent criminal class of people. Stated Gambino in his preface: "In regard to Italian-Americans, the New Orleans lynching was at once both a means of limiting their position, participation, and possibilities in the American community at the time, and one of the first major stimuli of the stereotype of inherently criminal Italian-American culture, a common defamation which still limits the ethnic group's position, participation, and possibilities in today's America." Gambino uses extensive documentation to prove that the mob that stormed the prison on that fateful day did not gather and act spontaneously in a burst of anger, but was well organized by some of New Orleans' most prestigious city leaders. The other aspect of this crime--the diplomatic furor that resulted between the United States and Italian governments--is also dealt with extensively. President Harrison's often rocky relationship with Congress became more stormy in the midst of the New Orleans incident. He seemed paralyzed to act in the face of threats of military retaliation by the Italian government if action was not taken against the organizers of the New Orleans mob. Harrison's lack of action led to calls for his impeachment, though the situation never progressed that far. Gambino's book is extremely well-documented, fast-moving, and shows how a localized incident can have far-reaching and long-lasting implications.

99. The literature on Sacco and Vanzetti is so vast that a list of sources could fill a volume itself. Some important and celebrated works include: Herbert B. Ehrmann, *The Case That Will Not Die: Commonwealth vs. Sacco and Vanzetti* (Boston, 1969); Felix Frankfurter, *The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti* (Boston, 1927); Francis Russell, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Case Resolved* (New York, 1986) and *Tragedy in Dedham: The Story of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case* (New York, 1962); *The Sacco-Vanzetti Case: Transcript of the Record of the Trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in the Courts of Massachusetts and Subsequent Proceedings, 1920-27, 6 vols.* (New York, 1928-1929), and Upton Sinclair, *A Documentary Novel of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case*, 2 vols. (New York, 1928). The most recent work on the subject is Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton, 1991), which says that the suspicious behavior of Sacco and Vanzetti at the time of their arrests was clearly linked to their background as anarchists. Their anarchist activity may have also hurt their attempts to prove their innocence given the "Red Scare" feelings in the United States at this time, Avrich noted. Still, Avrich draws no firm conclusions on their guilt or innocence, only frustration at the number of unanswered questions: "Nearly seven decades after their trial, the case against them remains unproved. Nor, on the other hand, can their innocence be established beyond any shadow of doubt."

100. Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, p. 79.

101. Iorizzo and Mondello, p. 221.

102. Iorizzo and Mondello, pp. 82-83.

103. Iorizzo and Mondello, p. 83.
104. Henry Cabot Lodge, "Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration," *North American Review*, vol. 152 (May, 1891), pp. 602-605. This article also is included in Salvatore J. LaGumina, ed., *Wop: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States* (New York, 1973), pp. 81-84.
105. See Iorizzo and Mondello, p. 85.
106. Iorizzo and Mondello, p. 290, offers tables and explanations of these incidents.
107. For a full description of this incident, see *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1906), p. 921. This incident deserves further treatment, as it touched off a diplomatic furor between the Italian consulate and the Secretary of State. The governors of Virginia and North Carolina also became involved, promising full investigations and offering official apologies for the treatment of the Italian laborers.
108. Jeremiah W. Jenks and W. Jett Lauck, *The Immigration Problem: A Study of American Immigration Conditions and Needs* (New York, 1917), pp. 88-89.
109. Jerry Mangione, "On Being a Sicilian American", in Francesco Cordasco, ed., *Essays in Honor of Leonard Covello* (Totowa, N.J., 1975), p. 40.
110. Andrew Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled Roots* (New York, 1980), p. 65.
111. Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled Roots*, p. 65.
112. See Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled Roots*, p. 66, and Barbara Miller Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Chicago, 1956), p. 164.
113. Humbert S. Nelli, *The Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility* (New York, 1970), p. 126.
114. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 10: "Immigrants in Industries", parts 3 and 4, pp. 771-772.
115. Robert DeC. Ward, "The Immigration Problem," (1904), in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed., *The Italians in America*, p. 32.
116. See DeConde, *Half Bitter, Half Sweet*, p. 101.
117. The best explanation of the importance of these religious practices is found in Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven, 1985).
118. For a full analysis on crime statistics in Italian neighborhoods, see John H. Mariano, *The Italian Immigrant and Our Courts* (Boston, 1925), pp. 23-35.
119. Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco*, p. 115.

120. Silvano M. Tomasi, *Piety and Power*, p. 24.
121. From Leonard Covello, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child (1944)*, excerpted in Francesco Cordasco, ed., *Studies in Italian American Social History: Essays in Honor of Leonard Covello*, p. xv.
122. Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco*, p. 115.
123. Gary Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill*, p. 111.



## CHAPTER V

### BOSTON'S NORTH END, 1900-1910: AN ITALIAN NEIGHBORHOOD GROWS, STABILIZES

When Constantine Panunzio arrived in Boston in 1902 from the province of Puglia, he offered the following observations about the North End: "Every sign of America seemed to have been systematically rooted out from this community as if with a ruthless purpose. Here still stood old Faneuil Hall, the Cradle of Liberty; here the Old North Church still lifted its steeple as if reminding one of the part it had played in the Revolutionary War; here was Copp's Hill and many other spots of the greatest historical importance. But while these monuments stood like sentinels reminding one of what this neighborhood had once been, now every last vestige of America was gone! All the American churches, homes, clubs, and other institutions which once had graced these streets were gone forever; gone to some more favorable spot in the uptown section of the city, leaving this community to work out its own destiny as best it could."<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will examine the roots of the North End's destiny, which was well on its way to being shaped by the first decade of the twentieth century. It was during this period, from 1900 to 1910, that the character of the North End became unmistakably Italian. It was during these years that Italians began the "process of settlement" in the neighborhood--marrying, having children, purchasing homes, bringing families over from Italy, starting businesses, and eventually for many, becoming citizens. This chapter looks at the development of the North End as an Italian community, including the changing population of the neighborhood, the growth of Italian businesses, and the number of Italian marriages and baptisms that took place. It then examines the influence of Italian political leader George Scigliano and analyzes the importance of individuals in the development of the neighborhood.

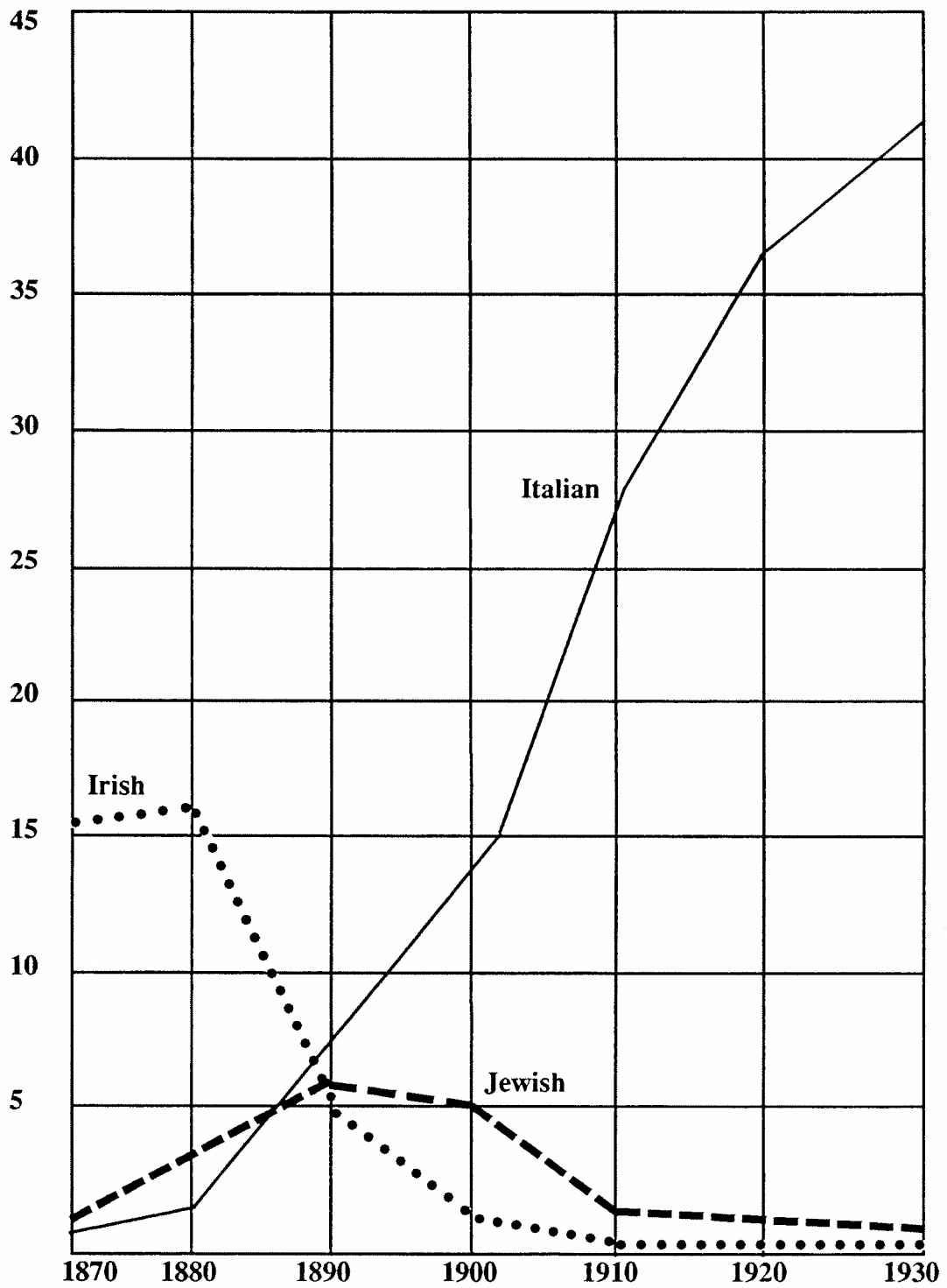
Next, it uses statistical information to refute the conclusion put forth by historian Stephan Thernstrom (and others) that the North End was one of the Boston neighborhoods that was too transient to study "individual continuity." Finally, this chapter makes use of The Dillingham Commission, and original research adapted from the naturalization petitions of a 125-member sample group, to analyze the "process of settlement steps taken by many North End residents between 1900 and 1910. The result of the original research and the accompanying statistical analysis support my conclusion that the North End developed stability as an Italian neighborhood during these years. Unlike many Italian neighborhoods, which were extremely transient right up until the beginning of the First World War, the North End had a solid and stable Italian identity well before 1910.

Constantine Panunzio was correct in his analysis. Beginning in 1890, the North End--Boston's first neighborhood and a section of the city that had been home to each succeeding wave of immigrant groups--had begun to undergo yet another ethnic transformation. A careful analysis of the North End's shifting population provides a valuable perspective on the changing face of the neighborhood. In the early years of the country, the North End had been Boston's most fashionable address, the home of the Hutchinsons, the Mathers, and Paul Revere. It was a springboard for the settlement of Boston in Puritan and colonial years, and later it became a center of commerce in a growing city. By the mid-1800s, however, the economic condition of the North End had deteriorated, as successive waves of German and then Irish poor had settled there, living six-to-ten in a room. The Irish potato famine of the mid-1840s provided the impetus for this flood of poor immigrants, and by 1850, the North End had become Boston's first slum neighborhood.

Population figures show dramatically how the North End changed over the next fifty years (see Figure 5.1, Page 117). In 1855, 14,000 of the 26,000 North End residents were Irish. The remainder were mostly German and British, some of the latter from Nova Scotia. The tiny Italian community in the North End at this time huddled in the Ferry Court area and numbered about 200. The 1880 population of the North End was slightly less than the 26,000 figure of 1860, and still, the Irish made up the vast majority of the population--about 16,000. By this time, the combined Jewish, Portuguese, and Italian populations numbered about 4,000, with Italians accounting for slightly more than 1,000 of the population.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1860 and 1895, however, the North End saw its most dramatic population shift since the arrival of the Irish and Germans in the 1840s. The 1880s and 1890s were critical years in the development of the immigrant community, as desperate conditions in Italy (outlined in Chapter II) and pogroms against the Jews in Russia served to drastically alter the ethnic mix in the North End. By 1895, Boston statistics show that 7,700 of the North End's 24,000 residents were Italians. There were 6,200 Jews, 1,200 British, 800 Portuguese, and the Irish population had dropped to only 6,800. The Irish population declined swiftly after that, the Jewish population dropped more slowly, and the Italian population continued to boom. Five years later, in 1900, there were still 24,000 people in the North End, but nearly 15,000 were Italian. In 1905, the North End population had grown to about 27,000, of which 22,000 were Italians. And by 1910, as the influx of Italian immigrants had driven the total population skyward, the North End's population approached 30,000 people, of which more than 28,000 were Italians (see Figure 5.2, Page 118).

This ratio held steady for the next decade as well. By 1920, the total North End population was about 37,000, with more than 35,000 Italians. By 1910, most all of the Jews and Irish had moved out of the North End and to better areas of



**Figure 5.1--Major foreign population groups of North End of Boston, 1870-1930 (in thousands)**

*Adapted from William DeMarco, *Ethnic Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End* (1981)*

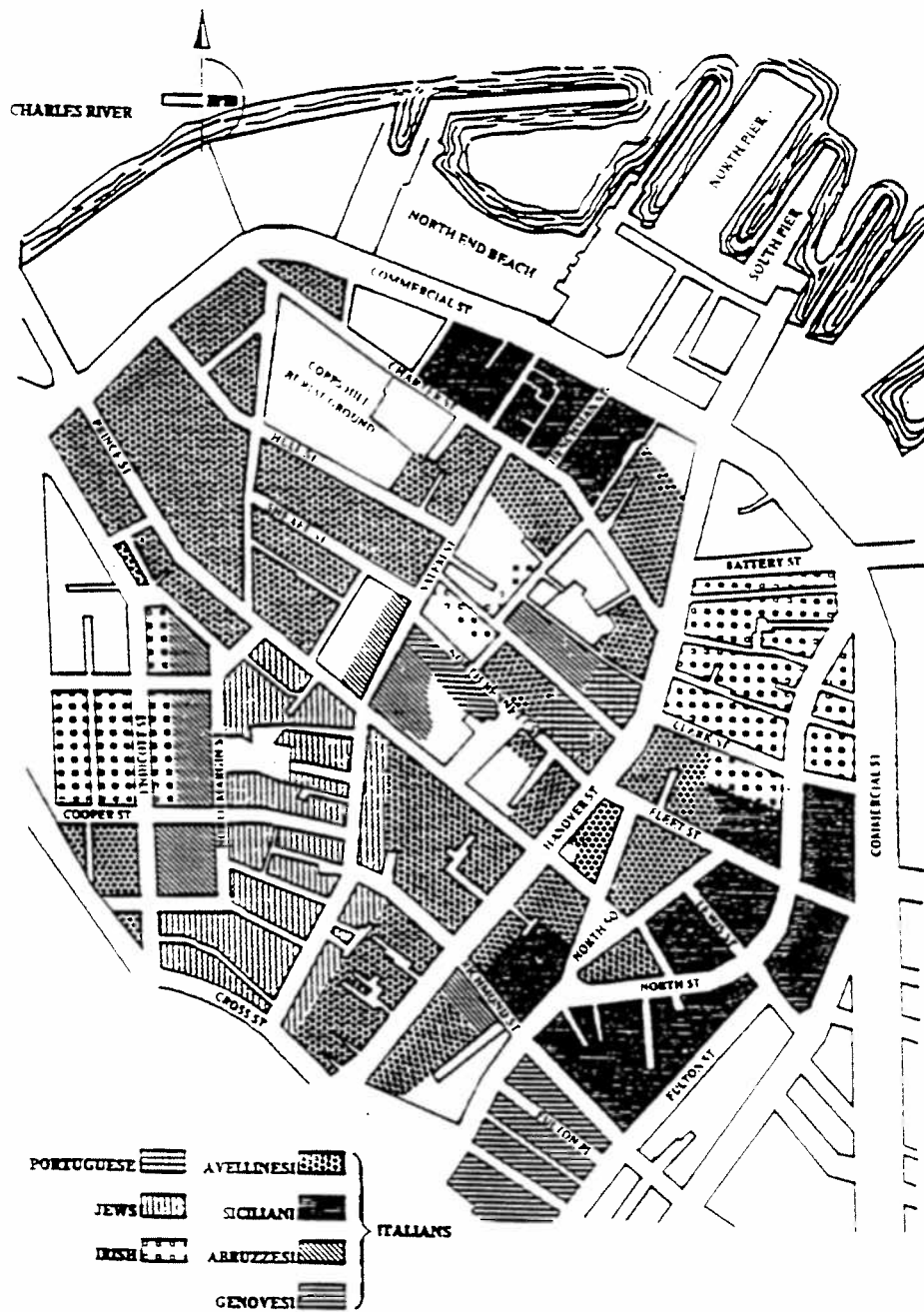


Figure 5.2--Major North End Ethnic Groups, 1910 (Adapted from William DeMarco, *Ethnic and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End*, 1981)

the city, although small enclaves of each remained in the neighborhood well into the 1930s. The Italian influx had made its mark on the neighborhood and the city. Consider that in 1895, about 1.5 percent of the Boston population was Italian. By 1920, 15.7 percent of the city's population was Italian. Put another way, the entire Italian population of Boston (not just the North End) soared from about 18,000 in 1900 to 77,000 in 1920.<sup>3</sup>

