



March | April
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Italia

NEWSLETTER of the ITALIAN WORKMEN'S CLUB

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President's Message

by Joe Tripalin

Ciao fellow members. The Club is doing well, and I was happy to see the great turnout for the January membership meeting. It was a very cold night, yet we had over 50 members attend the meeting. It was a special night with a guest speaker. **Father Andrew Showers** joined us for the meeting and was kind enough to share with us details about his five years in Rome at the Vatican culminating in his ordination. He had pictures and stories, and it was fun to see how that period in his life progressed. He enjoyed a wonderful meal with us, and it was clear that his presentation was popular as he was surrounded by members as the meeting ended.



His presentation is part of a goal I have, to try and incorporate a heritage component in each of our monthly meetings. This is a challenging, but I think important part of what members seek from the IWC. I can use your help. If you have ideas of individuals or topics that might be a good heritage component, please let me know. I am appreciative of any help or ideas you have.

I am writing this in mid-February for the March April newsletter publication, so I am talking about things that happened and things that are going to happen in February or March. One of those going to happen things, is Cathy Fleming is scheduled to present **tips and insights into traveling to Italy** at the February membership meeting. She is the

Easter and the Scoppio del Carro in Florence

In Florence, Easter is celebrated with the Scoppio del Carro (Explosion of the Cart). A huge, decorated wagon used since the 18th century is dragged through Florence by white oxen until it reaches the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore in the historic center.

After mass, the archbishop sends a dove-shaped rocket into the fireworks-filled cart, creating a spectacular display. A parade of performers in medieval costumes follows.

Buona Pasqua

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Oil and Vinegar

By Tom Smith



Oil and Vinegar...the yin and the yang of Italian cooking. In Eastern thought, the “yin and yang” can represent two complementary forces that make up all aspects of life, a duality or balance. But when we set about preparing a favorite dish, where would we be without olive oil and balsamic vinegar? Whether a robust salad dressing or a main course, they are essential elements in Italian cooking.

While they are all too familiar ingredients, who among us knows the history of these marvelous things. Let's start with olive oil, considered a “superfood” today but with an ancient history. The olive tree itself existed long before humans, dating back millions of years. Growing to a height from 10 to 40 feet, olive trees are known for their longevity, with some estimated to be more than 2,000 years old. These trees can endure wide ranges of temperatures, from the harshest winters to the hottest summers, and have branches that are strong and flexible, which allows them to carry large amounts of olives without breaking. The Greeks believed olive trees were sent by the gods. According to legend, when the city of Athens was founded the goddess Athena created the olive tree so that she would be chosen as their patron rather than the god Poseidon. Archaeological evidence suggests that olives have been a part of the human diet for as long as 35,000 years ago, and researchers believe that olives were first domesticated in the Mediterranean region some 6-8,000 years ago. The importance and use of olive oil continued to spread after the Roman empire conquered Greece and Egypt, and the Romans recognized olive oil not only as a food, but also as a fuel.



By the 5th century with demand increasing the Romans began using more sophisticated methods and equipment to produce olive oil. They invented a variety of presses, including the trapetum...a large press that worked much like a mortar and pestle. Apulia and Calabria emerged as leaders in olive oil production, expanding to Florence and Venice during the Renaissance. During the Industrial Revolution olive oil emerged as a source for lighting, and at the end of the 19th century Italian immigrants started introducing olives and olive oil to the United States.



So how is this precious olive oil produced? Olive fruit is a drupe, a type of fruit with a fleshy outer layer and a single seed surrounded by a hard shell. The skin is smooth and the flesh is

the edible part, surrounding a pit encasing the seed. When olives reach their maximum oil content and weight, six to 8 months after blooming, they are ready to harvest. In the past, all olives were harvested by hand. But over time, producers looked for faster and more efficient ways to harvest the olives. This wasn't driven by the desire for higher production and profits alone. When machines were invented that would shake the trees making the olives fall into a net or "catch frame" below, the machines would harvest the olives at a rate four times that of



hand picking. Olive oil is best when the olives are pressed immediately after harvest, the machines allowing producers to move rapidly to the pressing phase. And today's EVOO (extra virgin olive oil) is cold extracted – placing the ground olive paste in a centrifuge that spins at high speed – because that process is considered to be both more efficient and hygienic.

