



March | April
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Italia

NEWSLETTER of the ITALIAN WORKMEN'S CLUB
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President's Message

Where did the time go? It seems like just yesterday we were bringing in the new year.



Now it's time to start planning for our Festa 2024. As you know, Festa won't work if we all don't pull together. This means each one of us must get involved in some way or another. I urge all our able-bodied members to lend a hand (e.g. working one or more shifts, purchasing/selling all your raffle tickets, securing

sponsor support, or distributing promotional posters throughout the area).

Volunteer sign up can be done on line with Sign Up Genius, or in person at the clubhouse.

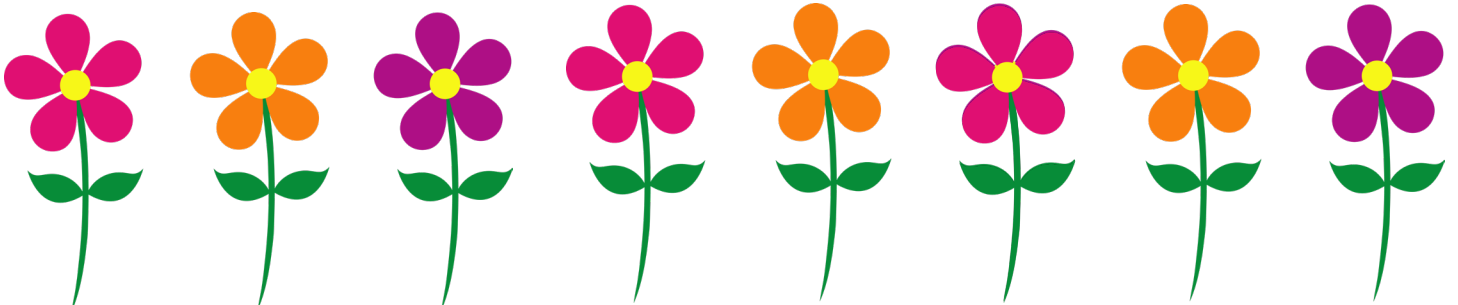
Again, I'm reaching out to all members for your help. Without you, Festa won't be a premier event. Please make me proud, and the IWC a great place to be proud of.

Grazie.

John Caliva ■■

*La semplicità
è l'ultima
sostificazione.*

—Leonardo da Vinci!

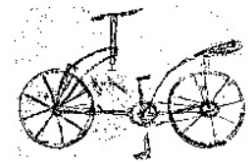


Italy, Bicycles, and Cycling

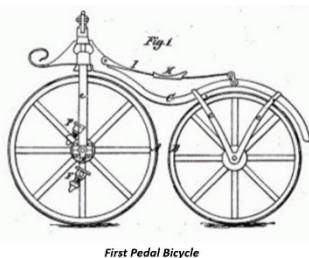
By Tom Smith

As someone who has enjoyed cycling for most of my life I couldn't resist investigating the history of bicycles and cycling in Italy. Riding a bike is a wonderful thing. It can be a way to get from place to place, to enjoy the outdoors, and it's good for your health...physical and mental. I remember watching a documentary ("The Ride") about how Phil Keoghan, the host of "The Amazing Race," spent 45 days on a coast-to coast 3,500 mile ride to raise funds for his favorite charity – Multiple Sclerosis. When asked about people who love riding a bike, he thought that it might be because it takes them back to the days of their youth, when they would ride for hours, feeling the sunshine and the breeze on their face as they whisked along the streets and paths with no particular destination in mind...just enjoying the ride. So whether it's around the block or across the country, cycling offers much to enjoy.

Like so many other things, the history of the bicycle and its role in Italian culture is rich and storied, though historians still argue about the origins of the bicycle. France, Scotland, England, and America all claim it was someone in their country who invented the first bike. There were those who believed that – like so many other great inventions – it began with the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci. Unfortunately, in this case it turned out that the drawing attributed to da Vinci was a forgery. However, an Italian physician and engineer named Giovanni Fontana is credited with building the first human powered land vehicle in 1418, consisting of four wheels and using a continuous loop of rope connected via gears to the wheels.



