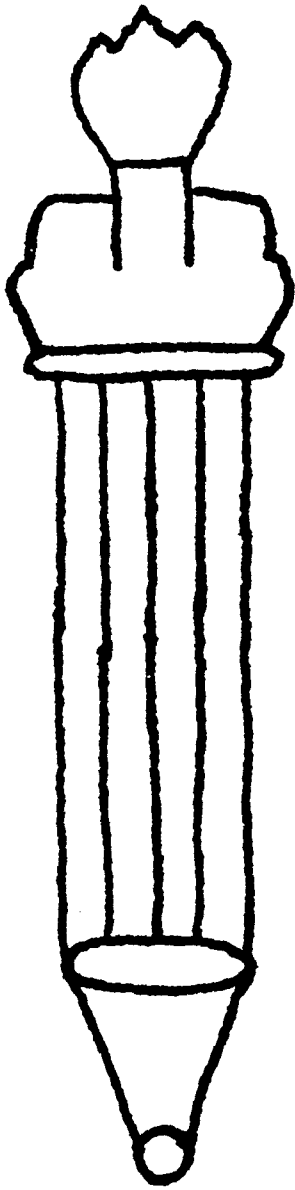




VALLEDOLMO



FERRE

DOMITIA



INTRODUCTION

The "American Community Life" class has tried to tell still another chapter in Fredonia's history. We have stitched together a story of human beings who courageously sought to improve their conditions. This pamphlet traces the major steps in the life of a group whose ancestors came here from Valledolmo, Sicily. We have included the conditions in Valledolmo, the trip to America, the early settlers, and the adjustment period prior to 1935.

The information presented by no means tells the complete tale. The Favata and Alessi Reports were valuable, but the paucity of printed materials has compelled us to rely heavily on twenty-two personal interviews. Errors have undoubtedly crept in because of our reliance on the memories of these people. We would like to thank all those who gave so willingly of their time. We are especially indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Peter Lanza and their daughter, Constance, for starting us on our way, and also to Mrs. Donald Sherman and Miss Agnes Andrew who typed the pamphlet.

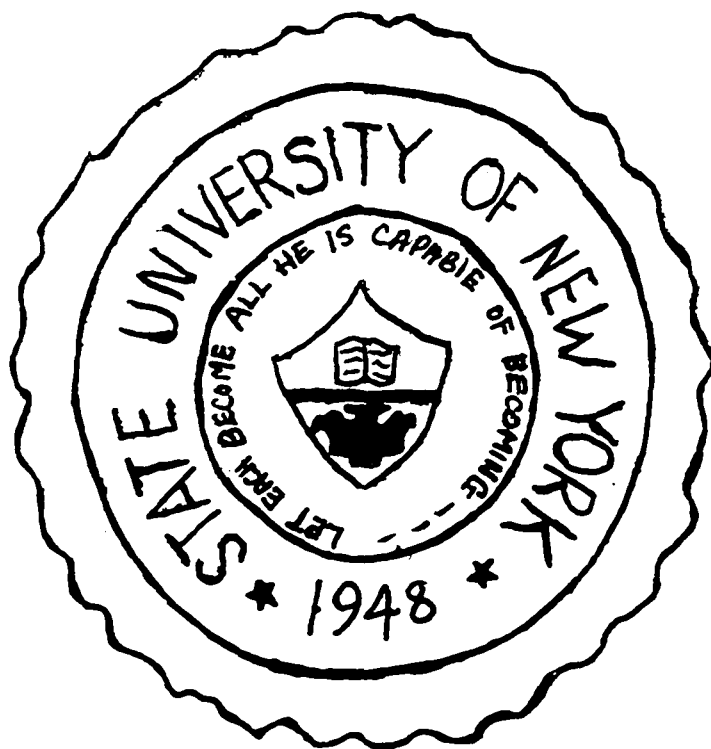
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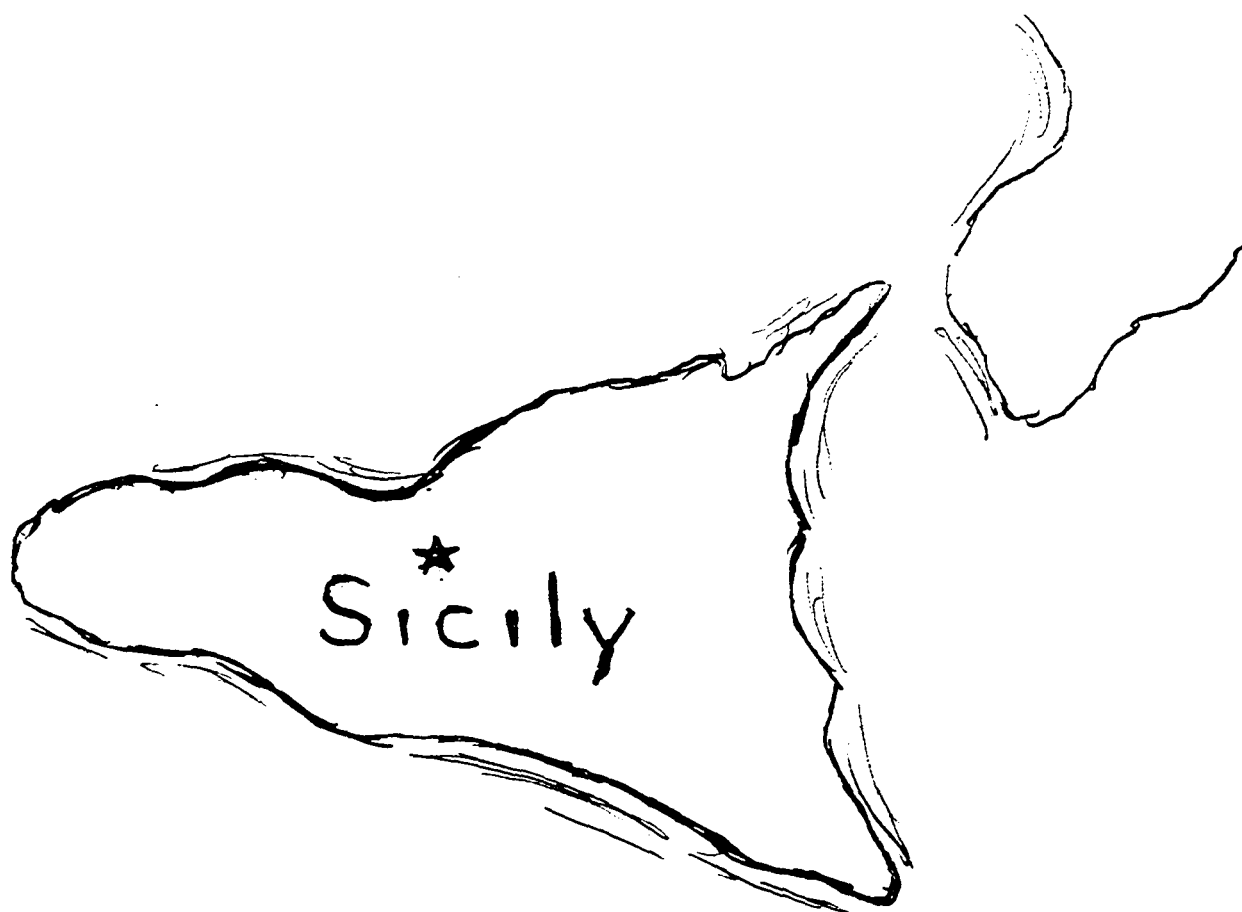
STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

FREDONIA, NEW YORK

May 15, 1961

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CHAPTER ONE VALLEDOLMO

1. The Geography

The geographic background of Sicily helps to explain the people who lived in Valledolmo. Separated from the toe of the Italian boot by the narrow Strait of Messina, Sicily rests in the center of the Mediterranean Sea. The Greeks called Sicily, Trinacria, the three cornered. This triangular shaped island, the largest in the Mediterranean, covers an area of 9,831 square miles.

Sicily is mountainous with an average altitude of over 1,450 feet. The Madonie, a Sicilian continuation of the Italian Apennine Mountains, stretches near the coastline on the northern side of the island.

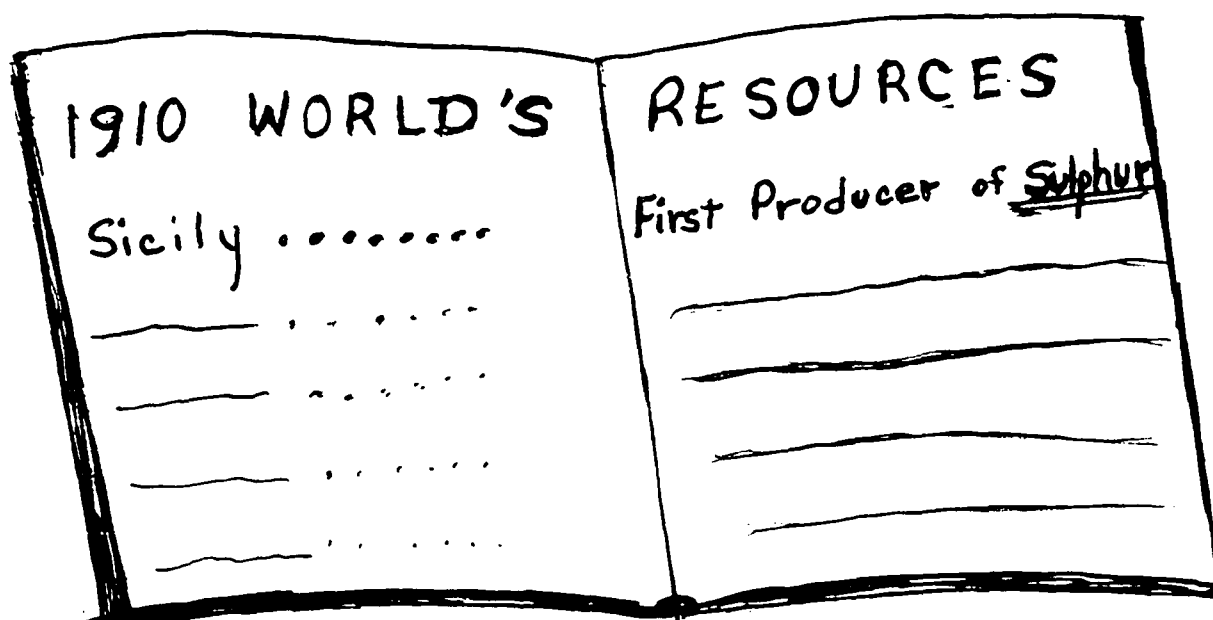
In these mountains lies the small village of Valledolmo, which means literally "valley of the mountain." It is located in northern Sicily at about 37°40' north latitude and 12°48' east longitude. Seventeen miles separate Valledolmo from the northern coast of Sicily. Palermo, Sicily's

capitol, stands forty miles northwest of isolated Valledolmo.