In Italy there are over 500 varieties of olives, including Leccino, Frantoio, Moraiolo, Biancolilla, Coratina, Ogliarola, Moresca, Casaliva, Nocellara, and many others. Italy is known for producing a number of wonderful olive oils, including Monini, Carapelli, De Cecco, and one perhaps best known to many in the United States...Bertolli, from the Bertolli company founded by Francesco Bertolli in Tuscany 160 years ago. Italy is one of the largest producers of olive oil (second only to Spain) with official records estimating almost 300,000 tons produced in 2024.



Likewise, balsamic vinegar (aceto balsamico) has a history dating back millennia. The first documented evidence of vinegar making dates back to 3000 BC and the Babylonians. In ancient Greece and Rome, archeological digs revealed vinegar was widely used as a preservative to transport food over long distances, as a condiment, as a cure for a variety of illnesses, and as a detergent. Vinegar was part of the culture

in Rome and small cruets for vinegar (called an acetabulum) appeared on tables, contributing to the development of flavored vinegars. The origins of Balsamic vinegar are found in the process by which the "must" – the concentration of fresh grape juice containing the skins, seeds, and stems of the grape – is cooked. The more grape "must" a vinegar contains, the more flavorful it will be, with the cooked "must" stored in a small room called a "cella defrutaria." Most balsamic vinegars are made in specific regions of Italy, like Modena for example, with these vinegars being aged up to 3 years.

The use of vinegar spread during the Middle Ages, and by the 14th century during the historical transition to the Renaissance, eating habits experienced a significant revolution. New food trends in Italy began to spread across Europe, from the tables and simple culinary traditions of the common people to those of the wealthy, including the use of balsamic vinegar as a refined concentrated syrup that flavored many dishes.

Oil and Vinegar continued

Authentic “traditional” balsamic vinegar comes from the “must” of grapes solely from the province of Modena and Reggio Emilia, and carry the PDO mark (Protected Designation of Origin). The uniqueness of authentic balsamic vinegar comes from its main ingredient – Trebbiano or Lambrusco grape “must.” Genuine balsamic vinegar is derived solely from these grapes, whereas commercial types include wine vinegar and caramel coloring. With authentic balsamic vinegar the “must” is slow cooked and then aged in a sequence of wood barrels, each barrel contributing to the vinegar’s unique aroma and flavors. If you want the highest quality balsamic vinegar, look for the DOP (Denominazione di Origine Protetta) seal on the bottle, which certifies and guarantees the product’s authenticity and production methods. The aging of balsamic vinegars can vary, from as little as 60 days to 3 years for Modena PGI and from 12 to 25 years for the “Extravecchio, with the Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Modena or Reggio Emilia PDO up to an indefinite age (as much as 100 years). DOP balsamic vinegars are aged for a minimum of 12 years, while IGP (Indicazione Geografica Protetta) vinegars have less stringent production requirements and can be aged for just 2 months. Though both varieties come from Modena, DOP is regarded as “the” authentic traditional product. Italy exports about 70% of the balsamic vinegar it produces...over 23 million gallons a year.



Olive oil and balsamic vinegar, whether used individually or combined, make for so many tasty treats and meals. Pour some olive oil in a dish, add some Italian spices, cut up some fresh, warm Italian bread for dipping and you have a delicious antipasto to savor...with a few olives on the side. Making a fresh salad to go with your dinner? Mix a little olive oil and balsamic vinegar for your dressing, a few twists of fresh pepper on

top and enjoy. Grilling vegetables? Olive oil and/or balsamic vinegar combined with a few spices and applied generously to the vegetables will give you wonderful results. Almost any entrée is better with olive oil. I once read that a favorite dish of Al Pacino is Spaghetti Aglio e Olio, prepared by his Nonna and Mamma just the way he liked it. This is a dish I have made myself, which I enjoy for both its simplicity and taste. Using only olive oil, garlic, parmesan cheese, red pepper flakes, and fresh parsley produces a truly delicious pasta dish. And to finish any meal, pour a little balsamic vinegar over vanilla ice cream, pound cake with strawberries, or almost any desert and enjoy the sweet and savory combination. These two products from Italy make everything delizioso!



CIAO Donates \$4,000 To IWC Scholarship Fund



For twenty-three years, the Cultural Italian American Organization (CIAO!) helped preserve Italian heritage and culture in the Madison area. Founded in 2001, the group quickly grew to over fifty members and was dedicated to engaging with the community through sales of freshly made cannoli at the annual IWC Festa Italia celebration, and a scholarship program for students studying in Italy.

CIAO! members voted to disband at the end of 2024, requiring them to donate the content of their treasury upon disbanding. At our recent IWC Christmas Party, Katherine Murray (past president) and Dick Murray (long time treasurer), on behalf of CIAO!, presented a \$4,000 check to outgoing IWC president, John Caliva and incoming president, Joe Tripalin. The money was deposited as a donation to the IWC Scholarship Fund and will be used for future scholarships. ■■

President's Message continued



Tourists in Venice

owner of **Viaggi di Gusto** and she leads four or five tours a year to Italy and also creates custom Italian travel itineraries. I'm sure her insights and travel tips proved helpful to some of our members.

Festa Italia is just three and a half months away as I write this in February. There will be a Sign Up Genius coming out and please sign up for a shift or two. This is the only time the club asks anything of you during the year and we really need your help to make this event happen. While we have made money at Festa the last few years, to me that is not the only goal of the event. We connect with the wider Dane County community and spread our Italian heritage to many attendees. It also offers the opportunity to work side-by-side with fellow members and your family members if they can help. These are important connections that are enhanced through your participation. Please do what you can to help with

Festa. Festa days are Saturday May 31st and Sunday June 1st with Friday as set up day and Monday as tear down day.

The metal plaque commemorating the inclusion of our building-club-house on the **National Register of Historic Places** is complete. The IWC Council is working on setting up a date to place the plaque on the building and celebrate this wonderful honor. Please watch your email for an announcement of this event.

The Greenbush Bar is doing very well. Sam Brown reports that sales are above his expectations, and he has added Tuesdays for the Greenbush to be open. Now you will be able to visit the Greenbush from Tuesday through Saturday. As our tenant, it is comforting to know that things are going well there.

Some final thoughts. Our men's club offers many ways for you as a member to be involved. We have many social activities and fun

things to do like making wine. We have an Italian language learning session once a month. Please get involved to help keep our club vibrant and growing. Speaking of growing, I would ask each of you to keep your eyes open for possible new members. If you have a friend with some Italian heritage, please share details about the club. You never know when someone might find this connection important to them or at least something interesting to learn more about. You are always welcome to bring a friend to a membership meeting so they can get a feel for the club.

Take care, be involved, and celebrate our Italian heritage...

Joe ■

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Jasper Vaccaro	24
Robert Brill	24
Ernesto Livorni	27
Andrew Salerno	28
Antonio Re	29

IAWC Birthdays

Cathileen Fridono, March 22

April

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Michael Schott	1
Mark Fumusa	5
Richard Baker	6
Bryan Remondini	12
Anthony DeGregoria	14
Mario Russo	14
John Caliva	15
Dominic De Rosa	15
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Things I didn't Know 4-A:

The Albanian influence, the Protestant Crusade in the Madison Italian community and the Italian Methodist Church.

Written and edited by Prof. Jim LeTourneau, IWC

In the previous two chapters of his Masters thesis, John Arthur Valentine wrote extensively of the work and influence the Neighborhood House of Madison and its “Americanization” efforts had on the Italian community. However, this wasn’t a singular effort. Another local institution designed for “Americanization” work was the Italian Methodist Church. It, too, was a product of the “Americanization” crusade of the early 20th Century in Madison. However, being a sectarian institution, it went one step further than Neighborhood House and endeavored to “Protestantize” as well as Americanize the local Italians. In time, the Church enjoyed great success in this endeavor with the Italo-Albanian immigrants. To understand why this occurred, Valentine went back several centuries and wrote about those peoples’ history, telling more “Thing’s I Didn’t Know”.