The word bicycle came into use in Europe to replace *vélocipède de pedale*, and the first bicycle with pedals appeared in Italy in 1868. A milestone came in 1885 when a 20 year old Italian entrepreneur and inventor named Edoardo Bianchi founded *Fabbrica Italiana Velocipedi*, a company that would become one of the most famous bicycle manufacturers in the world. As demand for this new invention outstripped his factory's capacity, other companies sprang up. Umberto Dei began making bicycles in Monza, in Turin the car manufacturer Fiat also produced bikes. In 1898, a company named Otio and Marchand was started in Piacenza to build motorcycles, bicycles, and cars. In 1904 Giuseppe Merosi was hired away from Bianchi to become the chief technician for Otio and Marchand, and Milan became the center for manufacturing bicycles.



Italians have always loved racing, be it with cars or with bicycles. Italy's first national hero of track cycle racing was Francesco Verri. In 1905 he became the national sprint champion, and the following year he won three gold medals at the Olympic Games in Athens. Between 1905 and 1921 he would claim eight Italian Sprint championships. The city of Padua also played a prominent role for Italian bicycle enthusiasts. Atala, one of Italy's most famous bike companies, was founded there by Angelo Gatti in 1907. Atala gained recognition for its success in racing and it was on an Atala that Luigi Ganna won the first Giro d'Italia in 1907 (one of the cycling world's three Grand Tours, taking place over 21 stages and including passages through the Alps).



Francesco Verri won 3 gold medals at the 1906 Olympics

In 1921 Atala was acquired by Cesare Rizzato, who started out as a bicycle frame maker in Padua. In the 1960s Rizzato introduced the Maino brand and acquired the rights to Umberto Dei, both brands prominent in the racing world to this day. To market their bicycles, Umberto Dei hung its bicycles from scales at exhibitions to demonstrate how much lighter their bicycles were compared to the competition. Atala also produces bicycles under the brands Carraro and Cicli.

But more than racing, cycling is very much a part of the culture and every day transportation in Italy. In every major city – from Milan to Rome to Florence to Bologna – one look at the morning rush hour and you will see office workers enroute to their jobs. Yes, there are the



serious cyclists decked out in lycra riding gear, but there are ordinary people doing their morning shopping and errands, riding everything from specialized road bikes to commuter bikes with a wicker basket on the handlebars, just going from point A to point B. And while cyclists often travel roadways in the United States in fear of their lives, it is very different in Italy.

It may be in part due to better manners, or it may be that in Italy bike riders take to the roads in such numbers that drivers have just become accustomed to sharing the road with cyclists. It is not uncommon to see clusters of cyclists crowding the road, and while true to form many Italians may ride two, three, four or more abreast...a "gentle tap" of the horn and they yield to those traveling by car. And while Italy has its share of bike paths, much of cycling takes place on roads that are no more than the size of a two-lane bike path in the United States. But in Italy those narrow roads are shared because there is no other option, whether it is on a slim farm road or a narrow city street with blind corners and tiny causeways. That said, it is also true that cyclists must be responsible for riding responsibly. Italian law bans riding bikes while using a cell phone. Violating the law can not only result in getting a ticket, but may end up in your bike being impounded.

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Italy, Bicycles, and Cycling *continued*

In the Emilia Romagna region of Northern Italy, Ferrara is known as the Bicycle Capitol of Italy. A city of about 130,000 people, the town has broad streets and palaces dating back to the Renaissance. It is almost entirely encircled by 6 miles of ancient brick walls built between 1492 and 1520, which make up a large urban park surrounding the town and a popular destination for cyclists.



Ferrara -- is the most bicycle-friendly city in Italy

For those planning a visit to Italy, if you're looking for an exciting and unique way to experience the beauty of Italy, consider joining a cycling tour, a fun and immersive way to explore the country. Cycling offers a way to explore places tourists often miss when traveling by bus or car. You can meet the locals, visit small towns, see landmarks, and enjoy the sights and sounds of



Italy up close. In the north you can find great cycling on trails near Lake Garda and in the mountain ranges of the Dolomites and the Alps. In the Liguria region there's cycling on the Italian Riviera and on trails alongside the ocean where no cars are allowed. A visit to the Puglia region in southern Italy offers pristine countryside and miles of coastline to be explored by bike, where you can cycle

from vineyard to vineyard sampling the local wine and food. Best of all, cycling is an aerobic, cardiovascular workout suitable for everyone, exercise that will let you burn some calories so that you feel better about indulging in more of the fresh pasta, wood-fired pizza, regional specialties, and gelato along the way. And if you need an extra boost on the hilly trails, there are E-bikes available in many places.

Italy played a key role in the invention and development of the bicycle. Its factories produced some of the finest bikes made in the past, and continue to do so in the present. And when visiting Italy, whether for a short ride in villages, towns and cities or exploring the trails across the country, bicycles offer an opportunity to see Italy in a very special way.

According to the most recent statistics available there are about 24 million bicycles in Italy, 120 million bicycles in the United States, and an estimated 1 billion bicycles being used around the world! If you don't have one of your own, maybe it's time to get one. If you ever rode a bicycle, they say you never forget how, and if you haven't it's never too late to start. ■



IWC Birthdays

March

- Robert Lashua 1
- Jim DiUlio 13
- Joe Puccio 13
- Robert Brill 24
- Ernesto Livorni 27
- Andrew Salerno 28
- Russ Cerniglia 29
- Antonio Re 29

April

- Ralph Russo 1
- Mark Fumusa 5
- Richard Baker 6
- Tom DiPiazza 8
- Bryan Remondini 12
- Anthony DeGregoria 14
- Mario Russo 14
- John Caliva 15
- Daniel Rendler 16
- Steve Ferraro 18
- Michael Horowitz 18
- Thomas Klinzing 21
- Nino Amato 23
- Joseph Cristoforo 24
- Thomas Crapisi 26
- Ricardo Gandolfo 26
- Daniel J. Langlois 27
- Mike Montalto 27
- Dominic DeSano 28
- Joseph Gmeinder 28
- Carmen Porco 29
- Anthony Bruno 30

Italia

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Things I didn't Know:

Chapter 1-B; Columbus, The "Leader" and respectability

by Jim LeTourneau

As I mentioned in the January-February, 2024 IWC newsletter, while searching the IWC storage rooms and closets in late 2023, I came across printed articles that seem to have been long hidden and forgotten in bags and boxes, many going back as far as the 1910's & 20's. One item I found was a brown file folder containing a UW-Madison graduate student's thesis. It was written in 1964 by John Arthur Valentine and titled: "A Study In Institutional Americanization; The Assimilative History of the Italian-American Community of Madison, Wisconsin". It was 248 pages written in 4 chapters with citations. Another was a 72-page thesis written 1916 by UW-Madison student Henry Barnbrock, Jr., specifically about the Madison Italians titled, "Housing Conditions of the Italian Community of Madison, WI". Barnbrock's information is referenced in different places in the

Valentine thesis and I intend to include more of what Barnbrock wrote in later editions of this series.

After reading the full Valentine thesis, I decided to share much of what he wrote 60 years ago in a series of summarized installments within the IWC newsletter. I will also provide information on other articles written about the Madison "Greenbush" area which I found, published or unpublished, which readers of this newsletter can access to read on their own. Despite my growing up in "The Bush", coming across information like the Valentine thesis elevated my curiosity of a history my grandparents lived in when coming from Palermo, Sicily to Madison in 1912 and, later, what my parents lived through in "The Bush" until the early 1960's. It is information of a lot of things I didn't know.

In the first series edition, we mentioned that for many Sicilians, especially from the Prov-

ince of Palermo, crime was a way of life. That long tradition was carried to America where murder and extortion, in the form of the Black Hand, were rampant in every Italian community, especially those with a population of Sicilians. However, the victims of these crimes were other Italian immigrants.

Not until Prohibition, which became effective nationally in 1920, were these illegal activities directed against the outside community. Formerly, these crimes against the immigrants had been a source of concern to the people of Wisconsin. Now, however, these crimes were a source of enrage-ment. All Italians were indiscriminately considered to be criminals. Valentine wrote that, for example, in September, 1914, members of the Madison Italian community appealed to the City for additional protection and laws to prohibit individuals from carrying weapons. This appeal came after the murder on September 24th, 1914, of Philip Carissimo, who was shot and

killed while walking on S. Lake St. Nothing was done and the Wisconsin State Journal barely made mention of the case. As late as 1924, after national laws were passed limiting immigration into the US, the Capitol Times, Madison's afternoon newspaper, referred to Italians, as a whole, as "gun-toting Sicilians".