Valledolmo's temperate climate reflects the influence of the nearby Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean breezes bring cool, rainy winters and hot, almost dry, summers. January temperatures fall to the low forty degrees, and, during summer, the mercury hovers in the high eighties and nineties. Most of the rainfall occurs in the late autumn and winter, causing an occasional water shortage during the summer months. Valledolmo rationed its water two hours a day in various sections of the village; electricity was turned off at 6 P.M. When the wells dried up, the people walked to the mountain streams, carrying water back to the village in home-made containers. Mrs. Carrie Ubaney aptly described this balanced climate of hot summers and cool winters when she smiled and reminisced, "It was just beautiful."

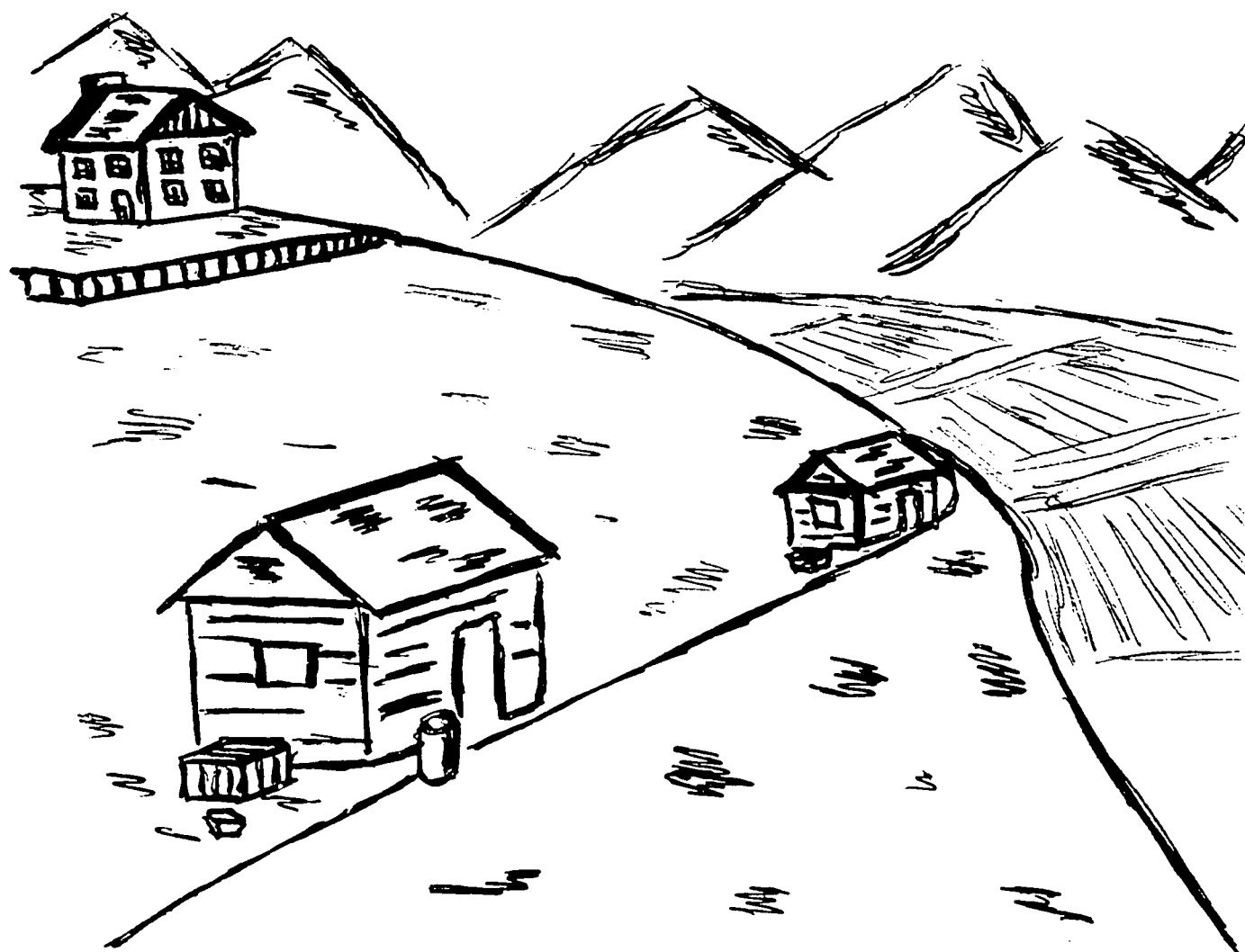
In the heyday of the Roman Empire, the richness of the soil made Sicily the grainery of all Italy. Wide pockets of fertile land stretched north of Valledolmo to the seacoast. This soil, coupled with the temperate climate, produced a vegetation of Evergreen Trees, Holm Oaks, Cork Trees, Junipers, and Brambles.

The village of Enna, near Valledolmo, furnishes the two major natural resources of Sicily: sulphur and salt. Prior to World War I, Sicily produced the world's largest supply of sulphur.



2. The Economy

Poverty-stricken farmers constituted the bulk of the population of Valledolmo. Semi-feudal arrangements prevailed and the people usually worked the land for a share of the crop. The peasants could not buy land to work and produce food, except on the terms of the owner of the land. One fifth of the total area was owned by 1,025 individuals. The "patrone," or land owner, furnished seed to the peasant who in turn planted, cultivated, and harvested the crop. The harvest was then divided equally between the "patrone" and the peasant.



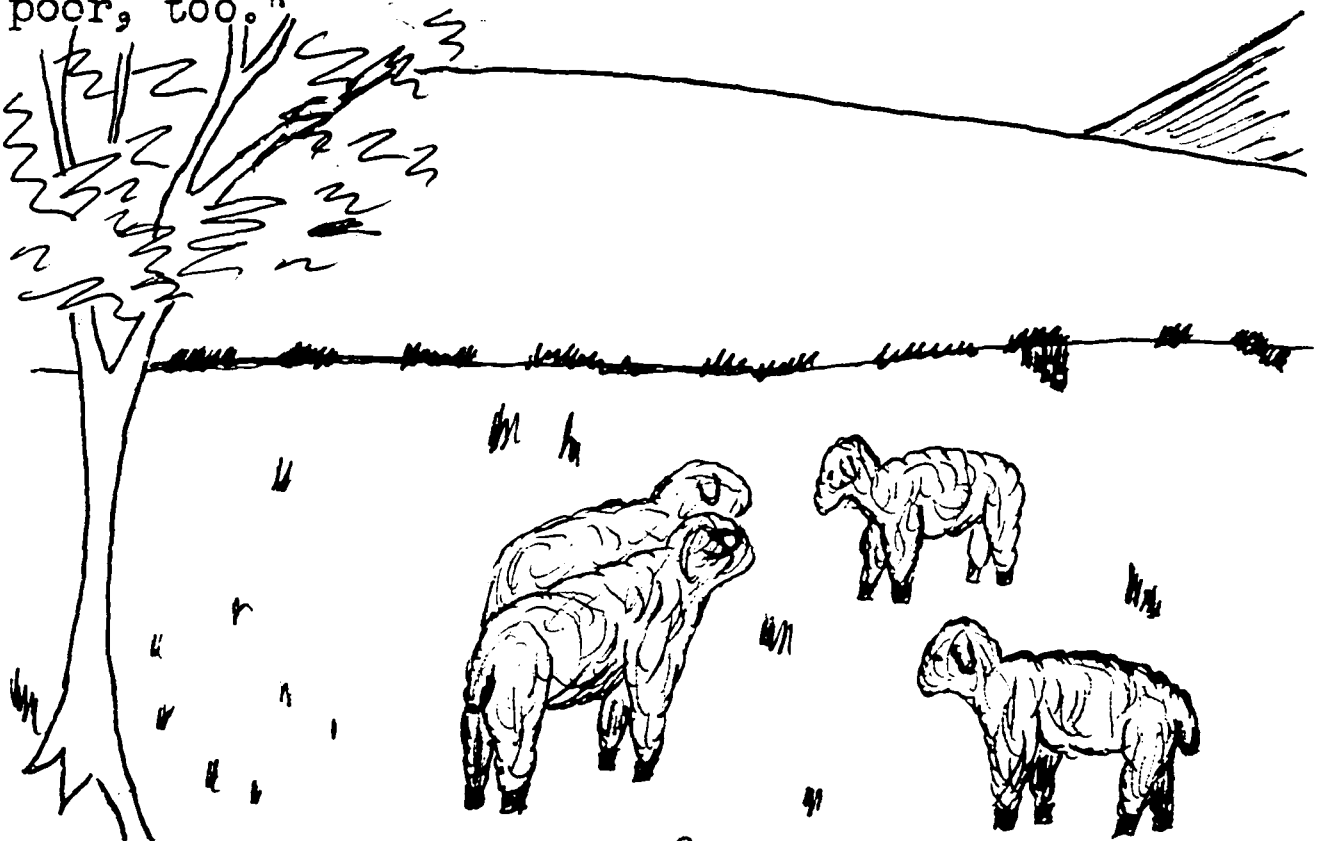
Using primitive agricultural equipment and mules to pull the plows, the people cultivated some 5,000 acres of land. They labored from four in the morning to dusk, earning eighty cents a day in the summer and a dollar a day in the winter. In addition to rye, grapes, olives, pears and favia (lima beans), the farmers raised wheat.