In the late 15th century, George Castrioti, often called “Scanderbeg”, an Albanian military leader and national hero, fought one of the most stubborn wars of



George Castrioti-Skanderbeg statue in Tirana, Albania

resistance in world history. For nearly 40 years, he and his sons staved off the invading soldiers of Ottoman Turkish Sultans Mehmet II and Bayezid II, trying to capture Albania and the rest of the Balkan peninsula. Because of Castrioti’s resistance, he helped save Christian Europe from Turkish conquest with the Pope calling him “the champion of Christendom”.

NOTE; Two branches of the Castrioti family still exist. One is in the city of Lecce in the Italian “heel”, the other is in Naples.

However, Castrioti was eventually defeated forcing him and his followers to evacuate Albania. In 1488, the King of Naples, Ferdinand I, out of a sense of appreciation, offered Castrioti, and

other Albanians who escaped the Turks, asylum in Southern Italy. The offer was readily accepted and these Albanians, who were originally of Greek descent, settled in over eighty villages of Southern Italy, mostly in the current regions of Abruzzo, Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily. The six main villages of Albanian settlement in Sicily included Mezzojuso, San Cipirello, Palazzo Adriano, Santa Christina Gela, San Giuseppe Jato and Piana dei Greci, later renamed Piana degli Albanese by Mussolini in 1941.

The Albanians were the fifth minority to settle in Southern Italy. They had been preceded by Ancient Greeks (*Magna Grecia*), Byzantine Greeks, the Saracens (*those who professed the Muslim faith*), and the Waldenses. Each of these groups established colonies in Southern Italy but, for various reasons, failed to survive with most being simply assimilated into Italian culture.

Note: The Waldenses were an early forerunner of the Protestant Reformation. After being branded as heretics by Pope Lucian III in 1184, they were expelled from Southern Italy and persecuted by

the Catholic Church before settling in the Alpine Mountain regions of France and Italy where church members still exist today.

Many of the Albanians were also assimilated, especially those who settled in areas of Abruzzo, Apulia and Campania. Because of modern communication and transportation, these Albanians were brought closer to Italians with the result that only vestiges of their original native culture remain.

Though John Valentine wrote his thesis words in 1964, my personal experience travelling in Sicily has shown that his comparative research observation of this ethnic group in "The Bush" over 60 years ago is pretty much the same today when compared to those Italo-Albanians still living in the "old country". Valentine wrote, "There still remain over 40 Italo-Albanian villages in Calabria, Basilicata and Sicily which have retained enough of their culture to be identified as a distinct ethnic group. For three reasons, Valentine wrote, they were able to retain their native Albanian heritage; 1) they lived in relative geographical isolation, 2) their culture did not arouse suspicion and, 3) they have an intangible desire to retain their identifiable cultural traits, especially their language."

Valentine continued, "even though the Albanians in Italy do constitute a distinct ethnic group, they have

been acculturated, in some degree, to their surroundings. For example, their housing, agricultural methods, diet and dress cannot be differentiated from those of the Italians. Moreover, they consider themselves to be Italians and have, historically, supported the Italian government. They fought with Garibaldi and later, in the Italian army, they served with distinction in Albania in both World Wars.

However, according to Valentine, one finds that under the Italian façade, their Albanian characteristics become quite evident with the most obvious being their use of the Albanian language, or Arberesh. In Sicily, the language they speak is 15th century Albanian, a dialect no longer spoken in present-day Albania. Nicholas Nasse, who wrote a 1964 research paper, "The Italo-Albanian Villages of Southern Italy" was quoted by Valentine, "...Italo-Albanian soldiers had difficulty conversing with the native Albanians during World War II because of this language difference. Apparently, Albanian, as spoken by Albanians in their country today, has evolved and changed in form. The language spoken by Italo-Albanians has remained relative unchanged for five centuries."

For the Italo-Albanians of Madison, it was difficult to retain their language because it was not taught in schools. Even sermons in

Mass at St. Joseph's Church were spoken for a long time in Italian, not Albanian. Albanian was only spoken at home. The same is true in the various Italo-Albanian villages in Italy. Italian is taught in schools, not Albanian and Italian is the language of trade and business, not Albanian. Yet, in Madison homes and those in Southern Italy and Sicily, the 15th Century Albanian was still spoken. This way, Albanian folklore and culture is passed down from one generation to the next. Valentine admitted he had never heard of Castrioti until he noticed books on Castrioti in homes of Madison's Italo-Albanians. He wrote, "it is not unusual for an Italo-Albanian child living in Southern Italy to know all about Castrioti. The same could be said about many second-generation Albanian-Italians of Madison. They learned about him at home".

"Language", wrote Valentine, "is also the one cultural trait which tied all Italo-Albanians together, providing a common bond and mutual identity with one another. Culturally, their language provided them with a unique sense of historical attachment to the past. Knowledge of a proud Albanian history gave them a sense of importance in a foreign Italian environment. But, the whole body of culture with which the Albanians identified could be lost if their language died. For this

Continued next page

reason, wrote Valentine, the desire to retain the language remained foremost in the minds of the Italo-Albanians. The same reason for retaining their language when they came to America in the 20th Century was probably the reason these Italian-Albanians in Madison remained speaking this language in their homes.

At the center of this preserved culture is the Greek Catholic Church. Originally, upon arriving in Italy in the 15th century, the Italo-Albanians agreed to the primacy of the Pope in Rome and not the Patriarch of Constantinople. In return, the Pope allowed the Italo-Albanians to celebrate Mass in the Greek rite rather than the Latin rite. Theologically, there is very little difference between the Greek and Roman Catholic Churches. However, in the Greek rite many religious practices of the Eastern Orthodox Church are retained. According to Valentine, “If an Italo-Albanian who followed the Greek Rite was to attend a service in an Albanian Orthodox Church, he would be in more familiar surroundings than in a Roman Catholic church in Southern Italy.

The connection is so close that many observers have mistaken Greek Catholic for Eastern Orthodox Churches. Angelina Paratore wrote in the Italian Leader newspaper in 1934 that “...it may be hypothesized that part of this mistake is based on the fact that Greek Catholic, like Eastern Orthodox

priests, wore beards”. Valentine added that “... he never talked to one Italo-Albanian in Madison who claims that their church in Sicily was Greek Catholic, nor did most recognize the difference between Greek Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox. What they did emphatically state is that their church was NOT Roman Catholic.

Like all churches in Southern Italy, the Greek Catholic Church is central to the Italo-Albanians' social life. Most of the unique religious customs and traditions observed during religious holidays, which distinguish this ethnic group from native Italians, are related to practices of the Eastern Orthodox Church. For example, the Italo-Albanians celebrate Easter with a midnight, candle-light procession through the town. When an Albanian girl is married, she wears a highly colorful and ornamental gown which is passed down for generations. This costume is also worn on special feasts days,



Piana degli Albanese bride

accompanied by traditional music and dance.

Note: Valentine wrote that he was shown one of these dresses in 1964 by the Paratore Family of Madison. Its estimated value in 1964 was \$ 1,200, about \$ 12,000 in 2025

While the Italo-Albanians became acculturated to some degree during their 500-year residency in Italy, the Southern area of the country provided them with a sanctuary where they continued practices that distinguished them from the Italians. Both Southern Italians and Italo-Albanians remain aware of their cultural differences.

Although these are not a source of extreme hostility, they did create mutual suspicion. This was evidenced even in the Madison Italian colony with the establishment of two, mutual aid societies, The Italian Workmen's Club for the Albanians and the Bersaglieri Club for the Sicilians.

As referenced in earlier chapters of Valentine's thesis, Madison's Sicilian-Italians overhearing local Italo-Albanians speaking in their native Arbëresh language, raised suspicions. The establishment of two basic neighborhoods within a few blocks of each other in "The Bush" also pointed to cultural differences as did the building of two different churches offering religious services to the two groups.



2nd Neighborhood House

In interviews with Madison Italians, Valentine was told that in Southern Italy and Sicily, Italians referred to the Italo-Albanians as “Ghegi”, a term which means distrust. The Italo-Albanians referred to the Italian as a “Latino”, a term which conveyed inferiority. Valentine admitted that he had heard of the term “Ghegi” used in the Madison Sicilian colony, but never the Italo-Albanians referring to the Italians as “Latino”. Because of this sense of superiority, Valentine was told, the “Ghegi” have, for the most part, kept their stock pure over a 500-year span while living in Italy. This superior attitude, too, enabled them to resist complete Southern Italian acculturation.

This maintenance of their native culture in an isolated mountain village would not be difficult to understand. But in Piana degli Albanese it is, according to Valentine, somewhat remarkable. Located about 25 miles south of Palermo and situated near a major, north-south highway (SS 624), this town has been in constant contact with the larger outside Italian

community. It is one of Sicily’s major tourist attractions based on the number of transplants to other countries. The inhabitants of Piana degli Albanese have been able to retain their native Albanian culture while developing “resistance” as a way of life.

NOTE: I have observed, in my past visits to the area, that many in Piana don't know where places like, St. Louis, Denver, Tampa,



Detroit or Minneapolis are. However, they know where Madison is since many of their relatives moved there a century ago while their descendants often make a pilgrimage from Madison back to their “old home village”

This long-standing tradition

of resistance caused these people to incur the wrath of certain vested powers of Italy. For example, the Mafia was not able to establish much foothold in Piana. As early as the 1890’s, the people of Piana sided with the Fasci Movement (*workers and peasants against*

landowners and the government over land usage and wages). During World War II, the people of Piana resisted the Fascist government and aided the Allies when they invaded Sicily in 1943. In the late 1940’s through the 60’s, the citizens of Piana voted leftist or communist in spite of violent reprisals from the ruling Mafia-Landlord coalition, which included the 1947 massacre of 11 peasants during a May Day celebration at Portella della Ginestra. The outlaw, Salvatore Giuliani, was blamed for the shooting, but many believed it was backed by the Mafia along with some local politicians and area landowners.

Most of the Albanians in Madison

Portella della Ginestra

were from Piana dei Greci (Piana degli Albanese) and some of the nearby villages. Upon arriving



into the U.S. many first went to the sugar fields of Louisiana, where work was plentiful and the climate similar to their homeland. However, their social and economic status was on a level equal to, if not lower than, that of the free

Blacks. For this reason, many left the fields and migrated to urban New Orleans where job opportunities were greater. A lesser number of the original sugar field workers instead migrated to Chicago where an Albanian colony was forming on the city's north side.

NOTE: Today there are number of Italo-Albanian Americans still in New Orleans with many Madison Italo-Albanians having relatives there. This includes Madison's Schiro family who's relative, Victor Hugo "Vic" Schiro, was Mayor of New Orleans from 1961 to 1970. His best-known achievements included getting the New Orleans Saints NFL team to



3rd Neighborhood House

the city and helping with plans to get the Superdome built near the French Quarter.

In keeping with their history in Sicily, the Madison Albanians remained apart from the Sicilians who were also coming

to Madison. As mentioned in chapter 2 of Valentine's thesis, in the first decade of its existence in Madison, the Italian colony had evolved a distinct social pattern. The Albanians formed their own neighborhood, living mostly on Regent, Murray and Spring Streets. Not unexpectedly, they did not join in any large number the existent Catholic Church, either the Sicilians' St. Joseph's or the nearby St. James Churches. It was inevitable that they would desire their own church.

The precise reason they did not form their own Greek Catholic Church is unknown. In his research, John Valentine came up with a plausible answer. First, the Albanians were smaller in number than the Sicilians, only about one-third of the total population of the Madison Italian colony. Consequently, they didn't possess the financial strength necessary to erect their own building. Second, their ranks were further depleted because some Albanians began attending the Catholic Church. The two religions are similar, and St. Joseph's was located in the Albanian neighborhood, a half-block south of Regent St. Services and sermons were conducted in Italian which the Albanians understood and St. Joseph's had an Italian immigrant priest, Father Angelo Simeoni. The only reason that more didn't join St. Joseph's was because Roman Catholic practice was strange to them.

Third, the Albanians wished to remain apart from Sicilians. In any event, those that did join St. Joseph's further depleted the ranks of the Albanians, lessening their chances of constructing a Greek Catholic Church.

NOTE: There was no Greek Orthodox Church in Madison until 1951 when the Assumption Greek Orthodox Church was formed. It first held services at Grace Episcopal Church on the Capitol Square before purchasing Bashford Methodist Church at 7th Street and East Washington Ave. where it still holds Greek Orthodox services to this day.

According to John Valentine, his research drew the opinion that approximately 80 percent of the local Albanians had no church of their own. Valentine wrote that he reviewed the membership list of St. Joseph parishioners during the years 1916 to 1921, finding about 80 percent of Albanian family names were missing. This void of having no church was later filled by the Italian Methodist Church which played a crucial role in the lives of the Madison Albanians. It tended to their spiritual and material needs by combining both into an Americanization program.

It is generally agreed that the Albanians more quickly and easily adjusted to American life than the Sicilians. Marjorie McFeters, in her own UW-Madison Masters

thesis in 1956, "The Role of a Settlement House in Neighborhood Development", wrote that "...residents of the Madison Italian community remember the Albanians as a superior class, who adjusted to American life with comparative ease". This does not mean that in the long run the Albanians made a better adjustment than did the Sicilians. The only difference between the two is that it took the Sicilians longer. However, ten years later, John Valentine opined that the Sicilians were far outstripping the Albanians in business and educational success.

The explanation for this "time lag", according to Valentine, could be found in the two groups' different churches. The Albanians' church, to their good fortune, was primarily designed for Americanization work. In terms of adjusting to the New World, this gave the Albanians a distinct advantage over the Sicilians. One graphic example illustrated this point. Most of the local Sicilians attended St. Joseph's Catholic Church which was, in short, according to Valentine, an old-world institution transplanted on new soil. Notwithstanding the aid it rendered in giving spiritual guidance as well as a sense of comfort and security to the Sicilians, the Church did very little, if anything, to hasten the Americanization process.

In another example, wrote Valen-

tine, St. Joseph's grade school at the time was definitely inferior to Madison's public schools. In its four-room building, eight grade classes split each of the rooms; first and second in one room, third and fourth, fifth and sixth, seventh and eighth grade in the other three rooms. The Albanians had no parochial school, so their children attended American public schools, either Longfellow, Draper or Washington elementary, where they learned American values and cultural patterns more quickly than the Sicilian children attending St. Joseph's. Thus, in the drive to become Americanized, the Sicilians had to overcome their church, while the Albanians' Church gave them invaluable Americanization assistance. If the Catholic Church was oblivious to any role it might play in Americanizing its parishioners, the Italian Methodist certainly was not.

In fact, it would appear from contemporary literature that the Methodist church's reason to exist was Americanization work. According to Valentine, he opined the Methodist church was hard pressed to discover what it believed its religious role to be. However, a passage from an annual report from 1920 written by Ernest Clark about the Methodist Church's growth and plans read, "To Evangelize is to Americanize...to Americanize we must Evangelize". Thus, Americanization and Christianization,

according to Valentine, were one and the same. In the rhetoric of the day, it was another way of saying..." in order to be an American, one had to be a Protestant"

When put in context with the times, these sentiments were not uncharacteristic. The Italian Methodist Church was organized at exactly the same time that the national Americanization crusade was reaching its crescendo. Thus, the Methodist Church would be an exception to the rule if it didn't sincerely believe that by serving as an Americanization agency it was providing an institution "where many would learn the ways of democracy and the kingdom (of God)." In 1914, an Italian Mission was founded in Madison by Presbyterians with assistance of the local Baptists, Congregationalists and Methodists. Two years later, in April 1916, the Official Board of the Madison Methodist Church decided in favor of assuming the leadership of the Italian mission. Although the Church was never wealthy, it was able to sustain itself with the cooperation of the Protestant community. This financial aid was bolstered by members of the academic community of UW-Madison. The Italian Methodist Church was thus organized in 1916, a product of the total Protestant community of Madison.

As one might imagine, the Sicilians'

Continued next page

response to the Church was not exactly hospitable. They not only refused to join it, they openly resented it being established in their neighborhood. That neighborhood was centered along South Lake and Milton Streets. It used various rooms in the neighborhood to meet and later, was granted access to the Trousdale Methodist Church on the far South Side. In 1922, a church was eventually built at the corner of Milton and South Lake Streets, an almost exclusively Sicilian section of the Italian colony.

For the Albanians, this was an uncomfortable location as they had to cut through the Sicilian neighborhood to attend church. Carrie Henderson, a church Deaconess documented a brief history of the Italian Methodist Church in 1945. She wrote "...Children came to Sunday School crying because the Catholic children made fun of them and threw stones and sticks at them for coming to a Protestant church".

Sicilian aversion to the Church took other forms as well. Insidious rumors were spread that it was the devil's church and little children were told they would burn in hell if they so much as entered it. Other manifestations of the Sicilians' profound dislike of the Church took more violent forms. Church worker Carrie E. Adams, in her 1923 history of the Church, "Report of the Italian Work in Madison", wrote "...there were incidents of the Church's windows being broken by flying objects, reportedly being thrown

by Catholics...another time a bomb was placed in an adjoining building and its explosion broke or cracked every window in the Church". *In fairness to the Sicilians, John Valentine added that he was quite convinced the bombing was intended to wipe out a competing bootlegger who was housed and operating in the adjacent building... and that if the Sicilians wanted to blow up the church, they would have placed the bomb inside the church, not next door. The culprits were never caught.*

In time, the Sicilian's hostility toward the Church subsided. Yet, the Sicilian's actions, according to Valentine, proved they would never accept the Church. Although the Methodist Church might have been anathema to the Sicilians, it had one redeeming quality for the Albanians: it provided them an opportunity to have their own religious institution. It would provide an agency whereby they could remain segregated by choice, just as they had in the "old country". The Methodist Church had other appealing qualities as well; it was located within the settlement and, after 1917, it was directed by Italian ministers.

Surprising as it might seem, Methodism incorporated many characteristics which the Italo-Albanian immigrants could associate with the practice of their Greek Catholicism in Sicily. Whereas Roman Catholic Sicilians thought it was sacrilegious for their



priests to marry, Greek Catholics were accustomed to this practice. Nor were the Italo-

Albanians disturbed when their Methodist ministers wore street clothing outside the Church, since this, too, was a custom of Greek Catholic priests.

NOTE: In travels overseas, especially in Sicily and Greece, I have seen Orthodox and Greek Catholic priests wearing regular street clothing or all black cassocks with a black cylindrical hat called a kalimavkion accompanied by their wives who are wearing colorful but modest skirts or slacks, blouses or sweaters, similar to what you would see worn by any woman out for a stroll or shopping at a Mall.

Similarities also existed between a Methodist service and a Greek Catholic Mass. In both religious services, the congregation would respond in the vernacular (language) of their clergyman, English, Italian or Albanian. Not until after Vatican II, in November 1964, was the Roman Catholic Mass spoken in the vernacular of the country. Before that, only Latin. Both Greek Catholics and Methodists received wine, as well as bread, during communion. *Note: Because*

Leave a Legacy

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.

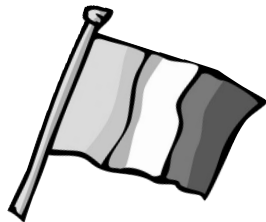
Imagine what your gift can do to help the club and in turn help our efforts to provide scholarships and to keep our Italian heritage relevant in today’s world. Certainly, no one likes contemplating their passing, but this is a positive step you can take to make a difference and leave a legacy to your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



abstinence is preached in many Methodist churches, juice is usually substituted for wine.

Theologically, of course, the Greek and Roman Catholic faiths are very close while both being quite dissimilar from Methodism. However, few Italian immigrants were aware of theology, let alone concerned about it. While Madison’s Italian Methodists were unaware of the external similarities which existed between their Protestant religious practice and Greek Catholicism. In building their own church, their hierarchy attempted to appeal to the Italian’s traditions.

In our next chapter of “Things I Didn’t Know”, 4-B, we’ll look at the work of the Rev. Antonio Perroni, his Italian-Methodist Church and its effect on the Madison Italian community as a whole. John Valentine described Perroni as “the most important and colorful figure in Madison’s local Italian history”. Prof. Jim LeTourneau, IWC. ■



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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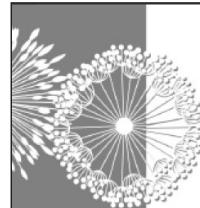
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