Hartford Paesani: Social Mobility of Italian Americans in the Twentieth Century

By Joe Garzone

Large numbers of Italians began to enter the United States in the 1880s and continued to arrive into the early 1920s, following the unification of the Italian peninsula during the 1860s. Economic possibilities that were not present in the homeland was available in the increasingly industrial United States after the American Civil War. I argue that a culture of work ethic, ethnic unity amongst second generation Italian Americans, and the decision to settle permanently are all major factors that contributed to Italian American success in small but growing cities such as Hartford, Connecticut, into the 1930s.

Illiterate southern Italians who were unable to compete directly with their more educated compatriots in the north, came in large numbers and encouraged a determined work ethic in their children. Second generation Italian Americans, especially from southern regions of Italy, climbed up the social ladder faster than their parents and found success as middle and upper class citizens of Hartford. The second generation had a strong advantage in being able to look past regional differences, a community necessity that not only helped the second generation, but newly arriving Italian immigrants as well. This unity brought about the creation of ethnically dominated markets, streets, and mutual benefit societies that greatly impacted the Italian Americans’ ability to succeed in Hartford. Finally, staying in Hartford rather than returning to Italy seasonally, a common practice among Italian immigrants, made it much easier for social mobility of the ethnic group as a whole. Family “dynasties” in Hartford that are still present today proved that Italians were important to society and capable of improving lives within the city.

Italian immigration to the United States can be traced back to the colonial era, even as early as the Jamestown settlement, which invited an Italian artist to craft glass beads for currency with the
indigenous people. Immigrants during this time consisted of skilled and educated citizens from the northern regions of Italy: tradesmen, artists, musicians, scientists, and missionaries. These Italian immigrants took advantage of the developing communities in the American colonies for their businesses and as such, were initially received as equals to the English colonists in some places. Democratic political refugees also moved to the American colonies, influencing the political fervor against British misrule. Filippo Mazzei is most notable in this role, as a friend of Thomas Jefferson who helped coin the term that “all men are created equal.”

Migrant Flows

Until the late 1860s, the Italian peninsula was populated by independent states and kingdoms heavily influenced by surrounding European powers and oppressive feudal lords. Prussia, Austria, and France dominated the northern states of Lombardy, Venetia, and Florence, investing in industrial equipment and factories in their wars against each other, while the southern Kingdom of Two Sicilies remained tied to the land under the feudal system; if it was not forcibly taken by the constantly warring northern kingdoms and oppressive Spanish and Bourbon rulers.

After the nationalist movement known as the “Risorgimento” (the Resurgence) unified the Italian peninsula in the 1860s, regionalism associated with those previously independent kingdoms perpetuated cultural and economic differences. They still operated and treated each other as separate communities rather than a united country and constantly fought against the stronger European powers surrounding them. Those who were fortunate enough to have factory jobs in the North benefitted from a new government dominated by northern Italians who enacted policies in

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2 Ibid., 14.
3 Ibid., 11.
4 Ibid., 12.
their favor. The push factors for emigration from Italy became much stronger after the unification of the 1860s. High taxes and protectionist economic policies hurt many farmers, especially in the South. Many Italians, northern and southern, emigrated to surrounding European countries for better economic opportunity, and eventually, to the Americas.

Northern Italians, who already had decent economic opportunities, moved to Central or Western Europe to avoid military service, achieve religious freedom, and secure political asylum, as well as for the opportunity to make even more money than they were making in Italy. Italians that moved to the United States in the 1860s were mainly peasant farmers who settled in the South, growing sugar, cotton and tobacco. After unification, northern Italians who were educated and had capital wanted to escape the farm life and became teachers, craftsmen, and entertainers across the country, but mainly in New York and California. Wine production and banking were popular among those that moved to the west coast of the United States as well. Most urban Italian settlers moved into poor areas of lower Manhattan in New York, working as construction workers, peddlers, organ grinders, and working in clothing factories. Italian men that lived in the United States ranged in age from sixteen to forty-five and worked seasonally to return to Italy in the winter. However, wealthier northern Italians preferred to spend the extra money to move to places like Brazil and Argentina. These areas were favored not just because of their increasingly industrial economy, but because of the similar climate and culture to Italy, compared to the United States.