The people of Valledolmo were forced to live

in poverty for many reasons: a feudalistic system of land, oppressive taxes, compulsory military training, the lack of opportunity for education, and poor soil, exhausted from years of cultivation without fertilizers. The few farmers who owned land found it difficult to profit from their holdings. Under such a system, the people could not rise above the condition of sharecroppers, no matter how industrious and ambitious they were. Many women were forced to contribute to the family income by working as housekeepers for the upper and middle class.

A handful of people raised sheep and cattle from which they obtained products for home use. Often disease or drought struck, killing the sheep and leaving the families with no source of income. When this occurred, many immigrated to the United States because "they just couldn't make a living." Their diet consisted of sphagetti, bread, favia, and home grown vegetables. The people found it more nourishing and less expensive to grind their own flour.

Valledolmo had no factories and only a few shops. Its citizens had to make trips on foot to Palermo to purchase essential articles. They possessed few material luxuries. Despite numerous hardships, these hard working people enjoyed life because "they didn't care, for their neighbors were poor, too."

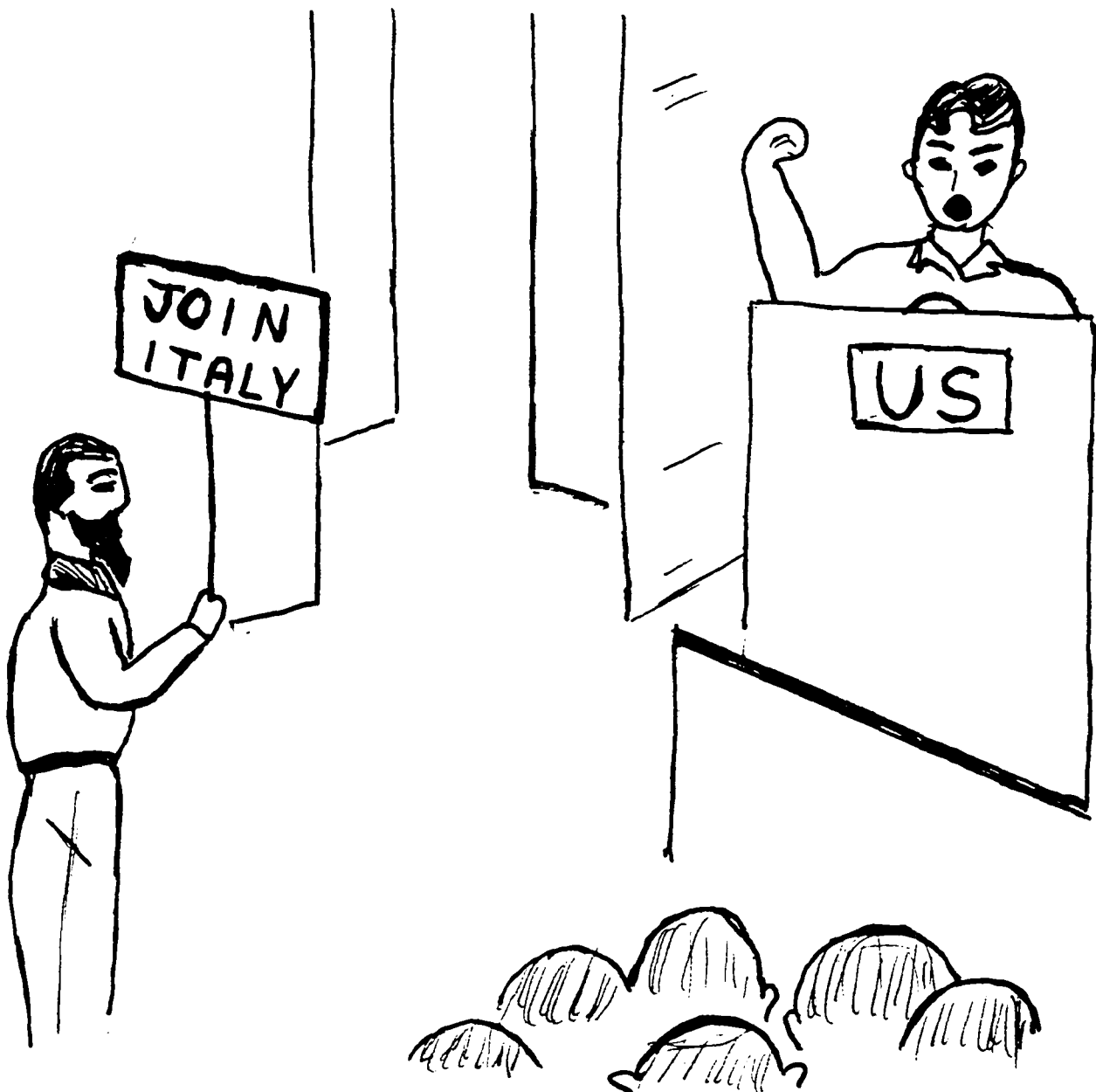


3. Politics

Sicily has a unique history. In ancient times, it served as a battlefield for Greeks, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, and Goths. Under Norman rule in the 1000's, the island combined with southern Italy to form the kingdom of the two Sicilies.

The medieval feudal system of land tenure under these governments was in force until after 1815. Although a constitution was granted to the people, it was revoked in 1815. All previous abuses were revived despite the vote of the Sicilian parliament in 1812 to abolish feudalism.

Then, the Italian patriot, Garibaldi, freed Sicily from Spain in 1860. The Island later voted to join Italy. Conditions of the people, however, got worse. Taxes increased and the military diverted manpower from producing the necessities of life.

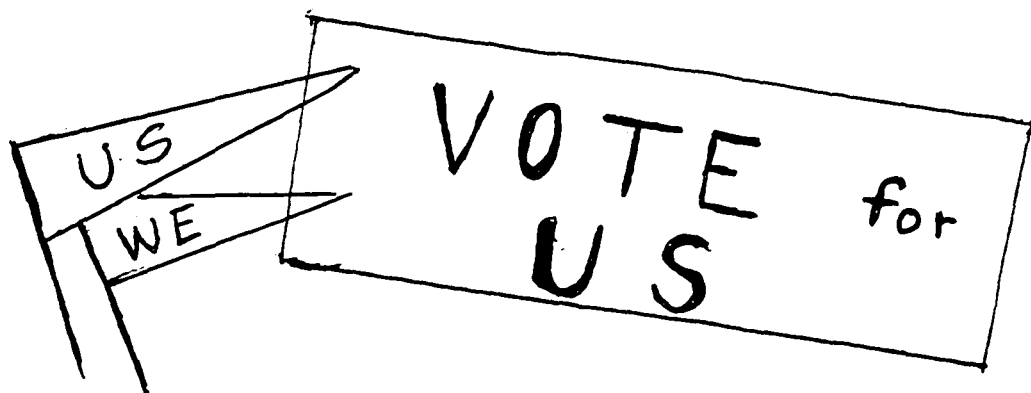


Sicilians generally distrusted the distant Italian government in Rome. Heavy taxes, government monopolies, and the semi-feudal aristocracy oppressed the people. In defense, the Sicilians cultivated a prized trait called "omerta," a kind of self-reliant manliness. The men formed secret associations that regarded the police as their enemies. Although the original purpose of "omerta" was to protect the poor from the rich and from the oppressing government, it gradually turned to extortion. The Secret Societies later became the Mafia. Mr. Gennuso remembered that "they killed my grandfather's cows, the Mafia did." Mrs. Peter Lanza's father was "robbed in Naples by the Mafia."

Although Italy possesses some power over the citizens of Sicily today, the island has its own government. Sicily is divided into nine provinces. Literate males over twenty-one years old elect the Mayor and send village representatives to the ninety-member Parliament at Palermo. As Mr. John Guzzetta said, "just the men vote."

Elections in Valledolmo were similar to elections in Fredonia. There were two parties, each with candidates for Mayor, secretary, and town clerk. Sicilians, though, did not need to register to vote.

The campaigns before election were very exciting. The candidates gave speeches, promising the people what they would do. Many of these campaigns resulted in big arguments which led to street fights at election time. Police and soldiers had to be called to restore order. Because the mayor had the power to make all village decisions, he was very important and generally was a lawyer or a professional person.



4. Social Life

The religious and social life of Valledolmo centered principally around the Roman Catholic Church. The religious holidays included St. Joseph's Day, March 19; Feast of the Crucifix, May 1; Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, June 1; Feast of St. Anthony, June 13; St. Lucy's Day, December 13; and the Feast of St. Pocco.



Each holy day had a distinct form of celebration. On St. Joseph's Day, the more fortunate townspeople gathered outdoors, set up long tables, and on them arranged food; this was given to the poor. The highlight of the holy day came when a procession marched through the village carrying a platform bearing the statue of the honored saint. Later in the evening the people enjoyed a band concert and dancing. This was generally followed by a spaghetti dinner served with eggs instead of meat. "Carnevale," a celebration similar to the New Orleans Mardi Gras, occurred three weeks before

Lent. It had one added attraction: fireworks!

Before 1860, ninety per cent of the population was illiterate, but by 1870 laws required that children attend school. The children received their formal education in a church school under the direction of nuns and priests. This learning continued to the fifth grade. The home, however, primarily trained the young people in family and community values.

The heart of the people was the family. From the time the child was very young, religion became an important part of life. In most of the homes sacred pictures hung from the walls and statues adorned the tables. Entire families usually sang in the church choirs. And, as entire families, they customarily made pilgrimages outside of Valledolmo. Carrying lighted torches, the men led the way.