Four years after the 1914 Carissimo murder, on February 4, 1918, Madison Patrolman Grant Dosch was shot dead in the 700 block of West Washington Ave., reportedly by some Italians. The city was enraged. The District Attorney and Madison Police Chief personally made investigations and referred to the Italian district as "booze clubs" and blind pigs" which they intended to "clean up". Valentine wrote that "The Italians of Wisconsin were reacting against these very attitudes. They were intent on proving that not all Italians were either criminal or morally inferior. No better example than that of Christopher Columbus could have been found to prove that Italians had made a significant contribution to America. Agitation for a Columbus Day became the focal point of their efforts to improve the image of Italian-Americans."

Italians in Wisconsin tried to get a Columbus Day bill passed

as early as 1913. By the early 1920's, virtually every Italian community celebrated the 12th of October with great fanfare. Parks, streets and clubs were all named after the Italian navigator. It should be noted that the Madison area where the Italians lived was often referred to by the print media as "Columbus Park" before it became later known as "The Bush". Madison's "Columbus Park" was one of many neighborhoods nationwide, including Kenosha, whose "Columbus Park" name designated a concentration of Italian residents.

Ultimately, in 1929, Governor Walter Kohler Sr. signed the commemorative Columbus Day bill into law. This meant on Columbus Day, or "Landing Day", all public schools had to set aside one hour of class time to teach about Columbus. Various state Italians, headed by the Italian-American Home of Kenosha, were influential in getting a letter-writing ⁷ campaign going which eventually persuaded the Wisconsin legislature to pass the commemorative law. On April 29, 1929, a great deal of fanfare surrounded the signing of the law at the State Capitol in Madison.

But, no matter how much Columbus was extolled by the likes of UW President Glenn Franks or Milwaukee's Cardinal Samuel Stritch, these virtues did

not transfer themselves to Italian immigrants in the eyes of the non-Italian community. Consequently, another campaign was launched to convert Columbus Day from a commemorative day to a legal holiday. In the Spring of 1928, a meeting in Kenosha of prominent statewide Italians was called. The group called itself the 12, 1933, "Landing Day" or "Columbus Day" was officially proclaimed a state holiday, which meant all public schools and most business were closed. Six months later, in April of 1934, President Franklin Roosevelt signed a proclamation recognizing Columbus day, but it wasn't until 1968 that President Lyndon Johnson signed the bill making Columbus Day a national legal holiday, effective in 1971.

**NOTE: There is a connection between the national Columbus Day proclamation signing by Roosevelt and the encased Italian flag at the IWC Clubhouse, which will be explained at the end of this chapter).*

Italian agitation for recognition of Columbus Day was a pervasive movement, touching all Italian communities throughout the state. Italians, as a group, desperately wanted something to be proud of – to prove the Italians' respectability and contribution in America. They wanted to overcome the stigma that had been attached to them as

an inferior class of people.

John Valentine wrote that “This need for respectability was well demonstrated in a monthly magazine, *The Italian Leader*, which began in December of 1933 and ran until the end of 1936. It was a project of the intelligentsia in Wisconsin and although it was published in Milwaukee, it was not strictly a project of Milwaukee’s Italians.” It was intended for Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois. Many contributors included UW-Madison students, among them, a young Italian writer, Francesca Paratore of Madison. While singing the praises of Columbus, its platform was: “to create a harmonious and cooperative relationship while discouraging petty differences among our people, to propagate Italian culture among Italo-Americans and to act as a medium for the Italians to voice their opinions on various matters.”

The *Leader* Magazine was also different from other, traditional publications issued by the immigrants of the older Italian organizations, like the Kenosha Columbus Day Association. The *Leader* had many second-generation Italians in charge of its production. Valentine writes that “Throughout the magazine, one finds an almost militant pride in Italy and (Benito) Mussolini. In its fourth issue, for example, Valentine writes “The cover design was an allegorical picture depicting the NEW ITALIAN

SPIRIT arising from the past and moving forward overcoming the obstacles which have retarded the advancement of Italian culture”.

A 1934 editorial in *The Leader* noted that Mussolini was a peace-loving man who brought great improvements to Italy since his rise to power. However, among the sayings of non-Italian doubters was the quip that “As least Mussolini made the Italian trains run on time”. The magazine name, *The Leader*, was pretty common English but its use in this 1930’s time frame might have led to some suspicion of its editorial intent. The name was significant in that “*The Leader*” was translated into Italian as “*Il Duce*”. When interviewed by Valentine in April of 1967, Francesca Paratore said the editor of the magazine chose the name “*The Leader*”. Valentine wrote that Paratore was uncertain but didn’t think the magazine name had any reference to Mussolini.