Spanish and Bourbon rulers prevented the impoverished and conservative southern Italians, from leaving the country during the first half of the nineteenth century. Nor did they introduce crop rotation, machinery, or fertilizers. Those southern Italians that were able moved to North Africa to make money that would eventually allow them to move to the Americas. The conditions

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6 Ibid., 547.  
7 Ibid., 547-550.  
in Southern Italy were worse after unification. Infertile lands, primitive agricultural technology, overcrowding, and disease were made worse by a government that favored the industrial North and made no effort toward land reform. Although Southern Italy, known as the Mezzogiorno, benefitted from the increase in railroad infrastructure and free trade that was enjoyed in the North, there was still almost no industrial growth despite the large labor force present. In 1900, only Holland, Belgium, and England had higher population density, despite the lack of industrialization in Italy. Deforestation created swamps in the Mezzogiorno, fostering the spread of malaria through mosquitoes and forcing southern Italians to move to the hills, away from their plots of land. Southern Italian mass migration to the United States thus occurred later in the nineteenth century and dwarfed earlier migration to the New World. Southern Italians moved to the United States rather than Brazil and Argentina – as northern Italians had in the past – because of an outbreak of disease and labor violence in Latin America. Southern Italian migration was aided by high tariffs on Italian wine in France, earthquakes, and strong competition for citrus fruits in the United States that further reduced economic opportunity for southern Italian farmers. In the southern region of Calabria, the number of landowners per one thousand people was 121 in 1882, and reduced to 91 per one thousand in 1901. Recruiters known as “padrones” aided Italians by finding them jobs and housing, usually in places previously occupied by seasonal northern Italian immigrants. While padrones served a useful purpose for arriving Italians, they often took advantage of these uneducated workers by overcharging them and were also known to kidnap children to work for railroad companies.

9 “Italian Americans,” 547.
11 “Italian Americans,” 547.
12 Jones, Destination America, 193-195.
14 “Italian Americans,” 550.
Compared to the 200,000 Italian immigrants arriving on average each year between the 1880s and 1890s, almost half a million Italian immigrants moved to the United States annually between 1890 and 1914, most of them from the Mezzogiorno. For perspective on the magnitude of this wave, only 14,000 moved between 1820-1860, as established merchants and farmers during the 1849 gold rush. Between 1889 and 1910, 2,284,601 Italians arrived: 372,668 from Northern Italy and 1,911,933 from Southern Italy. Finding jobs was so easy that half of the Italian immigrants that arrived in the United States and returned to Italy in one year could return to the United States and still find a job.

Relations among Italians from different regions were stronger in the United States than in Italy due to the stronger cultural differences of American life. Although the Italian peninsula was politically unified, the people from different regions were still not comfortable with their new compatriots. Italians who stayed in the United States started to work together to solve their problems collectively because of the differences in culture that they encountered while living in the United States. While many remained seasonal workers, others became important leaders in the community and in business such as Amedeo Obici, the founder of Planters Peanuts. Italian businesses kept areas “Italian” and attracted customers for ethnic reasons.

Italian immigration came to a near halt because of World War I and the passing of the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924, which included percentage quotas based on immigration records before the mass migration of southern Italians. The rise of Mussolini and fascist politics also damaged the reputations of Italian American, some of whom found hope in the strong and unifying force of the

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17 “Italian Americans,” 547
18 Ibid., 548-552.
The passing of the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965 removed the quotas and introduced a new migration of Italians still struggling after World War II. Italian Immigration was at its strongest between 1961 and 1970, with 214,111 Italians arriving in the United States. The decades after that would signal a decline in immigration from Italy, with about 300,000 Italians arriving between the years 1971 and 2000.