Still, it is misleading to look as late as 1920 when considering the emergence of the North End as a stable Italian community. It is even inaccurate to label the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 as a significant milepost on the road toward neighborhood stability (It is more accurate to suggest that the virtual cessation of immigration during the war years assisted North End Italians with their assimilation into the American mainstream). The fact is, that around the time Panunzio made his observations in 1902, the North End's character was unmistakably Italian. More than sixty percent of the population was Italian, and little English was spoken in the neighborhood. On newsstands, most newspapers and other publications were in Italian. Between 1900 and 1907, more than thirty mutual benefit societies and organizations were formed in the North End, each representing immigrants who hailed from a different *paese* in Italy.<sup>4</sup> In 1902, more than 19 percent of the real estate in the North End was owned by Italian residents.<sup>5</sup>

Italian businesses, too, had begun to flourish by this time. Two of the most prominent Genoese in the North End prior to the turn of the century were Pietro Pastene and Alessandro Badaracco. In 1874, Pastene opened his first food shop at 229 Hanover Street, specializing in Italian products. By 1901, his business expanded to the point that it was able to utilize all the space from 69 to 75 Fulton Street. Today, the New York-based Pastene Corporation is a major food importer. Badaracco, one of the earliest Italian immigrants to the North End--he settled there prior to the Civil

War--ran the largest fruit business in Boston by the late nineteenth century. The Boston Macaroni Company, headed by John Ponte, began operations in 1890. Shortly thereafter, The Prince Macaroni Company was founded. Both of these became highly-successful businesses employing North End Italian residents. In 1908, pizza was introduced to the Boston public in Guiseppe Parziale's shop at 78 Prince Street. Other businesses were not nearly as large or significant, but they were important signs that the North End Italian neighborhood was beginning to stabilize. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Italians set up fruit, produce, and meat shops, many of which developed from pushcart vendors peddling produce in the market district. Others opened barber shops; in fact, the second most frequently listed occupations for Italians in both The Dillingham Commission and my sample group was "barber." While some worked in the downtown business areas and hotels, several barber shops opened in the North End during the first decade of the new century.<sup>6</sup> Noted a magazine article of the period: "The large majority of the Italians in Boston are industrious and thrifty. They carry on several kinds of small trade with commendable assiduity...They are beginning to take their proportionate place in the skilled trades, in commercial establishments, and in the professions."<sup>7</sup> A 1903 monograph of the North End offered this description of Italian enterprise:

The citizens of Boston owe a great debt to the Italians for organizing and developing the retail fruit trade in the city. The Italians have, in fact, created a wholesome appetite for fruit among the mass of people. Even the newest immigrant, with his pushcart, makes his wares attractive. In their stores, in the North End, the Italians have striking displays of vegetables in season. There are several Italian firms in the wholesale fruit trade. The manufacture of Italian macaroni is a natural and growing avenue for Italian business talent. The making and selling of plaster casts of statuary, for which so large a demand has within a few years been created, is thus far an Italian monopoly. The number of Italian real-estate owners is very considerable. In the North End, in 1900, \$2.3 million worth of property was ascribed in the city records to persons having Italian names. A few artists, musicians, and handicraftsmen of distinct ability have begun to appear among them, and there is prospect of many more in the rising generation.<sup>8</sup>

The first decade of the twentieth century also was clearly a time when Italian North Enders began to sink family roots. It is important to examine marriage and raising children as critical steps in the process of settlement, particularly since so many single men were among the total Italian immigrant population. Italians who returned to Italy or crossed the Atlantic as "birds of passage" were almost always single as well. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Italians who married in America--or brought spouses over from Italy--and had children in America did so with the intention of settling in the New World. From the information we have available, it is clear that North End Italians were marrying and raising families in great numbers by the first decade of the twentieth century.

The two best sources for determining marriage rates of North End Italians are The Dillingham Commission and the marriage books at both St. Leonard's and Sacred Heart churches, the two major Italian Catholic parishes at the time. Both churches maintained orderly and relatively complete marriage records.

The Dillingham Commission showed that nearly 75 percent of the Southern Italians it surveyed were married, among the highest of all immigrant groups (Syrians and Russian Jews were close in percentage married). Of a total of 960 Southern Italians surveyed about marriage, 718 reported that they were married. "The figures indicate that the immigrant population of the districts studied in Boston is more settled than the native population, which contains a considerable proportion of single men and women who have come to the city to earn a living," the commission reported. "The immigrant men have, in most cases, come to stay, and have generally sent for their wives or sweethearts, and a large proportion of the women have come to join their husbands or in order to marry."<sup>9</sup> Further, a full 72 percent of the commission's sample of Southern Italians had been in the United States fewer than nine years. Since the commission began its work in 1907, it is clear that the vast majority of these



Italians were married between 1898 and 1907, again indicating that the North End was beginning to stabilize very early in the 1900s.<sup>10</sup>

The church records support this contention. The best analysis of marriage records was conducted by William DeMarco in his North End study. He used marriage records not only to confirm neighborhood stability, but also to support his "enclave" thesis. He reports that a stunning 36,616 individuals--virtually all of them Italians--were married at Sacred Heart and St. Leonard's churches from 1873 to 1929, with the bulk coming between 1895 and 1920. In fact, DeMarco studied only four representative years (1899, 1909, 1919, 1929), because "the great number of weddings involved was one reason a total study was considered unmanageable." Of the total number of weddings studied, an astonishing cumulative average of 82 percent were between individuals from the same Italian province, according to DeMarco. "People from Avellino, for example, married other people from Avellino eighty-two percent of the time," he reported. The highest "intermarriage" rate was between people from adjoining provinces in Italy. Not only did DeMarco's work bolster the theory of enclaves, it also illustrated the continuing friction and mistrust between North and South Italians in this country. Of 3,000 people he sampled, only six Northern Italians married Southern Italians. A total of eighteen non-Italians married Italians in this sample, meaning that Italians married non-Italians at a rate three times as great as the marriages between Northern and Southern Italians.<sup>11</sup>

Other historians concur on marriage being a sign of neighborhood stability and permanence. "Marriage implies a degree of economic stability that immigrants generally did not have upon arrival," said Dino Cinel in his study of San Francisco. "Our sample shows that only a small number of Italians married within the first three years of residence in San Francisco. Most of them married between four and ten

years after arrival, with the greatest number between five and seven years. Early immigrants might have delayed marrying either because it would make returning to Italy more difficult or because they planned to marry in Italy."<sup>12</sup> Added Gary Mormino in his St. Louis study: "Marriage reinforced and re-identified the fundamental allegiances of the first-generation residents on The Hill."<sup>13</sup>

The other family indicator of neighborhood stability--having and rearing children--also suggests that the North End indeed was developing its identity as a strong Italian community by the first decade of the new century. My own research, which will be analyzed later in this chapter, shows that most North End Italians had children years before their decision to become American citizens. This indicates that despite their low citizenship rates before 1910, many Italians had consciously or implicitly made the decision to settle and raise their families in America much earlier.

Baptisms are another way to measure the number of children born in a community, and here again, DeMarco's research is illuminating. While the number of marriage ceremonies in the two Italian parishes between 1873 and 1929 is impressive, the number of baptisms is staggering. During those years, according to DeMarco, there were nearly 71,000 total baptisms--42,872 at Sacred Heart and 28,124 at St. Leonard. "From 1900 to 1929," he concluded, "each church *averaged 15 baptisms per week* (my emphasis)." In 1899 alone, nearly 1,500 children were baptized at the two churches, 96 percent of them born to Italian immigrants. In 1909, there were nearly 2,300 baptisms between the two churches.<sup>14</sup> The evidence shows clearly that children were being born to North End Italians early and often between 1900 and 1910, the pivotal years in the growth and development of the neighborhood as a stable Italian community.

## The Struggle Continues

Even as the North End became unmistakably Italian, even as Italians married, had children, purchased homes and opened businesses, their struggle in America continued. We already have seen that most Italians at this time were unskilled laborers whose earnings were among the lowest of all immigrant groups (see Chapter 4). We also have seen that most Italian families needed assistance from boarders and from working children to supplement the family income. Beyond their sheer economic plight, or perhaps because of it, North End Italians endured two other major difficulties as they established themselves in America--difficulties which affected them psychologically as well as physically. First, these people who hailed from farming and other outdoor backgrounds were crowded into a congested neighborhood of dilapidated tenements as they struggled to make ends meet. Secondly, as was the case with their countrymen across the United States, North End Italians faced discrimination as they sought a foothold in America, particularly at the hands of the Irish in the early days of the neighborhood's development.

The degree of congestion in Italian North End tenements is touched upon briefly in Chapter 4 (pp. 78-80), but further elaboration is important to fully understand living conditions at the time. The Dillingham Commission reported that Italians in the North End had the highest percentage of households averaging four or more persons per room. "Especially high degrees of congestion are found among the Syrians and the South Italians," the Commission reported in its Boston study. "More than 85 percent of the households of these two races report two or more persons per sleeping room; slightly more than 45 percent report three or more persons per sleeping room; and nearly one-fifth of the households of each race report four or more persons per sleeping room."<sup>15</sup> Even among households which had been in the

United States ten years or longer, Southern Italians showed the greatest congestion in Boston, according to the Commission.<sup>16</sup>

An early report on Boston housing in 1889 "made special note of the condition of the Italians in the North End," and the Boston City Council reported in 1896, "in the North End the tenement houses are today a serious menace to public health."<sup>17</sup> One author who reported on slums in Boston in 1898 described tenements along Fleet Street as follows: "In none of the houses is there any thorough ventilation; air shafts were not thought of when these houses were built. Though the sun shines into some rooms on the top floors, all the lower rooms are very dark. From cellar to roof, each house is very dirty and battered. In many rooms pieces of ceiling have already fallen, and more is apparently about to fall. The wooden houses on both sides of the alleys shake so much as one walks about them, and their floors are so far from level, that it is surprising that they have not collapsed, in spite of the support given them by the adjoining buildings."<sup>18</sup>

Conditions like this took their toll on the North End. The extent of tuberculosis was discussed in Chapter IV. Just as telling is the overall death rate and the death rate of children in this section of the city. Not only did Ward 6--the North End--lead the city of Boston in births in 1898 and 1899, Ward 6 also showed the largest number of deaths under one year of age (184, or 8.7 percent of the total number of deaths under one year of age in the city), and the largest number of deaths between the ages of one and five (177 or a startling 14 percent of the total number of deaths of children between the ages of one and five). It should be noted that this was early enough so that a significant number of Irish and Jews were included in these statistics, as well as Italians.<sup>19</sup> Ward 6 also was notable for the level of disease that affected its residents. The North End in 1898 and 1899 had the largest total number of deaths in the city from pneumonia, meningitis, typhoid fever, and diphtheria, and

the second largest number of deaths from infant cholera and bronchitis.<sup>20</sup> Referring to the death rate among North End Italians specifically, one writer noted in 1904: "This is no doubt largely the effect of extremely close tenement quarters upon people who belong out of doors in a sunny land."<sup>21</sup>

To put the degree of congestion in the North End into perspective, it must be remembered that the total approximate area of this neighborhood is slightly less than 100 acres. Of this, only seventy acres were traditionally used for housing. The remaining thirty acres make up the waterfront area, which virtually surrounds this section of the city on three sides. The inhabitable portion of the North End is about half-a-mile square. By comparison, the parking lot at Florida's Disneyworld is about three times larger than the inhabited area of the North End.<sup>22</sup>

As they did in most parts of the country, Italians also fought discrimination in Boston's North End, especially in the early days and most often at the hands of the Irish, who comprised the majority of the population up until the turn of the century. Beyond a general tendency to be suspicious of newcomers, a number of factors fueled this Italian-Irish rift: the fact that Italians were largely illiterate; the belief by the Irish (largely correct in the early days) that the Italian "birds of passage" had no interest in making a commitment to the community; and finally, the strange and unusual--in the eyes of the Irish--form of Catholicism practiced by the Italians who arrived in a Boston Archdiocese that was governed almost exclusively by the Irish.

"Tension existed between the arriving Italians and the resident Irish in the North End," one historian noted. "Different customs, attitudes and manner of living kept the two groups antagonistic."<sup>23</sup> At this time the Irish were beginning to assert themselves politically in the city, and already controlled the hierarchy of the Catholic church. The southern Italian, who already had learned to mistrust both the clergy and

the government in Italy, carried those feelings to America. The combination of the Italians' mistrust of the Irish political and religious leaders, and the feeling by the Irish that the southern Italians essentially were an inferior people, led to significant problems between the two groups. "It was a story of conflict," wrote sociologist William Foote Whyte in a 1939 magazine article. "The Italians feel that they were badly handled by the Irish, and some bitterness remains even now. This, however, need not be taken as an indictment of the Irish. It may be that any new racial group always suffers at the hands of the older, more established race. Certainly, the Irish have for years complained of Yankee discrimination against them...The Irish resented the intrusion of Italians, whom they considered an inferior people. As a matter of fact, the new immigrants had few educational opportunities and most of those from Southern Italy could not read or write. While the Italians professed the same religion, their language, customs, and dress were incomprehensible to the Irish."<sup>24</sup>

There were, of course, more material reasons for the Irish-Italian clash. The newly-arriving Italians competed with the Irish for unskilled laborer positions. While the growth of the city at this time virtually assured enough work for all, there were periods of recession when jobs were scarcer and the conflicts escalated. "The Italian laborers were competitors of the Irish working class; both for jobs and for places to live," Whyte noted. "It was between these groups that the sharpest struggle took place, and many fiercely contested battles were fought on the North End street corners."<sup>25</sup> What seemed to bother the Irish as much, however, was the fact that so many of the early-arriving Italians planned to return to Italy. These Italians spent as little money as possible and sought to build up their savings so they could bring money home to their families. This seemed to indicate to the Irish, who were permanently settled by this time, that Italians did not have the community's interest at heart.

