



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK ARTS & HERITAGE PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (MR) Millie Rahn, ()

Accession Numbers:

MR-04-02-FN

Fieldnotes

- - -D

Audio recordings

- - -CS

Photographic documentation

MR-04-02-M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: 3/28/2004 Contact Date: 4/6/2004

Related Accession Numbers: - - - - -

Individual/Group/Event: walk through "Abbondanza!" exhibit

Address: [REDACTED]

City: [REDACTED] Zip: [REDACTED] County: Middlesex

Phone: Daytime: [REDACTED] Evening: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED] Website: [REDACTED]

Contact person: Dana Dauterman Ricciardi

Title: curator

Location of Interview: Edgell Memorial Library

Street Address: [REDACTED]

City: [REDACTED] Zip: [REDACTED] County: [REDACTED]

Special Needs (including translation): [REDACTED]

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): history of Italians in Framingham from late 19th century to present: domestic & occupational traditions, foodways, sports & recreation, music, religion, language, neighborhoods, community gathering spots/shops, etc.

Traditions noted for follow-up: [REDACTED]

Other Possible Contacts: [REDACTED]

Summary Description: see attached

Exhibit: "Abbondanza!: The Richness of Italian-American Life in Framingham"
(March 26-August 28, 2004)

By all accounts from everyone I talked to, this exhibit, which ran from March 26-August 28, 2004, had a huge impact on both the Italian community in Framingham and the Historical Society and Museum. It was a membership and visitation boon for the historical society and museum, which hosted many school visits, and other tours, and provided a model for other ethnic communities in Framingham to present themselves to the larger community. It also got a great deal of attention from historical societies and small museum across Massachusetts. The question everyone asked during fieldwork was how can they sustain the strong sense of community and create ongoing events to keep momentum going.

The exhibit had more than 125 photographs and about 120 objects and other materials from 45 donors and lenders. Most of the photos and objects came from family collections. There was also a videotape loop of scanned photographs from many sources (and again, more personal albums) projected outside the exhibit gallery. Before entering the gallery or afterwards, visitors were invited to put pins in a map of the world, showing their ancestral roots, emphasizing the theme of immigration. There was a separate enlarged map of Italy for those of Italian heritage to mark their origins.

Following are notes from the exhibit, which featured some key folklife themes, including Framingham's Italian community's origins, family networks, trades, church, foodways, occupational lore and objects;, funerary customs, war memorial from World Wars I and II, fraternal organizations such as the Christopher Columbus Society, which helped speed the decline of the Sons of Italy as the Columbus Society grew; place names such as the "Tripoli" section of town that had a large Italian population, named for the 1911 Italian invasion of Tripoli; demographic statistics, etc.

Italians Come to Framingham

The exhibit opened with a steamer trunk, symbolizing coming to America. It was meant to show the lot of immigrants, bringing only material objects that one could carry to a new country and leaving things behind. The Garbarino family from Cicagno (27 miles east of Genoa) were among the first Italians to come to Framingham in 1882. Other towns that were represented by early immigrants were Rimini, Norcia, Umbria, Cremona, Piacenza, Foggia, Taormina, Sicily, and Ispra. The year 1907 was the peak year for Italian immigration [as it was for general European immigration to the US].

Many men in Framingham worked in the construction and roofing trades; women worked in factories. The construction firms of Bianchi and Perini are associated with Framingham. Working for Perini was “every Italian’s dream,” though locally they were also known as the “WOP gang,” a racial slur. The Metro Water Works’ Weston Aqueduct project also employed many Italian workers c. 1901-1903, as did later road/highway/turnpike projects.

The Dennison company was known for its packing tags, and for which Framingham was dubbed “Tag Town.” Dennison was the largest employer in Framingham in the early 20th century. Many Italians worked at the factory and others, including whole families, did piecework at home stringing tags.

The Apron Factory hired many women, who only spoke Italian. The women communicated with the male English-speaking machinists by slips of colored papers, which connoted what needed fixing on their sewing machines.

Milford, Massachusetts also had a large Italian community, many of whom were granite workers.

Some years later, the Italians organized their own ethnic parish under the leadership of Rev. Pietro Maschi, who had trained in Parma with the Scalabrini missionaries. He arrived at what became St. Tarcisius Roman Catholic Church, still today the major parish of the Italian Catholic community in Framingham (and Portuguese and Brazilian Catholics), in 1906 and stayed for 38 years [1944]. See more on St. Tarcisius parish below. The church’s cemetery was founded in 1916 and includes examples of traditional Italian portraiture on gravestones and hand-carved ornaments. It also has a monument to World War I veterans, and later used the more typical American layout of graves, with modern headstone design and materials, especially granite and marble.

Artisans

Luigi Guerrieri (1877-1942) was a blacksmith who produced furniture hardware for the Wallace Nutting Factory, which moved to Framingham in 1922. [Wallace Nutting was a noted chronicler of the Colonial Revival period in New England in photos, books, furniture, much of which idealized Anglo culture--MR.] During the height of the Colonial Revival period, the Nutting factory made early American reproduction furniture at their studio near Park Street Common. A church is now located on the site.

Pedro Cacciola (1903-1978) was the only photograph printer for the Nutting factory, which was also known for their staged, nostalgic historical photographs. Cacciola also had his own photograph studio.

Foodways

- * In 1900, there were 4 Italian-American fruit dealers in South Framingham.
- * Hillside Dairy, 774 Waverly St. Run by Leopold Shiavi from the 1930s until ?.
- * Easter baking trads.
- * Pasta: eggs + flour + water = pasta.
- * Datti Store – early Italian food store. Began 1908-c. 1930s; became Union House Market.
- * Natoli Market sold fresh fruit and vegetables at an outdoor stand on Worcester Road, 1950-1958, then moved into a store from 1958-1967.
- * Waverly Market. Still there. Montage of multi-generation family food store.
- * Photo of Verdelli's Market (April 1941) at 560 Waverly St. Now the Gourmet Italian Market. The original market was established 1929; now run by third generation of Stefanini family. David Stefanini (b. 1953) is a meat cutter; trained as an engineer. He and his mother, Angie, took over the market when David's father died in 1975.

Neighborhoods

In early 20th century, Italians lived in South Framingham, south of Wavely Avenue and west of Hollis St. The two main neighborhoods were Coburnville, named for the Coburn and Co. shoe factory in 1882, and Tripoli, named in 1911 for Italy's war against the Turks in Libya. The latter neighborhood is on the Ashland line, near Waushakum Pond.

Place names

"Tripoli" neighborhood named for the 1911 Italian invasion of Tripoli [in modern Libya].

Decorative arts

Many examples of jewelry and other domestic and personal decorative arts such as needlework from individual families on display.

Industry

* Bonfiglio Perini came from Milan. He began his company with Italian construction workers c. 1893 by laying tracks for the B&W [Boston and Worcester] Railroad. He moved the company to Framingham in 1931; now Perini headquarters are at 73 Mt. Wayte Ave. and are a major regional construction company.

The company celebrated their centennial in 1994.

* The Freeman Shoe Co. had an annual outing at the Indian Inn.

* Fredericks Co., made raincoats on Trip St. in 1930s

Fraternal/Ethnic Organizations

* Christopher Columbus Society on Fountain St. was founded 1908 by men of Italian descent "to meet for good fellowship and to provide mutual aid." Moved to Fountain Street in 1911; still there.

* The Italian War Veterans Association. Also had a band; photograph of band in 1938.

Calendar Customs

"May Crowning." Photograph of event at St. Tarcisius in 1940s.

Musical Groups

*Drum and bugle corps

*Italian War Vets Band

Sports

Boxing. Link Merloni boxer in late 1920s; grandfather of Boston Red Sox player Lou Merloni, who joined team in 1998.

Prominent Framingham Italians

Politics: David Magnini was a long-time Massachusetts state representative [retired fall 2004]. Served in Peace Corps in Sierra Leone in 1969. Gave keynote address at Peace Corps 25th anniversary in 1986 in Washington.

Medicine: William Castelli, M.D., director of the Framingham Heart Study 1979-1995, and current director of the Framingham Cardiovascular Institute.

Real estate/development: Madlyn Fafard. Played accordion at St. Tarcisius in 1940s. Went on to work in real estate and helped develop MetroWest area.

Restaurants: Ken and Florence Hanna. Opened Ken's diner in 1941, and later Ken's Steakhouse, which were duplicated throughout the area. Other Italian-American restaurants followed.

See attached FHS newsletter and poster for the exhibit for more information and images.