### Italian Hartford

Connecticut was a popular destination for Italian immigrants because of its emerging industrial strength following the Civil War. About one fifth of the state's population identifies with Italian heritage today, the largest in the nation. Italians mostly moved to cities in Connecticut, such as Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, Willimantic, and Waterbury. As a reflection of the increasing industrial strength, between 1820 and 1850, the population of Hartford doubled, with only 20 percent of the population being native born. It doubled again in 1870, just twenty years later. In 1880, the Italian-born population of Hartford numbered only 82 people. By 1890, it rose to 350, and then swelled to 1,962 in 1900, and reached 4,521 in 1910. The relatively smaller sizes of these cities compared to Boston and New York was an advantage; Hartford was cleaner, and thus more attractive to immigrants who were not comfortable with large and busy city life.

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24 Grant and Grant, *City of Hartford*, 14.
27 Grant and Grant, *City of Hartford*, 178.
In the city of Hartford, second generation Italians generally fared much better than their parents who arrived before them. Prior to 1871, there were only three Italian American families living in Hartford: the Brancieri, Garibaldi, and Pallotti families. These Italian families were generally well-received, being small in number and able to move to Hartford because of the wealth they had already acquired in Italy. Antonio Andretta, born in Italy in 1874, moved to Hartford in 1893, and married the American-born daughter of Nicola Pallotti after being in the country for three years, living with her family on Village Street. He worked as a broker in 1900, and by 1910, owned a successful bank with his father-in-law called Pallotti, Andretta, and Co. The bank was not his only venture, as he also became the director of Riverside Trust Company, the director of the Land Mortgage and Title Company, and the Connalta Farms Company. His involvement in the community included the Hartford Lodge of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the

![Advertisement](image)

Figure 2. Advertisement for Pallotti, Andretta & Co.

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29 “Italian People Who Live in Hartford.”
32 Geer’s Hartford City Directory, 1910.
Foresters of America, Young Italian American Association, Victor Emmanuel Third Society, Italian Club of Hartford, Italian American Club of New York City, City Club, Automobile Club of Hartford, and the Republican Club. Andretta and Pallotti soon became not only some of the most famous and wealthiest Italian Americans in Hartford, but of all citizens in Hartford. However, their story does not represent the lives of all first generation Italian Americans. Andretta was fortunate enough to be college educated in the Basilicata province of Italy, one of the poorest provinces in all of the Mezzogiorno.33

The great majority of Italian immigrants to America were from the impoverished southern regions of Italy. They arrived poor, illiterate, and from small farming communities. In 1860, 78 percent of the population in the Mezzogiorno could not read or write Italian.34 These men and women wanted to work in factories at jobs they had no skills in, when they could not even read their native language, let alone English. Moreover, Hartford factory jobs required workers with higher skills than many other factory jobs in Connecticut. Hartford had a strong industrial sector, making guns, boilers, leather belts, lathes, screw machines, and more, unlike most cities in Connecticut, which consisted of mainly textile factories.35 Therefore, these unskilled workers were forced to take up jobs as day laborers, construction workers, freight handlers, and railroad workers.36 Italian American workers in 1897 were making $6.34 per week, the least of any other ethnic group in the city.37

Frank Sagarino, born in Corleto, Italy in 1854, was still a factory worker when he died in a car accident in 1932. He arrived in Hartford in 1879, but his name does not figure in the U.S.

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36 Ibid., vol. 10, part 4, 217.
Census data index until 1920, at which time he was working as a belt maker at a belt manufacturer and was living on Village Street, the same street that Antonio Andretta and Nicola Pallotti lived on.\(^{38}\) In contrast, his two sons, John and Rocco, grew up to acquire middle class careers as a doctor and city politician, respectively. John Sagarino was a member of the surgical staff at St. Francis Hospital and a fellow of the American College of Surgeons. After graduating from the Hartford Public School System, he earned his bachelor’s degree in philosophy at Yale University and received his medical degree from the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University in 1913. Just one year later, he established his own practice in Hartford. His expertise earned him the rank of first lieutenant of the Medical Reserve Corps during World War I. John also made himself available to politics while running his private practice, as head of the First School District in 1916 to 1918 and from 1919 to 1932. From 1922 to 1924, he was a member of the Municipal Building Commission, overseeing construction of the Bulkeley and Weaver high schools.\(^{39}\) Born in Hartford, Rocco J. Sagarino attended St. Thomas Seminary, Trinity College, and received his PhD at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy. Rocco served multiple government positions as an alderman, selectman, welfare commissioner, and purchasing agent for the Hartford Welfare Department. He eventually settled in Arizona as a member of the Arizona Pharmaceutical Association.\(^{40}\)

Women did not typically move to the United States alone, except for the rare exception of a single woman moving to help her family, improve her dowry, and possibly to find a husband. Husbands grew lonely over time and the decision to unite the family created a different atmosphere in the community. Women maintained the household, sometimes dividing the extensive labor amongst the children, and controlled the household income. The husband would return home with


\(^{39}\) “Dr. Sagarino Found Dead By Relatives,” *Hartford Courant* (Jul 22, 1939).

an unopened envelope for the wife to budget and ensure bills were paid with not too much being spent on the husband’s social life. Italian women of the first generation rarely left the home unless they needed to buy something in the market, or even participate in the marketplace through peddling. This was their chance to socialize and keep track of events in the community, but they might also take a factory job if their children could handle the household chores. Italian migrant women were famous for their work in the garment industry as they were able to produce fine lace and embroidered products. Italian women did not work to benefit themselves, but to support the family and aid in any gift giving for the children and members of the community. The second-generation women were much less conservative than their mothers were, and longed to live like the other American girls. They often took factory jobs in the garment industry, but had to give their paychecks to their mother. The goal was to secure money for their social lives just like their fathers did.

The difference of economic and social success between the first and second generation was not uncommon in Hartford at this time. Jobs were available in the large and reliable insurance companies that had been based in Hartford. Second generation Italian Americans in 1939, including one-third of women in the workforce, were employed as clerks, bookkeepers, comptometer operators, and other positions within insurance companies. A Hartford man once described this relationship between the generations: “In this land of opportunity, an Italian earned his family’s living as a scissor grinder in one of the large insurance companies and had the

44 Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 106
45 Grant and Grant, *City of Hartford*, 43.
satisfaction of seeing his son become a junior executive in that same company.⁴⁷ The insurance companies of Hartford were reliable sources of jobs for an emerging middle class of Italian immigrants, despite interference from the Great Depression and two world wars.⁴⁸

One difference between Antonio Andretta and Frank Sagarino and his sons was access to education. The problem is not that schools did not exist in Italy, it was that education was somewhat of a taboo among Italian families. Southern Italians, especially in Sicily, were much more conservative than their northern neighbors.⁴⁹ Even though it became law for Italian children ages six to nine years old to attend school, the attendance rate stayed around 65 percent nationally, being nearly zero in the Mezzogiorno. Formal schooling weakens values instilled by la famiglia and does not help to pay the bills in the short term. Apprenticeships could at least set someone up for a job in the near future to establish extra income for the family. In 1911, 1.5 million of the 2.5 million Italians aged 10-15 were employed, mainly from the Mezzogiorno region.⁵⁰ Education for girls was especially rare for Italians. Italian women were considered artisans because of the rigorous work they did in the household, and therefore needed to be trained for their future. Literacy was discouraged for girls to prevent them from being able to talk to boys and to focus their attention on their household obligations.⁵¹ Public education was especially feared in the United States, as American children were apt to influence Italian Americans toward American culture. For most Italian American children, school was only worth it because their friends were there.⁵² Immigrant families were upset that their children so quickly went against the Italian culture regarding la famiglia and began to openly defy the guidance and wishes of their parents.⁵³

⁴⁷ Grant and Grant, *City of Hartford*, 72.
⁴⁸ Ibid., 43.
⁵³ “From the Old Country,” 96.
Figure 2. Map of Hartford Waterfront, 1850.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{54} Grant and Grant, \textit{City of Hartford}.
Civic Engagement and Ethnic Unity

Education was not the sole cause of social mobility among second generation Italian Americans. Born in 1897 in Hartford, Dominick Delucco left school at the age of fourteen to work full time as a laborer to support the family. After years of working as a laborer, enlisting in the army during World War I, and working as a truck driver, Delucco eventually owned a successful restaurant on Walnut Street, “DeLucco’s Family Restaurant,” and then became the first Italian American mayor of Hartford in 1953. While being educated until the age of fourteen was more than most Italian Americans in Hartford, it cannot possibly be enough to qualify as mayor of a city. Another quality noticed from these successful Italian Americans is their degree of civic engagement. Civic participation was considered the end of an “evolutionary progression” of poor and “uncivilized” European immigrants and marked a completion in being assimilated into American society. Delucco and the Sagarino brothers’ interest in politics made them more engaged with the community, providing connections to climb the social ladder.

Andretta’s involvement most likely stemmed from his education upon arriving, with influence from his American-born wife and with Nicola Pallotti, who initially acquired his wealth by saving his money to invest in real estate. Pallotti gained notoriety in the community in his fight against the bridge commission’s interest in a building at the corner of Morgan Street and Front Street. With education certainly playing a role, second generation Italian Americans were more inclined to accept certain aspects of American life (school, jobs, politics, etc.) than their parents, while still looking to tend to values in supporting the welfare of la famiglia. This combination of values from the Old World, and the acceptance of New World culture, shaped a generation of Italian Americans motivated to succeed.

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56 Guglielmo, Living the Revolution, 106.
57 “Nicola Pallotti Killed by Fall,” Hartford Courant (Nov. 2, 1914).
Another contributing factor to the success of second generation Italian Americans was ethnic unity among the regional Italians. Italians from different regions of Italy, especially from the North and South, spoke in different dialects of the Italian language and practiced similar, but different traditions. Educated Northern Italians in the Old World saw their Southern Italian compatriots as an economic burden. People from Southern Italy were uneducated, corrupt, and “culturally backward,” with their ability to breed like *conigli*, rabbits, as their only advantage. They were unsuited for society because of their sense of individualism and superstitious traditions. Northern Italians made up only 20 percent of Italians arriving to the United States, but they had twice as much money as southern Italians, were skilled in factory jobs that were already available in the industrial northern Italian regions, and were literate.58 A man who grew up during this time in Hartford said:

The Italian people on Front Street…were from Sicily, Naples, Calabrese. All kinds of languages that you couldn’t understand. It was like Babylon there. Front, Morgan, Temple, all Italians, all different Italian nationalities. I couldn’t understand anything.59

The urban arena provided by American cities forced cohesion between regional Italians and create an environment beneficial to earlier immigrants and to new arrivals.

The first step toward achieving ethnic unity was the establishment of a national parish. The opportunities for a more active community. The Casa Maria recreation center opened next to the church, allowing Italians and other people of the city to partake in cultural festivals and other events meant to bring the community together.60 As the population rapidly grew into the 1900’s, the

59 “Getting their share,” 277.
60 “St. Anthony’s Carnival” *Hartford Courant*. May 25, 1928.
church moved to a larger location on Talcott Street.\textsuperscript{61} Irish and German populations of Hartford had been well-established before Italians began to arrive in Hartford. As Italians began to move into the east side of the city, especially to Market Street, they made a case for their own national parish. In 1898, a group of Italians purchased the small St. Paul Church on Market Street from the Germans, and renamed it the St. Anthony Church.\textsuperscript{62}

Figure 3. Front Street.\textsuperscript{63}

This development was important for the morale of Italian immigrants in the city, as religious festivals were more than just bringing people together to celebrate culture and religion. In a way, Italians used festivals as a means to “sacralize the streets,” bringing religion to the streets rather than the church, and making claim to the street. In New York, these large festivals provided an opportunity for Italian immigrants to “physically and psychologically heal” from the degradation

\textsuperscript{61} Archdiocese of Hartford “Merged and Suppressed Parishes” http://www.archdioceseofhartford.org/archives_closedparishes.htm (accessed Nov. 1, 2014)
\textsuperscript{62} Grant and Grant, \textit{City of Hartford}, 71.
\textsuperscript{63} Grant and Grant, \textit{City of Hartford}. 

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they were experiencing from leaving the homeland. Crime was common in immigrant communities, and religious festivals “cleansed” the moral decay in the community. Italian Americans of Italian Harlem scrubbed the filthy streets, which were otherwise not cared for before, in preparation for the parading of *La Madonna*.64 Hosting festivals like this gave Italian immigrants motivation and provided an opportunity for a physical and moral facelift in the community.

Soon, Italian immigrants occupied entire streets in Hartford: Market Street, Charles Street, Village Street, Main Street, and especially Front Street (see figure 3).65 Front Street was the main commercial street of the east side of Hartford and attracted many immigrants as a place to settle. A system of ethnic enclaves therefore dominated Front Street businesses: Polish immigrants occupied the southern end, Italians occupied the center, and Jews occupied the northern end. Peddling was a popular business for immigrants in and around Front Street because of the relatively small amount of capital required to start the business. Immigrants with little money could build or buy a pushcart cheap and purchase products to sell, as opposed to buying building space.66 Italians operated half of the fruit vendors in the city, and on Front Street alone there were seven restaurants owned by Italians in 1910.67 Businesses benefitted from being “Italian,” being able to attract patronage from other Italians in the area and from other ethnicities looking for variety in products that Italians in the city offered.

Unity was necessary due to unpopular stereotypes about Italians. An article in the *Hartford Courant* from 1900 entitled “Italians Not Wanted,” mentioned how the hiring of an Italian girl at the Hartford Carpet Company prompted the other girls to go on strike until the Italian girl went home.68 Discrimination stemmed from the fact that the migrants were arriving in large numbers and

65 Grant and Grant, *City of Hartford*, 108.
68 “Italians Not Wanted,” *Hartford Courant* (Jul 17, 1900).
consisted of many of the conservative southern Italians who were perceived as culturally inferior. Stereotypes of Italians included accusations that they were “illiterate, uncivilized, and depraved offenders who could not adapt to American life and institutions.”69 Not only did pre-existing Italian American culture consider immigrants “too ethnic,” but the reputation of all Italian Americans had been severely damaged because of the widely publicized New Orleans Lynching in 1891, which the assassination of a police officer and sparked an international crisis between the United States and Italy.70 Henry Cabot Lodge described Italians as “criminals and paupers who infected the United States with diseases such as cholera,” and favored the restriction of Italian immigration to protect the quality of American citizenship.71 Furthermore, the Dillingham Report found that southern Italians could trace their ancestry to Africa because of their proximity. This led Americans to believe them to be not just culturally inferior to northern Italians and other European immigrants, but biologically inferior. They were still able to benefit from the social label of being “white” because of their social location, but were not nearly as accepted as those northern Europeans who had arrived before them.72 Italian language newspapers worked hard to defend the “whiteness” of Italians by publishing articles that praised Italian civility and condemned American treatment of Italian immigrants. To further improve Italians’ status as whites, newspapers began promoting white supremacy in America and ended all positive coverage of African Americans.73

The assimilation of Italians was urged because of their reputation as lazy, ignorant, and more inclined to commit crimes. Assimilation targeted women and children, and women in particular. Italian women spent most of their lives in the household doing chores and rarely left the house,

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71 “Citizenship and Military Service” 370.
limiting their interactions with the community. They had little interest in social clubs because they were tired from work, and had a low sense of comradeship with foreigners and Italians from other regions, being said to dislike the mental effort involved in them. They maintained traditions from Italy and because of their control of the household and income, had the authority to limit the social lives of their husbands and children, and thus limit their interaction with other Americans that may lead to Americanization. The Americanization of older Italian women occurred over time when women began to buy goods from factories rather than making them at home. American style clothing and goods, plus the extra time afforded to them by not having to make them, provided Italian American women with the ability to leave the house more and interact with the community.

The development of “Little Italy” in the eastern part of the city created a more familiar atmosphere for Italians both already living there and just arriving. Despite regional differences, their similarities within the tight urban arena of the city were enough to develop healthy relationships. This was especially true of second generation immigrants who grew up mostly unaware of the regional differences besides what their parents told them. Although Italians had their differences, “owning” sections of the city created an atmosphere that was friendlier for Italian immigrants. A Hartford man is quoted saying, “You could walk out on the street [Front Street] at any hour of the day and meet friends.”

Societies and clubs also joined Italians together to their mutual benefit. Between 1892 and 1928, at least thirteen organizations existed in Hartford, differing according to region, gender, and profession. These clubs include the Young Italian American Association, The Italian Mother’s Club, The Italian Teacher’s Club of Greater Hartford, and the Floridian Men’s Society. These clubs existed for activism, mutual benefit, and even just for social gatherings. One of the most famous

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76 Grant and Grant, *City of Hartford*, 77.
organizations was the Order of the Sons of Italy. Originally created in 1891, it incorporated other clubs in 1914 for the sake of promoting the Italian name and creating a sense of community among Italians. The purpose was clearly stated in their by-laws to “promote fraternity and mutual love and assistance among members,” to “promote the educational, moral, and material welfare of its members in harmony of each other’s religious and political viewpoints,” and “to adhere to the principles and institutions of a democratic government so that they may be instilled in the hearts of man and their posterity.”

Membership into the Sons of Italy cost $1 and there was a monthly fee of $1.25. After six months of paying dues, a member became eligible for benefits. These benefits were mainly used toward the payment of hospital expenses that members may face. A member was eligible to receive $5 per day in the hospital, with the amount reduced to $5 a week after staying in the hospital for two weeks. However, the Sons of Italy would not subsidize hospital bills if the health concern was chronic before enrollment, was a result of attempted self-mutilation or suicide, or if the person practiced unsafe habits such as ignoring instructions of a physician or drinking too much at the bar. The club also did not pay toward pregnancies unless there were health complications that rendered the mother in the hospital for fourteen days. The club also contributed money to help mitigate the cost of funerals and provided attendance and a bouquet for the death of a member.

Mutual aid societies such as the Order of the Sons of Italy were meant to help Italians adjust to life in the United States while preserving aspects of Italian culture through a fraternity within the population. An article in the *Hartford Courant* titled “The Italians Who Live in Hartford” described the magnitude of the aid these clubs provided: “The newcomer, unable to speak English and ignorant of the ways of the country, is given all the aid he needs to place him on his feet.”

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 “Italians Who Live in Hartford.”
charity available to newly arriving immigrants gave them the opportunity to start their life in the United States in a strong standing in society. By being able to join together to solve their problems, Italians were able to be more successful because of the aid and support of other Italians when adjusting to American life.

Finally, the decision to stay in the United States, rather than constantly moving back and forth, made for easier social mobility. Hartford was ripe for economic opportunity if one was willing to stay and invest in the community. The entrepreneurial spirit of Italian immigrants in Hartford gave their children an advantage. A common profession practiced by Italian immigrants was barbering. In 1910, around 40 percent of the Hartford’s barbers consisted of Italian Americans.  

Antonio Buccino started cutting hair at the age of seventeen in 1906, and did so for over seventy years. Barbering was popular for Italians because the work was much less intense than being a day laborer, and the opportunity for business was high with the growing population of Hartford.

Letters from an immigrant to his home, recovered from a website regarding Hartford Italians, indicate an increasing income from this one individual by the name of Antonine Sbrilgio. In his first letter from 1923, he writes to his wife about the necessity of buying a new crib with the money he is sending. His wife’s sister had died recently, and so he consoles her in that she will get over her death soon, considering he had been over the death of their son who had died a while before in Boston despite not having anyone to help him cope with the death. Three days after Christmas in 1950, he was still in the United States. It is hard to know whether he returned later because his name does not appear in census records, but the fact that he is in America around the holidays must mean that he stayed for long periods of time. In this letter, he is thankful that his mother used the money he sent for her to purchase a gas stove, foot warmers, and a radio as he

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81 *Geer’s Directory 1910*, 984.
82 Mike Sheridan, “Barber, 87, Loses His Shop,” *Hartford Courant* (Oct 25, 1976). Antonio Buccino lost his shop because he had become a “nuisance” to the landowners and that they “did not want him as a tenant forever.”
instructed.83 This purchase is a significant upgrade from his letter in 1923 to his wife stating that he is sending all the money he has for her to buy a crib for the new baby. Antonine clearly increased his income to be able to spend money on his mother like that, and it must have stemmed from a rise in economic status through employment opportunities.

Conclusion

Names that are still famous in the Hartford area today: Andretta, Pallotti, and D’Esopo, became famous because of the immigrants’ willingness to not just work in Hartford, but invest and become civically engaged. These people created names for themselves and their children’s reputations benefitted from their parent’s success. The D’Esopo family is a great example of success through permanently settling in the United States. Donato D’Esopo arrived in 1879 with his wife and five children as one of the first four Italian families in Hartford. A farmer in Italy, Donato acquired wealth in America through the ownership of a grocery store on Morgan Street until he owned a business in real estate to provide for his eleven sons. His many sons became bankers, state legislators, lawyers, and most notably, funeral directors.84 The D’Esopo Funeral Home is still in business today and is located in Wethersfield on the outskirts of Hartford. Nicola Pallotti was one of the first Italians to arrive in Hartford, and decided to stay and save his money until he was able to invest in real estate. His partnership with Antonio Andretta eventually lead him to become the wealthiest man in Hartford.85 His son, Francis Pallotti, became a popular judge in Hartford after graduating from Yale Law School.86 More recently, Nicholas Pallotti, son of Francis Pallotti and a lawyer, died in 2012 and had his funeral service at the funeral chapel owned by the D’Esopo

85 “Nicola Pallotti Killed by Fall.”
family. Although the Pallotti’s and D’Esopo’s are not household names to residents in Hartford and Connecticut anymore, their businesses and consistency in maintaining their economic status are still present today, because of the strong foundation that was established in the past through their investment in the community.

Permanent settlement meant the chance to own a small business to support the family until they were able to either take over the business, or fund their education so that they could earn a middle class job, usually in law, business ownership, or banking. Not only that, but a degree of Americanization that came with gaining wealth further allowed their children to benefit in society, especially allowing them to learn English. This is significant because 50 percent of Italian immigrants in the United States returned to Italy between 1880 and 1900. The reasons for returning include holidays, marriage and family, mandatory military service, or they were unsure about an illness and wished to die in Italy. Return migrants often returned to the United States and would continue the cycle, having no intention of being naturalized citizens. In 1900, only 7 percent of Italians were naturalized citizens. In 1920 Stefano Miele, an Italian American lawyer in New York, described the mindset of Italians who decided to move to America:

If I am to be frank, then I shall say I left Italy and came to America for the sole purpose of making money. Neither the laws of Italy, nor the laws of America, neither the government of the one nor the government of the other influenced me in any way. I suffered no political oppression in Italy. I was not seeking political ideals: as a matter of fact, I was quite satisfied with those of my native land. If I could have worked my way up in my chosen profession in Italy, I would have stayed in Italy.

90 Destination America, 196.
91 “Getting Their Share,” 305.
But repeated efforts showed me that I could not. America was the land of opportunity, and so I leave intending to make money and then return to Italy. That is true of most Italian emigrants to America…\(^{92}\)

The Italian experience in Hartford is unique due to the economic opportunities it provided for struggling Italians. Hartford differs greatly from the experiences of Italians in New York and Boston because of the timing of its growth as an industrial city. The small city atmosphere made living conditions a little less dreary than what is generally written about urban immigrants in textbooks, and the opportunities afforded by a growing city in need of local business allowed the Italian community to flourish. The growth of the city and the advantages given to second generation Italians in Hartford made for prime conditions to achieve a higher status than their parents, and Italians elsewhere. Hartford and other cities in the United States provided a controlled environment that united a divided population to work together to solve problems and help their fellow countrymen that were arriving in the city. These strong communities of Italians with status made Hartford prestigious and gave a certain “panache” to being Italian in the city.


\(^{92}\) *Destination America*, 196.