The fact that many Italians were apathetic about obtaining citizenship in the early years also fueled Irish fears that Italians had no desire to make a commitment to the community (This fact also prevented Italians from controlling their own ward and political destiny). As late as 1909, less than a quarter of the Italian population had American citizenship.<sup>26</sup> As my research will show, the lack of citizenship before 1910 should not be confused with the Italians' commitment to settle in the North End before this. However, the Irish viewed the Italians' political apathy with contempt. Even when Italians did take part in politics, Irish organizers could not count on them to be reliable. "The chief difficulty about them (Italians) from the political organizer's point of view is that they are split into many rival camps, according to the city or province in Italy from which they came," wrote one observer at the time. "The leaders of these different cliques, in their claims to recognition, are very prone to exaggerate the number of their naturalized followers."<sup>27</sup>

Religious differences, too, caused friction between the Irish and the Italians during the settlement of the North End. The full nature of the problem the Italians presented for the Irish church leaders is outside the scope of this study. However, the issue needs to be mentioned since differing religious practices exacerbated animosities between the Irish and Italians, and affected the process of settlement for Italians. While both nationalities were predominantly Roman Catholic, Italian Catholicism--which included street processions and festivals to honor saints--differed greatly from the more traditional and moralistic Irish Catholicism. The Irish hierarchy in the church had a strong concern, nearly an obsession, about what was known across the church power structure as "the Italian problem." In the words of one writer, "The Italian form of Catholicism combined with Catholicism the older folk religions and customs that many Irish Catholics saw as pagan and idolatrous." In addition, "the Irish resented the anti-clericalism among Italian men and charged that

they did not see to their children's religious education."<sup>28</sup> This perceived lack of loyalty to the faith, in the view of Irish church leaders, made Italians particularly vulnerable to attempts by Protestant leaders in Boston to convert newly-arriving immigrants. The Catholic Charitable Bureau (CCB) in Boston was one of the agencies responsible for, among other tasks, protecting Italian immigrant parents and their children, "from the insidious efforts of proselytizing forces" that "infested" the North End.<sup>29</sup>

In his North End study, William DeMarco argues that root cause of most of the friction between Italian and non-Italian Catholics was the *fabbriceria* system. Commonly practiced throughout Italy in the late nineteenth century, the *fabbriceria* was a trustee system whereby prominent citizens gave major input into the administration of a parish. Even the financial affairs of the parish were within the sphere of these trustees. In the United States, however, Catholic bishops and pastors were totally responsible for the administration of the local parishes. The *fabbriceria* system was actually more similar to the manner in which many Protestant churches were administered in the United States. This similarity to Protestant practices, and its inherent challenge to the authority of the local Catholic hierarchy, made the *fabbriceria* system anathema in Boston, DeMarco argues. Beyond that, regular church attendance--considered a non-negotiable tenet by the Irish hierarchy--was generally viewed by Italians as a female activity, while men usually attended church services only on holy days and special family occasions. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals also held a special significance for Italians in a way that Sunday Mass did not.<sup>30</sup>

There are two general views held by Italian historians on the influence of Catholicism on Italians. One view, generally argued by historian Silvano Tomasi, suggests that the majority of Italians were Catholic by conviction as well as custom. Tomasi argues that Italian parishes, such as Sacred Heart in North Square and St.



Leonard on Prince Street, were made necessary by the negative experiences Italians encountered in Irish Catholic Churches, and that these parishes aided Italians in the Americanization process. Historian Rudolph Vecoli, on the other hand, maintains that Italians were Catholics simply by custom. He agrees that national parishes were formed in response to negative experiences Italians encountered in Irish Catholic churches, but he expresses doubts that these national parishes had any success in the Americanization process. Either way, these scholars would seem to agree with DeMarco's assertion about the Irish leaders in the Boston Catholic hierarchy: "The local Catholic clergy in Boston was either incapable or unwilling to recognize the fundamental differences of language and tradition which distinguished Italians of different regions."<sup>31</sup> This attitude by the church powers further alienated the Italians and made them the subject of additional scorn and derision by the Irish.

Differences in language and religion, then, as well as in attitudes toward citizenship and commitment to community, led to discrimination against Italians who settled in the North End. This discrimination, while for the most part not violent in Boston as it was elsewhere, made it much more difficult for Italians to assimilate into American society. For some, discrimination caused them to return to Italy. For most Italians, however, fear of being discriminated against made them reluctant to venture outside the enclave. Ironically, this was one of the criticisms leveled against them most frequently by the Irish and others, who believed Italians kept to themselves and had no desire to become part of the larger American society. It is interesting to note that discrimination may have delayed assimilation, but might also have been one factor in actually strengthening the resolve of Italians and the cohesiveness of the Italian North End neighborhood.

In the early years, as North End Italians were fighting poverty, congestion, and discrimination, they also received strength from another source. His name was

George Scigliano. A resident of the North End, he was the first Italian elected to the Boston Common Council and the first Italian member of the Massachusetts Legislature. Of more significance to Italian immigrants around the turn of the century, he was a protector, a benefactor, an advocate--to many, a hero. Scigliano's influence and efforts on behalf of Italian immigrants needs to be examined in this study, because both his leadership and his accomplishments went a long way toward helping Italians establish an identity in the North End. Scigliano's efforts played a key role in developing and stabilizing the North End as an Italian community.

In his book on immigrant leaders, historian Victor R. Greene argues strongly that individuals *do* matter, and he takes issue with "quantitative historians" writing social history "from the bottom up," who see immigrants as "totally proletarian and virtually leaderless."<sup>32</sup> While Greene does not include Scigliano in his study (perhaps because Scigliano was not an immigrant, but was born in Boston), his overall thesis is a sound one. In fact, in his chapter on the Italians, Greene cites the importance of immigrant leaders in helping to meet the "Italian peasants' need for personal protection" and in acting as "intermediaries or interpreters" to deal with government officials, whom Italians viewed with suspicion.<sup>33</sup> Scigliano would seem to be the embodiment of Greene's thesis that individuals and leaders were important to the immigrant experience. It is not an exaggeration to say that Scigliano's leadership ability and positive impact on the neighborhood instilled confidence in thousands of Italian immigrants, and sent a message that someone in a position of power was concerned about their welfare. To many Italians in the North End, Scigliano was regarded as a larger-than-life figure who fought tirelessly on their behalf against any number of people or groups who sought to do them harm. Perhaps more realistically, Scigliano's efforts made the New World seem less strange

to Italian immigrants, and offered hope and encouragement that there was room in America for them.

### The Scigliano Factor

In August of 1904, Boston attorney George Scigliano--already a beloved figure in the North End--attained near-legendary status when he publicly stated that he would ignore threats from the mysterious "Black Hand" criminal organization and defy its demands that he resign as chairman of a local Vigilance Committee. The committee, composed of prominent Italians, was formed in the North End "to aid the police in hunting down a gang of Italian and Sicilian thugs who infest the lower portion of the city." Despite letters warning the committee to desist or face possible death, George Scigliano's public response bolstered his standing among law-abiding Italian immigrants in the North End: "We are going to purge the city of Italian criminals. From some of the lurid accounts given by sensational newspapers, it might be thought that all Italians went around looking for plunder and blood. Of course there is a criminal class that comes from our land as well as any other European country. I think, though, that the percentage of evil-doers from Italy is far less than from other countries. Be that as it may, we are determined to arrest Italian criminals in Boston, and have them put in jail or expelled from the city as their degree of crime allows. The committee does this to protect the public and also in the interest of the respectable, hard-working Italians here. There are a small percentage of Italians in Boston that would be far better behind prison bars than at large and these we have determined shall get their just deserts. They can threaten, cajole, or plead, but justice will be meted out to them."<sup>34</sup>

That Scigliano was tough enough to ignore death threats and stand up for what he believed was one quality that endeared him to North End Italians. More

importantly, though, were his public utterances--and from all accounts, his private beliefs--that his work would directly benefit hard-working North End residents who were simply trying to earn a living and improve their standing in America. He was aware, for example, that Italians often were viewed as a criminal class by other Americans. By fighting against criminal elements like the Black Hand, while at the same time reminding people publicly that those criminals did not represent the thousands of honest Italians in the North End, Scigliano gained credibility among Italians and non-Italians alike.

His credibility and reputation for honesty enabled him to become the first Italian member of the Boston Common Council and the Massachusetts Legislature, and to accomplish a great deal in the short time he was in elected office. Scigliano was born in the North End of immigrant parents on August 26, 1874, and graduated from Boston University Law School. He was elected to the Common Council in November of 1900 at the age of 26, where he served three one-year terms. In November of 1903, he was elected to the State Legislature, where he served two-and-one-half years, before his premature death on June 17, 1906, two months shy of his 32nd birthday.<sup>35</sup> His elections during this early period from Ward 6 in the North End were evidence of his widespread support in the community from all ethnic groups. The Italian population was not large enough to have elected him alone, nor were there enough Italians naturalized at this time. To be elected, Scigliano would have needed a substantial number of votes from Irish and Jewish residents as well.

Once in office, though, his energies and attention were directed toward assisting Italian immigrants. His two major legislative thrusts were designed to protect Italian immigrants from unscrupulous opportunists. He was the key legislative force behind the state's decision to abolish so-called immigrant banks and to do away with the *padrone* labor system. Scigliano scorned the "banks", which

often were little more than unregulated grocery stores, whose proprietors collected money from immigrants and sold steamship tickets at the same time. Money was kept in cash, no interest was paid on funds, and record-keeping was extremely shoddy. When filing his bill, Scigliano submitted to the Legislature a list of North End Italians who had been swindled out of \$150,000 by these so-called bankers. "The pending peril by absconding the earnings of Italians and other laborers was one of the great evils which came to my attention," Scigliano told the Legislature. "There is no statutory requirement as to the opening of such banks, and the experience gained along this line by disaster, from the absconding of funds, and the readiness with which the small grocers, not only in Boston, but throughout the state, open up a banking department, presents an evil hardly without parallel in this State."<sup>36</sup>

Public and press response to this initiative was overwhelmingly supportive. "There is absolutely no law at present that applies especially to the operation of these immigrant banks," asserted the *Boston Herald* in 1904. "The thousands of dollars that represent accumulations from months or years of hard toil are absolutely at the mercy of the men who hold them in their hands. One of these men, for instance, not only cares for deposits, but carries on a bakery and a printing establishment. He could with impunity appropriate every dollar that has been placed in his keeping, and then claim that it had been lost in some one of his business enterprises, and there would be absolutely no legal redress...To regulate the practices of these bankers, and protect their ignorant depositors, is the purpose of a bill, of which George A. Scigliano, representative from Ward 6, is the father."<sup>37</sup> The *Herald's* editorial slant was echoed by other Boston papers at the time.

Scigliano was also instrumental in the decline and eventual end of the *padrone* labor system, which he described as "perhaps the greatest evil which has beset the Italian immigrant in this country."<sup>38</sup> Unscrupulous *padroni*, he argued, extorted

exorbitant fees from unsuspecting immigrants, held back full payment for weeks or months, and collaborated in rural areas with owners of "company" stores, forcing Italians to purchase goods there at inflated prices. "In almost all cases, where payments are held back, the money is not paid to the laborers," he argued, "and so at the end of the season, late in the fall, after the first frost sets in, the laborer returns to the city and is to house himself for the winter without funds."<sup>39</sup> The press again applauded Scigliano's efforts. "It may not be possible to eradicate altogether the so-called *padrone* system, but it is entirely practical to abolish the abuses which have made the title of *padrone* a name of infamy," said one editorial.<sup>40</sup> Another stated: "It is clear that Massachusetts sentiment does not approve of these Shylock methods being applied to workingmen in this state, even though they are helpless foreigners. Therefore, we believe that if Representative Scigliano's bill provides an adequate remedy for the evils of the *padrone* system, it should be passed."<sup>41</sup>

While the immigrant banks and the *padrone* system occupied most of his time, Scigliano was involved in many other immigrant causes. He founded the Italian Protective League in the North End to assist immigrants, helped form the first Italian workers' union in the North End, worked to kill a bill that would have required laborers to be naturalized, and pushed for legislation to establish the first Italian cemetery in Boston. Scigliano also wrote and spoke against those who would discriminate against Italians or criticize the North End neighborhood. These emotional appeals, rather than the legislative accomplishments, made him a friend and a hero to the workingman in the North End. For example, responding to a Baptist minister who was critical of the North End, Scigliano wrote: "On the whole, anyone who lives in this quarter knows that it compares favorably with any other--socially, morally, and educationally. Our troubles are not inherent in our neighborhood...my

people have done and are doing their best to lead lives that will benefit themselves and the country which offers them an asylum."<sup>42</sup>

In much of his public writing and remarks, Scigliano identified himself as one with the North End neighborhood and its people, a point he reinforced by walking the streets of the neighborhood and talking with residents. For the thousands of Italian immigrants who were illiterate and could not read his writings, this personal contact was how they came to know Scigliano. "He knew, personally, probably more North End Italians than any other resident," asserted the *Boston Globe* in its report on his funeral.<sup>43</sup> This quality made him more than a legislator to Italian immigrants in Boston. It made him more than someone who would risk his political standing for poor immigrants. It even made him more than a leader who viewed their problems as his own. Most importantly, this quality of identifying so closely with his countrymen made Scigliano--a man with education, financial wherewithal, and political influence--a community giant who offered hope to people who had none of these things. It is why, when he died in June of 1906 while visiting his wife's parents in Worcester, the entire North End neighborhood mourned.

George Scigliano's funeral was held on the morning of June 20, 1906 at St. Leonard of Port Maurice Church on North Bennett Street. The plan was for his body, which had been lying in state at his home on 222 Hanover Street since two nights before, to be transported to the church at 9 a.m. Yet, it was 9:45 a.m. before the large throng that had gathered outside his house permitted the hearse to remove the body, "so great was the desire of the people of his own race to see his face before the grave enclosed it."<sup>44</sup>

The funeral was described in virtually all reports as the largest and most notable ever in the North End. The night before the funeral, more than 1,000 people

filed through Scigliano's home to pay their respect and the line outside his house stretched for several blocks during the all-night vigil. The next morning, thousands of Italians crowded North End streets to follow the hearse from his home to the church. Seven carriages filled with flowers also followed the hearse. Businesses closed their doors during the funeral service. One report said the mourners "were from all ranks of society and all conditions of men."<sup>45</sup> Members of the legislature, the City Council, the mayor, delegates from social and civic organizations all joined "the ranks of the mourners with simple civilians--men, women, and children--many of whom had known him from childhood or had met with kindly assistance from him."<sup>46</sup> The priest who delivered Scigliano's eulogy paid him "a handsome tribute for his moral and upright life, his kindness to the poor and afflicted, his interest in the welfare of the Italian people at large and of the poorer classes in particular," according to one report.<sup>47</sup> "It was not surprising," said another, "that the streets were filled with friends and acquaintances who reverently bared their heads as the funeral procession passed."<sup>48</sup>

There were two other side elements to Scigliano's funeral that heightened the sympathies of Italians and illustrated the late legislator's stature. First, the funeral was held on the day of his sixth wedding anniversary "a peculiarly sad coincidence," according to one account.<sup>49</sup> This coincidence gave Scigliano's death the aura of a tragic opera or a religious event to many Italians. Secondly, North End Italians were saddened further when Scigliano's widow refused to allow his remains to be buried in the new Italian cemetery at Forest Hills that he had helped open. Instead, she decided to transport the body back to her home town of Worcester for burial, where her family still lived. In fact, an interment service was held the day after the funeral at St. John's Church in Worcester, where the Sciglianos had been married six years earlier. Boston Italians attempted to convince Scigliano's widow to bury her



husband in Forest Hills by promising to erect a \$15,000 monument to his memory, but she held firm, telling one newspaper that "if her husband's body was interred in Boston she would have to go to that city frequently, and that her grief would be more hard to bear in meeting the friends that she and her husband had known so well in his every day life."<sup>50</sup>

Shortly after Scigliano's death, his memory very fresh in their minds, North End Italians became embroiled in a significant Boston controversy in their efforts to honor the late legislator. The affair offered further evidence of Scigliano's popularity, and elevated him to even greater status after his death. It began simply enough. Upon the request of several North End Italian groups, Boston City Councilman James T. Purcell, a friend of Scigliano's, introduced an order in the Council to rename historic North Square to Scigliano Square. What began as a quiet legislative maneuver to honor an old friend soon exploded into a city-wide battle involving government officials, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and other patriotic societies, the Boston press, and residents from many of Boston's neighborhoods.

