



January | February
2025



Italia

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

by Joe Tripalin

Ciao amici. As I take on the presidential leadership role, it strikes me how important the IWC is to me and the need to keep our club moving forward as a warm and welcoming place. A place where you can connect with friends, celebrate our Italian heritage, and make an impact in our community. We have 113 years of history behind us which started with those brave Italian immigrants that came to America and Madison looking for a better future, but who never forgot their past. We have been building on that history and heritage since 1912 and I will do my best to keep our club true to our mission and moving forward.



Greenbush Bar

As I look back on the last two years under President Caliva's leadership, we accomplished a great deal. We saw Anna Alberici our tenant for over 30 years retire and Sam Brown take over the Greenbush Bar. As he took over, he decided to keep many things and recipes much the same which was comforting since any change after that length of time is a bit scary. We were able to negotiate a five-year lease with options for additional years with Sam. This is a wonderful change from trying to negotiate a new lease every year. The new lease brought with it a host of positive changes including greater participation by Sam in the cost of insurance and real estate taxes along with a significant adjustment in rent.

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FESTA ITALIA MESSAGE

While it's winter, we're looking toward spring and actively planning for Festa Italia 2025. The dates are set for a two-day event, Saturday May 31st and Sunday June 1st at McKee Farms Park in Fitchburg. Festa Italia is our club's best opportunity to engage with our community, celebrate our Italian history and culture, and generate revenue to meet our expenses.

Stepping forward to lead or help on one of our planning committees, and/or volunteering for a shift or two should be a priority for all club members. When the Sign-Up Genius is ready, we'll let you know how to sign up online, or in person at the clubhouse.

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Italian Culture

By Tom Smith



When I took over writing this column for the Club newsletter I wasn't sure what I would write about. People know how much I enjoy writing and love to dig into subjects, learn about new topics, and share what I learn with others. Over the past six years those efforts have resulted in almost three dozen articles covering more subjects than I ever imagined.

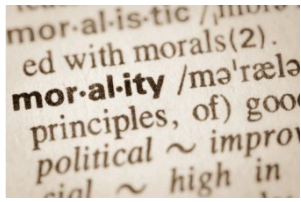
In fact, in thinking about this article, I went back and revisited all those past articles. They covered a wide range of topics about people (Italian authors, artists, musicians, inventors), wine and food (pasta, cheese, desserts), traditions and superstitions, and so many things (films, cars, inventions, glass blowing, musical instruments, bikes/cycling), and Italy's storied history in the evolution of architecture, language, and as the birthplace of medicine.

Reflecting on all of this made me think about what defines a people and a culture, and what is unique about Italians. A culture is defined by many things, including food, clothing language etc.. But a people and culture are also defined – and perhaps more importantly – by values, beliefs, rituals, and cultural expression. So what is unique about the Italian culture?

Central to Italian culture is family. Italian families tend to be close-knit and less individualistic than in other cultures. Though the multi-generational households of the past are less common today, family ties remain close even when separated by distance...whether across town or across the country. But the idea of “La Famiglia” extends beyond those related by blood, as close friends, coworkers, and others are also considered to be part of one's extended family. Italians value respect for elders and often seek their advice and counsel. For Italians, “family first” is more than just words!



Though family and the importance of community are central to the Italian culture, individualism is also valued. The uniqueness of every person, their autonomy, how they express themselves in their lives and their work is visible in how Italians live their lives. It is also evident in the artistic endeavors of so many Italians throughout history. It is an unusual balance in some respects. Italians take immense pride in their individual identities, but also come together in groups and in their communities. Personal freedom, self-expression, and individualism are highly valued traits, but Italians know that their sense of community is what brings them together.



The values of morals and honesty are essential in fostering a tightly knit community. The concern for the well-being of fellow members in the Italian Workmen's Club is reflective of the importance of morality in the Italian culture. The word 'morality' has its roots in Latin from 'morāle(m).'

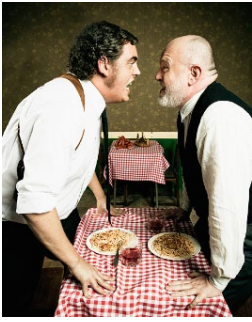
The famous Roman philosopher Cicero argued that what is honest and virtuous is beneficial, choosing between good and evil or right and wrong. Empathy, compassion, and treating others with respect are highly valued in the Club as in Italian culture. Likewise, honesty is something Italians believe to be of great importance. It is expected in every aspect of life, from personal relationships to business dealings. Straightforward conversations can be challenging, but are part of building trust and maintaining strong relationships.

One cannot think about the Italian culture without thinking about food. Making it, eating it, enjoying it. For Italians, food not only nurtures the body but feeds the soul! Recipes are something that transcend the years and are shared among families (and sometimes among close friends). Food must be prepared with love and with care, and it must be delicious. From appetizer (antipasto – "before meal"), to the meal, to dessert, it is an experience to be savored. When I had my first full Italian meal with my maternal family in New York, I was ill-prepared for what was to come. First, the antipasto...cheeses, prosciutto, salami. Followed by pasta, not just spaghetti but a couple of pastas. Then the "gravy meats," pork, beef, sausage, simmered in sauce that I was to learn was called "red gravy." All this accompanied by a nice red table wine, and ending with a tasty cannoli and a rich coffee. And when it wasn't a full Sunday family meal, there was nothing like a big slice of pizza from the pizzeria one found on almost every other street corner in Brooklyn – hand tossed with thin crust and foldable in the middle, and in my youth yours for only 25 cents. Little wonder Club meetings include a tasty meal when business is concluded.



Though often cited in many cultures, throughout the world Italians are known for passion and love. It is evident everywhere and in everything -- from family, friends, and community, to food, work, and their everyday lives. You see it in the ways we communicate...as I wrote in a recent article about how Italians express themselves with not only words but hundreds of emphatic hand gestures, or even the tone of our voice. Sometimes those conversations include a sprinkling of Italian words as only they can capture a certain feeling or emphasize a particular point.

Italian Culture continued



Of course, that passion often comes out in the form of arguments. In fact, some say that Italians like to argue, that it is the norm for Italians, whether it is about sports, politics, whatever. I actually read an article that included a list of reasons why you should never argue with an Italian. First and foremost, is that by definition an Italian assumes that he is right. He also won't be listening to your arguments because he is just formulating his own arguments to be expressed the moment there is a break in the conversation.

The Italian will also be talking loudly and using many of those hand gestures previously mentioned. All this may eventually lead to profanity and volume sufficient to drown out any counterarguments you have to offer. I have occasionally witnessed such “discussions” at the Club.

In the end, along with all of these values, beliefs, and qualities, at the core of the Italian culture is a philosophy that celebrates La Dolce Vita...the good life! Italians have an appreciation for life's simple pleasures and living in the moment. Famed Italian film director Federico Fellini's movie titled 'La Dolce Vita' explored savoring the simple joys of life, finding beauty in everyday moments, and cherishing the company of loved ones. For Italians this is more than a concept, it is a way of life rooted in the traditions of its people.



I hope the articles I've written over the last six years have been both entertaining and informative for members. As we begin 2025 I am always looking for new topics, and would welcome suggestions from members if there are things you would like featured in a future article. If you have an idea or topic you'd like to suggest, please email me at tomasd123@gmail.com. And have a great start to the new year!

“Italians value respect for elders and often seek their advice and counsel. For Italians, “family first” is more than just words!”



IWC Birthdays

January

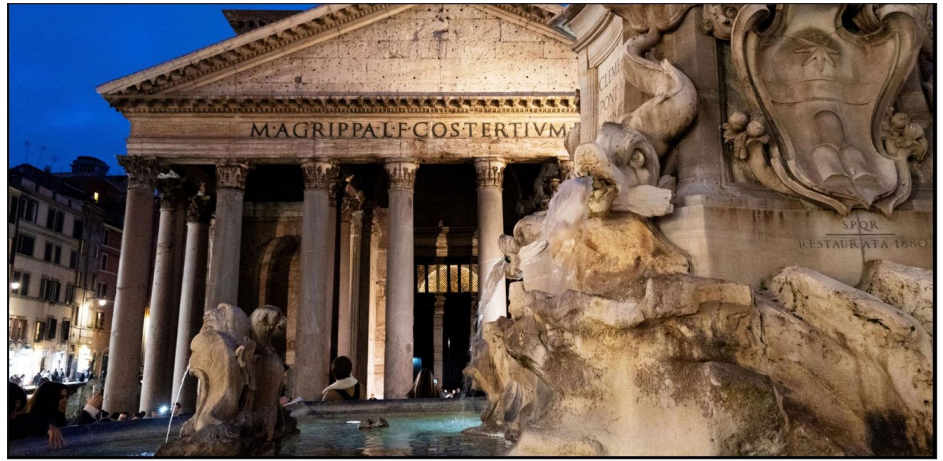
Charles Hannan	1/3
James Trameri	1/5
Steve Urso	1/8
Matthew Jarosz	1/9
Robert Murray	1/9
Dave Valenza	1/13
Garrett Gundersen	1/14
Davide Spadoni	1/15
Carlo J. Bonura	1/17
Bob Lavigna	1/17
Rudy Senarighi	1/19
Nick Baldarotta	1/23
Peter Cerniglia	1/24
Richard Trameri	1/29
Daniel Blasiole	1/31
Jason Mascitti	1/31

February

Russell Theel	2/2
Thomas Speranza	2/3
Joe Alfano	2/12
John Cusimano	2/13
Joseph Musillami	2/17
Joseph M. Schiro	2/19
Micheal Alioto	2/21
Vincent Ritacca	2/21
Joseph Scarpelli, Jr.	2/22
Robert Chiesa	2/24
Stephen Sasso	2/26
Frank Alfano	2/27

IAWC Birthdays

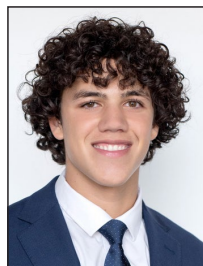
- Katie West, January 20
- Phyllis DeGioia, February 3
- Toni Gunnison, February 16
- Kathy Williams, February 17



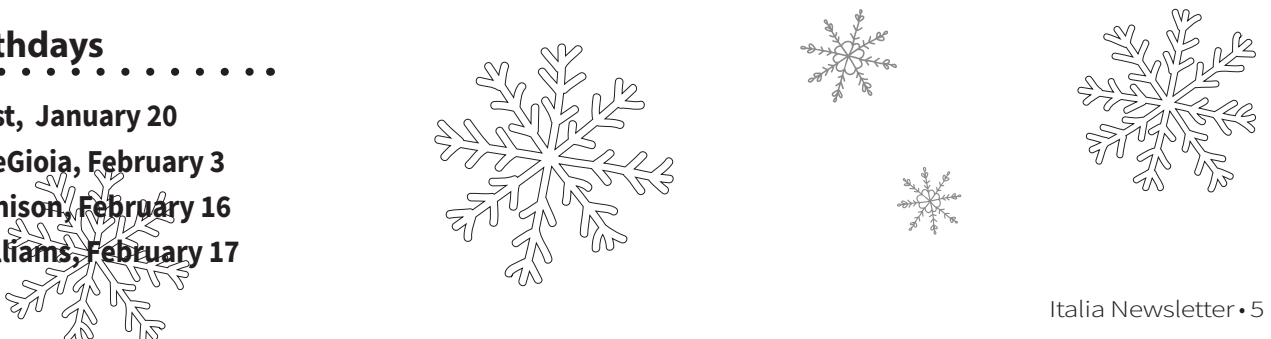
IWC Study Abroad Scholarships Awarded

In 2024, the IWC Council implemented a new program to award a scholarship to a student in the UW Italian program that is planning to study abroad in Italy in the spring semester in 2025. The idea is to provide this scholarship as a way to connect directly with a student studying Italian and who is going to study in Italy for a semester, to not only assist them but to have them share their experiences in Italy with the club on their return.

The council received a number of applications and two were outstanding. It was very hard to choose one and ignore the other. While the winner received a \$2,000 scholarship, the council decided to give the second place finisher a \$1,000 scholarship.



The two students are Anthony Di-Castri who will be studying in Rome and is hoping to connect with relatives nearby in Frosinone Italy. Julia LoBello, the other recipient, will be studying in Florence and has already signed up for special workshops to expand her educational experience. It will be fun to meet them next fall and hear about their experiences of living abroad and studying in Italy. ■



President's Message continued



www.realcrg.com/project/chapter-at-madison

800 Block Project

In another effort, we participated in the 800 Block Project which led to an amazing mural and history hallway at Chapter Madison with both commemorating the old Greenbush Italian neighborhood. Early in 2024, we made a big decision to change Festa Italia to a two-day event. This was challenging but also necessary to reflect the current level of support we can obtain from our membership. The change was difficult, but the results were wonderful, and we made a profit of over \$18,000 on the two-day event. This amount of profit, only a short time ago, would have been considered exceptional for a three-day event. Finally, **our building and clubhouse were placed on the National Register of Historic Places.** When this

effort started three years ago, that dream of national recognition seemed to be an unachievable goal. But we found out that a building that was built by hand by its members to support a men's club and the surrounding community and is still doing that 103 years later is quite an exceptional building worth national recognition. What a wonderful honor.

Pillars of Support for Our Club

Going forward, I hope we can address some of the "pillars" supporting our club that Antonio Re and many members worked on during his tenure. Some areas that come to mind are recruitment, heritage, and Festa. We can look back at what was done some years ago and continue to build on that work. I'm sure there will be some other areas that we will want to

address. I will need your help to work on committees addressing these areas to better understand our challenges and look for solutions. On a more day-to-day basis, I want our monthly meetings to be fun and a chance to connect with friends and maybe be exposed to some Italian heritage. We need to continue to follow the lead of Jim LeTourneau to implement ways to preserve our important records and photos; those heritage items chronicle our history and who we are as a club.

Membership Changes

One observation I would like to share involves the make-up of our club. I have been a member on two different occasions; one before 1990 and a much longer period after my return in the later 90's. Reflecting on those two periods, I've noted a significant change in the makeup of our club. Forty years ago, the club members were mainly men that were born and raised in the "bush", and they had perspectives about the club and its activities based on how things were always done. Today, we have a much more diverse membership. We have members from all over the country and from Italy. We are bringing in younger members and this diverse membership with new perspectives will mold our club in many positive ways. This diversity makes our club stronger and more resilient, and we need to continue

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Festa Message continued

As Co-Chairs (Jim DiUlio and Joe Tripalin), we understand that important family events may override Festa. Graduations, weddings, and vacation plans are just some of the things that may impact your ability to help. If your schedule has one of these important events planned, please give either Jim (414-652-6993) or Joe (608-445-0984) a call to let one of them know you won't be able to help this year.

Thank you for your help with this and your commitment to making Festa Italia 2025 a success. ■■



Continued from Page 7

to focus on recruitment to ensure the strength of our club.

So, what do the next two years hold and what challenges do we face? My crystal ball isn't working right now to tell me, but I'm sure we will have some things come up that we will need to work through. I am confident that we are in a very solid financial position. We have a considerable amount of money invested in a moderate long term growth strategy and this general account and scholarship account have grown nicely over the last few years. We have significant amounts in our checking account and in a "rainy" day account at our bank. We also have a Financial Committee led by Steve Carolla that has done an excellent job of not only investing our money but putting together a budget to help us manage our money. We are blessed with many very smart people in our club to help guide us as we navigate the

day-to-day challenges a club like ours may face. As we go along, I need your input and ask that you share ideas or concerns with me. My wife continually reminds me that I am far from perfect, so if I stumble here or there, please help pick me up.

The one thing I do know is any organization can die from lack of interest and engagement. I want the club to be here for its 200th anniversary and to do that we all need to be engaged and working to keep the club strong, vibrant, and planning for the future. I hope members volunteer to help at Festa and other events and they actively take part in the many fun things we do as a club. It sounds like a lot of work, but really it is just pitching in to help, being involved, and having fun being a part of a very special organization with your friends. Ti auguro il meglio.....Joe ■■

Italia

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"Buon Anno"

Things I didn't Know:

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.

Written and edited by Prof. Jim LeTourneau, IWC

In our previous edition of “Things I Didn't Know” 3-A, John Valentine wrote that Christy Kittle's support and influence for the expansion of Neighborhood House becoming the social hub for the Italian community was introduced. Her backing of its establishment solidified its need in the community, even though the Neighborhood House itself would move two more times from its original Mound Street location. It's when Mrs. Kittle began to promote Neighborhood House that one could clearly see the similarity between the local and national Americanization movements directed toward Madison's Italian community.

Kittle reasoned the local Italians could either become an asset or a liability to Madison and it was the duty of Neighborhood House to insure they became the former. This was the same logic that the national “Americanization” leaders espoused. They believed the immigrants could be assimilated, thereby contributing to American society. To become assimilated, the Italian needed to be exposed to Americanization programs. The immigrant's unfamiliarity with

the English language, his distrust of government, lack of respect for law and ignorance of American customs necessitated these programs. Social workers lamented that none had been implemented. Without help, the workers feared, immigrants might wreak havoc upon the traditional American way of life.

As John Arthur Valentine wrote in his 1964 thesis about the Madison Italian community, it was this type of argument which Mrs. Kittle most often used to solicit funds. She could not have struck upon a better idea, for it appealed to many of the Yankee families of the city. Puritan values of civil order and responsible citizenship were sacred to the middle and upper classes of the transplanted Madison families from New England cities. Moreover, these families probably also viewed Americanization work, i.e. teaching middle class values to the immigrants, as a means of protecting their own status in society; for certainly not a few must have recognized the possibility of the immigrants' potential threat to the established social structure of Madison.

Mrs. Kittle was an excellent fundraiser and her methods of publiciz-

ing Neighborhood House would do justice to the later methods of Madison Avenue in the 1960's. If soliciting funds from a prominent businessman, she would base her appeal on the Henry Barnbrock thesis of 1916, which used scientific facts and figures to conclude that the Italians could, with help, become constructive Madison citizens. Dealing with the general public, she would appeal to their humanitarian instincts by citing more sentimental and maudlin stories.

The most frequently cited, in Kittle's accounts and in various Madison newspaper articles, was the case of the Italian grocer, Mr. Anton Navarra, who's store was at 746 West Washington Avenue. According to Mrs. Kittle, Navarra went from door to door collecting \$94 (*\$2,812 in 2024 currency*) for Neighborhood House. Although a pitifully small sum by American standards, in Mrs. Kittle's hands, it became a fortune. As a result, many Madisonians believed the Italians were completely dedicated to the House and to the proposition of becoming Americanized.

Unfortunately, Anton Navarra was shot-gunned to death at his store at 8pm, Sunday, April 14, 1924. Police believe Navarra was killed

because he was involved in the neighborhood "Rum Wars", selling sugar to two different groups of moonshiners in the neighborhood. He left a widow and five children. The killer was never caught but the gun used was found on a trash heap in the back yard of the store.

Effective as she might have been, Mrs. Kittle ultimately succeeded because of the generosity of a few wealthy Madisonians. Undoubtedly, the single greatest financial benefactor was Thomas E. Brittingham. He was, in fact, Madison's most important philanthropist at the time. John Valentine opined that Brittingham exemplified those philanthropists who believed in the doctrine of stewardship. He had three particular projects to which he contributed quite substantially. He took great interest in restoring and building new parks and conservation areas. From 1900 to 1915, he contributed approximately \$ 20,000 (*about \$619,000 in 2024 currency*) toward the renovation of a park along Monona Bay which would be later named in his honor.

His largest contributions, however, were extended to the University of Wisconsin and Neighborhood House. For the University, he was responsible for the purchase of many art objects still now in possession of the school, including the Adolph Weinman statue of Abraham Lincoln which still sits in front of historic Bascom Hall.

Brittingham donated \$ 50,000



Thomas E. Brittingham

(*about \$1.66 million in 2024 dollars*) to the University Medical School which was used to establish a student

infirmary. His connection with the University was more than philanthropic. He was also a member of the Board of Regents, serving as its President from 1912 to 1914. However, by his own admission in a May 4, 1924 article in the Wisconsin State Journal, Brittingham said his greatest philanthropic interest, stimulated by Christy Kittle, was Neighborhood House.

A wealthy businessman who made his fortune in the lumber industry, Brittingham insisted that his funds be effectively used. He wanted to see concrete social and economic results. Dutifully, Mrs. Kittle would occasionally invite him to take a tour of the House and observe the business-like operation of the Americanization programs. This never failed to impress him, as he expressed in a May 7, 1920, letter he wrote to Kittle and which was usually followed by another contribution after a visit.

When Mrs. Helen Dexter's six-month rental obligation expired in late 1916, Brittingham agreed to pay the following year's rent for the Associated Charities. This con-

tribution was extended for the following five years, as well. When Neighborhood House expanded its activities into a full-fledged social settlement in 1921, he contributed two-thirds of the \$ 9,000 necessary (*about \$95,000 in 2024 dollars*) to purchase a new property. Perhaps as an indication of the Neighborhood House's mounting success, his contributions steadily increased until his untimely death in 1924.

The passing of Thomas Brittingham at age 63 was deeply grieved by officials of Neighborhood House and they paid tribute to him by lowering its flag to half-mast, for without his generosity, the institution's financial solvency would have been tenuous. Along with increased financial support, Neighborhood House also enjoyed a heightened public awareness. More and more Madisonians took an active interest in Americanization work. This mounting activity was due, in part, to Christy Kittle's propagandizing. However, the most important factor was America's entry into World War I and the consequent heightening of patriotism.

In early 1917, war hysteria, super-patriotism and devotion to all things "American" began to envelope Madison. Robert LaFollette, one of six US Senators to oppose the War, was harshly criticized in The Wisconsin State Journal which even intimated that his decision was influenced by money he

Continued next page

had allegedly received from the German Government. The Journal took such a violent pro-war stance that William T. Evjue, its managing-editor, resigned his position. Later that year, in December of 1917, Evjue founded his own paper, with offices on King Street, The Capital Times.

According to a “looking back” article published in a December 13, 1965 copy of *The Capital Times*,



William T. Evjue

Evjue defended LaFollette, and for this activity, he was hung in effigy and his personal safety was

even threatened. Ladies dressed in Red Cross uniforms marched around the Capital Square demanding that businessmen retract advertising placed with the Times, which they were forced to do. Even newspaper boys were threatened and abused while carrying or delivering the paper. Nationalistic patriotism demanded a conforming devotion to all things considered American. In a May 23, 1919 article of the Capital Times, it was reported that in Evansville, Wisconsin, about 22 miles south of Madison, a lady who refused to buy liberty bonds was put in a lions cage and paraded through the town to the cheers of the locals. In this social climate, it was not difficult to understand that Italian

immigrants, who were so “foreign”, became the target for every citizen who wished to perform his or her patriotic duty by Americanizing them.

World War I broke out in 1914, and by mid-summer 1915, virtually every European nation was involved. King Victor Emmanuel III called on all Italian men of fighting age who were living overseas to return to Italy to join the Italian Army. In America, the situation in Europe gave rise to nationalism and a corresponding suspicion of the immigrant. According to John Valentine, it also greatly contributed to the growth of the national Americanization crusade. However, when America entered the war about two years later in 1917, the fear of the immigrant was greatly intensified. It whipped up a greater interest in the crusade around the country, and in Madison, as well.

At this time, practically the whole city responded to the Neighborhood House program. Volunteers by the hundreds swarmed to the House to perform their patriotic duty and help Americanize the City’s Italian immigrants. Before America entered the War, one might best describe the local movement as rather low-keyed. However, from early 1917, when America entered the War, until 1920, the Americanization crusade in Madison was considerably accelerated, especially from the University. Sorority and fraternity members at Neighborhood House were particularly active, as exemplified by Chi Omega Sorority’s- Nu Chapter

sewing classes for young girls. Undergraduate men, under the auspices of the local YMCA, supervised various athletic programs for boys.

The academic community, too, was quite active. Many professors offered their services to organize and teach English and citizenship classes. In this endeavor, according to Public Welfare Records of Neighborhood House minutes, they were greatly aided by the Civics Department of the Businesswomen’s Suffrage Club. Christmas parties, scouting programs, garden clubs, Red Cross classes and more English classes for men were added to the House’s program. With increased fervor, new programs were proposed such as a nursery school and a theater project, but due to inadequate facilities and a shortage of qualified instructors these could not be inaugurated. Indeed, between 1917 and 1920, the House never suffered from a lack of volunteer workers. This surplus of volunteers provided a slight indication of the intensity with which Americanization work was being conducted at Neighborhood House.

Valentine wrote that there was no evidence to suggest that anyone connected with the House—either official or volunteer worker-- ever questioned the effectiveness of their work. However, it never seemed to have occurred to anyone that they might evaluate the results of their efforts to determine whether they were



2nd Neighborhood House

actually reaching the Italians. Success was measured solely in terms of quantity rather than quality. For example, success was measured by recording how many meetings were held, how many people frequented Neighborhood House or how many programs were inaugurated. Using these criteria, the officials of the Associated Charities judged Neighborhood House a huge success.

Accordingly, in August of 1917, the House moved to a second location, a stucco rowhouse at 25-29 S. Park St., across from the nun's house for St. Joseph's School, right in the heart of the Italian community. At this location, the Associated Charities believed the House would come into closer contact with the Italians who were attending Neighborhood House by an average of 250 people each month. However, the 1917 "Official Report of Neighborhood House" noted that the new location, a two-story tri-plex of apartments, was entirely too small to meet the needs of a growing neighborhood. In fact, from this time on, the most frequently voiced complaint was that the agency lacked adequate

space and facilities to keep pace with its steady growth. Two years after moving from Mound St. to the S. Park St. location, the July 10, 1919 minutes of the Public Welfare Association noted that, "Neighborhood House in its present location has reached its capacity."

There had always been a few officials of the House who wanted to convert the institution into a bona fide settlement house with a professionally trained resident worker directing the programs. But at the height of the Americanization crusade, when patriotism was rampant, these views did not prevail. With the end of World War I and the return to normalcy, there was a subsequent waning of interest and the crusade diminished considerably. By the winter of 1920-21, the only people still interested in Americanizing the local Italian immigrants were a few transplanted Yankee families from New England, a handful of social reform-minded Progressives and two settlement workers, those previously mentioned in Chapter 3-A of this report, Helen Dexter and Mary Saxton. (Note: Both ladies remained active in the House during the crusade years and reportedly attended the 1921 grand opening of the West Washington Ave. House. The last reference to Miss Saxton was her moving to California. Mrs. Dexter moved to New York City in the mid-1920's where her husband had

secured new employment).

It was these people who optimistically carried on and at the end of four years' time, in 1920, it was decided that, as an experiment, Neighborhood House was most successful and valuable. But, the time had arrived when something of a more permanent nature should take its place, in other words, a social settlement house. Accordingly, on June 10, 1920, the Public Welfare Association recommended "that the present Neighborhood House be discontinued". The whole problem of reorganization, establishment of permanent facilities and the securing of resident workers was referred to the executive committee and empowered to "act alone".

Under the reorganization, Neighborhood House became a separate entity unto itself. It was, however, still part of the Public Welfare Association's chain of charitable organizations, still receiving funds from the organization. However, the actual operation of the House was no longer supervised by the Association and now had its own ruling body. Even though a majority of the organizations in the Associated Charities lost interest in Americanization work, relations with Neighborhood House remained good since social workers and philanthropists who governed the House retained their membership in the Associated Charities.

Continued next page

It should be noted, according to Valentine, that at the height of the Americanization crusade, the Public Welfare Association formulated rather expansive plans for the Italian community consisting of modern apartment buildings, a new building to house a theater and gymnasium, and other recreational areas. Estimates ranged from \$ 25,000 to \$40,000 for these projects (*\$616,000 to \$986,000 in 2024 dollars*). But, when the War ended and crusade interest faded, Neighborhood House officials had difficulty scraping together the \$9,000 needed to buy a dilapidated former furniture store warehouse as a new location until Thomas Brittingham stepped in with a needed donation to close the purchase.



3rd Neighborhood House

The most compelling problem for Neighborhood House was the 1921 acquisition of the permanent and adequate facility at 756 West Washington Avenue, across the street from what would later be Brittingham Park. The two-story former Van Deusen furniture warehouse

had upstairs apartment facilities for the House Director, an unfinished basement and enough classroom space. Through the years, additions to the building were made, including the 1926 purchase of an empty lot next to the west side of the building for a small gymnasium and upstairs activity room, local volunteer workers to refurbish the basement for woodworking shops and table tennis rooms, and the purchase of a cottage at 713 Mound Street which abutted the rear of the main Neighborhood House building to be used as a nursery school. The major benefactor during most of these intervening years was Madison's Lions Club, which adopted Neighborhood House as its major philanthropic Americanization project. Later in the 1920's, all connection with the Public Welfare Association was severed. By 1926, operating expenses for the House were taken over by the Community Union, later called Community Chest.

The next task was securing a head resident. Professor Edgar B. Gordon of the University Music Department was made chairman of the Neighborhood House director selection committee. (*Edgar "Pop" Gordon was the longtime head of the University of Wisconsin School of Music. Gordon Commons Food Service building in the southeast corner of the UW-Madison campus is named after him*). Previously, Gordon had been a social worker for five years at Chicago Commons which

was then under the direction of the renowned settlement worker, Doctor Graham Taylor and they remained lifelong friends.



Mary Lee Griggs

Gay Braxton

After Professor Gordon's selection committee had been unsuccessful in efforts to recruit Henry Barnbrock Jr. to return to Madison from Chicago to take up the Neighborhood House residency job, Gordon asked Taylor to recommend a candidate. Taylor recommended a former student of his who was overseeing a West Virginia settlement house. In 1921, after much persuasion from both Gordon and Taylor, Miss Gay Braxton accepted the Madison position with a \$2,400 yearly salary (*about \$ 22,500 in 2024 currency*) as head resident. Miss Mary Lee Griggs was hired as an assistant resident worker in 1922. Now a redesigned institution, Neighborhood House was converted into a bonified social settlement house. It opened its doors at its new West Washington Ave. location on November 11, 1921, Armistice Day (*now Veterans Day*). Under the direction of the two settlement workers, Braxton and Griggs, the House performed very effective Americanization

work for the Italians for the following 28 years, providing the City of Madison "investment" with considerable dividends.

In one respect, quite ironically, Neighborhood House was back where it began in 1916. It was again under the direction of two settlement workers, Braxton and Griggs replacing Saxton and Dexter, both teams inspired by humanitarian-idealism. The intervening years, however, witnessed a truly unique social phenomenon in local history. Probably never before or since have so many Madisonians, with such divergent views and backgrounds, been involved in a social movement than during those five brief years of the Americanization crusade. Any evaluation of the Americanization crusade must first begin with its immediate results.

Neighborhood House, like most other Americanization agencies, never took care to precisely define the term "Americanization. John Valentine referred to the book, "Movement to Americanize the Immigrant", by Prof. Edward George Hartman, who taught at Boston's Suffolk University. Hartman wrote that "Americanization" meant, "...to win over the immigrant from his foreign ways, speech and ideals through education, persistence and good example transforming him into an individual holding the same sort of life as that of his native contemporary American neighbor."

Valentine then opined that given this definition, which quite fairly

represents the goals and purposes of the local Madison crusade, one would have to judge the effort a failure. According to Valentine, very few Italians were Americanized due to the crusade. He referred to a quote Gay Braxton wrote in her own 1941, "Talks and Reports about Neighborhood House; Reminiscences of Twenty Years at Neighborhood House, volume 3". She wrote... "when she arrived in November, 1921 to assume Head Residency of the House, she learned that most Italians could not communicate in English. She claimed, 'This was my first real feeling of being in a foreign land'".

Valentine continued, "It (the Americanization crusade) did not fail because of intentions, nor perhaps even because of methods. The crusade failed simply because assimilation is a dynamic process which takes not five years, but a lifetime, and in some cases, generations. It is ludicrous to presume that the Madison Italian immigrants could have become Americanized in a matter of months or even a few brief years, no matter how intense the effort".

Jim LeTourneau writes: I would have to agree with Valentine. Growing up in "The Bush", we lived on Mound Street with my Italian grandparents living upstairs, I never heard them speak English. My mother, Catherine Caravello LeTourneau, would speak to them in Italian as would my mother's brothers and sister, my aunt and

uncles, when coming over for a family Sunday pasta dinner. I was never taught to speak Italian. I learned basic Italian taking four semesters of it at UW-Madison. My grandmother, Josephina Caravello lived to be 96 and I only heard her speak Italian to other elderly Italian mothers in the neighborhood. I found pictures in the IWC archives of myself and young friends from the neighborhood attending some functions at Neighborhood House. Looking closely, I would find my mother sitting back in the crowd with my grandmother. I wonder what my grandmother was thinking, wondering what was going on because she could not have understood one word of what was being said by speakers and actors entertaining us kids at the House. I don't know if that was true with any of the other kids who grew up in the "Bush" with me, so I can only speak for myself.

Valentine went on to write, "it was the intensity of the Americanization crusade which produced what was, perhaps, the most negative result. The crusade heightened prejudices and discrimination against Italians. This bigotry had existed in Madison long before 1917" with Valentine referring to Henry Barnbrock's theses in which Barnbrock asserted the Madison city administration had systematically discriminated against the Italians. However, according to John Valentine, two adverse images of

Continued next page

the immigrants were solidified by the crusade. The patriots perpetrated one image, portraying the immigrants as a suspect element, an image which lingered into the 1920's. It became further distorted and served to justify a Ku Klux Klan march and demonstration against the Italian community in 1924 (*which will be further discussed in upcoming chapters*).

Many Madisonians would say that distrust of the Italians began with its bootlegging activities, not to mention the numerous shooting deaths in the neighborhood during the 1920's, including those of two Madison police officers. However, the stereotype of an Italian as an unsavory element began long before with its root found in the intense Americanization crusade. Added to this were published police reports and news articles describing the typical Italian male, including one Wisconsin State Journal article from May 12, 1917 generalizing them as "immoral and unsanitary".

A second image portrayed the Italians as powerless to resist the debilitating influences of their environment. Paternalism had always

been an attitude of the settlement workers. But the crusade so publicized these views that the general population also adopted this paternalistic attitude. John Valentine wrote that when interviewing Italians for his thesis, they mentioned that they were often given the paternalistic compliment..." You Italians have come a long way". However, there was one crucial difference between these attitudes. While settlement workers looked upon the immigrants as helpless to overcome this slum culture without aid from their agencies, they did believe the Italian might become a worthwhile citizen with exposure to Americanization programs. The general populace failed to consider the environmental factor; they did not hold a strong conviction that the immigrant would ever become a competent citizen. Most Madisonians came to look upon the Italians as helpless, if not inferior, beings. This image prolonged itself until World War II.

However, the crusade also had far-reaching positive results in Madison. Before the crusade, welfare programs were not considered a responsibility of local government. Such charity as did exist was

administered by private organizations. As a direct product of the crusade, Neighborhood House was created as a welfare program established by private philanthropy. It serves as the best example of the way in which private charity modified public welfare. The Visiting Nurse and Baby Clinic pilot projects were later adopted as city sponsored operations. Pre-school programs organized much upon the same principle as Head Start and Tot Lot served as a model for similar city classes. Adult education courses conducted with the House pioneered cooperative efforts between private charity and governmental support--both at the state and federal level. City school systems also established joint functions with the University's student teacher programs, an idea which had been formulated between Neighborhood House and the University.

According to John Valentine, it can be said that in some respects the local Americanization crusade touched most Madisonians. The narrowness of super-patriotism left a residue of prejudice and discrimination. Yet, a broad humanitarianism created greater social and educational opportunities through the extension of private and public welfare programs seen in Madison today.

In our next chapter of "Things I Didn't Know," 4-A, we'll look into the Protestant Crusade in the Madison Italian community, the Albanian influence and the Italian Methodist Church. Prof. Jim LeTourneau, IWC ■

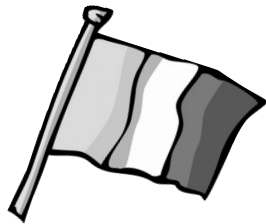
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Members have expressed their desire to help the IWC. Not just being an active member or working a shift or two at Festa, but doing something that will leave a lasting legacy. If you count yourself in that group, consider a donation to the IWC as part 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.

Imagine what your gift can do to help the club and in turn help our efforts to provide scholarships and to keep our Italian heritage relevant in today’s world. Certainly, no one likes contemplating their passing, but this is a positive step you can take to make a difference and leave a legacy to your beloved club.





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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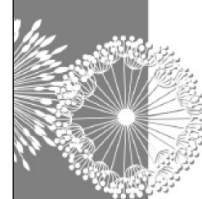
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