From Jim LeTourneau: Paratore might have been correct. Though the title, “Il Duce” was made infamous by Mussolini and is no longer used, it was a title given to some famous Italians before him. The most common translation of “leader” is “Capo”. However, “Duce” (from the Latin “dux”, meaning “guide”; “duke” in English) could also be a title given if the person was a military leader. During the Italian “Risorgimento” of the mid 1800’s,

Giuseppe Garibaldi was given the title “Duce” by the press even though he didn’t take the title himself. Italian King Victor Emmanuel III had the title “Duce” as he was officially the commander of Italy’s armed forces during World War I. Mussolini took the title “Il Duce” as his Fascist Party had a para-military wing, the “Black-shirts”. Mussolini actually had three titles: Capo del Governo (Head of Government), Duce del Fascismo (Leader of Fascism), Fondatore dell’Impero (Founder of the Empire). Yes, Italy actually had an empire of sorts at this time, part of Mussolini’s desire for a modern Roman Empire. It consisted of Albania 8 (invaded in 1939 following internal Italian demands on the Albanian government), Libya, and countries in the Horn of Africa; Italian Somaliland (current Somalia), Italian Eritrea (current Eritrea), and Ethiopia.

According to John Valentine, “The articles and editorials of “*The Leader*” suggested the need of its Italian “intelligentsia” readers to overcome their stigma of inferiority. They very much resented being depicted as illiterate ditch-diggers or criminals. The magazine was filled with accounts of young Italians at the University, Italian contributions to the State and nation and the enduring richness of Italian culture. But like the Columbus Day Association before it, “*The Leader*” could not drastically improve the image of Italians to

the outside community. What both organizations failed to do, however, World War II accomplished in short order.

Valentine wrote that, "During the war, the fortunes of the state's Italians were considerably improved and, most importantly, they gained a degree of respectability. Italian men probably fought in larger relative numbers than did those from the general population. Valentine cited war records from 1955 which showed that 9.77% of the general population of the U.S. served in the armed forces in W.W.II. He estimated that roughly 250 Madison Italians served in the war. That meant that 12.5% to 15% of the Madison Italian population. Though these numbers were not conclusive, another survey of Italian men from Milwaukee who served was similar in the same percentage comparisons to those in Madison.

Their contribution commanded respect and no longer did the newspapers speak of the Italians in paternalistic terms. Also, the war occurred at the same time the second generation of Italians was reaching maturity. Schooled in American values and having achieved a degree of respectability because of their participation in the war, these younger men were no longer content with the social or economic status which had been assigned to their immigrant parents. They began to disperse into outside American communi-

ties, achieving upward social and economic mobility.

Valentine wrote "It is difficult to measure the impact which Italians, as a class, made upon the state. This immigrant group contributed more than its culture to Wisconsin in the 20th century. Italians increased the state's population by two or three percent." However, Valentine lamented that by the time he wrote his thesis, the Italian folk culture had virtually vanished due to its assimilation into American culture. He wrote that "more than a few cities would like to see their "Little Italy" reinstated." He pointed to the 1950 official U.S. Census indicating the number of Italians in Wisconsin at 60,000, less than 2% of the state's population. However, he also pointed out that this number would probably be higher, at least to 100,000, except for the fact the census did not account for the third generation of Italians who were now defined as "native stock", not part of a separate ethnic group as the first and second generation of Italians had been.

Valentine pointed out the fact "Italians were the chief builders of Wisconsin's railroads, principal workers in its mines, factory hands and contributors to the state's high agricultural position. Not all Italians were ditch-diggers or unskilled laborers". He pointed out a few who made spectacular economic gains. "The Montemurro brothers of Kenosha developed the

large Golden Bell Dairy Company. In fact, by 1940, Italian cheesemakers in Wisconsin produced the equivalent amount of cheese imported from Italy. Frank Spicuzza of Milwaukee, a native of Termini, Sicily, started as a ditch-digger, who eventually became the owner of a large wholesale food outlet while his son, Frank, Jr, later became a famous art painter. Antonio Fiore of Madison rose from being a railroad laborer to being a multimillionaire by developing his coal and oil company.

Somewhere between the two extremes of great economic prominence and lifelong menial labor belong others who achieved middle-class status by opening their own business: grocery stores, construction companies, shoe-repair shops, restaurants, barber shops, farms and cheese factories. But most Italian immigrants who came as unskilled laborers continued in that status for the duration of their lives. The sons and grandsons of these immigrants, for the most part, far surpassed the socio-economic position of their fathers. The overwhelming majority became model, middle-class citizens and their central aim in their upward climb was a desire for "respectability". Their fathers and grandfathers found this recognition within the confines of the immigrant neighborhood which had its own well-defined social order.

Continued next page

The only concern with the outside community was Italian effort to eradicate an image as an inferior or criminal class.

Valentine wrote, “That image, for the most part, was destroyed by World War II”. The men who served were respected 9 within their Italian community. Now, second and third generation Italians were forced to find “respectability” outside of those old confines to within those of a dominant middle-class, a much larger, “American” society. The first assault upon that larger middle-class came from sports.

Traditionally, athletics have provided a beginning for all minority groups in their upward social goals. Sport is democratic—achievement is based solely on ability. Great public recognition is heaped upon outstanding athletes; success is easily measured. Italians began to appear on high school and local community teams in the 1920’s. By the ‘30’s, Italians began appearing on the roster of University of Wisconsin teams. Kenosha’s Frank Pacetti was a football star at Wisconsin during the Depression years. In the late 30’s, Vito Schiro of Madison had a substantial “Italian following” when he became a national collegiate boxing champion for Wisconsin. And, of course, in the early 50’s, there was Alan Dante Ameche of Kenosha, who was probably the most famous athlete from Wisconsin, being a Heis-

man Trophy winner, a successful NFL player and a millionaire businessman. Ameche, along with a Baltimore Colt teammate, Gino Marchetti, opened 5 fast food restaurants in the Baltimore area simply called “Ameche’s”. The company slogan was, “Meetcha at Ameche’s”. Interviewing Italians in the 1960’s, Valentine found they preferred Ameche to be more popular than Packer’s Coach Vince Lombardi, also Italian but from Brooklyn, NY. Because Ameche was an Italian from the state, he represented Italian respectability and superiority. Italians identified with him as the successful “Calabrese from Kenosha”. At age 55, he died of a heart attack in 1988.

A large number of Italians looked upon education as a prerequisite to upward mobility. In April, 1967, Arthur Cirilli, a second generation Italian and State Senator from Wisconsin’s 22nd District, was quoted by Valentine, “Even during the depression when our fathers were working on the WPA (*Works Progress Administration*), they insisted on sending us to college”. Following World War II, the movement of Italians through universities to obtain degrees accelerated thanks to the GI Bill. For example, Anthony De Lorenzo of Racine earned his schooling through UW-Madison during the Depression, eventually becoming a Vice President of General Motors and a Past President of the Wisconsin Alumni Association. Second generation Italian, A.C. Odorizzi, from Hurley was a Vice-

President of RCA Victor. Angelina Paratore became a professor of linguistics at Indiana University and was listed as a “Who’s Who of American Women”.

Valentine wrote that, “A majority of the new Italian middle class in the state did not get a college degree. They were drawn to three specific career areas—trades, independent business and, to a lesser degree, government work.” Italians, especially those from the South of the country, often found it difficult to get government jobs, which they found to be very prestigious, if they could get one. Interviewing one Italian businessman, Valentine quoted the man, “If you don’t have a college education, and if you don’t want to be a manual laborer, the only thing you can do is to go into business for yourself”. Consequently, second-generation Italians often expanded their father’s entrepreneurship by establishing their own small businesses. A few expanded ones they inherited like a family-owned restaurant. Doing a brief scan of Dane County’s tax rolls in the 1960’s, Valentine found Madison’s Italians owned the majority of the city’s bars, restaurants and liquor stores. Somewhat infrequently did these men pursue their fathers skilled trades as barbers, shoemakers or grocers.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, Valentine referred to a passage from Luigi Barzini’s book, “The Italians”, It said, “Government

Things I Didn't Know

jobs represented power. In Southern Italy, a man's respect was based on his power and, literally, how much fear he could command. Working for the government, officials often used their jobs to exploit and intimidate the peasants. For this reason, the "contadini" had little faith in government. However, very few would not have coveted the prestigious government positions themselves."

The Italians' improved political position in Wisconsin—from near exclusion to state-wide participation-- more nearly reflects their economic and educational advancements than their political savvy. The first political attitudes displayed in Wisconsin reflected their old-world traditions. A few, mostly Northerners from Piedmont, were anarchists or socialists. Their political agitation was focused mainly in Milwaukee and Kenosha and included speechmaking, distributing imported leftist newspapers and the occasional attendance to a Chicago political rally. However, very little resulted from this action as most Italians in the state were Southern Italians, the "Contadini". Traditionally, Southern Italians placed little trust in government and, consequently, their political interests were minimal.

The most primitive type of political activity which reflected their exposure to American political thought occurred within the forma-

tion of clubs. Members of these clubs were usually naturalized citizens, with voting privileges and whose activity was usually confined to petitioning local governments for limited objectives. However, for the most part, these clubs failed because membership cooperation was difficult to achieve if the club action was contrary to the interests of an individual member's family interests.

After World War I, political interest and participation expanded in a few areas, especially those areas with a heavy Italian population, which led to the election to Aldermanic posts in Milwaukee, Kenosha and Hurley, W. But, other than these positions, Italians were virtually excluded from Wisconsin politics. No statewide political activity took place in the 1920's except for the movement to get Columbus Day established. In various local communities, however, a close connection appeared after 1919 between bootlegging and politics. Italians were often successful in bribing local officials. Regardless of the moral issue, this activity was significant because it demonstrated a broadened political awareness of the Italians.

1932 saw the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as President and Italian papers like "The Leader" were clamorous in backing him. Political activity of the Italian ethnic group was considerably

enlarged during the Depression. Italian political loyalties were very vague before this era because participation in political activity was very meager. But with newspaper support for FDR, the state's Democratic machine also helped bring Italians into his camp. Wisconsin Democratic governor Albert Schmedeman was very effective, never missing an opportunity to speak before large gatherings of Italians. Democrats also brought in New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia to Wisconsin, which eventually led to state Democratic control of the Italian vote.

The first statewide politician of note who was Italian was Paul Alfonsi from Pence, Wisconsin, a small town near Hurley. In 1932, he was elected to the State Assembly. In 1940, he unsuccessfully ran for Governor. He left politics for 10 years, but later returned as a Republican from Marinette County. Despite some legal problems, he eventually became majority Republican whip of the State Senate.

Alfonsi was able to use the ethnic vote for his political position. But after establishing a name for himself, he no longer required the Italian voter. Years later, in 1966, Arthur Cirilli was elected as a Republican from Alfonsi's former 22nd district. However, Cirilli demonstrated that he didn't need an ethnic vote to win in a Democratic

Continued next page

stronghold of northern Wisconsin. Even though he was Italian, his base of support came from non-Italians though the Italian vote was useful for him as a secondary “swing” vote.

John Valentine wrote, in a political observation, of the need for an ethnic vote being used in capturing a place like Iron County. The Italian community in Iron County centered around Hurley, WI, which had almost 1/3rd of its population being Italian. Alfonsi needed the ethnic vote to become the first Italian assemblyman in Wisconsin. In later years, locations like Kenosha, with a heavy Italian population, were able to vote in politicians like George Molinaro to the State Assembly. But city or county wide elections requiring non-Italian voters often led to defeats of Italian candidates.

In the 1960's, Kenosha had, in relative terms, the greatest percentage of Italians of any major city in Wisconsin. This allowed George Molinaro to be voted in as a state representative, serving in the legislature for over 30 years. His election was a reflection of the power from ethnic Italian votes. However, during this same time period, Italians in Kenosha had not yet won county-wide posts as judges or city commissioner. Election to these positions needed support from non-Italians. It was George Molinaro's brother, Joseph, who was among those Italians in Kenosha who were among the first

to be elected after campaigning to combine the Italian and non-Italian vote to become Kenosha County District Attorney in 1955. He later served two years as Kenosha's first municipal judge.

According to John Valentine, “No Italian settlement in Wisconsin, except perhaps Milwaukee, compared to Iron County and Hurley, when it came to political activity. This might have been due to the Iron County Italians coming originally from Northern Italy. Italians in Kenosha and Madison, coming from Italy's South, exhibited little political interest or activity compared to Iron County”

However, Italian politicians going back to the 1920's and 30's were being elected aldermen in Milwaukee, representing Italian districts in the First and Third wards. By the 1950's Italians began seeking a larger political base beyond relying on the Italian vote. Louis Ceci from Wauwatosa was elected a state assemblyman and later became a state Supreme Court justice, largely on the vote of non-Italians. Joseph Greco was elected Milwaukee County Commissioner in 1958. In 1965, John Fiorenza was appointed Judge of Milwaukee County, the first State Italian judge.

However, the power of the Italian vote was demonstrated in the 1964 Democratic primary race for Governor between Milwaukee attorney Dominic Frinzi and Governor John

Reynolds. In Reynold's campaign literature, he noted Frinzi defended criminals like serial killer Ed Gein and “gangsters” like mob boss Frank Balistreri of Milwaukee and was involved in the “Syndicate”. Reynolds defeated Frinzi but refused to accept Frinzi's post primary support in the campaign against Republican Warren Knowles, intimating that he didn't want “votes from the Mafia”. This “slur” in the eyes of Italians made them turn their support toward the Republican Knowles who defeated Reynolds by 10,000 votes—all of which, according to John Valentine, could be attributed to Milwaukee's traditionally Italian (and Polish) wards. In an interview in 1967, Frinzi was quoted; “I may not have become Governor, but I determined who did”.

Addendum: *IWC member Anthony “Nino” Amato can attest to being a more recent Italian politician having to face ethnic negative political rhetoric. Already a Madison city councilman at age 24, he ran for Madison Mayor in 1974, losing to incumbent Paul Soglin. Amato was quoted in a 2017 news article; “Soglin's campaign manager trumped up some false charges about my parents were connected to the Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin Mafia,” I wouldn't say that was the only reason why we lost the election but it was a big portion of the margin.”*

Jim LeTourneau

***NOTE; Columbus Day Holiday/IWC Connection**

Jim LeTourneau

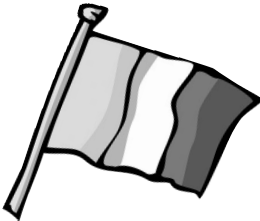
Frank A. DeCaro of Brooklyn, NY, was born in 1867. He was a longtime leader of the Italian-American community in New York, a founder of the original Italian-American Chamber of Commerce and its Christopher Columbus Society. He was a leader in the effort to make the birthday of Columbus a national holiday. In 1906, he received jewels from Italian King Victor Emmanuel III and a certificate of recognition for his service on behalf of Italian Americans. DeCaro founded a company in Brooklyn which, for over 50 years, manufactured uniforms, banners...and flags.

In early 1912, DeCaro receive a letter and \$ 84.00 from a newly organized Italian-American society in Madison, Wisconsin, which was to become the Italian Workman's Club. The club requested two flags be woven, one American and one Italian. The two current American and Italian flags in the clubhouse are made of nylon, which wasn't invented until the mid 1930's. However, the Italian flag encased at the clubhouse was made of cotton, which was the earlier fabric used for flag-making. If you look at the lower left-hand corner of the encased flag below, you will see the stitched name of its maker: "Frank DeCaro, N.Y.". Frank DeCaro died on March 17, 1955 at age 88.

And why is the Italian flag green, white and red in vertical strips? It's modeled after the French flag of red, white and blue vertical stripes. The Italian colors are, green for the Lombardy region, white for the House of Savoy and red for the city of Milan. The IWC encased flag has its three stripes, plus the Coat of Arms for the House of Savoy in the middle.

In the next installment of "Things I Didn't Know", we will look at the first half of chapter 2 of John Valentine's thesis, "A Survey of the Italians Experience in Wisconsin; "The Formation of Madison's Little Italy".





Meeting Dates

- IWC Council Meetings – 2nd Tuesday of Each Month 7:00 pm
- IWC Membership Meetings – 3rd Tuesday of Each Month 6:30 pm

Please clip and post this calendar.



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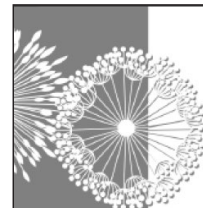
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