On one side were North End Italians , who believed changing the name of the historic square was an appropriate way to honor a man who had given so much to the neighborhood in which it was located (though this sentiment was not unanimous; there was opposition among Italians in the North End to the name change). On the other side were patriotic organizations, many city officials, and much of the local press who believed--in the words of the DAR--that changing the name of North Square was, "a sacrilege...as well might they have voted to change the name of the glorious frigate Constitution."<sup>51</sup>

The Common Council actually voted to adopt the name change, a decision that caused the *Boston Globe* to wince: "It is safe to say that the new name for the square, Scigliano, is one that will not drop lightly from the tongue of all visitors to that region...The name North Square is one of the richest names of Boston in its historic associations, and the change will certainly create a necessity for many textual changes in local histories before the rising generations can become habituated to describing Paul Revere, Increase and Cotton Mather, Gov. Thomas Hutchinson, Sir Harry Frankland, and Sir William Phipps as connected with Scigliano Square."<sup>52</sup>

For the change officially to take place, however, it had to be approved by the Board of Alderman in the city, and prior to that vote--scheduled for 10 days later--the debate began to heat up. Boston Mayor John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, whom some said instigated the name-change idea as a reward to the Scigliano family for the late legislator's unwavering political support, began to back-pedal and finally said he was opposed to the name change. In fact, in one of his more disingenuous political assertions, Fitzgerald claimed that the first he knew of the plan to change the name of North Square was when the matter "first appeared in the newspapers, stating that the Common Council had passed such an order."<sup>53</sup> Fitzgerald suggested that the proposed name change should be the decision of the street commissioners rather than the Board of Alderman.

The press, led by the *Boston Globe*, the *Boston Post*, and the *Boston Journal*, also editorially opposed the change, although a significant number of column inches were devoted to presenting the views of supporters of Scigliano Square. In general, though, the Boston establishment vigorously opposed the name change. The *Journal* ran an editorial cartoon entitled "Balloon View of Boston Re-Tagged" that showed famous Boston landmarks renamed--Copp's Hill was labeled "Cosmopolitan Terrace" and Faneuil Hall was named "Cabbage Arcade."<sup>54</sup> The *Post* quoted Dr. Francis

Brown of the Sons of the American Revolution when he learned of the Common Council order: "Give up that old name, so identified with history and life of Boston? Why it is an outrage! There shall be a protest against such an action."<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, there was. For a solid week, the protest continued, led understandably by historical societies. Levi L. Willcut, a director of the Bostonian Society said: "I don't believe in such changes. Mr. Scigliano was known throughout the district, but the name of North Square is known the world over. The home of Paul Revere and the center of such historic happenings. It should be considered an almost sacred spot." In the same publication, Charles Francis Adams, president of the Massachusetts Historic Society, said that to make a change would be "the worst kind of vandalism...there should be decided protest and it could not be made too strong."<sup>56</sup> In the North End, too, there were protests. Two dozen merchants--all non-Italians--signed a petition protesting the name change.<sup>57</sup> One banker commented: "We have over a million envelopes marked 3 North Square. We don't want a change, we'll fight against a change, and if there is a change we won't pay any attention to it."<sup>58</sup> Not even all Italians supported changing the name of North Square. A reporter visited the North End "and was surprised that some of the very men who most had reason to rejoice at a change in name shook their heads and spoke against having the place...known to coming generations as Scigliano Square."<sup>59</sup> One Italian attorney, Domenico Romano, a friend of Scigliano's spoke strongly: "I am opposed to the change, absolutely opposed to it. Mr. Scigliano was a dear friend of mine and I have in my possession the last letter he ever wrote. I am glad to see that they want to honor him, but I cannot see why they want to change a name so widely known for its historic associations...I am not opposed alone to having it named Scigliano Square, but I am opposed to having it named any other name. If they

absolutely must change the name, name it Paul Revere and preserve American history."<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the pockets of protest among Italians in the North End, general sentiments were very much in favor of the name change, particularly among the average working Italian immigrants whom Scigliano touched. Noted Achille Forte of 5 North Square: "George Scigliano was not a politician. He looked out for the poor and the lowly, letting his own interests go to benefit others...He did more to promote the interests of his race than any other Italian in Boston. The naming of this square would not be too great an honor to this man among men."<sup>61</sup>

The sentiment to change the name of the square also extended to professionals, the clergy, and to James V. Donnaruma, the editor of the Italian-language newspaper in the North End, *Gazzetta del Massachusetts*. Donnaruma, himself a champion of immigrant causes, blasted what he called the special interests who opposed the change: "Instead of North Square or Scigliano Square, it ought to be Blackmail Square. The bankers have opposed the project because Scigliano got that banking bill passed, regulating their business and making them keep their books in good shape."<sup>62</sup> The *Post* predicted that the issue would become intensely political, stating that "so much feeling has been aroused in the North End among the Italian population that it has been stated that if Mayor Fitzgerald did not take a position openly in favor of the change, a united effort would be made next fall to take the control of Ward 6 out of his hands."<sup>63</sup>

For the most part, however, Italians who spoke in favor of changing the name of the square did not wield the political club, but suggested it was simply the right thing to do in light of Scigliano's accomplishments. "I am in favor of changing the name to Scigliano Square," said the pastor of St. Leonard's Church. "It is a deserved tribute to a man who performed great works for his race and whose memories will

ever be cherished."<sup>64</sup> Another St. Leonard's priest added: "A most beautiful character had Mr. Scigliano and all that he did was for the interests of his own people. He deserves the honor of having the square named after him."<sup>65</sup> A physician, Dr. John Cecconi, may have summed up the feelings of North End residents best when he said: "I believe in calling it Scigliano Square. If a vote of the residents of this section were taken, it would be practically unanimous."<sup>66</sup>

In the end, of course, the Boston Board of Alderman defeated the Common Council's resolution to rename North Square to Scigliano Square. The vote was unanimous, with Aldermen citing the intense protests from historical societies and businesses against the change.<sup>67</sup> In what amounted to a consolation prize of sorts, the Alderman did agree to change the name of the former North End Park near Copp's Hill to Scigliano Park, a decision that was approved by Mayor Fitzgerald.

The name-change controversy is important in the context of this study for two major reasons. First, it shows the influence an individual can have over a community in general, and the impact Scigliano's presence had on the Italian community in the North End. The leadership he exerted in the Legislature--with the immigrant bank and *padrone* bills--and on the streets had a profound effect on the development of an Italian identity for the North End neighborhood. Secondly, the fight to rename the square was the first major political battle that Italians had waged with any kind of consensus or unity. It would still be many years before Italians had any real political power in their own ward, but in the controversy over the North Square name change, they developed a sense of political character and savvy that had not existed until this point. In some ways, George Scigliano's idealism and activism had rubbed off on them.

George Scigliano's contribution to the North End experience is the story of the importance of the individual in bringing about neighborhood stability. This notion cuts two ways. To be sure, his individual efforts benefitted an entire immigrant community. In the first five years of the twentieth century, his was the sole voice speaking on behalf of Italian immigrants in the city of Boston. He was a stabilizing force moving among the Boston power brokers to improve life for his constituents. Perhaps more importantly, though, was the fact that he viewed every Italian immigrant as an individual, and as such, treated each with dignity and respect. In so doing, he instilled pride and a sense of belonging in people who--until Scigliano made his presence felt--had very little of either. George Scigliano's story also serves as a reminder that the Italian migration to and settlement in the United States was as much an individual struggle as a collective experience. To draw general conclusions about the group's process of settlement in America, it is important to study the individuals.

### The Importance of Individuals

In his celebrated study of "common Bostonians"--the lives, occupations, and mobility of Boston's working-class population from 1880 to 1970--historian Stephan Thernstrom makes the following assertion:

The extent to which foreign-born newcomers typically huddled together in neighborhoods composed largely of their fellow countrymen has often been exaggerated, and even where there were highly segregated ethnic neighborhoods there was little continuity of the *individuals* who composed them over time...There were indeed Irish, Italian, Jewish, and other ethnic neighborhoods that could easily be discerned, but the vast majority of anonymous immigrants who lived in them at one census were destined to vanish from them before 10 years had elapsed. Some institutional continuity there was, but little individual continuity (author's emphasis).<sup>68</sup>

Since the publication of his work in 1973, Thernstrom has received a great deal of criticism for his research and conclusions. "Several methodological problems

and one very important conceptual failure severely undermine its value," said one critique. "Changing sample bases, ill-conceived sampling methods, undefined sample attrition, and a failure to adjust for differentials in geographical mobility weaken almost all of the findings..."<sup>69</sup> Added another similar critique: "The book is hampered by several conceptual problems in its measurement of social mobility and thus it systematically overestimates occupational mobility, particularly for the lower ranking occupational groups."<sup>70</sup>

While criticism alone does not invalidate a body of work, it does seem clear that Thernstrom dealt with these newer, poorer immigrant groups in the aggregate. In the case of Italians in the North End, particularly, he did not take into account specific characteristics of the individual immigrant group. For example, he described the "slow upward mobility" of Boston's Italians, vis-a-vis the Yankees, Irish, Jews, and Blacks. He stated that both Italians and Jews experienced similar employment handicaps--poor initial financial status, inadequate English language skills, lack of formal education--and yet the Jews achieved a far greater level of upward economic mobility in the first and second generations.<sup>71</sup> Yet, I must concur with William DeMarco, who argues that: "Thernstrom's study failed to analyze the importance of Italian enclaves in the employment process. He erroneously dismissed the need for such research when he stated, 'Ethnic groups were too transient to allow for a study of their persistence in *any* Boston neighborhood (DeMarco's italics).'" DeMarco added: "My research shows that the North End Italians were not nearly so transient, and that upward economic mobility was not necessarily tied to any out-migration."<sup>72</sup>

Both The Dillingham Commission and my own sample study indicate that DeMarco is correct and that Thernstrom's conclusion about widespread transience was not necessarily the case among Italians in the North End, especially immediately after the turn of the century. In the first decade of the twentieth century, according to

my research, North End Italians were establishing the roots that would stabilize the neighborhood for years to come. Certainly, many still returned to Italy, and undoubtedly others moved outside of the city. However, the North End was the center for Italian life in Boston during this time, and--contrary to Thernstrom's assertion--"individual continuity" was a critical component in the development of the neighborhood.

Of all the large Boston ethnic groups surveyed by the Dillingham Commission, the statistics show that South Italians from the North End neighborhood, far and away, were the leaders in the category called "population stability." It is interesting that Thernstrom barely cites the Dillingham Commission in his work (only once that I could determine, on the issues of illiteracy among immigrants), and does not use it as a source in his discussion about "individual continuity." However, the Commission's findings clearly indicate that this notion of individual continuity was an important part of the North End neighborhood experience. Thernstrom relies on Boston City Directories, the U.S. Census, marriage records, and other documents from which to draw his sample base and conclusion. Yet, considering the unreliability of some of these sources in including poor laborers and immigrants--the very issue Thernstrom deals with in his analysis of the "other Bostonians"--it is surprising that he did not consult The Dillingham Commission. While most historians view the conclusions reached by the Commission with some skepticism, they give the Commission high marks for its raw data and collection methods. In its "method and scope" section on cities, the Commission points out that it focused its data-collection on particular blocks or sections of the city, with a plan "to secure information from every family living within their limits."<sup>73</sup> Commission representatives often returned several times to particular sections to question every



family, indicating that its sample--while comparatively small--would have included a broad spectrum of people. This would include groups that may have been overlooked by less thorough city officials or census enumerators.

What The Dillingham Commission findings show about stability among Italians in the North End is startling. Of the more than 300 families surveyed--the largest number of families of any ethnic group in the Boston study--more than 72 percent *had resided in the same neighborhood for the entire time they had been in the United States* (see Table 5.1). Next closest of the larger immigrant groups were the Polish, which had remained in the same neighborhood in 51.3 percent of the cases. They were followed by Lithuanians (45.7 percent), Jews (38.5 percent), and Irish (27.2 percent). Overall, the average number of immigrants living in the same neighborhood for their entire time in the United States was 49.2 percent and among native-born Americans, 43.8 percent. The only ethnic group with a higher percentage

**Table 5.1.**--*Number and percent of immigrant family households in Boston which have spent whole time in United States in the same neighborhood (large immigrant groups)*

<u>Nationality of those reporting data</u>	<u>Number of families reporting data</u>	<u>Number spending whole time in neighborhood</u>	<u>Percent spending whole time in neighborhood</u>
South Italian	315	228	72.4 %
Polish	104	53	51.3 %
Lithuanian	169	76	45.7 %
Jews	245	93	38.5 %
Irish	184	50	27.2%

*Figures compiled from The Dillingham Commission Report on Immigration*

of neighborhood continuity than the Italians were the Greeks (92 percent), but only 27 families were surveyed among Greeks, who arrived for the most part even later than Italians.<sup>74</sup> Even more interesting is that South Italians lead the large immigrant groups for "neighborhood continuity" regardless of the amount of time they had been in America. For example, for people in the United States fewer than five years, 84 percent of South Italians had spent their whole time in the North End neighborhood. The next closest immigrant group living continuously in the same neighborhood were the Polish with nearly 68 percent, followed by the Syrians (60 percent), Lithuanians (54 percent) and Jews (50 percent). For those immigrants in the United States for between five and nine years, nearly 69 percent of the Italians had lived in the same neighborhood continuously, followed by the Irish (57 percent) and Jews (36.5 percent). Finally, for those immigrants living in the United States for ten years or more, a full 55 percent of the South Italians had spent their whole time in the same neighborhood, more than twice as many as the next closest group, the Lithuanians (26 percent). The Jews (22 percent) and Irish (21 percent) followed.<sup>75</sup>

These statistics clearly show the Italians to be an exception in the general movement of immigrant groups in Boston, a fact acknowledged by the Commission. "The character of the population of the foreign districts of Boston changes rather rapidly," it noted. "The topography of the city makes it comparatively easy for the immigrants to move from crowded sections where they are obliged to pay high rents for poor accommodations to outlying districts where rents are lower and air space is not at so high a premium. The fact that most of the foreign colonies have changed their location since they first came to Boston would seem to be an indication that the foreign element in that city is likely to become absorbed in the general life of the community in a comparatively short period of time." Yet, the Commission noted the obvious exception to this analysis: "Of the South Italian households, 72.4 percent

have lived in the neighborhood where they now reside ever since their establishment in the United States."<sup>76</sup>

One other important element of neighborhood stability can be gleaned from The Dillingham Commission. We already have seen the importance of chain migration in Italian immigrant communities, whereby entire villages and towns in Italy are "transplanted" to America. The process begins when just a few residents of the village establish homes in America. They then send for relatives or friends, who become boarders in the households of the initial immigrants. The boarders eventually establish their own households, and the process is repeated by sending for new people in Italy. A look at the number of boarders and their economic impact among Italians indicates that this process of chain migration was stronger in the North End than in other Italian communities.