Each parent had his special responsibility for the child. Mothers carefully chaperoned their daughters' activities, and taught them early in life the importance of homemaking and motherhood. The fathers taught their sons, so eventually the oldest son could inherit the family's trade. The close knit family depended on the father to make all the important decisions, especially with regard to his daughters' marriage. When a girl reached the marrying age of fourteen to sixteen, it became all important that she value her chastity, take into consideration her family's reputation, her skill at housework and her potential fecundity and her "health, sobriety, and religious devotion." The families arranged the marriage, and gay celebration followed the wedding ceremony.

The village square became a meeting place for all the villagers. Here news was passed around and goods were bartered. The children played games which are popular even today such as Bocce, similar to bowling and, Mura, finger guessing.



CHAPTER TWO DEPARTURE

1. In Transit

In the spring of 1887, natives from Valledolmo started the long trek to the United States. Most of these immigrants found the preparation for this journey a comparatively easy task. Qualifications for admittance to the United States included a rigid health examination and good eyesight. Social and economic status, however, did not affect their entrance requirements. The majority of those who came were from the lowest economic class of Valledolmo.

Because of their poverty, the people brought very few material things with them. Vermouth, fruit, and almonds comprised the bulk of the luggage of this impoverished group. To secure a better life in a new land, "they feared the ocean, but braved its dangers without hesitation."

These people suffered many economic hardships to accumulate enough money to come to the United States. Agents in Valledolmo sold tickets, or Italian-American relatives mailed them from the United States. The prices ranged from \$40 to \$80 a fare. The cost of the tickets varied with the time of year and the accommodations aboard ship. Due to the cost, the father or the oldest son frequently came alone.

After obtaining their tickets and passing the health examination, the people left Valledolmo. At Palermo, a train took them to Naples, where many of these travelers fell prey to shrewd characters. They took advantage of the immigrants by pick-pocketing or charging them ridiculous prices. It was common opinion that these people were members of the feared Mafia.

The ocean journey from Naples to America lasted from two to four weeks. Hoping for good weather, the people left in the warmer months. However, storms were frequent at this time. Not uncommon was this reaction: "The women would wail and weep and loudly express great doubt in the wisdom of their decision to go to America. One of them, I remember, began to curse Christopher Columbus for having discovered America."

Much of the sickness came from overcrowding. Few travelers realized that as many as 1,000 persons would board each boat. "In bad weather, the portholes remained closed, and the air became so foul that one could hardly breathe." It often got very stormy, and at one point the people found it necessary to tie down their few belongings. Doctors were available only to those with extreme cases of sea-sickness. No births or deaths have been recorded aboard these ships, because the group was generally a healthy one. The majority of the passengers were young to middle aged men, and a lesser number of younger women. Very few children or elderly people migrated; the older people hesitated to leave their home land. Rarely did families

travel as a group. Instead, the men left Valledolmo, hoping to return home later, or to earn enough money to send for their families.

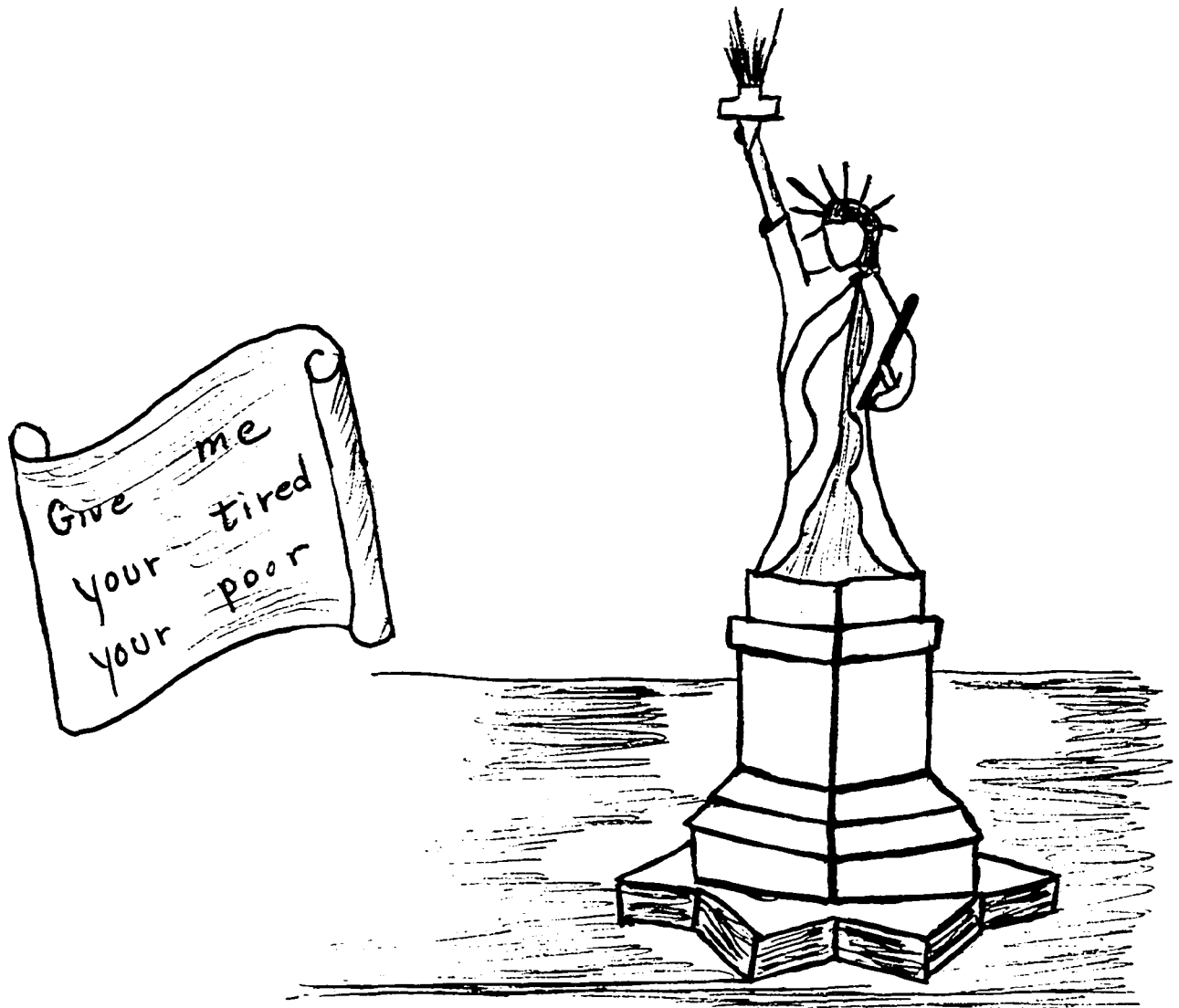
Primitive conditions existed aboard the immigrant ships. The sleeping quarters were divided into two sections, one for the men, the other for the women. They consisted of wooden bunks arranged with upper and lower berths. Just large enough for a person and his few belongings, these bunks were situated near the bottom of the ship. The location of the sleeping quarters limited the air circulation. As one woman happily recalled, "I had an upper bunk which was O.K., but, oh, those poor people below!"

The food consisted almost entirely of hard bread, beans, wine, and sometimes coffee. Few fresh fruits or vegetables were taken as they would perish on the trip over. However, some people brought lemons with them to prevent scurvy. The men of the family gathered the food which the ship provided into a container. Otherwise, the passengers waited in line for their food.

Despite misery and hardships, the people managed to be cheerful a good part of the time. To while away the long month, some sang and danced to songs of their native land. A few of the more fortunate members had brought accordians and guitars. The men aboard often told jokes and played cards. Some, however, found it a lonesome trip because they knew no one on the ship. "Their distress was almost beyond endurance." But unpleasant and uncomfortable as the journey was, once they set foot on American soil, the discomforts were at once forgotten.

The first glimpse of the majestic Statue of Liberty facing the travelers, brought joy to the ocean-weary immigrants. They landed on Ellis Island where each had to pass another physical examination. The doctors accepted most of the immigrants but did send back a few unfortunate people

because of illness. Some complained that the cockroaches on Ellis Island were so loud and numerous that they couldn't sleep. From here they proceeded to New York City, where, unable to speak English, they were often treated cruelly.



2. Arrival in the United States

Once in New York City, the immigrants were herded like cattle on a train and sent directly to Buffalo, New York. There, relatives and close friends waited for them. The journey from New York City to Buffalo was an unpleasant one for these people, their biggest handicap being an inability to communicate with transport officials.

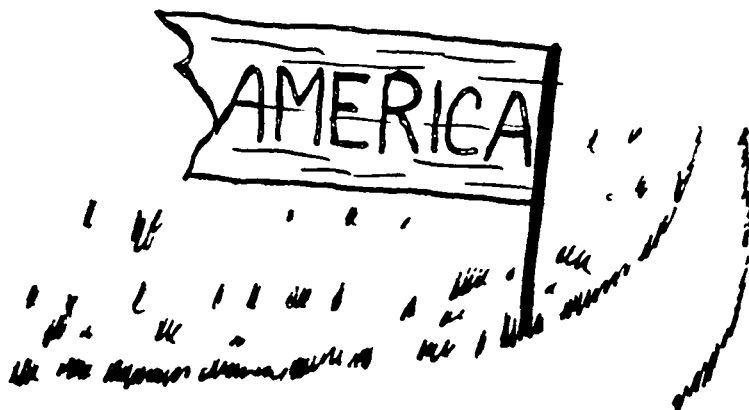
Many of the earlier Italian immigrants journeyed to Buffalo, with the thought of becoming economically secure so that they might return to their native land "rich." Buffalo offered them the hope of jobs in the factories, on the construction gangs, and in the railroad yards.

The Lograsso family had one of the most heartwarming experiences upon their arrival in Buffalo. Frightened by the unknown that lay ahead, they were warmly greeted by the eldest son who had previously come to America and had arranged their trip. They found dinner waiting for them in a new home. The family continues to remember this incident today as a landmark of their lives in America.

After several months in Buffalo, these immigrants found they could not earn enough money to support themselves. Only a small number of men found work on the railroad, and they moved from place to place, living in freight cars. Many ventured out of the city, joining migrant groups which traveled throughout western New York. Some of these journeyed to Batavia, LeRoy, and Orchard Park to pick fruit. In almost all cases the entire family worked, and the children attended school whenever possible.

Word soon spread that help was needed in the canning factory in Fredonia. These Italian immigrants literally swarmed to Fredonia in search of work. Many found jobs in the canning factory, while others were employed in nurseries, on construction jobs, and on nearby farms. A small proportion of these people left Fredonia to work in Jamestown, Falconer, Westfield, and other communities in Chautauqua County. The majority, however, settled in Fredonia.

When asked why they remained in Fredonia, Mrs. Anthony William Russo, one of the first settlers here replied, "We just seemed to click."





CHAPTER THREE SETTLING IN FREDONIA

1. The First Settlers

Economic and political conditions throughout southern and eastern Europe caused many people to seek a better life in America. The immigrants from Valledolmo, Sicily, were no different. Today, these people comprise about ninety-five percent of the population of Fredonia of Italian descent.

Several specific reasons dominated their decision to leave. They heard that they could make a great deal of money and thus rise in social status. Friends and relatives wrote back home, telling of the "glories" of America. Adventures and tales of streets lined with gold and easy-to-get money also lured many of them to American shores. A large number intended to return to Italy after they had become wealthy. A special factor promoted immigration from Valledolmo, Sicily: the ownership of land. Possession of property was important because of its symbol of status in Valledolmo.

In western New York, almost all of the first immigrants from Sicily went to Buffalo. Initially, the majority of Italian immigrants went to cities where work was more plentiful. In time, they ventured into the smaller surrounding areas. There, they joined work gangs in Brant, Angola, and Farnham to pick peas, beans, and other crops. Numerous canning factories in Farnham, Silver Creek, and Irving also provided work. Usually the women and children were hired as pickers. In this line of work the women received forty cents a day while the men earned seventy-five cents a day.

Fredonia attracted more immigrants from Italy than any other village or city in Chautauqua County. However, everyone who came did not remain. Many people went to Falconer, Jamestown, and Westfield. Falconer attracted the immigrants because of the great need for skilled and unskilled labor in the factories. Jamestown offered work in furniture and textile plants, construction, and on the public streets. The Adsonia, Goodwill Worsted Mills and Maddox Table Company employed many immigrants.

The first settlers in Fredonia from Valledolmo were Antonio and Mary Grace Lanza and their four children, Peter, Horace, Rose, and Lucia. The Lanzas arrived in New York City on June 5, 1887 and went directly to Buffalo, New York. They sought work in Farnham, Batavia, Leroy and Orchard Park. Peter Lanza joined a group from Buffalo who got jobs constructing the Dunkirk and Fredonia Railway. Then, in the summer of 1887, the American Canning Company in Fredonia provided employment for the rest of the Lanza family. In this way, the Lanza family came to Fredonia.

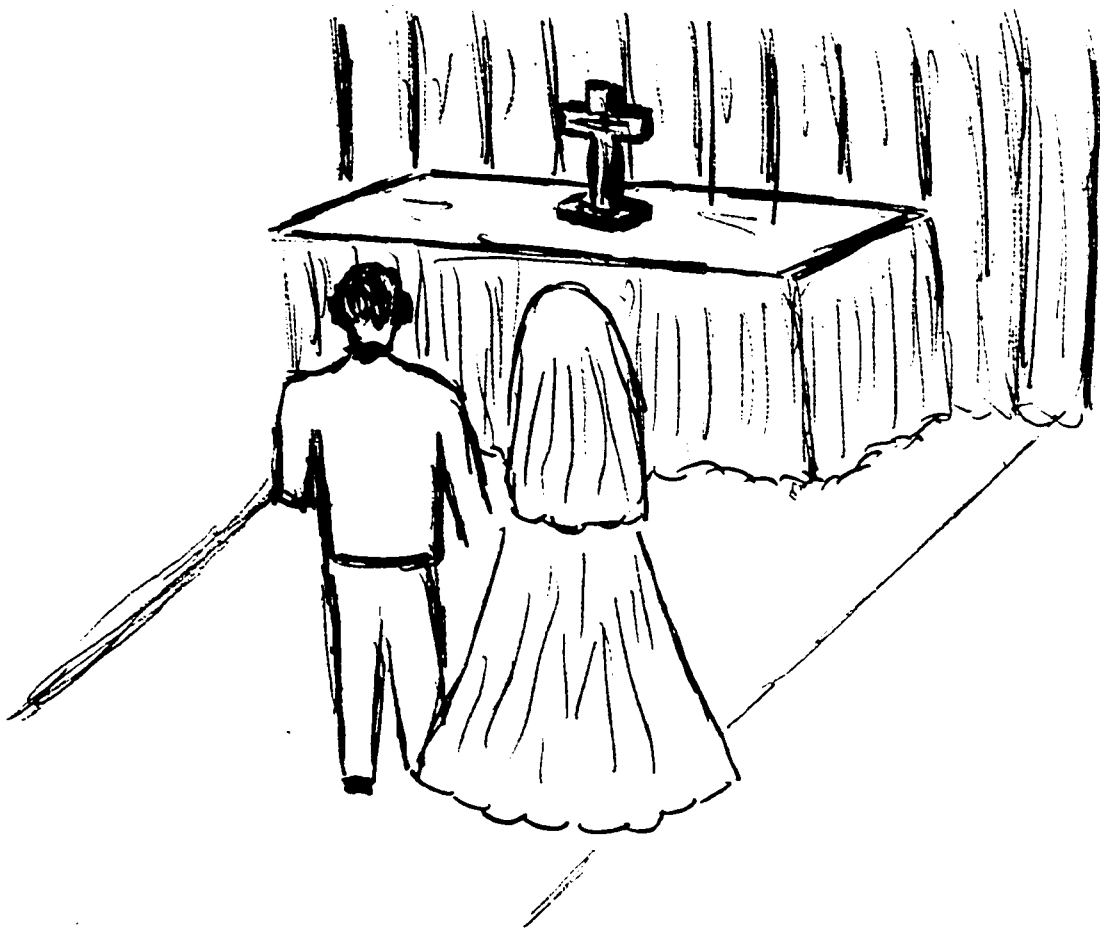
Once settled, the Lanzas sent for their old friends from Valledolmo, the Lagrassos. Within one year Anthony and Rosaina Lagrasso and their children Sebastian, Josephine, Lucia, and Horace joined the Lanzas in Fredonia.

Then came the families of Lo Guidice, Gugino,

Giambrone, and Valone. Before coming here, many of them had searched for farm work in Brant and North Collins. They, too, were attracted by the opportunities for employment in the canning factory of Fredonia.

The numbers from Italy increased steadily. The Fredonia directory of 1890 listed one Italian, Francisco Geoginto, who ran a confectionery store. The directory of 1894 contained four Italian names, Anthony Lanza, Peter Lanza, Anthony Lagrasso, and Michael Traverso. Four years after that little group had come to Fredonia, the Italians increased their number to thirty-one. By 1910, there were 1,187 Italian-born residents living in Fredonia.

Several other noteworthy firsts followed. The first children born of Italian ancestry in Fredonia were Olimpia Familet, in January 1894 and Orazia Barone, in June 1895. The first baptism of Italian ancestors recorded on the St. Joseph's rolls was Vincent Cracamisi. The same records showed that the first marriage took place on January 8, 1900, when Rosario Scanio wed Anna Marie Fasso.



2. The Housing Problem

Reluctance of the older residents of Fredonia to rent to these new immigrants caused the first settlers from Valledolmo much difficulty. The Lanzas, particularly, experienced hardships upon their arrival. The only place that they could rent was located in Laona, two miles from the French canning factory where Mr. Lanza worked. He often walked two or three miles, four times a day, to his place of employment.

Later on, the Lanzas found a home on Cleveland Avenue. As their friends and relatives began to settle in Fredonia, they joined the Lanzas. Their homes were concentrated in the area of Cleveland Avenue, on Cushing, Eagle, Liberty, and Prospect Streets, all in the southwestern part of the village.

Another settlement sprang up at the corner of Risley and Chestnut Street. This location reminded them a great deal of the land surrounding a flour



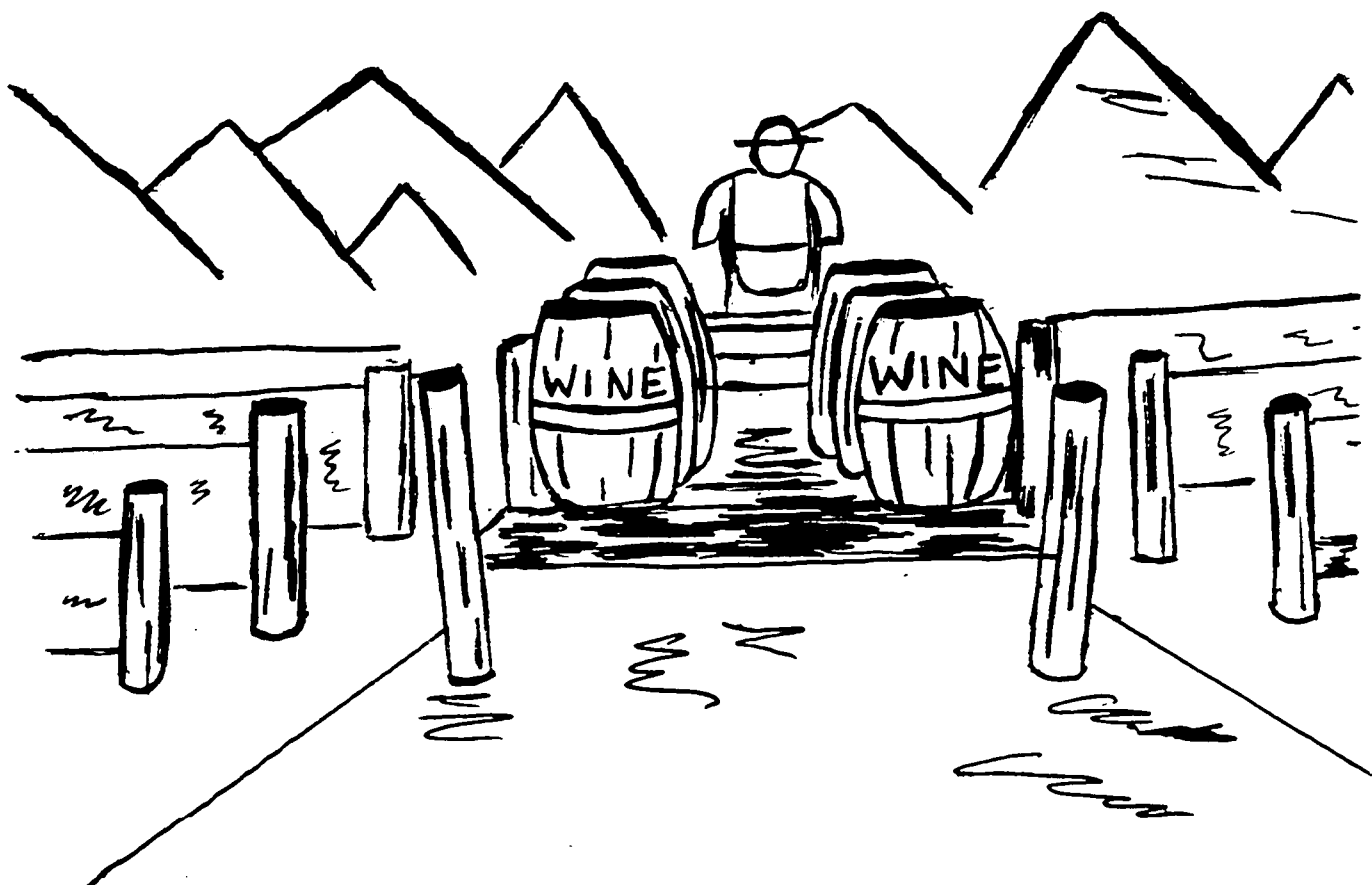
mill in Valledolmo, Sicily. The settlement, known as Cordova, was also referred to as "Milano al Peru" or mill by the pear. The name came from the pear tree and the old mill located by Canadaway Creek, which ran through Fredonia.

The first settlers were often compelled to seek a home in any "shack or shed," according to Mr. Nicholas Gugino. It was not uncommon for two or three families to share one apartment. These apartments, often small and poorly equipped, had little furniture and lacked gas and electricity. The early settlers burned wood for heat. Housing conditions, though poor in Fredonia, were an improvement over those existing in Buffalo.

Judge Hooker helped them solve their housing problems. Purchasing four abandoned homes near the tannery, he employed Kirby Hayward to transport them to Clark Street, in southwestern Fredonia. Judge Hooker then rented the dwellings to the new immigrants. As the Italian population grew, the housing problems became less acute.

In general, the new immigrants preferred to buy their own homes, rather than to rent places to live. Once they had obtained their own homes, they proudly added a touch of Valledolmo to the atmosphere of the new community by planting vegetable gardens.





3. Making a Living

Opportunity for work attracted these people, but secure jobs were scarce. Poor working conditions and the lack of steady employment were a constant threat. The absence of child labor laws, workman's compensation, job security, and paid vacations plagued them as much as they did the rest of the laboring class in the United States. Language barriers added to their difficulties.

The workers earned small salaries. The men received fifty cents a day in the canning factory and fifteen cents an hour in construction. Less than a dollar a day could be made working at the steel plant, the railroad, the nurseries, the farms and the trolley line between Dunkirk and Fredonia. Many of the men bought their own shovels and sought jobs on the construction gangs where they earned about fifteen cents an hour.

Men, women, and children all contributed to the family income. The women were the migrant

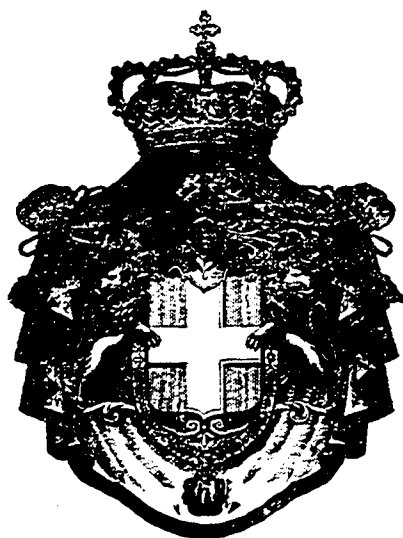
workers of the day. They performed the most back-breaking and monotonous chores without complaint, working as many as twelve to fourteen hours daily. Whole families brought their work home with them, joining one another around the kitchen table after supper to string beans. This activity earned the entire family \$1.25 a day.

The settlers branched out into various occupations. Living in a grape belt area, they started to produce wine. The first of the many wineries established in Fredonia was that of Peter Lanza in 1894. The Fredonia directory of 1898-99 recorded the following: Joseph Serrone, who was in the fruit business; Sam Catanzaro, a shoemaker; and Joseph Narducci, shoemaker. The same directory also listed Pietro Gulletta, who was in the fruit business at 12 Portage Road.

Insecurity haunted the newcomers. Lay-offs and strikes threatened them. Mr. Frank St. George recalled having to work as far away as Niagara Falls one year because of a lay-off at the United States Radiator Plant. Winter jobs were so scarce that families worked hard during the summer to earn enough money to carry them through the remainder of the year.

Their capacity for hard labor made them welcome to employers and co-workers. They willingly faced the burdens by rolling up their shirt sleeves and this saw them through the hardships of these early days. Eventually, a number of them went into businesses of their own. Groceries and other small stores opened and served the expanding group of new citizens from Valledolmo.





IN NOME DI SUA MAESTÀ

UMBERTO I.

PER GRAZIA DI DIO E PER VOLONTÀ DELLA NAZIONE

RE D'ITALIA

N° del Registro 25
N° del Passaporto 1229

CONNOTATI

Età anni 26
Statura metri 1.75
Capelli cast.
Sopraciglia id.
Occhi id.
Naso piccolo.
Bocca id.
Mento ovale
Barba bionda
Segni particolari cicatr. al mento
e altre al sopracciglio destro
Condizione trafficante

Tato a chiodi
maggiore
Domicilio

Firma del titolare
Gargano

*Il Ministro per gli Affari Esteri
prega le Autorità Civili e Militari di Sua Maestà
e delle Potenze amiche ed alleate di lasciar liberamente passare
Lanza Pietro Salvatore di Antonio
che va in New York*

*Il presente Passaporto rilasciato a Lanza
il 13 Luglio millocottocento novanta e
vinto nulla osta
è valido per un anno*



*Per delegazione
del Ministro per gli affari esteri
Il Sotto Segretario
Pantaleone*

A copy of an Italian passport issued in 1895.

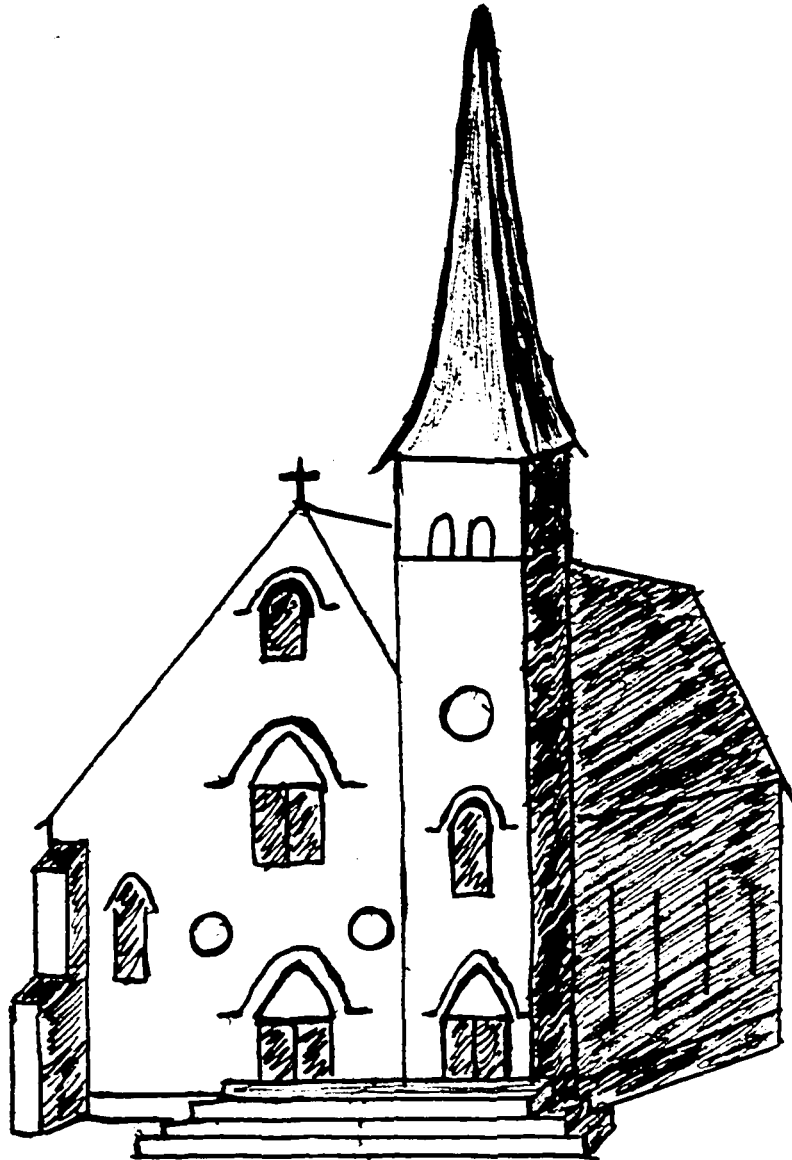


The Lograsso family as photographed by the Mason Studios in 1892.
Left to right: Anthony Lograsso, Horace Lograsso (later a medical
doctor), Josephine Lograsso (the present Mrs. Peter Lanza),
and Rosalia Lograsso.

4. The Role of Religion

Social life centered around family, friends, and religion. The people gathered together at night and told stories. The men congregated at one of their friends grocery stores, and the women visited in the homes. Most of the people contributed much of their time to the organizations of the church. After the completion of Saint Anthony's Hall in 1913, the Saint Anthony's Society became the leading social group.

Their feasts, held in private homes during the summer months, had a religious significance. A Carnival occurred three weeks before Lent, and featured a masquerade parade. The leader would stop at a house and everyone followed dancing and singing into that home. Saint Joseph's Day, a holiday where the poor received food from the more fortunate, was the most significant Italian-American feast day, and was celebrated on March 19th. In May, the Feast of the Crucifix was enjoyed in honor



of the finding of the cross. Saint Anthony of Padua was commemorated June 13th; he was the patron saint of wanderers and immigrants. The Feast of the Blessed Sacrament occurred in June; San Colloquial, in July; and Saroco in August. These holidays gave the people an opportunity for gay expression as well as religious observance. The church band played concerts. Dancing eventually followed the procession around the village where a person carried a statue significant to the name of the feast.

Religion offered comfort to the oppressed and the Catholic Church played a major part in the lives of the people. Upon arrival, they experienced hardships and discontent in the practice of their religion. The faithful walked six miles, on the D. A. V. railroad tracks, to St. Mary's Church in Dunkirk. They, therefore, set up a makeshift church on the third floor of a dance hall in Fredonia. On June 18, 1896, Father Casemer Taylor offered mass at Union Hall, which is now known as I. O. O. F. Hall located on 7 East Main Street. Even after the completion of St. Joseph's in 1902, they continued to be less than happy. Language difficulties and resentment between the Irish and Italians caused the latter to seek a church of their own.

For years they continued their many customs. They went from house to house with an accordian, serenading the young ladies of the village. They clung to their dietary habits. Spaghetti and meatballs, macaroni, fave beans, cici (a type of cookie) --all held a place at the family table.

Discrimination did not prevail in Fredonia to the extent that it had in Dunkirk and Buffalo. However, experiences in the markets, usually in the form of taunts, made life somewhat difficult. Markets owned by Italians soon opened their doors to these new citizens. "It is that way with any new group," these people say now as they recall those early days. They all agreed that Fredonia had made them feel very welcome during these years and one

person remarked significantly: "You notice none of us went back."

5. The Desire for Education

At first, education did not play a crucial role in the life of these people. Upon arrival, so few knew how to read or write that often one member of the entire group was assigned to write letters to Valledolmo for the rest. The children immediately attended public school, but many quit to work and supplement the family income. It was not the rule for the mother of the Italian family to concern herself with the Parent-Teachers Association or other school activities. Obtaining a living was most important and language barriers presented a serious problem.

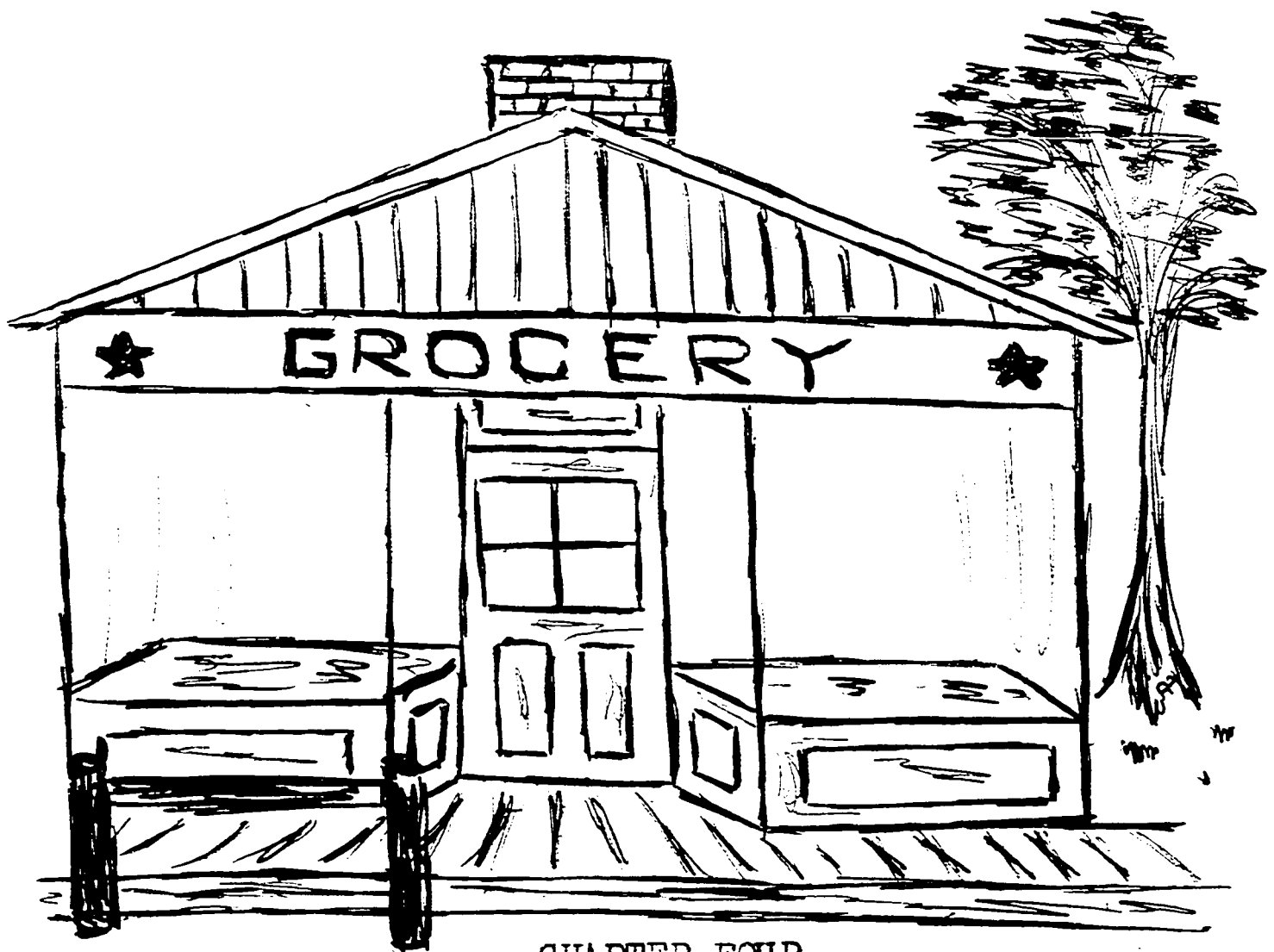
Not too long after their arrival, however, the families from Valledolmo sent their children to school. They took a special kind of pride in their children's education. Both teachers and students cooperated and encouraged the children to continue their education.

The newcomers pointed with pride to those who have advanced professionally. The first two young men of their group to receive a college degree were Horaze Lanza, a criminal lawyer, and Dr. Horace Lograsso, a tuberculosis specialist. Joseph Chilli became the first Italian-American doctor in Fredonia, followed by Dr. Frank Ubaney. Practically every Italian family in Fredonia can justly boast of one professional member. In a recent incomplete survey compiled by the members of Saint Anthony's Church, one hundred and eighty persons of Italian ancestry in Fredonia had entered a profession. Perhaps because of the opportunities offered at the nearby College of Education, teaching ranked highest among their chosen fields.

The Italians from Valledolmo underwent many

hardships on their arrival in Fredonia. This is true, however, of any new group in a community. By facing these hardships with faith, frugality and hard work, they have come a long way since those first days in Fredonia.





CHAPTER FOUR BECOMING A PART OF FREDONIA

1. Economic Life from 1900 to the Depression of 1929

The early arrivals found employment in a variety of industries as unskilled laborers. Their agricultural training in Sicily had prepared them to fit into the agrarian area of Fredonia.

In the fruit industry, the American Canning Company employed many women and children. Here the jobs were varied: peeling tomatoes, packing strawberries, snipping beans, or pasting labels. The steam necessary in the canning of tomatoes, corn, beans, and peas made the temperature inside the factory almost unbearable. The worker labored ten to twelve hours for an unbelievable fifty cents a day. In September, 1898, the factory turned out nearly 66,000 cans of tomatoes each day, employing upwards of 500 people during the packing season.

The T. S. Hubbard Company and The Josselyn Company, both nurseries, hired many men as did the

Brooks Locomotive Company in Dunkirk. The Wages at the nurseries were not much better than those offered at the canning factory, but they furnished a living. The Brooks plant paid higher salaries for fewer working hours.

As the new citizens adjusted to the community and purchased their own property, they found various ways to supplement their seasonal incomes. Like Sicily, Fredonia offered an opportunity for growing grapes and making wine. Packed in eight and twenty pound baskets, grapes fetched an average price of seven and one-half cents for eight pounds. E. J. Turk Company of Fredonia, manufactured the baskets and employed a few people. Many produced only enough wine to satisfy their personal needs. For some, however, such as Peter Lanza, it offered an excellent living. The miners of the Pittsburg area provided a large market for the red liquid. In the beginning, the wineries were of moderate size, but gradually thousands of gallons of wine were produced by a single winery. This wine usually sold in fifty-gallon barrels.

In 1902, Cosimo and Filipp Drago established the first macaroni factory in a building located at the corner of Cleveland and Orchard Streets. The property on which this factory was located is thought to be the first piece of real property acquired by an Italian immigrant in the village of Fredonia. Purchased by Antonio Rizzo in 1900, it was sold to the Dragos in 1902. The original Gioia macaroni factory was started in 1919 by Antonio and Elphonso Gioia and Charles Bellanca. A few years later, the Gioia factory moved to Rochester and became the large corporation of today.

In 1902, other new businesses also emerged. These included Frank Lograsso's grocery, 60 Prospect Street, and Nicholas Rizzo's meatmarket, 18 Orchard Street. By 1906, the people from Valledblmo were active in several types of business: J. Demarco, Joseph Parlato, barbers; Salvator Vacanti, shoe repair; A. Joy and Brothers, fruit dealers;

Antonic Alessi, Edward Dispenza, Joseph Ladrone, Peter S. Lanza, John Leone, Tony Liberty, grocers; Barone Brothers, meat market; Vallone Brothers, Charles Alessi, tailors; A. Joy and Brothers, news dealers.

This growth did not come easily but resulted from hard work and thriftiness. Many of the new American grape farmers bought land where no one thought a crop could be grown. They cleared the land, cultivated the soil, and started fine vineyards on the hills outside the village. The fruits of labor soon became evident. Rather than squander their money freely, they put it back into the farms or businesses.

A great number of them did invest their money in a specific area, the education of their children. Many of the mothers worked long hours in the canning factory to send their sons to college. As a result, Fredonia gained a number of professional men. Parents and children have a right to be very proud of this accomplishment.

World War I was a prosperous time for everyone in the village. Those who didn't have a chance to serve their country in the armed services served at home working in the factories or producing the food needed for the troops. Farms expanded and business boomed.

1920 and the Eighteenth Amendment affected a number of the prosperous industries in Fredonia. but it did not end the custom of making wine. No doubt, production slowed down considerably, but the wine barrels were never completely empty. An interesting story of the times was told by Vince Gugino, one of the stock holders of the Fredonia Salsina Canning Company. On his way to work in the morning, he would pass one of the small cellars where wine was being made. The next day, he would walk by the same cellar and would see a sign on the door: "Closed by U. S. Government." A week later, production was again in full swing.

The canning factories have always employed many Italian-Americans. Red Wing, Gervas, Fredonia Preserving Company, and Mr. Gugino's company, Salsina, depended on this source of labor. Salsina, which means tomato paste in Italian, started in 1920 with just this in mind. The business eventually had to be abandoned because tomato paste could be manufactured cheaper in California. Salsina now turned to the canning of beans, tomatoes, tomato juice, a few apples and cherries; this kept 150 to 200 people busy during the harvest season.

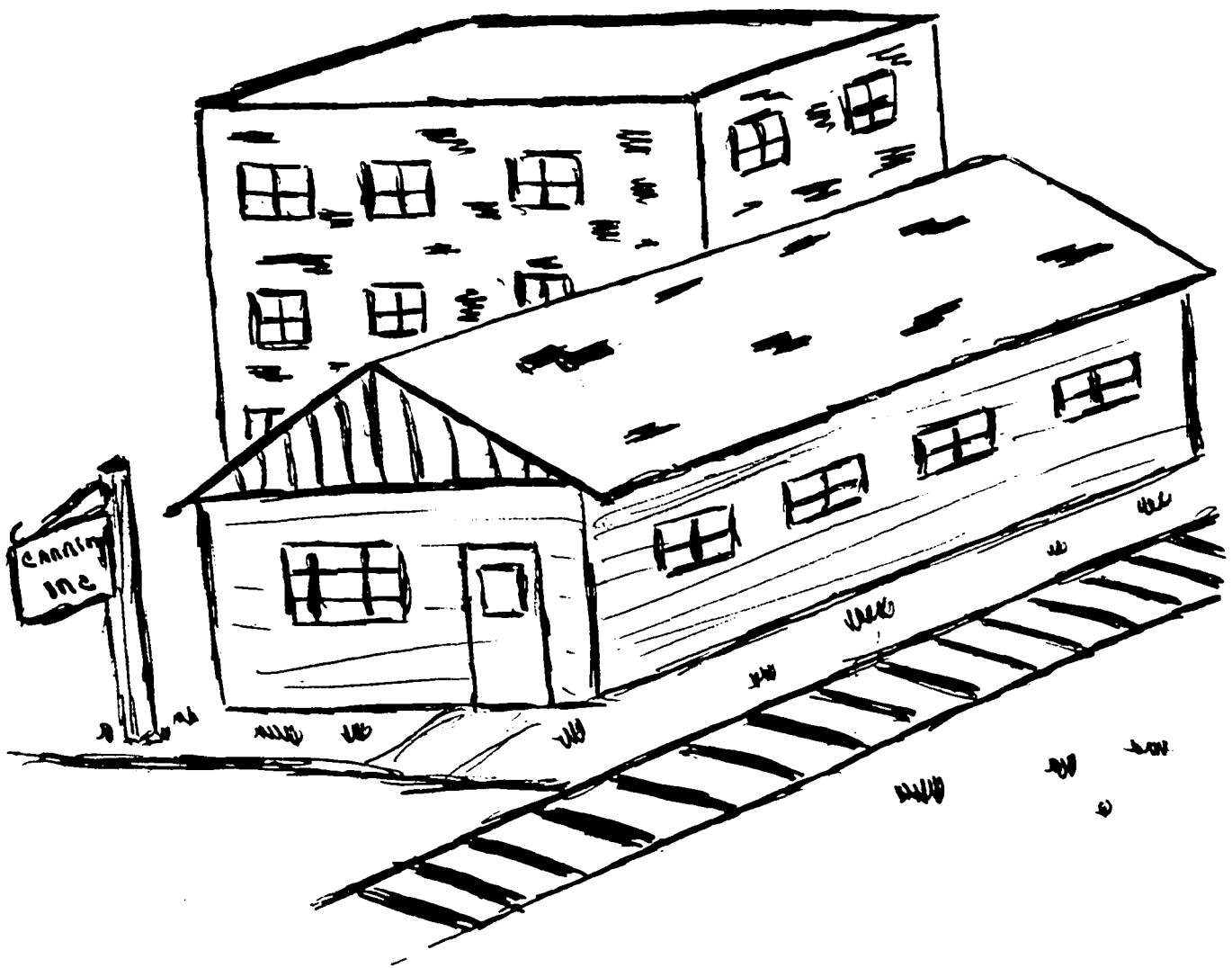
These people were so anxious to work that they lined up around the bean shed early in the morning for a day's employment. Sometimes they pushed and shoved each other, afraid that there might not be enough work for all. One mother with many children could not come to the shed to snip beans, so the worker loaded beans on a cart and took them to her home where she might work and watch her children at the same time. Mr. Gugino remarked that he wished that the people of today worked as hard and faithfully as the new citizens.



2. Economic Conditions from the Depression to 1935

By 1925, the Americans of Italian ancestry in Fredonia had become well established in the business life of the community. Their shops and stores appeared on every street and their assets grew continually. The listing in Kerwins' Dunkirk and Fredonia Directory showed that they owned over half of the grocery stores in Fredonia. Very few were the occupations in which these people did not enter. However, they concentrated on manufacturing and processing, like the Fredonia Salsina Company and Gervas Canning Company.

With the depression of 1929, there came a temporary halt to the business growth of the newest citizens in Fredonia. The collapse of the stock market did not, however, ruin Fredonia's economic activity as it had elsewhere. Most of the people at the canning factories retained their jobs. Although these industries provided only seasonal work,

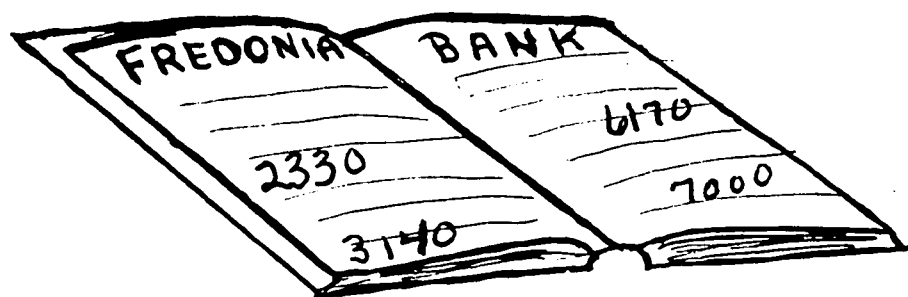


they helped carry many people through the lean years. During the 1929 depression, the situation was accurately summed up in one sentence, "The canning factories were bread lines in Fredonia."

The depth of the depression came in 1931. Even the seasonal work supplied by the canning factories was insufficient to support the village. The people depended increasingly upon the land. In many cases, they cultivated the front yards, growing food for their tables. The local welfare department also supplied many of the necessities of life to the needy.

By 1935, Fredonia was getting back on its feet and growth again got under way. Evidence of this was found in the canning industry. Two more canning companies went into production by the end of that year. This made a total of six packers: Fredonia Preserving, Salsina, Gervas, Red Wing, and the two new plants, Bison Canning Company and Brocton Preserving.

Growth tells the story of the newest American businessmen in Fredonia. They had grown from penniless immigrants with wonderful ideas to prosperous citizens whose dreams have become a reality. This is evidenced today by the many successful farmers, businessmen, and manufacturers of Italian descent in the Fredonia area.





3. Social Changes

When the immigrants from Valledolmo arrived in Fredonia they had known only their own language. Because of this, they sought their own people to serve as interpreters and to help them get settled.

The problems they encountered as a result of their illiteracy made them desire a good education for their children. Because some children had not previously attended school, they were too old to sit in the same room with younger students. The families that had money sent the boys to school immediately. The girls worked to help educate the boys. The few girls who did attend school rarely went on to higher education. