

CHARLES F. GOULD

Portland Italians, 1880-1920

NO MATTER HOW AMICABLY a new way of life may present itself, the tried and true, the traditional, the comfort found in association with one's "own kind," is almost always preferred.¹ So it was with Portland's Italians, especially during the period of their greatest influx to the United States—1880 to World War I. The three significant questions that arise concerning Portland's Italian population are: From what specific region in Italy did they emigrate? Why did they choose Portland? And what did they do when they got here?

Italian immigration to the U.S. before 1880 was hardly more than a trickle; it reached an unprecedented peak from 1902 to 1914, and by 1916 reverted to a trickle again. Between 1887 and 1916, 3,984,976 Italians arrived in the United States.² Good reason for this exodus from their native land was the Malthusian contention of population pressure on the means of subsistence, nowhere in Europe more apparent than in southern Italy and Sicily. The adversities that beset these agricultural regions were overwhelming in their severity and number: insufficient rainfall a perennial problem, obsolete farming methods, semifeudal proprietors who neglected the interests of their tenants, a general failure of absentee landlords to return profits to the land, government monopolies, heavy taxes and usury. And there was unrestrained deforestation which fostered erosion, flooding and malaria.³ A series of natural disasters throughout the 19th century, culminating with the catastrophic earthquake, tidal waves,

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2. Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of our Times* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1919), 32.

3. *Ibid.*, 44-82.



Above, boarding house of Abramo and Giuseppina (2nd from left) Cereghino, 326 S.W. Front St., in 1890s (see p. 249). Pine tree was landmark for newly arrived Italians. (Courtesy Eda Zolezzo.) Below, new truck for Italian Delicatessen & Grocery Co., 1915. Left to right, John Quilici (owner), unidentified man with barrel, Lorenzo Giusti, "Rosino" Martini, Italo Montecarlo, and Battista Giannini. (Courtesy Al C. Giusti.)



and fires of Dec. 28, 1908, were without precedent in the history of Europe.⁴

Under such circumstances one might readily agree that "of all the consequences . . . the most serious was probably psychological, the creation of a mood of helplessness, even worse, of apathy, restraining at once the impulse to progress and the energies needed for accomplishment."⁵ This would certainly seem the natural effect of such an enormity of setbacks. But the southern Italian did not become apathetic, he did not lose his impulse to progress, he did not lack energy or the will to accomplishment. He emigrated. He emigrated not to escape his inhospitable country, but to provide for himself and his family by obtaining much needed money before returning home. It is a phenomenon of Italian emigration that nearly half returned home.⁶ These "birds of passage" were intent on acquiring a nest egg. "Italians are not imitators of the Puritans, who came to America to find political and religious freedom. They came for bread and butter."⁷

Although history and the elements have been kinder to the north Italians than to those from the south, they have hardly been benevolent. The conditions were similar in the north, only less magnified. Many northerners found surcease in seasonal agricultural and industrial jobs in nearby European countries, especially France and Switzerland. By this time, too, northern Italians had begun to develop their own industries. Had this not happened when it did, the north could easily have lost as many of her citizens as did the south.⁸

American industrialists recognized Italy as a great labor pool. They sent agents there with prepaid tickets to induce workers to come to the United States. Foreign and Italian shipping companies set up their own "go now, pay later" plans.⁹ Between 1895 and 1914 almost all an Italian needed to get to America was the will to go.

4. *Oregonian* (Portland), Dec. 29, 1908.

5. Foerster, *op. cit.*, 63.

6. George M. Stephenson, *A History of American Immigration* (Boston, 1926), 67.

7. Enrico C. Sartorio, *Social and Religious Life of Italians in America* (Boston, 1918), 16.

8. Foerster, *op. cit.*, 106-26.

9. *Ibid.*, 474-89.

With the outbreak of World War I (1914), an Italian royal decree suspended the emigration of all men of military age. The year 1914 saw the last large Italian disembarkation on the eastern shore of the United States—292,414.¹⁰ The low total the following year was 57,217.¹¹ The U.S. Congress abetted the Italian decree of 1914 by passing, over the President's veto, a law prohibiting the entrance of illiterate aliens into the United States. The flood of immigration was dammed even more by further restrictive legislation after 1920.

The major ports of call for many shipping lines were Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Into these industrial cities the predominantly rural Italians disembarked. Here in this country, coming together for the first time, were the "intelligent Neopolitan," the "warm-hearted Sicilian," the "aristocratic Piedmontese," the "industrious Lombard," the "artistic Venetian," the "frugal Tuscan," and the "dignified Roman."¹² These Italians settled in colonies within the cities, and were further divided into sections according to their home region.

Like all foreigners, they prefer to be among their own, not so much from a feeling of clannishness, although that is not absent; but because among their own, they are safe from that ridicule which borders on cruelty, and with which the average American treats every stranger not of his complexion or speech.¹³

This sort of treatment made the Italians balk at venturing into farming areas where they might become isolated, and is indeed a sad commentary upon America's lack of preparation to assimilate the hundreds of thousands of Italian farmers we welcomed to our shore. As it was, they worked in the major cities doing the most menial kinds of labor. Finding security in numbers, Italians were "willing to go to remote places, to give up all thought, for a time, of a fixed home, or have been ready to toil long hours for a wage that allows only a pinched and stunted living."¹⁴ Thus thousands were employed cheaply on work-gangs all over the country—especially on the railroads.¹⁵

10. *Ibid.*, 15-18.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Sartorio, *op. cit.*, 36-39.

13. Edward A. Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant* (New York, 1906), 263.

14. Foerster, *op. cit.*, 402-403.

15. *Ibid.*, 357-58.



Above, view over southwest Portland, 1920s. Many houses in foreground were occupied by Italians and Jews. Trolley car trestle spans Marquam Gulch, where city dump was located (see p. 250). Upper end of trestle is S.W. 4th and Sheridan. (Boychuk Col., OHS.) View below at S.W. 5th and Baker, with dump pit lower left (now Duniway Park), c. 1920. (Courtesy Don A. Casciato.)



It was the railroad that was most significant in Italian settlement of the Pacific Northwest. But it was not the sole inducement to settlement; work on the railroads got Italians to Oregon, but climate and good farmlands convinced them to stay.

Since the first American beheld the Oregon Country, there has been a continuing, almost hyperbolic, extolling of its climate, meadows, woods and streams. The propagandizing was most often directed toward the farmer. Retired trappers and zealous missionaries were the first to turn Oregon sod and in a short time became successful farmers; for decades to come, Oregon remained synonymous with fertile, free land.

Once under way, there was a steady migration to Oregon, but it was never the flood envisioned, probably because of the periodic gold and silver discoveries in neighboring California, Idaho, Washington, Nevada, and not too distant Montana. As adventurers were skirting Oregon's boundaries in search of mineral wealth, a *Morning Oregonian* editorial in 1871 was reassuring its readers that

the people now coming among us in such large numbers are not roving adventurers looking for sudden fortune and irking at the slower but more sure and useful methods of industry; but they are the substantial, industrious people of the country, who come here expecting to make homes and be content with the quiet prosperity which their industry will bring them.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the "substantial, industrious people" were not moving into Oregon swiftly enough to satisfy the established businessmen and politicians of the infant state. By legislative act of Oct. 28, 1874, the Board of Immigration Commission was created.¹⁷ The commission was financed by the state, Portland businessmen, and a number of transportation companies. The purpose of the commission was to promote Oregon through the free distribution of circulars and pamphlets. The Board of Immigration Commission also set up 24 special commissions: two each in New Zealand and Canada, 10 in Europe, and 10 in the United States.¹⁸ As recently as 1913, the Oregon State Immigra-

16. *Oregonian*, April 28, 1871, p. 2.

17. *Ibid.*, Sept. 14, 1876, p. 3.

18. *Ibid.* See also Lancaster Pollard, "The Pacific Northwest: A Regional Study," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, LII (December, 1951), 232-33n9.

tion Commission—a descendant of the previous board—undertook a study. It concluded that colonies of immigrants within the state were “serious minded, earnest, thrifty . . . each colony . . . made up of people speaking the same foreign language, is anxious to add others of the same blood and faith to its members, and in this way many of the most desirable settlers are attracted here from abroad.”¹⁹ The commission called on the various local alien societies to assist it in proselyting “desirable” foreigners; however, they resolved to “conduct its first works among Germans and Scandanavians.”²⁰

It adds little to Oregon’s credit, indeed to the United States as a whole, to say that at that time anti-Italian, anti-Jew, anti-Chinese, anti-Catholic, and anti-alien feelings in general ran high. “America for Americans” became the full-throated cry from coast to coast; if foreigners were to come, they must be the right kind.

Still the Italian came; he wanted work, he needed work, and America had plenty of jobs available. In Oregon he worked on railroads, in mills, in lumber camps, and on great roads like the Columbia Highway. In Portland he laid rails for both steam and electric cars, laid pipe for sewers and gas companies, and constructed buildings and streets; he worked wherever he was offered a job—he was offered less pay, so he worked for less pay.²¹

It must not be supposed that Italians suddenly appeared in Oregon en masse during the height of their exodus from Europe. Italians have been among Oregon’s earliest pioneers. Between 1844 and 1847, there were no fewer than six Italian-born pioneer priests.²² In the late 1840s an intrepid Genoese, Antonio deMartini, wandered north into Oregon from the California gold fields. Foraging along the way, he subsisted for a while on wild duck eggs. He went back to Italy never to return to the United States, but tales of his adventures in the new country were enough to incite his son, Raffaele, to come and settle in Portland in 1901.²³

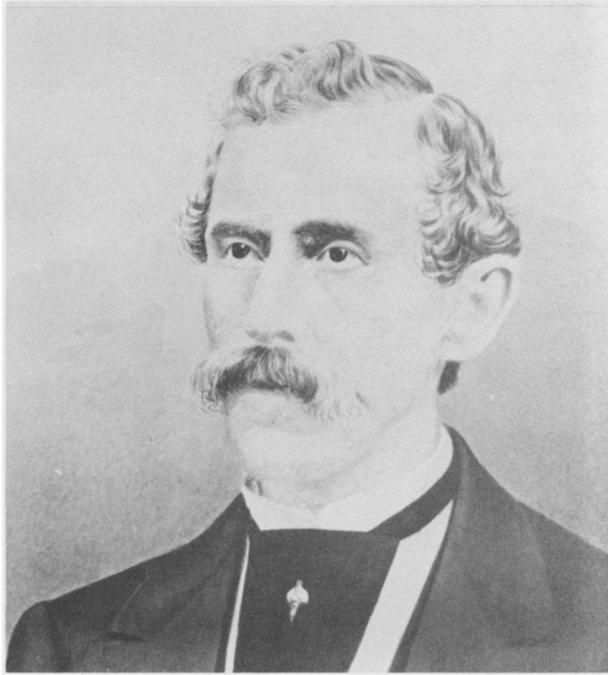
19. *Catholic Sentinel* (Portland), April 24, 1913, p. 8.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Interviews with Jerome Colasuonno and Sam Simonatti, May, 1971.

22. *Catholic Sentinel*, March 7, 1901, p. 7.

23. Interview with Mary DeMartini, May, 1971.



Samuel N. Arrigoni. (Sketch in OHS Cols.)

The earliest account we have of a successful Italian businessman in Portland is that of S. N. Arrigoni—born Milan in 1821. After a career as a seaman—he was chief officer aboard a steamship running between Panama and San Francisco—he came with his wife to Portland in 1856.²⁴ The Arrigonis opened a restaurant and later owned and operated the Pioneer Hotel on the corner of Front and Washington streets. An advertisement in the *Portland Register* (1863) announced: “This is the oldest established hotel in Portland. . . . The Pioneer Hotel is the largest in the State. It has ample accommodations for Three Hundred Guests.” The hotel’s name was soon changed to Arrigoni’s Hotel.²⁵ Sometime in 1869 S. N. Arrigoni sold his hotel and moved to Astoria, where he became one of that city’s prominent citizens. With the

24. Joseph Gaston, *Portland, Oregon: Its History and Its Builders* (Chicago, 1911), Vol. II, p. 753.

25. *Portland Register* (1863), an annual publication of Portland’s residents, businesses, clubs, organizations, etc. Arrigoni was one of the five original directors of the Portland and Milwaukie Macadamized Road Company. *Ibid.*, 1864, p. 10.

assistance of four other men, he is credited with forming "Astoria's first permanent organization for fire protection."²⁶

A check of the *Portland Registers* of the 1860s and 1870s will show that a dozen or so Italians came to Portland and set up businesses—groceries, a fish market, and a fruit store—but they stayed only one or two years and left, never to return.

DeMartini, Arrigoni, and the Ferrera brothers can be considered the vanguard of northern Italians, and of Italians in general. The *Portland Register* lists another DeMartini in 1880; Dotta and Mari in 1884; DeBenedetti and Cereghino in 1885; Boitano in 1890; all from northern Italy—Liguria.²⁷ In 1888, possibly the first southern Italian (excluding the pioneer priests who in most cases were sent here), a Sicilian, appeared: Frank Amato, a 14-year-old railroad laborer.²⁸

The railroads ended Oregon's isolation. The trains brought thousands of people whose national origin was quite different from those already here; and yet, between 1845 and 1885 the culture that developed in Oregon was "largely local and more 'characteristic' than would seem likely in a community composed of people from many regions and several nations."²⁹

In 1880, there were 30,503 foreign born living in Oregon; by 1910, 113,136.³⁰ In 1900, Oregon had 1,014 foreign-born Italians; in 1910, Oregon had 5,538³¹ foreign-born Italians which was less than five per cent of the foreign born in the state and less than one per cent of the total population.³² Although a formal census of Portland Italians during these periods is non-existent, one source estimated that Portland had an Italian population of 10,000 in 1917.³³ The writer believes this to be an exaggeration, unless the total included children born here and also tallied individuals outside Multnomah County. The foreign born com-

26. Emma Gene Miller, *Clatsop County, Oregon: A History* (Portland, 1958), pp. 68-70.

27. Liguria confirmed in interviews with DeMartini, Colasuonno, and Simonatti.

28. Interview with Joseph P. Amato, May, 1971.

29. Pollard, *op. cit.*, 211.

30. *Ibid.*, 231.

31. Eliot Lord, John D. D. Trenor, and Samuel J. Barrows, *The Italian in America* (New York, 1905), 6; and Forester, *op. cit.*, 328.

32. Pollard, *op. cit.*, 219.

33. *Oregonian*, July 3, 1917, p. 1.

prised 16% of the state's population throughout the period 1880-1910.³⁴ And of the foreign born, those emigrating from Germany, Ireland, Canada, England, Scotland, Sweden, and Norway outnumbered Italians in that order.³⁵

Two Italian immigrants—one from the south and the other from the north—represent typical migrants. Frank Amato, age 14, left his family in a small town near Palermo, Sicily, and arrived in Toronto, Canada, in 1887. It was winter and he had never experienced such cold weather. He had heard of a construction job building a railroad line between Seattle and Portland and seized the opportunity when told the climate was considerably more agreeable. He worked but a few months for the railroad and saved enough money to move to Portland and enter the produce business. He saved more money, returned to Sicily, married, and then brought his bride to Oregon along with his three brothers and three sisters. Amato eventually became a prosperous produce merchant.³⁶

Sam Simonatti was born in Tuscany. He was a carpenter by trade, but could not, at first, follow his profession when he arrived in America because he did not know English and "because things were done so much differently in America. In Italy everything was done by hand—here, machine."³⁷ He crossed the continent by rail and settled in Tacoma in 1914. Simonatti soon got work with the railroad, and later worked with lumber companies and on road construction. Following the latter job he went into partnership with two fellow laborers. They chose Portland as a base for their new building company because it seemed to offer steady employment. He also went to trade school. Simonatti, now retired, whose self-employment started in 1918, owned and operated his own building company.³⁸ The accounts of these two immigrants are in no way exceptional among Portland Italians.

What was Portland like to a newly arrived Italian? Many were penniless, illiterate, and spoke only their native dialect. Chances are, if he arrived before 1890 he would have found very

34. Pollard, *op. cit.*, 231-32.

35. *Ibid.*

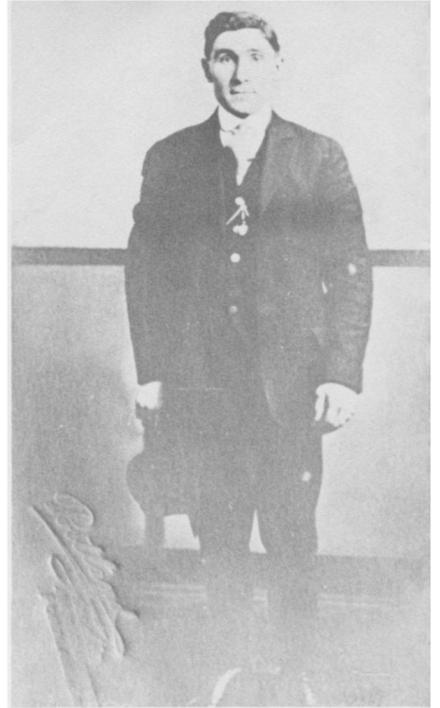
36. Interview, Amato.

37. Interview, Simonatti.

38. *Ibid.*

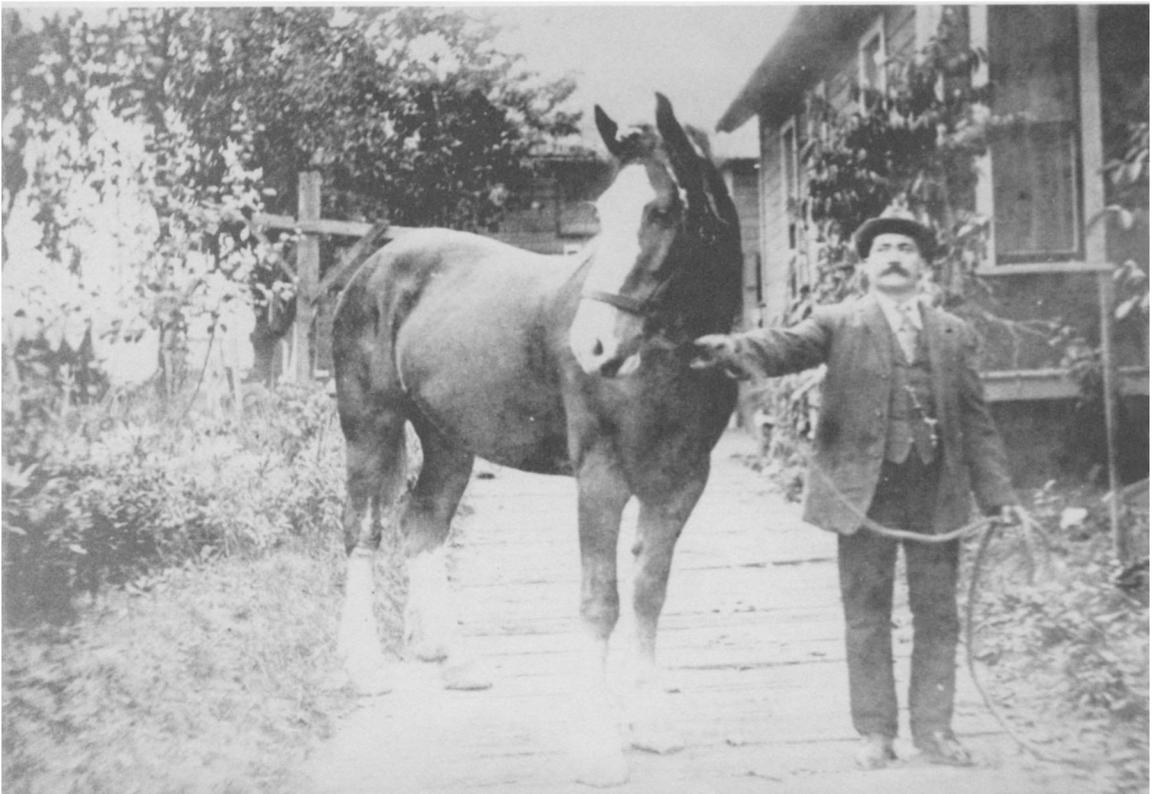


Above, Jerome Colasuonna and Vita Vitti's Garibaldi Grocery delivery truck. (Courtesy Col. Joseph Colasuonna, USAF (ret.).)



Right, Sam Simonatti, age 19, a year after he arrived in America. Photo taken in Tacoma, 1914. (Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Sam Simonatti.)

Below, Salvatore Dindia displaying fine horse he used to pull produce wagon through Portland streets, 1907. (This was the start of Pioneer Fruit Co., oldest continuous produce operation in Portland. In 1915 city had over 100 retail produce peddlers, mostly Italian. (Courtesy Gus Dindia.)



few of his paesani" (fellow countrymen), most of this small number from the north. He may have been awaited by an "amico" (friend) or "congiunto" (relative) who had sent for him. If he happened to arrive friendless there were a few boarding houses and hotels operated by Italians he could turn to. One such boarding house stood at 326 Front Street. It was operated by Abramo Cereghino, a Genoese. Angiolo Aletro owned and operated the Italian Hotel on the corner of Fifth and Pine streets.³⁹

Dotta and Mari were the proprietors of Campi's Hotel at 86 First Street. Campi's had, beside lodging, a saloon and a restaurant. The bill of fare included "Macaroni, Raviolli, Tagliarini, Lasagne, Spaghetti, and Risotto served in Italian Style."⁴⁰ At Campi's, the Italian Hotel, and Cereghino's, Italians could find agreeable company, familiar food, and share a common language. There were also many homes available to "pensionati" (boarders).⁴¹ With good fortune the newly arrived Italian would be offered a job; if not, he could buy one for \$3.00 at any number of private employment offices set up in the city.⁴² Vito Vitti's Garibaldi Grocery not only offered foods imported from Italy but it was also a free labor agency. Vitti placed Italians on railroad, lumber, and construction jobs as far away as Idaho from about 1910 through the 1920s. And these men, accustomed to Italian cuisine, ordered their groceries from the Garibaldi Grocery.⁴³

Wages lower than Americans received were paid to Italians everywhere throughout the country, and they took the job or the man standing behind them got it. Though treated unfairly, the men dug in, saved, settled down and became part of the growing city.

The 1883 *Portland Register* locates an "Italian Row" in East Portland on J Street (now Oak Street) between First and Second, and an "Italian Gardeners' Garden" ("near Car Shops") along the Willamette River at the foot of what is now Willamette

39. *Portland Register* (1892). See also *Oregon Journal* (Portland), April 29, 1970, Section II, p. 1.

40. *Portland Register* (1884).

41. *Portland Register* also lists occupations of Portlanders.

42. Interviews, Simonatti, Colasuonno, *et al.*

43. Interview with Col. Joseph Colasuonno USAF (ret), April, 1972. All further Colasuonno entries are Jerome's.

Street. Census reports do not list Italian names as residents in either "Italian Row" or "Italian Gardeners' Garden." Both areas were close to a number of railroad yards and the Italians in these areas may very well have been part of a mobile railroad labor gang.

The first Italian colony in the city was set up on the edge of the Portland city dump, situated on the present site of Duniway Park, south of S.W. Sheridan and west of S.W. Fourth Street. Italians were sparsely scattered throughout the city, but most were congested between S.W. Clay Street and the west end of the present Ross Island Bridge.⁴⁴ A second and third Italian colony grew up in the Parkrose and Milwaukie areas.⁴⁵ Many Genoese purchased inexpensive land in these areas which they brought under cultivation. Many of these farms are still producing, but their number is dwindling due to the relocation of industry, expansion of the Portland Airport, and housing developments.

The next sizable Italian colony within the Portland city limits rose on the east side of the Willamette River. Here some jerry-built rentals were thrown up in and around Ladd's Addition. These were occupied mostly by Italians. Sam Simonatti, beginning around 1918, tore down some of the rickety dwellings and replaced them with many of the fine substantial homes that presently stand in that area.⁴⁶ The colony on the east side of the river became, and still is, the largest in the Portland area. It extends from the Willamette River east to S.E. 50th Avenue. The northern edge is Hawthorne Boulevard and the southern edge is Powell.⁴⁷ Needless to say these boundaries are not definite. Within this colony were, and to some degree still are, pockets of family and of regional kinship.

The first colony, north and east of the dump, was predominantly northern Italians. The later arriving Italians, the southerners, came into the area as many of the northerners—the Genoese—moved further from the city into farming communities. Later, the east side colony drew many of the southerners from the west side into their area. In the east side, Italians were mainly

44. A check of Italians' addresses listed in *Portland Register*.

45. Interviews, Amato, Colasuonno, DeMartini, Simonatti, *et al.*

46. Interview with Anne Chiotti, May, 1971.

47. Interviews, Amato, Colasuonno, *et al.*



Early aerial view of Ladd's Addition (c. 1915?), where many prosperous Italians built family homes (see p. 252). Note furrowed fields and gardens. (OHS Cols.)

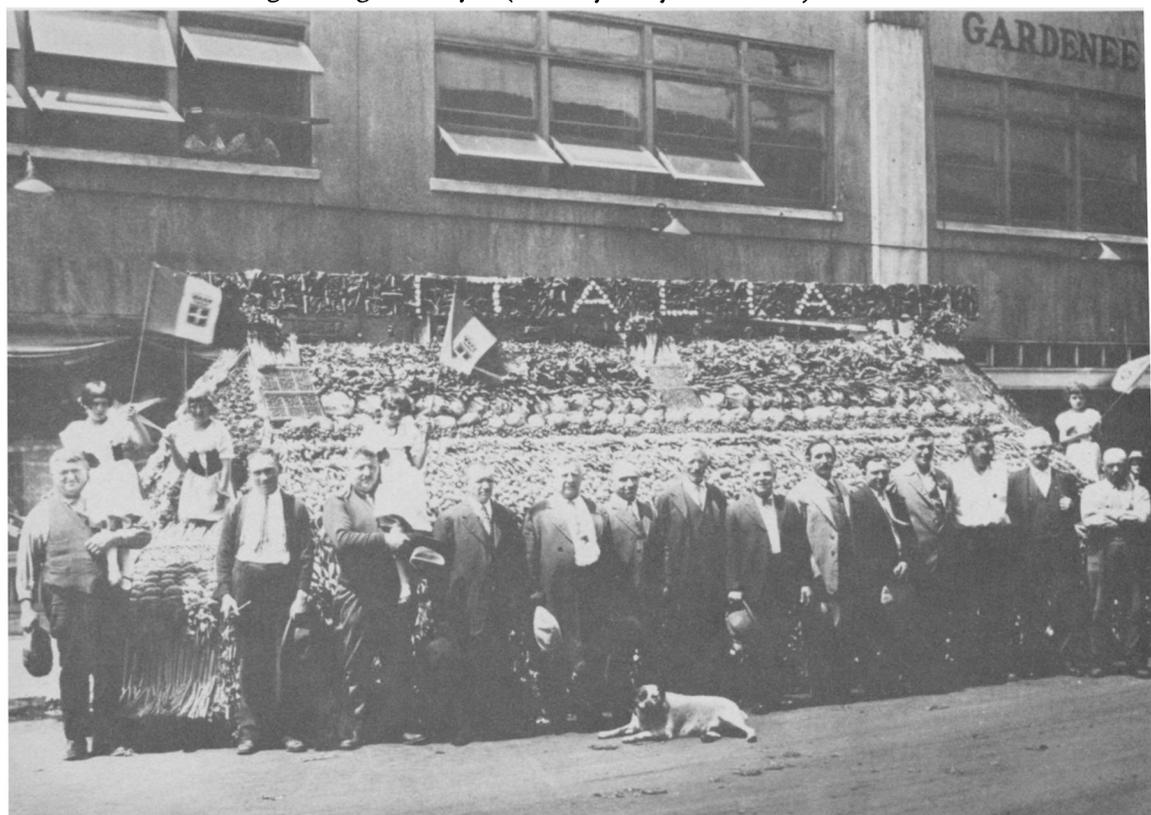
from Calabria, Abruzzi, Sicily, and some from Apulia, with a few Piedmontese, Ligurians, and Tuscans.⁴⁸ Very few from Lombardy, Latium, and Campania are found in Portland before 1920, and practically no representatives from Emilia, Venetia, Marches, Sardinia, Umbria, and Basilicata.

This is an interesting lacuna, for Basilicata, Campania, and Venetia, Lombardy, and Tuscany were well represented in the Italian exodus. One wonders why Portland failed to draw them. A general characteristic seems to have prevailed: the earliest arrival to get money ahead sent for his family, relatives, or friends

48. *Ibid.*



Above, truck farming at turn of century on the Rivelli and Montecucco farm, now Reed College campus. (Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bottaro.) Below, Italian Gardeners Association members and their float of vegetables, c. 1920s. Left to right, Raffaele DeMartini, Pietro Casinelli, Mike Zolezzo, William Semenza, Matteo Viganego, Charlie Cereghino, Lorenzo Semenza, Frank Spada, Giombattista Ratto, Jim Damonte, Giuseppi Cereghino, Tom Molinari, Luigi Figone, Francesco Molleta and Pietro Nave. Four girls' last names are Codino, Ratto, Vescogne, Calcagno. Dog is "Lady." (Courtesy Mary DeMartini.)



to join him; they in turn did likewise, and so on. It was not unusual for a whole village or town to become completely depopulated, and move to the United States where the people all settled together again.⁴⁹

Over 200 different family names extant in Portland before 1916 have been associated with their particular region in Italy.⁵⁰ From a list of 211 the following figures came to light: from Calabria, 62; Abruzzi, 35; Liguria, 29; Sicily, 27; Apulia, 11; Piedmont, 9; Tuscany, 7; and the rest distributed among the remaining regions.

These new citizens entrenched themselves in a variety of occupations even before the major building and construction jobs began to subside. The agricultural background of the majority of Italians stood them in good stead. The Genoese who moved out to Parkrose and Milwaukie worked diligently on their 10 and 15-acre truck farms.⁵¹ Many other Italians supplemented their incomes with small gardens in the city. Ladd's Addition was a giant farm made up of private individual gardens, the produce of which was for both home consumption and sale.⁵²

In addition to men who leased or owned farms . . . less prosperous arrivals rode streetcars to the end of the line and worked as much as twelve hours a day in the fields. . . . And young boys . . . worked mornings and after school cleaning out market spaces for producers who paid 15 cents a day for a five foot stall to the market master.⁵³

The produce stalls were arranged on the south side of S.W. Yamhill, between Third and Fifth streets.⁵⁴

The growers formed the Italian Ranchers and Gardeners Association and had their initial market on the west side just below the present site of the Civic Auditorium. It was a wooden

49. Telephone communication with Portland's Italian Vice-Consul, Dr. Luigi Giacometti, May, 1971.

50. The names are collected from a number of sources: old Portland newspapers, incomplete lists from Saint Michael's and Saint Philip Neri's Italian Catholic churches, the *Portland Register*, DAR Wills and Intestate Estate index files in the Oregon Historical Society library, and from interviewees, most especially Jerome Colasuonno, Sam Simonatti, and Mary Gallucci.

51. Interviews, DeMartini, Simonatti, *et al.*

52. Interviews, Simonatti, Colasuonno.

53. *Oregon Journal*, April 29, 1970, Section II, p. 1.

54. Interview, Amato.

structure built on pilings embedded in the bank of the Willamette River. Recurring high water weakened the building and plans for a new market on the east side of the river were under way in 1906. The new location would be more readily accessible to the growers. The new market covered a complete block. It was bounded by East Main, Madison, Third and Union. Here, in the pre-dawn hours, DeBenedetti, Fazio, Garbarino, Cereghino, Rossi, Spada, and other growers brought their produce to sell; any excess was put into wagons to sell throughout the city.⁵⁵ In 1908 the fruit and vegetable vendors also organized an association—*Unione Dei Rivenditori Di Frutta Ed Erbaggi*—union of and vegetable retailers, or vendors.⁵⁶

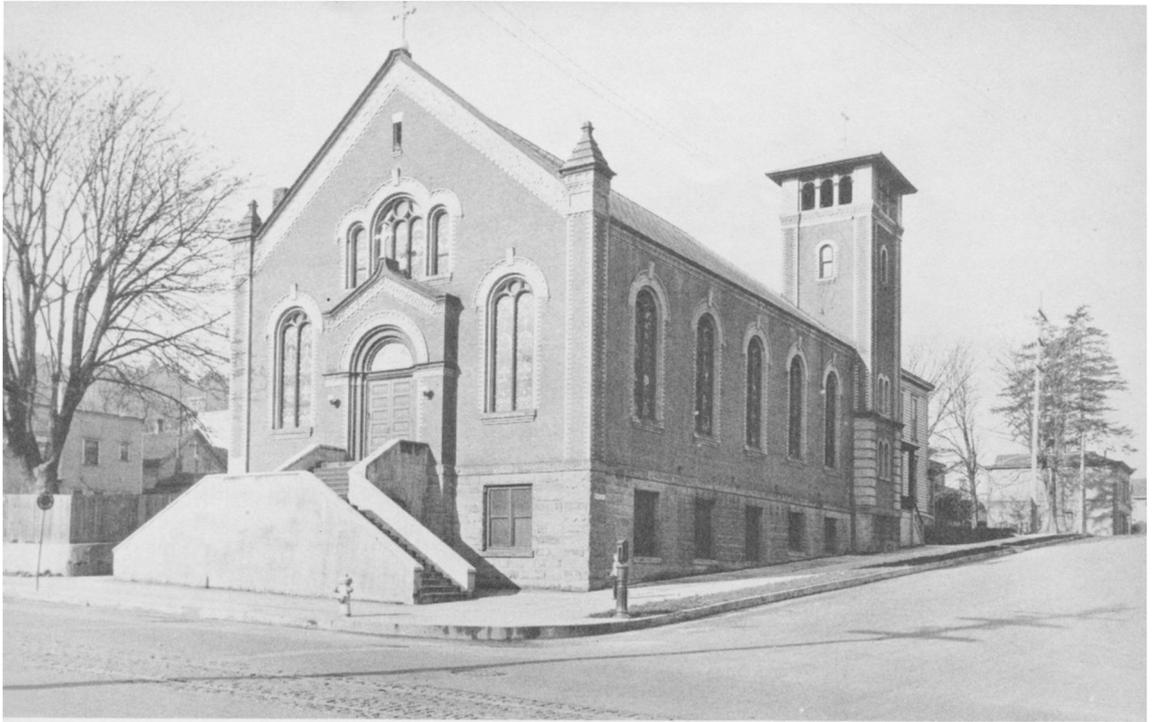
Italians fairly well captured all phases of the local fruit and vegetable market. But certainly not all Italians went into this field. Farming required a capital outlay that many did not have; it was slow and speculative, whereas day labor brought an immediate wage. Many of these laborers eventually formed their own companies. In the building trades we find Zanello, Simonatti, and Scopacasa; in construction, Caputo, Liberto, Casciato, Monaco and Constanzo. There were store owners and merchants—Vitti, Bonofiglio, Quilici, Colistro and Jachetta, Garbarino, Arighi and Marracci; importers—Giusti and Cecchini, Arrigucci and Bocci. Italian names soon began to appear in the professions; physicians, Candiani, Visetta, DeRosa; attorneys, Montrezza, Ferrera; police, Cordano; fireman, Favero; editors and publishers; Romano, Ferrera, and DeRosa; music teachers, Navoni and Taglieri. Roberto Corruccini was the conductor of the Portland Opera Association from 1916 to 1923. Some were able to practice their old-country skills in the new world—bakers, barbers, blacksmiths, tailors, stone masons, shoemakers, and cooks. Many became street vendors, garbage collectors, saloon keepers, and restaurateurs.⁵⁷

An example of the rapid success attained by Italians can be shown in the way they readily donated toward a relief fund to help ease the pain and misery caused by the great earthquake in

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. Randomly picked from early editions of *Portland Register*. Conductor Corruccini's name is extracted from notes on a book on opera the author is presently working on.



St. Michael's Church in early 1930s. Exterior remains unaltered. (OHS Cols.)

southern Italy and Sicily on December 28, 1908. The day following the disaster 14 Italian businessmen pledged over \$1,000 in relief.⁵⁸ In all, a collection of over \$7,000 was made throughout the city of Portland.⁵⁹

By 1895 there were enough Italians in Portland that they began preparations for building their own church.⁶⁰ The cornerstone of Saint Michael's was laid September 24, 1901: "*Chiesa Italiana di San Michele Arcangelo, Fabricata Della Colonia Italiana di Portland, Oregon, A 1901 D.*" The church and the cornerstone can still be seen at the corner of S.W. 4th and Mill. Its styling is Italianate inside and out, and its designation as an historical landmark was not without consideration of its serene beauty, as well as its age, heritage, and history.

Only 12 years after the building of Saint Michael's Church a second Italian church was constructed on the east side at S.E. 16th

58. *Oregonian*, Dec. 30, 1908, p. 1.

59. *Ibid.*, Jan. 7, 1909, p. 1.

60. Interview with Father Aldo Orso-Manzonetta, pastor of Saint Michael's Catholic Church (Portland), May, 1971.



Customary Sunday social of co-operative farmers and their families near N.E. Union and Columbia, 1911. (Courtesy Tom Molinari.)

and Division.⁶¹ This parish is Saint Philip Neri. The original church became the grade school gymnasium; a newer church was needed to accommodate the evergrowing congregation. A third Italian church was located at the corner of S.E. 18th and Tibbetts. This was the Baptist Italian Mission, the Rev. Francesco Sannella, pastor.⁶²

Wherever Italians have settled they manage to have an active social life. And children were very much a part of their gatherings; they were not left at home with a babysitter. There were always as many children as adults at dances, weddings, picnics and games. Every Sunday afternoon “*bocce bal*” games were played in an orchard near 52nd and Division—winners got to buy ice cream for the children.⁶³ The Italian gardeners were avid “*bocce bal*” players and Sunday tournaments were held at Montavilla, Parkrose, and other places too. There was the popular Saturday night dance in which gentlemen would politely remind each other when dancing with one another’s wife or girl friend, to “*balla senza maliza*” or dance without malice.⁶⁴

61. *Catholic Sentinel*, Oct. 3, 1912, p. 1.

62. *Portland Register* (1914).

63. Interview, DeMartini.

64. Interviews, DeMartini, Simonatti.

Picnics up the Columbia River by train or down the river by boat were major annual social events. These trips were sponsored by one or more of the many Italian lodges and the Gardeners Association. They were all-day excursions. More than 500 people floated up and down the river on the hired passenger ship *Swan*. Two bands accompanied dancers on the upper deck and the lower deck. Picnics were held ashore at Sauvie Island or Cascade Locks.⁶⁵

Italians are extraordinarily social and are often members of a number of clubs and societies, either as part of their church's religious activities or as an extension of their heritage. A good indication of the Italians' economic and civic progress is the number of clubs and societies that spring up in the community. In Portland there were many. Three major benevolent societies were established between 1880 and 1910 and they each lasted half a century or better: Columbia Lodge, 1889-1965; Bersaglieri Columbia Society, 1906-1963; and the Mazzini Society, 1908-1957.⁶⁶ These particular organizations were originally founded to assist Italians in financial straits, but they were also very active social clubs.

In 1916 the Italian-American Republican Club was formed, "with a membership of 500. The purpose of the organization is . . . to make American citizens out of Italian subjects living in Portland by bringing about the naturalization of many Italians eligible for citizenship."⁶⁷ (Also to vote Republican. The club assisted those who had not taken the initiative.)

The organization of United Italian Societies falls at the end of the period, Sept. 23, 1919.⁶⁸ It is interesting for two reasons: it offered a good opportunity for all of the clubs to pool their resources into a strong political bloc; and it shows vividly the Italian's willingness to unite and his inability to co-operate for long with fellow Italians. This federation of a dozen lodges and societies announced at its formation that "from now on, in the event of any communication of the Chamber of Commerce or

65. *Ibid.*, et al.

66. *Ibid.*, and Colasuonno.

67. *Oregonian*, Dec. 20, 1916, p. 7.

68. *Ibid.*, Sept. 23, 1919, p. 10.



Rose Festival Parade, Portland, 1917. (Courtesy Eda Zolezzo.)

other civic body regarding the participation of the Italian colony in matters of civic or public nature, the colony hopes that such communications will be addressed to the federation, and not to any individual claiming to represent the body.”⁶⁹

It was felt the various Italian groups were not pulling together for the benefit of all. It must be recalled that during the height of Italian immigration the people of Italy had been united into one country for only a few decades. Before 1860 Italy was divided into papal states, independent states, and foreign dominated kingdoms. And it was not until the annexation of Venetia in 1866 and Rome in 1870 that Italy became one. Adjustment to a feeling of a united Italy took time. Consequently, to many immigrants, they were Sicilians, or Tuscans, or Venetians first, and then they were Italians.

By the turn of the century an Italian disembarking in Portland would be comforted in knowing that his former countrymen had settled in earnest in this small corner of the United States. He would have found, already established, a church, a lodge, and definable Italian communities; he would note the industry of all and the success of many. For companionship and recreation he could visit the Italian Hall at the corner of S.W. Fourth and Hall

69. *Ibid.*

streets.⁷⁰ If he needed information or counseling in business matters he could stop by and talk with Louis Deluchi at the Italian Information Bureau at 324 Front Street.⁷¹ If he wanted medical attention or consular service he could go to the Italian consular agent, Dr. Charles Candiani.⁷²

When Italians first appeared in Portland they had to do without news from home except by mail. There were few among them who could read or write their own language, let alone English, but for those who could read, three Italian language newspapers were soon available. The *Italian Tribune* was founded in Seattle in 1889 and was distributed throughout the Northwest. It was edited in Portland by Albert Ferrera. The newspaper was printed in both Italian and English.⁷³ About 1910, Dr. DeRosa of Portland printed and published his own paper in English and Italian. He named it *La Stella* (The Star).⁷⁴

70. *Portland Register* (1914).

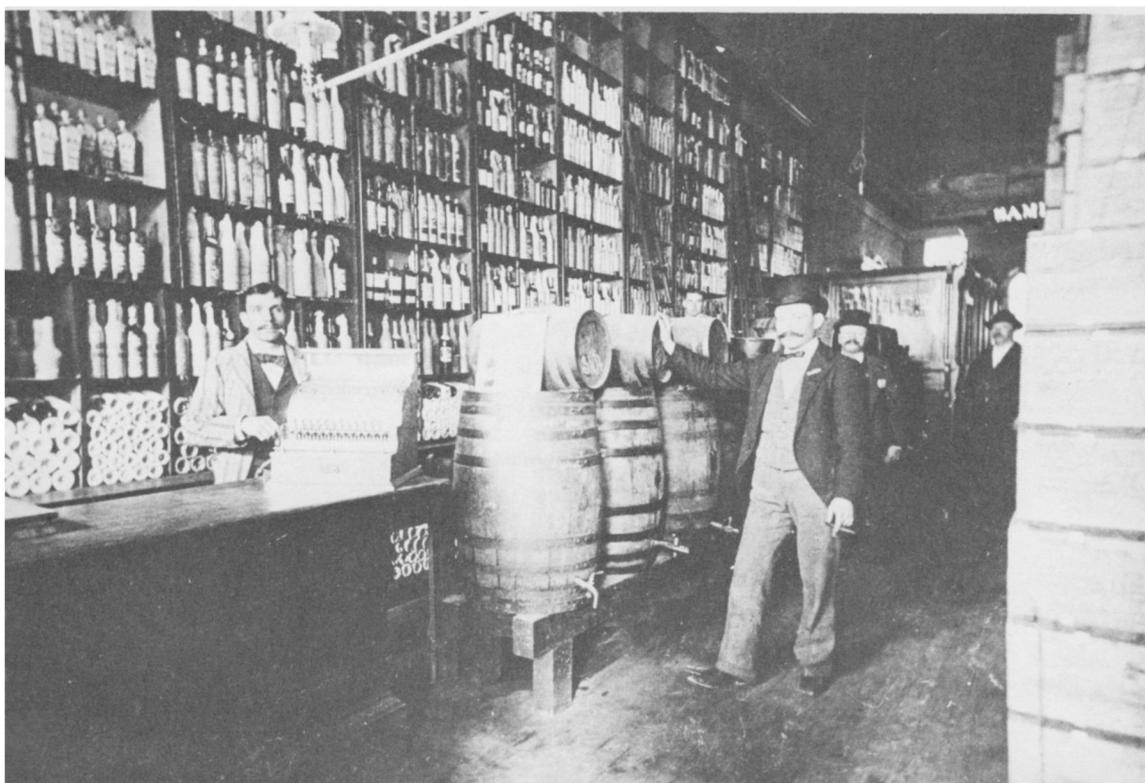
71. Interview, DeMartini.

72. Interview, Giacometti. Dr. Giacometti said that the Italian Consular Agency was inaugurated in 1908.

73. Interviews, Colasuonno, *et al.*

74. *Ibid.*

Interior of G. Arata and Co., wholesale liquor house at 1st and Main. Francesco Arata behind counter (c. 1890). (Courtesy Art Arata.)



And in 1917, *L'Asino* (The Donkey) was published in Italian only and edited by the Italian consular agent in Portland, Dr. Carlo Visetti. *L'Asino* editorials were strongly influenced by the ideology of the Italian government at that time and as a result, often clashed with the "Americanized Italian" editorials in Ferrera's *Italian Tribune*.⁷⁵ Ferrera and Visetti were enemies of long standing. In 1915 they had a memorable fight outside an Italian restaurant at First and Stark: "Each had a badly discolored eye and a bruised face at the conclusion of the encounter, when friends separated the pair."⁷⁶ It was believed then that "ill-blood between the Consul [Visetti] and the attorney [Ferrera] was first stirred in 1911, when . . . Dr. Visetti wrote a letter to . . . an Italian paper in New York, attacking the movement headed by Attorney Ferrera to procure a state-wide recognition of Columbus Day. Mr. Ferrera, who is the owner and editor of the *Italian Tribune*, published here, is said to have printed a copy of the letter and an attack on Dr. Visetti. The attorney also is accused of fighting the confirmation of Dr. Visetti's appointment as Consul and succeeded in holding it back for a year."⁷⁷

A weekly illustrated magazine, *L'Italico*, edited by Raphael E. Romano, offered lighter reading; it was a literary and agricultural publication.⁷⁸ The *Oregonian* and three or four other daily newspapers were also available. One other newspaper that contained news of interest to Italians was the *Catholic Sentinel*. This newspaper's career began in 1870 and it has been published every week since. However, Italian news was very skimpy in the early years compared to the space devoted to the Irish and the Germans both here and abroad.

Portland has an easily identifiable population of Italian-Americans that still retain a touch of the old country in their habits of mind, social and domestic customs, and in their incredibly mellifluous names.

75. *Oregonian*, May 20, 1915, p. 11.

76. *Oregonian*, April 7, 1915, p. 13.

77. *Ibid.* The oldest extant Portland Italian family may be Ferrera. In 1868 Anthony and John Ferrara (spelling of last name changed much later to Ferrera) began Ferrara and Bros. Fish Market at 135 First Street. The Ferreras are from Liguria. Albert Ferrera is the son of the aforementioned Anthony.

78. *Portland Register* (1914).