According to The Dillingham Commission, the highest number of boarders among South Italian families in its seven-city study occurred in Boston, where, in the 326 households examined, there were a total of 298 boarders or lodgers, or about .91 lodgers per household. This ratio is considerably higher than the next closest city, Milwaukee (.78 boarders per household), and significantly higher than Cleveland (.69), Buffalo (.61), and New York (.42).<sup>77</sup> This is a clear indication that the chain migration process in Boston was stronger and more direct than in these other cities, since it was rare for Italians to allow a person to board in their homes unless they knew him well. We already have seen, in Chapter 4, the positive economic impact these boarders had on the neighborhood. Further discussion on how boarders helped solidify the neighborhood by strengthening the migration chain in the North End can be found in the Conclusion (Chapter 6) of this study.

As the Commission's results showed, then, neighborhood stability was a characteristic most applicable to the South Italians in the North End. The

Commission never used the word, but it is clear that its own results reinforce the concept of the Italian "enclaves" in the North End. This factor, most comprehensively researched by William DeMarco, also was ignored by Thernstrom both in his research and his conclusions. Despite his general assertion about immigrant groups, "individual continuity" was a significant factor in the development of the North End as an Italian community, and it was a factor early--in the first decade of the new century. As we have seen in this study, it was during this time that Italian immigrants began purchasing property and establishing businesses. We have also seen the number of Italians who married and had children during this time, perhaps the clearest indicator that the process of settlement was under way. With that in mind, it is time to examine further the individuals involved in establishing the North End neighborhood. We turn our attention now to the North End sample population--a critical component of this study and of the Boston Italian experience--to learn more about how these immigrants established roots in Boston and America.

**The Sample Group:**  
**125 Immigrants Who Became Citizens**

Orazio Capodiece, who was born in the Taranto region of Italy, arrived in America alone in May of 1896, steaming into the Port of New York aboard the vessel *Burgandia*. He was nearly twenty-two years-old. Two years later, perhaps after working in New York, Capodiece moved to Boston's North End, probably to live with relatives. Shortly thereafter, he married, and in 1901--five years after his arrival in the country--he and his wife Lelana had their first child, a girl, whom they named Lucy. In 1904, he had his second child, a girl, Mildred. Clearly, by this time, Capodiece had made a commitment to stay in America. In November of 1908, twelve years after his arrival in America, he declared his intention to become a citizen. However, it was not until after his third child, Inez, was born in February of 1912,

that he pursued his citizenship goal. In May of that same year, he took the second and final step of filing a naturalization petition. On the petition, he listed his occupation as a "cook" and his address as 2 Prince St. On his application he said he had resided continuously in the United States since his arrival and continuously in Massachusetts since 1898. In January of 1914, nearly eighteen years after his arrival in the United States, he was granted American citizenship.

Two years before Capodiece arrived in America, Tommaso Cosco, who was born and raised in Sellia, Italy, arrived at the Port of New York aboard the vessel *Brittania*. The date was April 20, 1894, several months shy of his twenty-fourth birthday. The voyage had taken 20 days--Cosco had departed from Naples on March 30. Cosco arrived alone, leaving a wife, Marianna, and one child, Maria, back in Italy. He apparently spent some time in New York and other places in America (although his petition says he never left the country), before moving to the North End in 1898, at which point he sent for his wife and child. After settling in Boston, he had his second child, Giuseppe, in 1902. He and his wife then had six more children in the North End--in 1903, 1905, 1907, 1910, 1911, and 1912. His final child, Giovanni, was born in June of 1912. In September of that same year, Cosco declared his intention to become an American citizen. In February of 1916--22 years after he arrived in America and four years after the birth of the last of eight children--Cosco filed his naturalization petition. On his naturalization petition he listed his occupation as laborer, the same occupation listed for him fourteen years earlier in the 1902 Boston City Directory. He was granted citizenship in May of 1916.<sup>78</sup>

Capodiece and Cosco were two of the immigrants in the sample population for this study--North End residents who became American citizens. They share many of the same characteristics of the vast majority of the group, and--it is my contention--a

large percentage of the North End population during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Each man arrived in America alone and when they were young. One married in Boston and the other sent for his wife and child once he was settled. Each had children in Boston prior to 1910. Each had been residents of Boston and the North End for years. Each claimed that they had resided continuously in the United States since their arrival. Finally, each man became a citizen of the United States *after* 1910. The important point is that, neither man would have been included among the numbers of naturalized Italian immigrants in 1910, when most statistics show that a full 75 percent of Boston Italians were not citizens. This low naturalization figure often is used to support the argument that Italians were transient and lacked commitment to settle in America in the early years; that it was not until the First World War when Italians began to settle permanently in America. The Capodiece and Cosco examples demonstrate otherwise--both men clearly had decided that America would be home to them and their families *before* they took steps to become American citizens. This holds true for the vast majority of the North End sample population. The process of settlement for these Italians began early. Their actions indicate that they considered themselves Americans well before they obtained citizenship. Their naturalization petitions permit us to "work backwards" to recount their individual stories.

It seems appropriate at this point to review briefly how this sample group was obtained, its composition, and how the people included in it provide us with a sufficient sampling from which to draw certain conclusions about the overall stability of the North End. As indicated in the Introduction to this study--which contains a more complete explanation of the process--250 men with Italian surnames were selected from *Boston City Directories*. The names were chosen in groups of fifty

from five different years--1899, 1902, 1905, 1908, and 1911 (see Appendix A for a full methodological explanation and rationale for the soundness of this sample base).

Once I had selected the 250 names, addresses, and occupations, I matched them against the naturalization petitions contained in the National Archives, and continued to track them in future City Directories. My results were as follows: 125 people, exactly 50 percent of my sample, had eventually obtained their citizenship; 6 individuals were denied citizenship for various reasons;<sup>79</sup> and 27 people, while not applying for citizenship, continued to show up in city directories as North End residents up through 1920. This means that of the 250 names in my sample from 1899-1911, 158 of them--63 percent--appear to have settled permanently in the North End.

Since the number of people in my sample population who obtained citizenship was significant, I focused on this group to gather my "process of settlement" information. Again, the explanation in Chapter One details the rich personal information available on these petitions. The other thirty-three people--the six who were denied citizenship and the twenty-seven who continued to appear in city directories--clearly settled in the North End. There is little reason to think their process of settlement would be significantly different from those people who were eventually naturalized. The remaining ninety-two people who "disappeared" are not considered in this study.

While historians often question the accuracy of the *City Directories*, those concerns are largely irrelevant in this study. Those questions of accuracy almost always focus on enumerators *omitting* names of residents from the lists--especially in the case of Italians who tended to be suspicious of government or "official" workers--not *including* names that do not belong there. In the case of this study, if names mistakenly were omitted from *City Directories*, it could mean that some of the ninety-

two people who disappeared from my sample base actually remained in the North End. This would serve to strengthen, not weaken, my thesis of stability in the North End neighborhood. As it stands, the information that follows about the sample population clearly shows that a large percentage of Italians began their process of settlement in the North End before 1910. Boston's North End already had an Italian character and identity in the first decade of the twentieth century.

**ARRIVAL**--The years of arrival of members of the sample population correspond to the overall percentages of Italian immigrants to America. Of the people in the study, only eight arrived before 1890, seventeen between 1890 and 1894, and twenty-five between 1895 and 1899. Those numbers jumped to fifty-two arrivals between 1900 and 1904 and dropped back to twenty-three between 1905 and 1910. It means that a full 102 members of the 125-member sample group--or nearly 82 percent--arrived before 1905 (Table 5.2, Page 153).

Like most Italians who first arrived in the New World, most of the individuals in the sample population group arrived in the spring and summer (Table 5.3, Page 153). Of the 125 naturalization petitions examined, eighty-nine people (71 percent) arrived between March and August, whereas only nine people arrived in the January-February time period and eleven in November and December. It is interesting to note that the greatest single number of people (forty-three) arrived in March and April, the beginning of the spring season in America's northeast. This is particularly true of the early years. For example, of the fifty Italians from the sample population who arrived before 1900, only nine arrived between November and February. This is certainly one indication that most of the members of this sample group intended to come to the United States only temporarily and take advantage of construction work and other outdoor employment opportunities.



**Table 5.2--Years of arrival for the 125-member sample group**

---

<u>Years of Arrival</u>	<u>Number of Arrivals</u>
Before 1890	8
1890 to 1894	17
1895 to 1899	25
1900 to 1904	52
1905 to 1910	23

---

*Figures compiled from naturalization petitions filed by sample group*

**Table 5.3--Months of arrival for the 125-member sample group**

---

<u>Months of Arrival</u>	<u>Number of Arrivals</u>	<u>Percentage of Arrivals</u>
January/February	9	7.2%
March/April	43	34.4%
May/June	33	26.4%
July/August	13	10.4%
September/October	16	12.8%
November/December	11	8.8%

---

*Figures compiled from naturalization petitions filed by sample group*

As for their port of arrival, a full ninety-six members of the sample group, or 77 percent, arrived in New York before making their way to Boston, presumably to join family members and friends (Table 5.4, Page 154). Only twenty-nine people disembarked in Boston. In fact, Boston virtually was unused by this sample group prior to the turn of the century. Before 1900, only two of the fifty arrivals landed at the Port of Boston. It is also important to point out that more than 80 percent of this group came from Southern Italy.

To sum up the arriving characteristics of the sample group, then, most of these Italians were from the South, arrived between 1895 and 1904 (61 percent) in the spring or summer (71 percent), and landed in New York (77 percent) before settling in the North End.

**Table 5.4--Ports of arrival for the 125-member sample group**

<u>Years of Arrival</u>	<u>Number Arriving in New York</u>	<u>Number Arriving in Boston</u>
Before 1890	8	0
1890 to 1894	16	1
1895 to 1899	25	0
1900 to 1904	36	16
1905 to 1910	11	12
<b>Total Numbers</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Total Percentages</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>23%</b>

*Figures compiled from naturalization petitions filed by sample group*

**OCCUPATIONS**--It is important to analyze briefly the occupational breakdown of the sample group, if for no other reason than to illustrate that--as DeMarco argued--occupational mobility had little impact on an Italian's decision to settle in America and eventually obtain citizenship. In addition, the breakdown of labor among the sample group offers a colorful look at the way Italians earned their living during this period.

As might be expected from the general occupational status of Italians during this period, the largest percentage of people in the sample group seeking citizenship

(19.2 percent) identified themselves as laborers (see Table 5.5, Page 156), followed by barbers (12.1 percent) and a group I have identified as skilled tradesmen (7.2 percent). This latter group includes stone masons, furniture finishers, glass workers, mirror assemblers, and marble cutters. The percentage was the same for semi-skilled tradesmen (7.2 percent)--which included blacksmiths, coalmen, and gardeners--followed by shoemakers (6.5 percent), carpenters and cabinet makers (5.6 percent), and tailors and pressers (5.6 percent). Cooks, clerks, merchants, candy-makers, musicians, bakers, butchers, machinists, fruit vendors, and salesmen also were represented on the list. There were also two physicians, three druggists, and one "pool-room proprietor."

It is clear on its face that the desire to become a citizen was not necessarily affected by occupational status or mobility--note that nearly one-third of this sample group either were laborers or barbers. This point can also be illustrated by noting that few significant changes in occupations were recorded between the years these Italian names were culled from the city directories and the time these same people applied for citizenship--usually a significant length of time. For example, an Italian who listed himself as a "laborer" in the 1899 city directory also listed himself as a laborer when he filed for citizenship in 1921. In another example, an immigrant who was listed as a painter in the 1899 directory was listed as a "furnisher finisher" in his 1924 petition for naturalization. The latter example may be considered an occupational upgrade to some degree, but in general, what a person did for a living did not seem to make a difference in his decision to seek citizenship. A selective sampling of this lack of mobility between the city directory listings and the naturalization petition listings is shown in Table 5.6, Page 157 . The same general trend holds true for the entire sample group.

**Table 5.5**--Leading occupations of sample group when filing naturalization petitions

---

<b><u>Occupation</u></b>	<b><u>Number</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Laborer	24	19.2%
Barber	15	12.0%
Skilled Tradesmen	9	7.2%
Semi-skilled Tradesmen	9	7.2%
Shoemakers	8	6.4%
Carpenters, cabinet- makers	7	5.6%
Tailors, pressers	7	5.6%
Salesmen	6	4.8%
Cooks, clerks	6	4.8%
Merchants/shippers	5	4.0%
Candy-makers	5	4.0%
Musicians	4	3.2%
Bakers	4	3.2%
Grocers/butchers	4	3.2%
Druggists	3	2.4%
Machinists	2	1.6%
Physicians	2	1.6%
Fruit Vendors	2	1.6%
Jeweler	1	0.8%
Pool-room proprietor	1	0.8%
Laundry man	1	0.8%

---

*Figures compiled from naturalization petitions filed by sample group.*

**Table 5.6--***Sampling of occupations of sample group from city directories versus naturalization petitions*

<u>City Directory</u> <u>Year</u>	<u>City Directory</u> <u>Job</u>	<u>Year</u> <u>Naturalized</u>	<u>Job When</u> <u>Naturalized</u>
1899	clerk	1908	clerk
1899	painter	1924	furniture finisher
1899	contractor	1914	contractor
1902	laborer	1920	grocer
1899	laborer	1921	laborer
1902	cook	1914	cook
1899	laborer	1912	machinist
1899	laborer	1912	barber
1902	laborer	1916	laborer
1902	watchmaker	1911	watchmaker
1902	mason	1911	cabinetmaker

*Compiled from naturalization petitions filed by sample group*

**DECISIONS ABOUT CITIZENSHIP**--The vast majority of Italians in this sample group waited many years between the time they arrived in the United States and the time they decided to seek citizenship (see Table 5.7, Page 158). Again, this gap accounts for the assumption by many contemporary and later historians and social scientists that North End Italians were overly transient and uncommitted to their new country and neighborhood. The process of settlement steps described in this study show that this assumption generally was incorrect. For the most part, North End Italians began sinking roots long before they sought citizenship (the "family status" section that follows shows the numbers that support my theory for the sample group).

It is easy, however, to see how and why those assumptions developed. The 125 people in the sample group waited an average of 17.8 years between the time of

their arrival in the United States and their decision to seek citizenship (immigrants were required to have five years of residency). On average, the earlier the sample group member arrived, the longer the period before he became a citizen. Members who arrived before 1890, for example, waited an average of thirty years before filing their final naturalization petitions. Those who arrived between 1900 and 1910 waited just over twelve years. The dates these Italians applied for citizenship are also telling (Table 5.8, Page 159). For example, none of the sample group applied for citizenship before 1905, and only twenty-eight had applied before 1910, or 22 percent of the group. This is about consistent with general statistics indicating that only 25 percent of Italians in Boston were naturalized by 1910. What those general statistics do not show, however--and what we will see in the next section--is that a far greater percentage of Italians decided to settle in America well before they decided to become citizens.

**Table 5.7**--Average number of years after arrival that sample group waited before applying for citizenship

<u>Years of Arrival</u>	<u>Average number of years waited before applying for citizenship</u>
Before 1890	30.1 years
1890-1894	18.5 years
1895-1899	15.5 years
1900-1904	12.2 years
1905-1910	12.7 years
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>17.8 years</b>

*Compiled from naturalization petitions filed by sample group*

**Table 5.8--Years sample population applied for citizenship**

<u>Years Applied for citizenship</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Before 1905	0	0%
1905-1909	28	22%
1910-1914	46	37%
1915-1919	20	16%
1920-1924	27	22%
1925 and later	4	3%

*Compiled from naturalization petitions filed by sample group*

**FAMILY STATUS**--Perhaps the most important indicator of a willingness to settle in a neighborhood is to begin raising a family there. We have seen that Italian immigrants--mostly men--usually arrived in America alone. We also have seen that those who returned to Italy, either permanently or as "birds of passage", most often traveled alone too. It was very rare for an entire Italian family to leave America and return to Italy. Because of the importance of *la famiglia* to Italians, establishing a family in America was the most crucial "process of settlement" step for them. Based on these observations, it is appropriate to infer that those Italians who either started families in America or sent for their families in Italy, did so with the intention of settling in the New World. It is important here to say something about the use of the phrase "intention to stay." Individual motivation is always difficult to presume or specify, of course, and it is impossible to know what these Italians were "thinking" at this time. Still, it seems to me that the "intention to stay" does not need to describe a deliberate or fully planned act. For many of these immigrants, it may have dawned on them that they had "decided" to settle in America *after* they had married, had children, or purchased property. The phrase "intention to stay" certainly allows for the possibility that settling in the New World was not necessarily a deliberate act

planned well in advance. However, if we examine the sample population, the evidence does show that most of these North End Italians took the crucial step of starting a family early in the neighborhood's development.

First, we must establish the "sample group within a sample group" to assess accurately the family statistics. Of the 125 people in the sample group who became citizens, thirty-seven--or 30 percent--listed no children on their naturalization petitions. This means that eighty-eight people listed children on their petitions, a full 70 percent of the sample group. It is this sub-group that must be analyzed to determine the settlement process and the growth and development of the North End neighborhood.

In all, 260 children were born to these 88 people who filed naturalization petitions. Of these, 210 were born in America, or 81 percent. A full 80 percent of the immigrants had no children upon their arrival in the United States. Looking at when these children were born, of the 260 children listed on these petitions, a total of 148--or 57 percent--were born before 1910. A full 85 percent of these children were born before 1914 (see Table 5.9, Page 161), the year usually cited as the beginning of Italian neighborhood stability in the United States because of the outbreak of the First World War. However, if we look further, we see that these North End Italians were establishing families much earlier. More important than the overall number of children born to these immigrants in the United States is when the *first* child was born. This is more of an indicator of the Italian immigrant's intention to settle in America. Taking this approach, of the eighty-eight people who had children, a full 71 percent had their first child by 1909, and 50 percent had a *second child* by 1909. In fact, a full *seventy percent* of these North End people with children had two or more children by 1911.



Now let us look at the average number of years these Italians were in the United States before having children, and compare that with the number of years they waited before applying for citizenship (see Table 5.10, Page 162). Using one slice of the sample group as an example, of the sixty-five people who arrived before 1904 and had children in the U.S., a full 83 percent of them had their first child before 1910. Yet, only nineteen of these people (29 percent) had applied for citizenship by this time *even though they were eligible to do so*. Of those who arrived between 1905 and 1910, 75 percent had their first child before 1914, yet only a mere 8 percent sought their citizenship before 1915, the year the latest arrival would have been eligible. Taking the sample as a whole, these Italians waited an average of eight years after their arrival before having their first child, compared with the nearly eighteen years they waited before applying for citizenship. These numbers show that any attempt to analyze the North End's stability as an Italian enclave by relying solely on the

**Table 5.9--Years children were born to sample group (260 children in total)**

<u>Years</u>	<u>No. of children born</u>	<u>Percentage of total</u>
Before 1890	11	4.2%
1890-1894	14	5.4%
1895-1899	22	8.5%
1900-1904	43	16.6%
1905-1909	58	22.3%
1910-1914	62	23.8%
1915-1919	38	14.6%
1920-1924	12	4.6%
1925 or later	0	0%

**TOTAL CHILDREN                      260**

*Note that 148 children, or 57% were born before 1910 and 210 children, or 81% of the total were born by 1914. Figures compiled from naturalization petitions filed by sample group.*

percentage of those who are naturalized is a mistake. For many reasons--perhaps because of illiteracy, or language difficulties, or a general mistrust of government--North End Italians clearly waited a long time before applying for American citizenship. However, as we can see from their patterns of establishing families, they made the decision to settle in America years before they decided to become American citizens.

**Table 5.10**--Average number of years sample group was in country before having first child versus average number of years before seeking citizenship

<u>Years of Arrival</u>	<u>Average No. of years before having 1st child</u>	<u>Average No. of years before seeking citizenship</u>
Before 1890	8 years	30.1 years
1890-1894	10.2 years	18.5 years
1895-1899	8.8 years	15.5 years
1900-1904	6.2 years	12.2 years
<u>1905-1910</u>	<u>7 years</u>	<u>12.7 years</u>
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>8 years</b>	<b>17.8 years</b>

*Compiled from naturalization petitions filed by sample group*

**CONTINUOUS RESIDENCY**--The last important factor to examine when considering the stability of the North End is the length of time members of the sample group resided continuously in the United States and in Massachusetts. We already have seen from the Dillingham Commission statistics that South Italians had a remarkably high percentage of people who had lived in the same neighborhood during their entire time in the United States. However, those figures do not specifically indicate whether a person had left the United States at any time--in other words, whether the Italian had been a bird of passage. The naturalization petitions, on the other hand, required an immigrant to state under oath how long he had *continuously*

lived in the United States and in the State of Massachusetts. Even using this standard, it appears that the North End Italian population was much more stable than other Italian settlements in the United States.

For example, of the 125 people in the sample group, only three reported that they had been outside the United States after their initial arrival--one who had arrived before 1890, one in 1897, and one in 1910. That means that 97.5 percent of this group stated on their naturalization petitions that they had lived continuously in the United States since their arrival. As for their residence in the state, 101 people--81 percent of the group--said they had lived continuously in Massachusetts since their arrival. If we couple that statistic with the information from the Dillingham Commission about neighborhood continuity, it is logical to conclude that, for these Italians, continuous residence in Massachusetts meant continuous residence in the North End. These statistics are particularly noteworthy, especially given the large number of "birds of passage" that marked the Italian immigration experience. Boston's North End, like "The Hill" in St. Louis, appears to have been a neighborhood with significantly fewer birds of passage than most.

There is one cautionary note that must be sounded in this section on continuous residence. There is the possibility that some Italian immigrants seeking citizenship were less than honest about the length of time they spent continuously in the United States. While I have come across no evidence of this in my research (or in anyone else's), it is something that must be considered, especially given the Italians' general suspicions about government authorities. It is possible that a certain number of North End Italians felt that by admitting they had left the country, they would actually jeopardize their chances to obtain citizenship (This was not the case--the only continuous residency requirement was that a person had to have lived at least five consecutive years in the United States). I put forth this suggestion only as a

possibility to partially explain the astonishingly high number of Italians in my sample group who claimed to have never left the country and the state. Having mentioned this as a possibility, it is equally important to stress that no evidence exists to support it. Moreover, even if a small percentage of the sample group was less than forthright with the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, the overall results of this residency analysis are abundantly clear. All indications are that members of this sample group, once they arrived in the North End, decided soon thereafter to make it their home.

It has been the contention of historians that Italian immigrant neighborhoods across America shortly after 1900 were essentially communities in flux and often in turmoil, as Italians came and went depending on the need for labor. Many stayed for a few warm-weather months and then returned to Italy, only to set sail for the United States the following spring--these were the so-called birds of passage. Others went from city to city, or even from city to mining camp, seeking work. The feeling among contemporary Americans was that Italians had no desire to make a commitment to the United States. Often they were viewed as opportunists who took jobs that otherwise would have gone to "native" Americans, a label that led to intense and often violent discrimination against them in many United States cities and towns. The fact that so many Italian immigrants remained unnaturalized in the early years also was used as an indicator by politicians and social scientists of the period that Italians were not interested in settling permanently in America.

Yet, in the example of Boston's North End, we have seen an exception to many of these assumptions about Italian settlements. The neighborhood, which contained barely a handful of Italian residents before 1880, was an important Italian community by the first decade of the new century. The settlement pattern of the 125-

member sample group provides the final and most convincing piece of evidence that Boston's North End had developed the foundation of a stable Italian community well before 1910. As a group, these Italian immigrants who eventually became American citizens began to establish families in the North End shortly after the turn of the century. They also tended to remain in the North End once they arrived. Their stories are added to those of other Italians living in the North End at the time, who--as we have seen--married and baptized their children in staggering numbers, purchased property, established businesses and fraternal groups, and overcame discrimination. They began taking these "process of settlement" steps comparatively early after their arrival in the United States, much earlier than they took steps to become American citizens. This fact, interestingly enough, is reinforced by information contained in the naturalization petitions themselves. Along the way, these immigrant residents of the North End learned about unity and the importance of political clout from Representative George A. Scigliano, who helped them develop a collective identity and sense of purpose.

What, if anything, made the North End different from other Italian communities in the United States during this period? Why did Italian immigrants seem to settle permanently in Boston's North End earlier than Italian immigrants in other cities? In short, were there specific reasons that helped the North End stabilize as an Italian community well before the First World War? There are undoubtedly many answers to these questions, some of which will never be known. However, a few other answers that seem a little less elusive will be analyzed in the concluding chapter of this study.

## NOTES

1. Constantine Panunzio, "Arriving in Boston" (1902), in Allon Schoener, ed., *The Italian Americans* (New York, 1987), pp. 70-71.
2. Probably the best analysis of North End population trends has been done by William DeMarco, *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1981). See pp. 21-24, 31. Also, see Paula J. Todisco, *Boston's First Neighborhood: The North End* (Boston, 1976), p. 29.
3. DeMarco, p. 23.
4. DeMarco, p. 114 (Table A2).
5. Todisco, p. 33.
6. See DeMarco, p. 23 and pp. 69-86, and Todisco, p. 35. Also, it should be pointed out that in my sample group of North End residents who eventually became citizens, the second largest occupational listing (after laborers) was barber. For general occupational information on Italians in the North End, see also The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27: *Immigrants in Cities: Boston*, pp. 474-475.
7. Robert A. Woods, "Notes on the Italians in Boston" (1904), in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed., *The Italian in America: The Progressive View, 1891-1914* (New York, 1972), p. 81.
8. Robert A. Woods, ed., *Americans in Process: A Settlement Study--North and West Ends of Boston* (Boston, 1903), pp. 107-108, 120-121.
9. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27: *Immigrants in Cities: Boston*, pp. 443-444.
10. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27: *Boston*, p. 446.
11. DeMarco, pp. 38-44.
12. Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, 1982), p. 174.
13. Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis* (Chicago, 1986), p. 72.
14. DeMarco, pp. 51-52, 63-64.
15. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27: *Boston*, pp. 450-451.
16. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27: *Boston*, pp. 458-459.
17. Woods, ed., *Americans in Process*, pp. 83, 86-87.

18. Woods, *Americans in Process*, p. 91.
19. Woods, *Americans in Process*, p. 95.
20. Woods, *Americans in Process*, p. 94.
21. Woods, "Notes on Italians in Boston", in Tomasi, ed., *The Italian in America: The Progressive View*, p. 81.
22. DeMarco, p. 21. See also Woods, *Americans in Process*, p. 2.
23. Todisco, *Boston's First Neighborhood*, p. 36.
24. William Foote Whyte, "Race Conflicts in the North End of Boston", in *The New England Quarterly* 12 (December, 1939), p. 625.
25. Whyte, p. 626. Whyte also notes that battles took place away from the street corners, and, symbolically enough, in the boxing ring. In the early years of the North End, and even into the early twenties, boxing was controlled by Irish promoters and largely patronized by Irish fans. Therefore, it was believed necessary to have an Irish or at least a non-Italian name in order to achieve success in the ring. Noted Whyte: "Al Delmont, Mickey Landis, Eddie Waters, Little Jack Dempsey, and Sammy Fuller, were a few of the many Italian fighters of the period who had to change their names. Yet this did not eliminate the race rivalry from the contests. One of the most popular matches was that between Sammy Fuller and Andy Callahan. Although no title was ever at stake, they fought six times, and each time large crowds of Italians and Irish turned out to cheer their favorites." (pp. 632-633).
26. Todisco, p. 36. For further work on Italian citizenship, see Frederick Bushee, *Ethnic Factors in the Population of Boston* (New York, 1903) and Stanley Lieberson, *Ethnic Patterns in American Cities* (New York, 1963). In addition, The Dillingham Commission details patterns of citizenship of ethnic groups in Boston (vol. 27, pp. 502-505). One of the key arguments of this thesis, of course, is that the low percentage of Italians who were naturalized before 1910 was not a good indicator of the neighborhood's stability or of Italians' commitment to the community.
27. Woods, *Americans in Process*, pp. 159-160.
28. Susan Walton, "Catholic Charities in Boston", in James M. O'Toole and Robert E. Sullivan, eds., *Catholic Boston: Studies in Religion and Community, 1870-1970* (Boston, 1985), p. 98.
29. See O'Toole and Sullivan for more on the CCB's purpose, pp. 100-101.
30. DeMarco, pp. 46-47.
31. DeMarco, pp. 45-46.
32. Victor R. Greene, *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910: Marginality and Identity* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 4-5.

33. Greene, p. 125.
34. "Italians to Defy Mafia," *The Boston Traveler*, August 20, 1904.
35. The circumstances around Scigliano's death are interesting. Most accounts of the period say he died from an "organic disease" or "organic infection" brought on by exhaustion and hard work. There has been speculation, however--perhaps to romanticize his reputation further--that he was poisoned by members of the Black Hand or Mafia as retribution for his refusal to go along with their requests. In general, Scigliano's work and influence in the North End have been largely untreated by historians until this study. More needs to be done on one of the most interesting political ethnic lives in turn-of-the-century Boston. The sources for this study are contained in *The George A. Scigliano Collection*, contained at the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota.
36. "Plan to Wipe Out Immigrant Banks", *The Boston Sunday Post*, March 6, 1904.
37. "Move to Do Away With Immigrant Banks Evil", *The Boston Herald*, March 11, 1904.
38. "State Asked to Stop the Padrone System", *The Boston Post*, February 18, 1904.
39. *The Boston Post*, February 18, 1904.
40. "The Padrone System", *The Boston Post*, February 20, 1904.
41. "A Stop Should Be Put to the Infamous Padrone System", *The Boston Traveler*, February 23, 1904.
42. "North End Responds to Charges of Crime and Immorality", *The Boston Journal*, February 17, 1903.
43. "Scigliano Funeral Largest Ever in North End", *The Boston Globe*, June 21, 1906.
44. "High Honors are Shown at Funeral of George A. Scigliano Today", *The Boston Globe*, June 20, 1906.
45. *The Boston Globe*, June 20, 1906.
46. *The Boston Globe*, June 20, 1906.
47. *The Boston Globe*, June 20, 1906.
48. *The Boston Globe*, June 21, 1906.
49. "Funeral Same Day as Wedding Date", *The Worcester Telegram*, June 22, 1906.
50. *The Worcester Telegram*, June 22, 1906. The Italians' offer to erect the memorial statue was covered in all the major Boston papers as well.



