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Italia

NEWSLETTER of the ITALIAN WORKMEN'S CLUB

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• • • President's Message • • •

IWC & IAWC Awards Banquet

On Sunday evening October 13th, the annual IWC & IAWC Awards Banquet was held at Fabiola's Spaghetti House on Regent Street. Owner Sam Brown was a gracious host and all 60+ attendees enjoyed tasty antipasti, generous helpings of several entrees served family style, delectable desserts and delightful house wines.

Award winners on page 5:



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My term
As your
President is
drawing to an
end. It has
been an honor
to serve as



President of the best Italian
Club in the country.

Please give your best support to the new leadership. Remember, they'll be trying to do the best job they can do in keeping the club going in the right direction.

Again, thank you for your support and friendship. I will be active in all the club functions; wine making, sausage making, Christmas parties and most of all Festa Italia 2025!!

Grazie,
John Caliva 🇮🇹

What's in a Name

By Tom Smith

What's in a name? In William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* we find the phrase "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." The meaning in that phrase is that things are what they are no matter what name you give them. But when it comes to a person's name, our family surname, and the name that we go by, it becomes personal, rooted in our ancestry and our family.

Italians reportedly have the largest number of surnames in the world, with over 350,000 different surnames. In fact, these surnames are the result of a process that unfolded over the course of 1,000 years. And over time, family names were inherited and took on greater importance for public purposes. In this article you'll find the origin of a number of the more common ones detailed (some will resonate with some members in particular). Many of the most common derive from the names of places or areas of origin. In Northern Italy last names often have Germanic roots given the region's history when it was ruled by Germanic tribes. In Central Italy, many last names are derived from Latin or Etruscan origins. Surnames in Southern Italy often reflect Arabic, Greek or Spanish origins.



Common Surnames in each of the 20 Italian Regions

Some may come from the first name of the head of a household, some from a nickname, still others from a trade. Local dialects often altered the spelling of a surname, and prepositions (individual or combined) like "di," "della," and others were added to indicate parenthood or other connections.

Rossi

--- derived from the nickname, and is the plural form of *rosso*, meaning "red". It was originally used as a descriptive name for people with red hair or ruddy complexion.

Bruno

--- The Italian word for "dark" or "swarthy," Bruno as a surname is linked with *brunna*, which means "breast plate."

Rizzo

---denoting a person with curly hair, derived from the Italian word *riccio* which translates to "curly-haired," "wavy-haired," or "the one with curly locks."

Surnames can be categorized into some broad categories. Patronymic surnames derived from the name of a parent. Toponymics were surnames derived from the name of a place, which often told people a lot about migrations. Occupational

surnames were derived from a profession, which offered insights into jobs and traditions (for example Barbieri – barber, Pastore – shepherd, and Medici – physician). Nicknames as surnames were derived from some feature of an ancestor, providing insights into social milieu and dialects.

Russo

--- Southern variant of *Rossi* and comes from Late Latin *russus* or *rubius*, which means “red”

Giordano

--- The surname **Giordano** is the Italian form of “**Jordan**,” the name of the river where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist.

Gatti

---from “gatto,” the Italian word for “cat,” and represents the word’s plural form, originated in Italy and is mostly found in the country’s northern parts.

There was also a strong custom in Italy that determined how children were named. The first male was named after his paternal grandfather, the second male after his maternal grandfather, the first female after her paternal grandmother, and the second female after her maternal grandmother.

So where do our names come from...how did the idea of names even develop? In Italian, the cognomen or surname is the family name or last name. It was added to an original or baptismal name and inherited from the paternal line. Cognome is derived from the Latin *cum nomine* as the further definition that accompanies a first name and identifies the individual.

The great variety of Italian surnames stems from the many dialects, the variations of singular and plural, and the derivatives of the final suffix, for smaller (ending in -ello, -etto, -ino), bigger (as in -one), or bad (as in -accio or -azzo).

In ancient Greece there were no surnames. People typically had a single name, sometimes with additional “qualifiers” (something that related to a person, a tribe etc.). In ancient Rome, the use of *tri nomina* (three names) became popular, but that custom was lost in the Middle Ages when individuals became known by only their baptismal names. Then the use of surnames developed through a gradual spontaneous and complicated process prompted by both economic and social progress, first in urban areas and later across the countryside, and first among the upper classes and later among the common people. And those names might have come by adding the name of the father (Giovanni son of Bernardo), adding a suffix (“-son”), or a color (Rossi, Bianchi).

Salerno

--- surname taken by families from the city of Salerno where they originated, most likely after moving out of the city, to identify having come from there

Parisi

--- someone with connections to Paris, France, surname reflects the historical mobility & cultural interactions between Italy and other European regions.

Caruso

--- common occupational name for a person who was an apprentice, traced back to the Old Italian word “*caruso*,” which meant “a young apprentice.”

What's in a Name continued

It was around the year 1000, starting in the city of Venice, that a second name – the surname -- was added. The custom gradually spread from the nobility to all classes of people, and by the 15th century most surnames were formed.

In a small village with limited social circles this was all that was needed, with perhaps – as in ancient Greece – “son of” added. For Italians, the addition of Di or De with a nickname was sufficient. That custom is still common in villages throughout the countryside where people are often known by their nicknames. In some villages with a small number of surnames, they became so common that over many generations it became difficult to distinguish familial relationships. To make it easier to identify family groups, other nicknames would be attached, including things like a color, place, or size. For example. Cola (from Nicola) could become Colarossi or Colaneri, perhaps from the hair color of an ancestor. Bucci, from Buccio, itself a nickname from the Latin "bucca"= mouth, could become Buccigrossi.

The use of surnames grew and was eventually formalized over time. It was in 1564 that the Council of Trento (the 19th ecumenical council of the Catholic Church) ordered parish priests to record each parishioner with their first name (often referred to as their Christian name) and their last or surname. This act did formalize what by that time had become a common practice in many areas to have a first and last name. It was also done in part in order to stop marriages between blood relatives.

Surnames are a part of our Italian heritage, culture, and history. Gaining knowledge of the origin and etymology of our surnames is just one more way of learning about that history and our roots, as well as honoring our ancestors. In researching this article I discovered a number of sources that provided insights into my own surname from my Mother’s side (the Della Pietras) of the family. If yours isn’t one of those I selected to highlight, and your family has never enlightened you regarding the history of your surname, do a search on the Internet for its origins. Who knows what you might find out!

Della Pietra

--- pietra is derived from the Italian word for “stone” or “rock,” from the Latin word “petra,” symbolizing strength and stability. Also the relationship with Castle of Rock (Castello della Pietra).



IWC Birthdays

November

- Raul De Luna (3)
- George Fabian (3)
- David Lombardo (7)
- Jack Theel (7)
- Rick Bonanno (10)
- Kenneth Urso (11)
- David Rizzo (11)
- Daniel M. Amato (13)
- Mike Bender (18)
- Victor Lombardino (22)
- Mark Salerno (23)
- John Tobin (25)

December

- James S. Capacio (1)
- Tony Reitano (2)
- John Valenza, Jr. (7)
- Bennett Fraboni (7)
- Jack Zarovy (7)
- Patrick DePula (9)
- Joseph Rane (10)
- Dennis Di Carlantonio (18)
- Robert Moccero (21)
- Dan Malone (22)
- John Sheehan (24)
- Vincent D’Orazio (28)
- Marco Galletti (29)

IAWC Birthdays

- Andrea Hunter 11/7
- Terry Parisi 11/9
- Rose Hoffhein 11/10
- Debby Hillebrand 12/13
- MaryAnn Berger 12/18
- Jeanette Montalto 12/18

IWC & IAWC Awards Banquet continued

IWC Winners

- Italian Of The Year — Steve Carrola
- Community Service Award — Timothy Lehmann
- Outstanding Service Award — Ben Scalissi
- Athlete Of The Year — Jasper Pullara

IAWC Winners

- Woman Of The Year — Karen (Gandolph) Myers
- Community Spirit Award — Cindy Parisi





Wine Making Event, Fun and Productive

The long standing and cherished tradition of wine making at our club continued this fall. From purchasing the grapes and picking a few from the vines next door to breaking the skins and pressing out the juice, over twenty members produce this year's vintage of Clubhouse Red.

A big thank you to Todd Cambio for coordinating the effort. Additional thanks to Joe Tripalin for purchasing and hauling the grapes. Finally, thanks to Larry Gundlach for taking the photos. Here are some of the photos and a list of the members featured in them.

Joe Tripalin, John Caliva, Todd Cambio, Dan Dyer, Bob Lavigna, John Capra, Jim Trameri, Jim LeTourneau, Rudy Senarighi, Joe Scalissi, Dominic DiMarco, Ross DePaola, Mike Stassi, Andy Lager, Jack Zarovy, Jack Theel, Sirio DiCarlantonio, David Rizzo, Vince Fumusa, Rick Bonanno, John Tobin and Butch Pullara. 🇺🇸



IWC Membership Update

Membership in the Italian Workmen's Club is at one of its highest levels ever. As of this writing we have 162 members. Last year, along with this year, have seen a record number of new members joining the club. In 2023 we welcomed 15 new members and so far this year we have welcomed 11 new members, with three more applicants awaiting approval.

The new members bring a variety of backgrounds and interests to the club. They have been warmly welcomed by current members and have participated in many of the club's activities.

As a reminder, we will be sending out 2025 IWC Membership Renewal notices in the next month.

If any of your information has changed, be sure to make note of it on your notice. This will help us to keep our records up to date and be able to keep you informed of all club activities.

If you're dues exempt or have a hardship request, please return your notice so we can keep up to date on your status. Also, if for some reason you decide not to renew your membership, let me know as well. That way, I won't keep after you to pay your dues.

Dues will remain at \$65 for the year and I would appreciate it if you could return your dues and notice soon after receiving it.

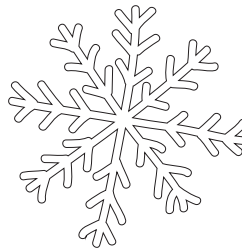
Interesting membership information:

Average age of members: **63**

Average number of years in the club: **16**

Out of state members: **6**

Out of Dane County members: **12**



Italia

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Things I didn't Know:

Chapter 3-A; The Americanization Crusade of Madison's Italians, 1916-1921

Written and edited by Prof. Jim LeTourneau, IWC

In the following chapter, UW-Madison graduate student John Arthur Valentine often refers to information written in a 1916 thesis by another UW-Graduate student, Henry Barnbrock, Jr. Barnbrock's thesis was the first to document the deprivations faced by the Italian colony of Madison in the early 1900's. Because we have copies of both Valentine's 1964 thesis and that of Barnbrock, we will interperse information from both in Chapter 3-A of "Things I Didn't Know".

According to John Valentine, when Henry Barnbrock, Jr. graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1916, he left Madison and did not return for another half-century. Ostensibly, his first return visit to the city, in May of 1966, was to take part in the 50th reunion of his class. But there was an added attraction as well, for he was feted at a local civic dinner.

When introduced to the gathering, according to a May 13, 1966, Capital Times newspaper article, Barnbrock received a standing ovation. "It was well deserved," wrote the article, "since it was his senior thesis which exposed

the miserable living conditions endured by members of the small Italian colony in a swampy area of Madison. Because of his painstaking study, the thesis provided a prime force in the efforts that were made to improve the area and to establish Neighborhood House, a successful social center."

The intervening years had dimmed many of Barnbrock's personal recollections about his thesis. However, when questioned by John Valentine in a 1966 interview as to why he undertook the study, Barnbrock vividly recalled that..." in those days the Americanization movement was like a fever sweeping the country. Practically everybody was interested in it. It was almost like the civil rights movement today (the 1950's and 60's)".



Above: Henry Barnbrock Jr., Mrs. Theodore Paratore, a friend of Barnbrock and John Arthur Valentine. The picture was taken in May 1966 at a reunion of the UW-Madi-

son class of 1916.

Americanization in the early 1900's was a hot topic. According to Valentine, another Professor, Edward G. Hartman, in 1948, wrote a book titled, "The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant". It supported Barnbrock's observations of over 30 years earlier. "During the two-year period, 1915-1916" Hartman wrote, "which preceded the entrance of America into the First World War, the nation was subjected to one of those social movements or crusades, which have periodically sprung up and colored the social history of the United States. The new movement, very aptly characterized as the Americanization Crusade, gained momentum as German-American relations went from bad to worse and beyond, remained very active during the war years, then died a gradual death as the US found itself again in the blessings of 'normalcy'."

As a component of this national crusade, Madison responded by establishing Neighborhood House, an institution designed to Americanize the City's Italian immigrants. Note: Neighborhood House would be joined by some members of the Italian Methodist Church in

this Americanization effort. More on this church's efforts in coming chapters. The creation of Neighborhood House was not an event which occurred overnight, but represented, rather, the accumulated efforts of a good many people and organizations. Most of the organizations were philanthropic in nature and their origins predated the Americanization movement by a decade or more. Yet it was the national crusade which acted as a catalyst, bringing the groups together into a common and unified effort. However, in order to understand Neighborhood House's organizational history, one had to go back in local Wisconsin history to around the turn of the 20th century.

In 1900, Robert M. LaFollette took office as Governor of Wisconsin. His ascendancy to power culminated in a ten year struggle against what he commonly termed, "the bosses". Under his leadership, the Wisconsin Progressives agitated for economic and political reforms, often meeting with a high degree of success. Economic reforms such as railroad, taxation, banking and conservation legislation were all formulated to curtail the abusive powers of the entrenched "interests". These measures, the Progressives believed, would increase the voice of the people. To further strengthen the common man, they enacted favorable political reforms such as a direct primary, in which voters choose candidates via direct vote. This is contrasted with an

indirect primary, in which voters chose delegates who then chose a party's candidates at a later convention. The reforms also created a state civil service commission.

Wisconsin Progressivism was designed by and for the middle classes, wrote Valentine. LaFollette, for example considered the "people" to be workers, farmers, professional men and white-collar workers. However, the Progressives demonstrated very little sympathy for the lower classes. This included the financially destitute and culturally deprived, and the newly arriving immigrants. This assumption by Valentine was based on a book written in 1965 by John Highman, "Strangers in the Land". Highman observed that the Progressives in general, up until about 1910, were aloof and indifferent to the immigrant and his problems. Highman admitted that depending on time, locale and other circumstances, this was not always the case. Valentine himself believed it was not true that all Wisconsin Progressives felt this way. He wrote there was a minority group of settlement and social workers and some educators who were interested in aiding the lower classes, particularly the immigrants. But they were a distinct minority and, after 1910, this indifference was converted to anti-immigration sentiment.

Indeed, the currents of nativism ran deep in the Wisconsin Progressive philosophy. But, according to Valentine, the type of minority

Progressives which sought to aid the immigrants was an important figure in acting as a braking force on nativism. John R. Commons, who in 1904 wrote the book, "Amalgamation and Assimilation", favored immigration restriction based on the belief that the new immigrants were inferior and could not be assimilated. Edward R. Ross, in his 1905 book "Foundations of Sociology", held to the belief of a "race suicide" theory and was in the vanguard of the eugenics movement. Such racist and elitist thoughts were not limited to the so-called "experts" either, for in 1913, the rank and file of Wisconsin Progressives were responsible for the passage of a sterilization law. Although this law was not strictly aimed at the immigrant, one can well imagine how such attitudes tended to discourage any social reform being of direct positive value to the immigrant.

However, ironic as it might seem, the Progressives were indirectly responsible for reform agitation which aided the lower classes and especially the immigrant. With their vociferous attacks on the new immigrants, they stirred up considerable opposition among those who believed that the newcomers to the country were not inferior and could be assimilative. Many opponents of nativism, most often settlement workers, began Americanization programs to prove this point.

Continued next page

Even more subtly, according to Valentine, the Progressives were responsible for creating a reform climate. Although the brunt of Progressive reform was political and economic, it was extremely difficult to demarcate the limits of reform once it had begun. The Progressives created a climate that was conducive to social, as well as political and economic reform. This observation was born out by one astute observer who remembered that “around the turn of the century Madison was experiencing a definite social reform”. That observer was Mrs. Christy Buchanan Kittle (Mrs. William Kittle).



NOTE: Mrs. Kittle helped build the foundation of what was to later become the United Way of Dane County. In March of 1922, Mrs.

Kittle was one of the founders of the Public Welfare Association, one of 14 original agencies that made up the Madison Community Union, now United Way. In 1941, she wrote a paper, “Neighborhood House; The Answer to a City Need”. She was the wife of educator and author William Kittle. William Kittle was best known for being Wisconsin Secretary of the State Board of Normal School Regents. He established many education programs for normal schools, better known as teacher colleges.

According to John Valentine, by stressing the importance of environment, the Progressives suggest-

ed a solution to the problems of the lower classes. If the environment could be manipulated to improve the lot of the common man, then could not the social institutions for the lower classes be reformed as well? That this thought occurred to more than a few people of Madison--the home of Robert LaFollette and Wisconsin Progressives—is well illustrated in the organizational history of Neighborhood House.

In the early 1900's there were very few governmental channels by which social reformers could enact their proposals. However, through much agitation, the city government was persuaded to provide “a police matron”, the Juvenile Court created a child welfare committee to supervise the granting of mothers' pensions, the County Board of Supervisors supplied a women's probation officer along with the first woman Police Commissioner. These were the types of social reforms which appealed most to the typical Progressives. However, these types of reforms were of little consequence to the Italian immigrants.

For example, as Henry Barnbrock wrote, “mother's pensions were useless to the Madison Italians since, in 1916, there was not one illegitimate child or a divorced Italian mother. There were only five Italian widows with families and all the fatherless families were taken care of by relatives.” Also, for the most part, the city government lagged behind the spirited efforts of the many Madison social reformers. In fact, the city was

quite blatant and unashamed of its discrimination against the Italians.”:

Impeded by government obstacles, most social reformers directed their activities to various philanthropic organizations. Most charitable groups, at the time, worked independently of one another. It was easily understood that this unregulated form of giving, even with the best of intentions, produced more and more problems. Cognizant of this difficulty, a young Madison alderman, Peter Schram, organized the Associated Charities in 1910. Essentially, it was a loosely federated and decentralized organization, but its declared policy was far reaching—” to promote the general welfare of the poor and prevent poverty by the establishment and maintenance of any activity to meet those ends”. By 1919, the Associated Charities had grown to include some 50 different philanthropic groups. Because it believed its name should be as broad as its purpose, it became known as the Public Welfare Association.

The Associated Charities was a project of older and more wealthy families in Madison. Most of the families were descended from transplanted New England Yankees. Their influence encouraged frugal and efficient operation of the Charities by eliminating duplication. However, the Charities, like most fledgling donative organizations, suffered from a lack of substantial funds. In time, this deficiency was usually overcome with the aid of some of these

wealthy local families who are best remembered for the streets and parks named after them: Tenny, Brittingham, Doty, Vilas, Murray, Stark or Butler, among others.

In many respects, Madison is similar to a Yankee town, according to John Valentine. Originally settled by New Englanders, many old Yankee traditions and Puritan values have frequently influenced Madison's history. For example, the doctrine of stewardship, which makes civic responsibility an obligation of the wealthy, is evidenced by these families' generous support of philanthropic work. More clearly, the Yankee tradition in honest and frugal government had always been present in Madison and the State. The Puritan respect for education is well evidenced in the City's superior educational system (as of 1964) and especially in its support for the University of Wisconsin.

In the first decade of the 20th century, there was a definite need for private charity. Public assistance was meager and, as Mrs. Christy Kittle wrote, "the most compelling and important problem at the time was the giving of proper relief to those needing it". Of all the people requiring assistance, probably none were more in need than the newly arrived Italian immigrants. Valentine wrote that the social and economic conditions in which they existed were, to put it mildly, deplorable. This fact was made graphically clear in Henry Barnbrock's 1916, 74-page senior thesis, "Housing Conditions of the

Italian Community of Madison, WI".

A student of UW-Madison Professor John R. Commons, Henry Barnbrock, Jr. began his studies in the Fall of 1913. For the next year-and-a-half, he spent his spare time in the Italian community, interviewing nearly every family. The task was made more difficult by his inability to speak Italian. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this summary, Barnbrock was held in suspect by the immigrants, for they could not possibly imagine what he wanted or why he needed the information which he was collecting. Barnbrock secured three interpreters, one of whom was a priest, believed to be Father Antonio Simioni. However, before he finished his study all, but the priest, had deserted him because their lives had been threatened. Despite these difficulties, he managed to complete his study and the result was an exhaustive and comprehensive commentary of the Italian community.

Barnbrock provided detailed information on the Italians' social and economic conditions. Of equal importance, he made some significant observations about the state of philanthropic work being carried out within the colony. He noted 13 different organizations performing charity work, one of which was the aforementioned Associated Charities. This, he believed, caused duplication and inefficiency. Two or three groups would be aiding one family while another family,

perhaps in more dire need of help, was receiving none. He concluded that only when all the organizations joined together could their efforts enjoy satisfactory results.

One example of unified action occurred when the organizations cooperated in petitioning the city to stop dumping its trash and garbage on the vacant lots within the colony. Barnbrock's conclusions had an impact on Associated Charities. His whole thesis had the effect of arousing the public conscience, particularly those interested in social reform. Barnbrock wrote with a good deal of humanitarian sympathy for the Italians. His experience working within and observing the Italian community eventually led him to become a settlement worker in Chicago.

In Madison, Barnbrock presented a very interesting figure in the local Americanization movement. The Madison crusade was composed of two diverse elements—the "idealists" and the "patriots". The "idealists" consisted of settlement workers and later, professional social workers and educators. The "patriots" consisted of those individuals and organizations which viewed Americanization as work in terms of nationalistic gains. Some of these "crusaders" were motivated by both idealism and patriotism. Henry Barnbrock was one of the mixed-motivational. He was a humanitarian idealist yet, by his own admission, was vitally interested in the Americanization movement for

Continued next page

patriotic reasons, as well. He was, on the local scene, a “swing man” between the two factions, for his thesis helped to fuse both elements together.

Before Henry Barnbrock began to publicize the conditions of the Madison Italian immigrants, two very dedicated settlement workers already knew of the conditions through first-hand experience. The two were Miss Mary Saxton, a Visiting Nurse of Attic Angels and Mrs. Helen Dexter, a Visiting Housekeeper of the Associated Charities.

NOTE: According to John Valentine, the name “Attic Angels” is derived from the fact the ladies would go from home to home collecting unwanted articles and goods from peoples’ attics and then distributing them to the needy.

Three to four years before Barnbrock’s study came out, these women had already been active in working with the immigrants. On certain days of the week, Mrs. Dexter would enter the colony and instruct the Italian women in the American ways of cooking, sewing, housecleaning and shopping. Miss Saxton’s role was much the same. According to a letter written in 1941 by Mrs. Dexter to future Neighborhood House Director Gay Braxton, “day after day she (Saxton) went into the dirtiest homes, gently and sympathetically caring for the sick”. Both had great sympathy for the immigrants and dedicated their efforts to rectifying

the deplorable conditions. Thus, according to the letter from Dexter to Braxton, “it was that Mary Saxton’s work was her life” and that Dexter, “was never in all her life more interested in anything than in working to alleviate the Italians’ miseries.”

While writing his thesis, Barnbrock befriended the two ladies. Other than a few other ladies of the local Italian Methodist Church, they were the only people to have any extended and personal contact with the Italian community. Significantly, they all concluded that for the Italians to overcome their abject conditions, they must be Americanized. According to an excerpt from the Dexter to Braxton letter, one day while speaking with Barnbrock, Mrs. Dexter wrote that Barnbrock had deplored the fact that Dexter and Saxton were not really getting near the Italians; they were not making American citizens of them. They had no idea what an American home was like, with Barnbrock ending with a plea, “Can’t you do something about it?” Right there, according to John Valentine, the Neighborhood House came to life.

The only way in which Americanization for the Italians could occur was through greater contact with the outside community. But the Italians were quite averse to venturing outside their own neighborhood. Consequently, the ladies decided, to create more contact, if the Italians would not come to them, they would go to the Ital-

ians. The only way to do this was to have a house or meeting place in the Italian district.

Acting upon this desire, Miss Saxton and Mrs. Dexter took the first direct action which resulted in the establishment of a permanent Americanization institution. The building which the two ladies decided upon was the former residence of ex-Governor James Davidson, a Republican who held office from 1906 to 1911. It was a large, two story house which had previously been moved from its once fashionable, former location on Gilman Street to the corner of Mound and Murray Streets, on the fringe of the Italian colony.



NOTE: The first Neighborhood House, at 807 Mound St., was across the street from the Sinnagub grocery, later G & S Supermarket and was used as a private two-family rental residence in later years until it was demolished in the 1960’s Urban Renewal project.

After establishing the rental cost of the lower flat and armed with Barnbrock’s thesis, Mrs. Dexter approached the executive committee of the Associated Charities with a definite plan. She proposed

to pay two-thirds of the rent herself (the Attic Angels assumed the other one-third) if after six months the Charities assumed the full cost. On June 13, 1916, the executive committee agreed to her proposal and an Americanization agency was officially begun.

After successfully soliciting furnishings and other necessities from personal friends, the two ladies opened the doors for operation about a week later. The stated purpose of this new enterprise was, according to Associated Charities, to provide "a place where the Visiting Nurse and Visiting Housekeeper hoped to have the Italian women come and learn American customs and the American language". It was called Community House. However, in the 1941 letter to Gay Braxton, Helen Dexter wrote that a few days after it was opened, a young girl approached Mrs. Dexter and asked, "if she was going to be her neighbor"? Mrs. Dexter felt this was exactly what she wanted the social center to be, so she renamed it Neighborhood House.

Although operating on a much smaller scale than in later years, the House's first six months proved to be quite successful. The two ladies recruited volunteer workers, mostly from the University, and they initiated various programs. Classes for men, women and children were organized to help the entire neighborhood. Sewing and housekeeping, gymnastics and English classes were started along

with various kinds of Americanization work. Kindergarten, storytelling and play hours were also introduced so that the house was constantly busy. In a November 21, 1916, article in the Wisconsin State Journal, it reported that, "Mrs. Dexter gives her mornings to the work of visiting homes and her afternoons to the Neighborhood House, she gives practical instruction of keeping house and making the best use of time and foodstuffs. In the last year, Mrs. Dexter has visited 148 homes and done actual work in 27 of them".

Not unlike her colleague, Miss Saxton was also instrumental in starting the House's most popular program, the Baby Clinic. It soon became the most important branch of the House. With a room fitted as a clinic, every Thursday afternoon with the help of different members of the Attic Angels, babies were brought in to be weighed and examined. Miss Saxton had an Italian woman who also spoke English to interpret for her as many of the women didn't speak English.

According to John Valentine, it was difficult to determine what the Italians thought of all this activity. It would appear that when the House offered programs the Italians favored or thought beneficial, they quickly responded positively, like that toward the Baby Clinic. On the other hand, Miss Saxton reportedly exhibited a paternalistic attitude which some Italians resented, such as coming into family homes and giving advice as to how

children should be disciplined. But Mrs. Dexter defended this as "giving the Italians good advice when they needed it".

It was important, Valentine wrote, to understand why these ladies encountered difficulties in the relations with the Italians. They possessed the best of humanitarian intentions, but the major problems were precipitated by the attitudes which these women held. Coming from upper and middle-class society, they wanted to convert the Italians into middle-class American citizens. They viewed slum culture as a breeding ground for crime, disease and poverty. Settlement workers, like Dexter and Saxton, assumed that their culture was superior to that of the slum.

By imposing their middle-class culture upon the slum dwellers, they hoped to eradicate the social disorders of the ghetto. House visits, sewing, housekeeping and cooking classes aside, what the settlement workers failed to recognize was that the immigrants nurtured an on-going culture of their own. But, whatever difficulties the two ladies may have encountered, they were instrumental in the establishment of Neighborhood House. Motivated primarily by humanitarian idealism, they were active in aiding the Italian immigrants long before it became fashionable or an obligation based on patriotism. Along with Henry Barnbrock, the two ladies' most enduring achieve-

Continued next page

Things I Didn't Know

ment was to persuade the executive committee of the Associated Charities to take up their cause, transforming it into a powerfully supported institution for Americanization work.

Before 1916, according to Valentine, the work of Associated Charities with the Italians could be described as “tokenism”. But after 1916, large-scale Americanization projects became popular due to the nationwide spreading of the Americanization Crusade. The major impetus of this activity was the outbreak of World War I. An intense patriotism and devotion to all things American gripped the nation, while a suspicion of all things alien in nature, or which might be considered a threat to the security of the nation began to grow in intensity as the conflict continued. Given this perspective and the fact that the executive committee knew that some 50 to 150 Madison Italians had returned to Italy to fight for their homeland, after 1916, Associated Charities minimal interest in the Italians was greatly heightened. *Note: In World War I, Italy was allied with England, France and, later, the United States against Germany, Austria-*

Hungary and Turkey.

Although the first six months of Neighborhood House’s operation was modestly successful, it still lacked widespread public awareness. Relatively few Madisonians knew of Neighborhood House in late 1916. Consequently, the House lacked adequate funds and volunteers, both necessary to expand its Americanization work. At this time, however, the task of publicizing its case was assumed by someone well-suited to the task, the previously mentioned, Mrs. William T. Kittle.

The wife of a prominent author and educator, Christy Kittle herself was involved in Progressive politics. A member of the Wisconsin League of Women Voters, she worked to get women the right to vote. She also had a vital interest in social reform directed at the lower classes and was also a member of the Associated Charities executive committee. With Mrs. Kittle at the helm, pragmatic leadership for the Associated Charities’ efforts to Americanize the Italian immigrants was provided. As leader of those Progressives connected with Neighborhood

House, Mrs. Kittle assumed the role as organizer for the center. She once characterized the history of Neighborhood House as, “finding a friend each time in need of one”. Once she had assumed the role as publicist for the House, Mrs. Kittle preferred to remain behind the scenes and shunned any official titles even though she was unofficially “the grand overseer”.

According to John Valentine, probably no one else understood the total workings of Neighborhood House as well as she did, for no problem, big or small, escaped her attention. There is no evidence Kittle ever did social work directly with the Italians as all her work was directed toward organizing and promoting the House. She was the undisputed leader and driving force behind Neighborhood House until she moved from Madison to Washington, D.C. in 1929. In 1941, when Neighborhood House celebrated its 25th anniversary, Head Resident Gay Braxton invited Mrs. Kittle back to Madison for the occasion. Not only did she accept, but, ever the planner, Mrs. Kittle returned and mapped out all the plans for the whole event. It was reported to have been a “smashing success”.

In the next segment of “Things I Didn't Know”, 3-B, we'll look at the expansion of Neighborhood House, the influence of Thomas Brittingham, the arrival of Gay Braxton and the effect of World War I on the Americanization Crusade of Madison's Italians.. ■

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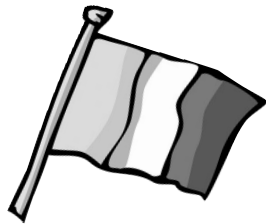
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Members have expressed their desire to help the IWC. Not just being an active member or working a shift or two at Festa, but doing something that will leave a lasting legacy. If you count yourself in that group, consider a donation to the IWC as part of your estate when you pass on from our wonderful world. Your gift could be something as simple as a statement in your obituary that says “in lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Italian Workmen’s Club, 914 Regent Street, Madison, WI 53715”. You can specify the donations go to the club in general or directly to the scholarship fund. For larger gifts, language can be included in your will to specify a sum of money or other assets to be given to the IWC. This language should be coordinated with your will through your attorney.

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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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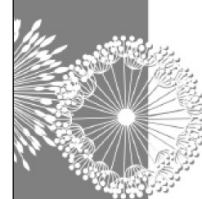
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