51. "Woman's Protest: Sacrilege in Changing North Square Name", *The Boston Globe*, December 15, 1907.
52. *The Boston Globe*, December 13, 1907.
53. "Not Mayor Fitzgerald's Idea", *The Boston Globe*, December 14, 1907.
54. *The Boston Journal*, December 14, 1907.
55. "Protest North Square Change", *The Boston Post*, December 15, 1907.
56. *The Boston Globe*, December 14, 1907.
57. *The Boston Globe*, December 15, 1907.
58. *The Boston Post*, December 15, 1907.
59. *The Boston Post*, December 15, 1907.
60. *The Boston Post*, December 15, 1907.
61. "Italians Insist That the Name of North Square be Changed to Scigliano", *The Boston Post*, December 22, 1907.
62. *The Boston Post*, December 22, 1907.
63. *The Boston Post*, December 22, 1907.
64. *The Boston Post*, December 22, 1907.
65. *The Boston Post*, December 22, 1907.
66. *The Boston Post*, December 22, 1907.
67. "North Square Stands: City Fathers Shut Down on Proposition to Change Name," *The Boston Globe*, December 24, 1907.
68. Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 232.
69. See Richard S. Alcorn and Peter R. Knight, "Most Uncommon Bostonians: A Critique of Stephan Thernstrom's *The Other Bostonians, 1880-1970*," *Historical Methods Newsletter* 8, no. 3 (June, 1975), pp. 98-114.
70. Roberta Balstad Miller, "The Historical Study of Social Mobility: A New Perspective", *Historical Methods Newsletter* 8, no. 3 (June, 1975), pp. 92-97.
71. See a discussion on this in DeMarco, *Ethnics and Enclaves*, pp. 133-134.
72. DeMarco, p. 134.
73. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 26: *Immigrants in Cities: Summary*, p. 7.

74. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27: *Immigrants in Cities: Boston*, p. 506.
75. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27: *Immigrants in Cities: Boston*, pp. 504-505.
76. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27: *Boston*, p. 506.
77. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 26: *Immigrants in Cities: Summary*, p. 92.
78. The examples used here, the information and data compiled in the remainder of this chapter, and related analysis derives from original research. The materials examined were Petitions of Naturalization contained in the *Petitions and Records of Naturalization of the United States District Court and the United States Circuit Court for the District of Massachusetts, 1906-1929*, housed at the National Archives Regional Office in Waltham, Massachusetts.
79. In two examples, the petitioners' criminal activity was cited as a reason for denying citizenship. There was no notification on the other four except to say the request for citizenship was denied.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

In 1903, Representative George A. Scigliano wrote: "People who leave their own for another country do so usually because they are dissatisfied with their lot in their native land, and hope to secure a greater measure of happiness under the flag of some other nation."<sup>1</sup>

Happiness is a relative term, but it is unlikely that Italian immigrants who settled in the North End around the turn of the century experienced a great deal of "happiness" as we have come to define it. Unquestionably, life was a struggle, and the adjustment to urban American society was difficult. Economic circumstances were harsh, especially in the early years. Language differences and illiteracy presented barriers that seemed insurmountable at the outset. Living conditions in the North End were congested and communicable diseases spread rapidly. Ridicule and discrimination from the native population and members of other immigrant groups were part of daily life.

And yet, if Italians did not find a "measure of happiness" in the North End, they certainly found something else. Perhaps it was simply an escape from the unbearable poverty in Southern Italy. Perhaps it was something greater, a sense of purpose or hope for the future that enabled them to endure initial hardships--because as we have seen, endure they did. The 100 acres of inhabitable land that comprised the North End of Boston was a lively, thriving Italian neighborhood by the first decade of the new century, carved into enclaves that were defined by the regions in Italy from which the new immigrants hailed. Between 1900 and 1910, the North End stabilized and solidified as an Italian community, much earlier than in many Italian immigrant neighborhoods. Most often, the outbreak of the First World War is

used as the defining period for the beginning of neighborhood stability, since transoceanic travel slowed to a trickle during this period. This prevented the influx of new immigrants and prevented Italians already in America from criss-crossing the Atlantic as "birds of passage," thereby giving neighborhood populations an opportunity to stabilize. Boston's North End developed its Italian identity and culture well before 1914. More importantly, in direct counterpoint to Stephan Thernstrom's assertion that "individual continuity" did not exist in the early years, we have seen that the "process of settlement" steps taken by individuals are what gave the North End neighborhood its strength and character.

The Italian population in the North End soared between 1890 and 1910. Church records show that Italian immigrants married and baptized children in astounding numbers during this period. We have seen from other sources that they purchased homes, opened businesses, and organized fraternal societies almost immediately after the turn of the century. The Dillingham Commission concluded that Italians in the North End had lived in the neighborhood since their arrival in the United States in percentages far greater than any other ethnic group. Finally, the sample group's naturalization petitions demonstrate clearly that Italian immigrants began establishing families in great numbers between 1900 and 1910, generally years before they decided to become citizens. This last point offers strong evidence that historians must give less weight to the "percentage of naturalized residents" as an indicator of Italian neighborhood stability or of commitment on the part of Italians to settle in America. It is clear from the evidence in this study that obtaining citizenship was less important to North End Italians than these other process of settlement steps; indeed it was often the last step. This must not be confused with assuming that these immigrants had less of a commitment to their new nation.

The obvious question is, of course, what made the North End different? Why was it less transient than Italian neighborhoods in other American cities? What factors led to the neighborhood stabilizing as an Italian community earlier than most? There are no indisputable answers to these questions, but it is possible to offer some strong theories. My general contention is that the unusual geographic size and location of the North End, coupled with the strong influence of individuals and family members, helped shape the neighborhood's character in the first decade of the 1900s.

There are several geographic considerations to ponder. First, the North End alone of all the Italian immigrant communities in the United States was unique because of its proximity *both* to the downtown business section *and* an ever-thriving port and dock area. Immigrant colonies in most cities were close to one or the other, but the North End abutted both. For Italian immigrants, this meant access--within walking distance--to a multitude of jobs. In the downtown area, Italians could work as laborers to help build a growing city, as fruit vendors to serve the business community, or as barbers, waiters, or porters in downtown hotels. The Boston subway system, for example, was in the midst of construction around this period (the Park Street line opened in 1897), providing ample jobs both for unskilled Italian laborers as well as skilled craftsmen. In his study of the North End, William DeMarco reported that more than twenty-seven percent of the individuals used in his sample were employed in construction.<sup>2</sup> At the other end of the neighborhood, less than a mile from downtown, the Port of Boston was becoming one of the most active on the Eastern seaboard. Not only did this provide Italian fishermen--mostly Sicilians--with plenty of jobs, the docks opened up other opportunities as well. Italian immigrants worked as warehousemen, longshoremen, shippers, merchants,

packers, and many other positions that were available to support the bustling dock activity.

The North End's geographic proximity to the downtown area provided something more than jobs for Italian immigrants. It also afforded them a convenient opportunity to observe and eventually become a part of the American mainstream. While it is true that most Italian immigrants spent most of their free time with family and *paesani* in the enclave, literally hundreds of residents left the neighborhood daily to work. In this way, they learned a little more about the United States and its people each day, and carried that knowledge back to the North End with them. This exposure to people other than Italians--while especially difficult because of the discrimination factor--aided the confidence and the assimilation progress of North End Italians. The geographic location of the North End placed Italian immigrants literally on the edge of the American mainstream. The North End served as a window to the larger American society rather than a closed door that discouraged entry into it. Unlike many other Italian enclaves that simply hindered assimilation, the North End offered the best of both worlds. Italians could get a taste of the bigger American picture during the day and retreat to the relative safety and familiarity of the enclave at night. By serving this dual function, the North End neighborhood eased the transition for Italians into the larger American society.

Interestingly, being located at the opposite end of the geographic spectrum also seems to have gone a long way to ensure stability. If we look at "The Hill" in St. Louis, historian Gary Ross Mormino argues that one of the reasons for the neighborhood's remarkable stability is its isolation from the downtown metropolitan area.<sup>3</sup> Because of this isolation, Italians were forced to fend for themselves. They worked, shopped, and lived within the confines of the enclave, and a stable, self-contained Italian community developed as a result. I see no inconsistency in arguing

that either of these extreme geographic venues would have encouraged neighborhood stability. In the case of The Hill, *because* of its remote location, Italians had little choice but to stabilize if their community was to survive. In the case of the North End, nestled up against the American mainstream, Italians developed a sense of familiarity with their new country, which led to confidence about their ability to build a life in the United States. In other Italian neighborhoods located between these two geographic extremes, the choices for immigrants were less clear and stability was slower in developing.

The last geographic consideration we must examine about the North End is its small size and the effect that size had on its development and stability. The hardships created by the density of the neighborhood have been documented in this study-- congestion, disease, dreary tenement housing. However, I believe the intimacy of the North End assisted Italians in another way. Psychologically, it helped them bridge the gap from perceiving themselves as residents of regional enclaves to viewing themselves as residents of an Italian community. It is always perilous for historians to venture into the minefield of psychological analysis. However, I believe enough evidence exists about the Italian immigrant mindset to support the theory that the small size of the North End actually helped encourage stability in the neighborhood. We have seen that Italians had little sense of national identity upon their arrival in America (see Chapter 4), that they viewed themselves instead as being from regions of Italy. "For the Italians," one historian wrote, "nationalist sentiment was a post-immigration phenomenon, a group consciousness imposed upon them by the conditions in their American life. It is a curious footnote to the history of immigration that many Italians became Italians only after first becoming Americans."<sup>4</sup> My belief is that the size of the North End helped accelerate that process in the neighborhood and served as a unifying factor. It is true that individual

enclaves played an important role in the development of the North End, but residents from different enclaves were all but forced to interact with each other because of the compact size of the neighborhood. They could, therefore, often submerge regional differences to deal with more common problems of survival and assimilation, such as finding jobs and overcoming discrimination. "Contact with the strange surroundings emphasized to the immigrant his kinship with those fellow Italians in the new land, who, regardless of their provincial origin, were in many ways like him," one study noted.<sup>5</sup> In larger Italian communities this kinship took a longer time to develop. In the North End, with its postage stamp-size geographic footprint, the kinship among Italians from different enclaves would have been realized earlier. In all likelihood, it helped strengthen the neighborhood's identity as an *Italian* community.

If the geography of the North End played an important part in its early stability, so too did the influence of individuals and the strength of family ties. Politically and economically, these factors bolstered the North End's neighborhood character and identity.

We have seen already the impact of George Scigliano on the North End people, but his efforts need to be reiterated here so they are not underestimated. His impact on Italian immigrants in the North End was unlike any other Italian leader that I encountered in my research. What makes Scigliano so important is his influence both as a *political* and an *inspirational* leader. Not only did he work tirelessly as a legislator to assist Italian immigrants, but more significantly to them, he treated them as important human beings. As mentioned earlier, he offered Italian immigrants in the North End a sense of hope and dignity, two items that were in short supply around the turn of the century. He did this by walking the streets of the North End and meeting and talking with his neighbors and countrymen. His stature only was



enhanced by his position in the Legislature, a source of pride among North End Italians who viewed his political accomplishments as a symbol that Italians could sit confidently at the table with other power brokers in the city. In the portions of this study focusing on discrimination, I have drawn the parallel between the treatment of Southern Italians and blacks. In a similar way, it is not an overstatement to suggest that Scigliano's influence on North End Italians was very much akin to the impact that major civil rights leaders had on blacks later in the twentieth century. Certainly Scigliano's efforts were a key component in the development of the North End Italian community. By the time of his death in 1906, the neighborhood he loved had assumed a distinctly Italian character.

The other factor that strengthened that character was the influence of family and *paesani* in the North End, best illustrated by some important social and economic facts worth re-examining at this point. We already have seen the importance of chain migration in Italian immigration communities, whereby entire villages and towns in Italy are "transplanted" to America. The process began when just a few residents of the village established homes in America. They then sent for relatives or friends, who became boarders in the households of the initial immigrants. The boarders eventually established their own households, and the process was repeated as they sent for new people in Italy. A look at the number of boarders and their economic impact among Italians indicates that this process of chain migration was stronger in the North End than in other communities. As we saw in Chapter IV (pp. 87-88) and Chapter V (p. 147), the presence of boarders and lodgers played an important role in the settlement of the North End. According to The Dillingham Commission report, the economic impact of the contributions from boarders affected Italians' total household income more than any other nationality. More importantly for the purposes of this study, the highest number of boarders among South Italian families

in its seven-city study occurred in Boston. This is a clear sign that the chain migration process was stronger and more direct than in other cities, since it was rare for Italians to allow a person to board in their homes unless they knew him well.

By taking on boarders, then, the Italians in the North End were taking steps to solidify the neighborhoods in several ways. First, the added income enabled them to pay the higher rents the North End commanded because of its proximity to the downtown business community.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, boarders and lodgers enabled North End Italians to save money for which they invariably purchased homes as soon as possible, another step toward neighborhood stability. Finally, because boarders and lodgers in Italian homes were usually relatives and close friends, a strong migration chain was forged from Italy to the North End. This strengthened the community even more.

Exactly why the migration chain appears stronger in Boston's North End than in most other Italian colonies is unclear. Perhaps it was because of the neighborhood's intimate size, coupled with its relatively easy accessibility after Italian immigrants disembarked in New York. Nevertheless, William DeMarco's observation of the neighborhood is particularly astute: "A complex network of relationships, which relied heavily on both the nuclear and extended family for survival in the old world, was transplanted in the North End of Boston by the late nineteenth century."<sup>7</sup>

In an introduction to a book on Italian immigration, A. Bartlett Giamatti observed the following: "Once immigrants had seen America, they were spoiled forever for the old life because now they knew a fantastic, open secret: life--even life tough and demanding in a strange land--can change. Change is possible. Change is America. America was a place which was not like Italy, the Italy that was ever the

same, shaped by fate, burdened by history...In America there was the chance for change. That story went back, and millions came. The American dream began with the dream of a land of change. It was the first dream not fated-to-be that anyone could remember. It was itself, like America, a new thing."<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps it was this change, the "first dream not fated-to-be," that motivated millions of Italians not only to come to America, but to struggle to make a life here. Italians, particularly those from Southern Italy, knew what they had left--*la miseria*, an exhausting, poverty-stricken existence with little hope for improvement in the future. Still, for many, the decision to leave Italy permanently was difficult at first. Hundreds of thousands became "birds of passage," hoping to earn money in America and return home to Italy to make a better life. For others, leaving Italy permanently was impossible, as hundreds of thousands more repatriated to their homeland.

For those who stayed, the settlement process was a different kind of struggle than life in Italy had been. There were now crowded urban tenements instead of rolling farmlands and fresh air. There was a strange language instead of a familiar dialect. There was a need to become literate to improve life for one's self and family. There was the sadness and anger that resulted from mistreatment and discrimination. To survive, to grow, these immigrants who stayed looked to the neighborhood enclave, and later to the Italian community as a whole, for strength and stability. In most neighborhoods, this stability did not occur until about the outbreak of the First World War. In a few others, including Boston's North End, the years from 1900 to 1910 were pivotal in the development of the neighborhood as an Italian community. It was during these years that the North End became the center of Italian life in Boston, as even those who had left the neighborhood returned regularly to shop and socialize. It also was during these early years that Boston's North End established

the reputation it would carry for decades--indeed, even to the present--as one of America's most colorful and vibrant ethnic neighborhoods.

### NOTES

1. George A. Scigliano, "Why Italians Emigrate", *The Boston Traveler*, May 31, 1903.
2. William DeMarco, *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End* (Ann Arbor, 1981), p. 71.
3. See Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982* (Chicago, 1986).
4. Michael J. Parenti, "Ethnic and Political Attitudes: A Depth Study of Italian Americans" (Ph.D. diss. Yale University, 1962), pp. 33-34.
5. Parenti, p 34.
6. The Dillingham Commission, vol. 27, *Immigrants in Cities: Boston*, p. 469, which stated: "The amount of rent paid by the different races depends largely on the location of the colony: thus, the South Italians live in the north end, the Russian Hebrews in the west end, and the Syrians in the south end. All of these neighborhoods are in crowded sections of the city and are close to the business center. On the other hand, a great majority of the Poles, the Lituanians, and the Irish live in South Boston, where the rents are cheaper." According to the Commission's statistics, South Italians paid an average of \$3.84 per room per month, followed by Jews (\$3.35) and Syrians (\$3.25). This was in sharp contrast to the rents paid by the Polish (\$2.52), Lithuanians (\$2.50) and Irish (\$2.02), all of whom lived away from the business area of the city. Interestingly enough, the only group to pay higher rents than the South Italians were the Greeks, who paid an average of \$4.59 per room per month. The Commission reported: "The exceptionally high rent for the Greeks is presumably due in part to the fact that many of them use their rooms for storing the fruit they peddle."
7. DeMarco, p. 107.
8. A. Bartlett Giamatti, "Commentary" in Allon Schoener ed., *The Italian Americans* (New York, 1987), p. 14.

## B I B L I O G R A P H Y

### Official Records

Archives, Archdiocese of Boston

Parish Files--Correspondence to and from St. Leonard's and Sacred Heart Church in North End, Boston

Archives, State of Massachusetts

Birth, marriage, death records of North End residents, 1880-1900

*Boston City Directory*, 1890-1920.

National Archives New England Region

United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts. *Petitions and Records of Naturalization, September 1906-June, 1929*. Petition no. 1 to 119,586, 421 vols.

United States Circuit Court for the District of Massachusetts. *Petitions and Records of Naturalization, October, 1906-December, 1911*. Petition no. 1 to 5,357, 22 vols.

United States Immigration Service. *Passenger lists: Port of Boston arrivals, 1900-1921*.

St. Leonard's Parish baptism, marriage records, 1890-1910.

Sacred Heart Parish baptism, marriage records, 1890-1910.

United States Bureau of the Census. *Statistical Abstract of the Twelfth Census of the United States*. Washington, 1903.

United States Bureau of the Census. *Statistical Abstract of the Thirteenth Census of the United States*. Washington, 1913.

United States Bureau of the Census. *Statistical Abstract of the Fourteenth Census of the United States*. Washington, 1923.

United States Department of State. *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States with the Annual Messages of the President Transmitted to Congress, December, 1906*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909.

United States Department of State. *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States with the Annual Messages of the President Transmitted to Congress, December, 1907*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910.

United States Immigration Commission, 1907-1910. *Report of the Immigration Commission*. 42 vol. Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1911.

### **Collections**

*The James M. Donnaruma Collection*. Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

*The George A. Scigliano Collection*. Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

### **Conference Proceedings**

Tomasi, S.M., ed. *Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity: Proceedings of the Symposium held at Casa Italiana, Columbia University, May 21-23, 1976*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1977.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *American Italian Historical Association Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference, November 17, 1973, The Religious Experience of Italian Americans*. Staten Island: The American Italian Historical Society, 1975.

### **Books and Articles**

Alba, Richard D. *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity*. Englewood, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985.

Alcorn, Richard S. and Peter R. Knights. "Most Uncommon Bostonians: A Critique of Stephan Thernstrom's *The Other Bostonians*." *Historical Methods Newsletter*, Vol. 8 No. 3 (June, 1975): 98-114.

Amfitheatrof, Erik. *The Children of Columbus: An Informal History of Italians in the New World*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1973.

Banfield, Edward C. *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. New York: The Free Press, 1958.

- Bernard, William S. ed., and Carol Zeleny and Henry Miller, asst. eds. *American Immigration Policy--A Reappraisal*. New York: Kennikat Press, 1969.
- Bernardi, Adria. *Houses With Names: The Italian Immigrants of Highwood, Illinois*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990.
- Bodnar, John. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Borden, Lucille Papin. *Sister Francesca Cabrini: Without Staff or Scrip*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1945.
- Briggs, John W. *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890-1930*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978.
- Brownstone, David M. et al. *Island of Hope, Island of Tears: In Their Own Words, The Story of Those Alive Today Who Made the Great Migration Through Ellis Island from the Old World to the New*. New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, Inc., 1979.
- Bushee, Frederick A. *Ethnic Factors in the Population of Boston*. New York: Published for the American Economic Association by The MacMillan Company, 1903.
- Caroli, Betty Boyd. *Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1973.
- Carr, John Foster. *Guide for the Immigrant Italian in The United States of America*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1911.
- Churchill, Charles. *The Italians of Newark: A Community Study*. New York: New York University, 1942.
- Cinel, Dino. *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1982.
- Cordasco, Francesco. *Italian Mass Emigration: The Exodus of a Latin People--A Bibliographical Guide to the Bollettino Dell'Emigrazione, 1902-1927*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Studies in Italian American History: Essays in Honor of Leonard Covello*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975.
- Cordasco, Francesco and Salvatore LaGumina, eds. *Italians in the United States: A Bibliography of Reports, Texts, Critical Studies, and Related Materials*. New York: Oriole Editions, 1972.
- Crispino, James A. *The Assimilation of Ethnic Groups: The Italian Case*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1980

- Daniels, Roger. *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990.
- DeConde, Alexander: *Half Bitter, Half Sweet: An excursion into Italian-American History*. New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1971.
- DeMarco, William. *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1981.
- DiGiovanni, Stephen. "Michael Corrigan and the Italian Immigrants: The Relationship Between the Church and the Italians in the Archdiocese of New York, 1885-1902." In *Italian Americans: New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity*, ed. Lydio F. Tomasi, pp. 302-319. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1983.
- diLeonardo, Micaela . *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender Among California Italian-Americans*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Dinnerstein, Leonard and David M. Reimers. *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.
- Engel, Madeline H. and Silvano M. Tomasi, eds. *The Italian Experience in the United States*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, Inc., 1977.
- Erickson, Charlotte, ed. *Emigration from Europe, 1815-1914: Select Documents*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1976.
- Femminella, Francis X. and Jill S. Quadagno. "The Italian American Family." In *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and variations*, eds. Charles H. Mindel and Robert W. Habenstein, pp. 61-88. New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1976.
- Foerster, Robert F. *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919.
- Gabaccia, Donna R. *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Americans, 1880-1930*. Albany: State University of New York, 1984.
- Gallo, Patrick J. *Old Bread, New Wine: A Portrait of Italian Americans*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981.
- Gambino, Richard. *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of Italian Americans*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Vendetta: A True Story of the Worst Lynching in America: The Mass Murder of Italian-Americans in 1891, the Vicious Motivations Behind it, and the Tragic Repercussions that Linger to This Day*. New York: Doubleday, 1977.



- Gans, Herbert J. *The Urban Villagers*. New York: The Free Press, 1962.
- Greene, Victor R. *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910: Marginality and Identity*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.
- Gross, Feliks. *Il Paese: Values and Social Change in an Italian Village*. New York University Press, 1973.
- Gumina, Deanna Paoli. *The Italians of San Francisco*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1978.
- Handlin, Oscar. *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1941.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *This was America: True Accounts of People and Places, Manners and Customs, as Recorded by European Travelers to the Western Shore in the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Centuries*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949.
- Higham, John. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988.
- Iorizzo, Luciano J., and Salvatore Mondello. *The Italian Americans*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980.
- Jenks, Jeremiah W. and W. Jett Lauck. *The Immigration Problem: A Study of American Immigration Conditions and Needs*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1917.
- LaGumina, Salvatore J. *The Immigrants Speak: Italian Americans Tell Their Story*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Wop!: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States*. San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973.
- Lieberson, Stanley. *Ethnic Patterns in American Cities*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963.
- Lord, Robert H., John E. Sexton, Edward T. Harrington. *History of the Archdiocese of Boston: In the Various Stages of its Development, 1604-1943, in Three Volumes; Vol. 3*. Boston: The Pilot Publishing House, 1945.
- Mangione, Jerre and Ben Morreale. *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience*. New York: Harper Collins, 1992.
- Mariano, John Horace. *The Italian Contribution to American Democracy*. Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1921.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Italian Immigrant and Our Courts*. Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1925.

Martellone, Anna Maria. *Una Little Italy Nell'Atene D' America: La comunita italiana di Boston dal 1880 al 1920*. Napoli: Guida Editori, 1973.

McClelland, David C. et al, eds. *Talent and Society: New Perspectives in the Identification of Talent*. Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1958.

Miller, Roberta Balstad. "The Historical Study of Social Mobility: A New Perspective." *Historical Methods Newsletter*, Vol. 8 No. 3 (June, 1975): 92-97.

Mormino, Gary Ross. *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Nelli, Humbert S. *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans*. Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1983.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Italians in Urban America: A Study in Ethnic Adjustment." *The International Migration Review*, Volume 1 (new series) (Summer, 1967): 38-55.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Hennessy Murder and the Mafia in New Orleans." *Italian Quarterly*, 19 (1975): 77-95.

O'Toole, James M. *Militant and Triumphant: William Henry O'Connell and the Catholic Church in Boston, 1859-1944*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

O'Toole, James M., and Robert E. Sullivan, eds. *Catholic Boston: Studies in Religion and Community, 1870-1970*. Boston: The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston, 1985.

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

Parenti, Michael John. *Ethnic and Political Attitudes: A Depth Study of Italian Americans*. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1975.

Piore, Michael J. *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Pomeroy, Sarah Gertrude. *The Italians: A study of the Countrymen of Columbus, Dante, and Michelangelo*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914.

Pozzetta, George E. "Immigrants and Ethnics: The State of Italian-American Historiography." *Journal of American Ethnic History* (Fall, 1989): 67-95.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The America of Italian Immigrants: The View From Italy. *Reviews in American History* 21 (June, 1993): 259-266.

Rolle, Andrew F. *The American Italians: Their History and Culture*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Italian Americans: Troubled Roots*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980.

Schoener, Allon, ed. *The Italian Americans*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1987.

Smith, Darrell Hevenor, and Guy H. Herring. *The Bureau of Immigration: Its History, Activities and Organization*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1924.

Smith, Judith E. *Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900-1940*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.

Solomon, Barbara. *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956.

Stack, John F. Jr. *International Conflict in an American City: Boston's Irish, Italians, and Jews, 1935-1944*. Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1979.

Thernstrom, Stephan. *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis 1880-1970*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973.

Tomasi, Lydio F. ed. *The Italian in America: The Progressive View. 1891-1914*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1972.

Tomasi, Silvano M. *Piety and Power: The Role of the Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area, 1880-1930*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1975.

Warne, Frank-Julien. *The Immigrant Invasion*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1913.

Whyte, William Foote. "Race Conflicts in the North End of Boston." *The New England Quarterly*, 12 (December, 1939): 623-634.

Wilcox, Walter F. *International Migrations, Volume I, Statistics: Compiled on behalf of the International Labor Office, Geneva*. New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_. *International Migrations, Volume II, Interpretations, Edited on Behalf of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., Demographic Monographs, Volume 8*. New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1969.

Williams, Phyllis H. *South Italian Folkways in Europe and America*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1938.

Wittke, Carl. *We Who Built America: The Saga of The Immigrant*. Wisconsin: Cueno Press Inc., The Press of Western Reserve Universtiy, 1939.

Woods, Amy. "Italians of New England." *New England Magazine*, 30 (July, 1904): 626-632.

Woods, Robert A. ed. *Americans in Process: A Settlement Study by Residents and Associates of the South End House: North and West Ends Boston*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Notes on the Italians in Boston." *Charities*, 12 (May 7, 1904): 541-542.

Yans-McLaughlin, Virginia. *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971.

A P P E N D I X A  
NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The sample base for this study was a collection of 250 obviously Italian surnames with Boston North End addresses, compiled from the *Boston City Directory* 1899, 1902, 1905, 1908, and 1911. The names, addresses, and occupations in the sample base then were compared with the names, addresses, and occupations of those who had filed naturalization petitions to become citizens.

There were two major methodological issues to consider when selecting the 250-member sample base for this study from the *Boston City Directories*: ensuring, to the fullest extent possible, that the people selected indeed were immigrants; and dealing with the notion of "random" selection.

The first is imperative, of course, for the study to be conducted at all. The second is something that should be considered in order to make the study as valid as possible.

To determine as completely as possible that the people were immigrants, I took the following steps:

- I checked each name in the directories for the several years' previous to the year from which he was selected. If the name didn't show up in a previous directory for three consecutive years, I assumed the person was an immigrant. As an example, I selected a name from the 1905 directory. I then checked the directories prior to that year. The first year the name did not show up was 1901. I then checked the directories from 1900, 1899, and 1898, and also saw no evidence of the person, and made the assumption that he was an immigrant. This check alone is not foolproof; there could be several other reasons why the person's name did not appear in previous directories. However, this step is important to consider when trying to determine whether a person was an immigrant.
- In almost all cases, I selected residents with "ethnic" first names, such as Giuseppe or Giovanni rather than Joseph or John. First-generation Italians almost always used their Italian names, especially for their early years in the country. Some Anglicized their names later, but mostly, it was the second generation--children of the immigrants--who changed their names. Again,

this alone is not sufficient to confirm a person's status as an immigrant, since some second-generation Italian children were given ethnic names in the early years of immigration. However, it is reasonable to assume that most of the ethnic Italian first names with North End addresses during the sample years were immigrants.

As to the issue of "randomness"--if there is any such thing--I admittedly took steps that may have detracted from the pure randomness of the sample in order to further maintain the sample's integrity. For example, I selected 250 *different* Italian surnames, so there would be no chance of including brothers or sons in the sample population, and a smaller chance of including cousins, nephews, etc. There is only one "Capodiece" in my sample, for example, and that is true for each of the 250 names. I also chose surnames that weren't commonly listed in the directories. In about 75 percent of the cases, the surname was the *only* one listed in the directory. These steps reduced the chances that I would be choosing people who had close relatives or members of extended families in Boston. Why is this relevant? Because it is much more likely that people with a broad family network in the North End would decide to stay in America permanently, thereby potentially skewing the results of this study. I felt it would be more prudent to err on the side of conservatism for the purposes of selecting names for this sample. By taking these steps, my findings--which show that the North End neighborhood had developed stability before 1910--actually are strengthened.

A P P E N D I X B

TWENTY-SIX PROVINCES OF SOUTHERN ITALY  
REPRESENTED IN BOSTON'S NORTH END

Ariano  
Avellino  
Agrigento (Sicily)  
Bari  
Benevento  
Brindisi  
Caltanissetta (Sicily)  
Campobasso  
Caserta  
Catania (Sicily)  
Catanzaro  
Cosenza  
Girgenti (Sicily)  
L'Aquila  
Lecce  
Matera  
Messina  
Naples  
Palermo (Sicily)  
Pescara  
Potenza  
Reggio di Calabria  
Salerno  
Siracusa (Sicily)  
Taranto  
Trapani (Sicily)

*Compiled from naturalization petitions of sample group and from Sacramental Files of North End Italian churches as identified by William DeMarco, *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End* (1981)*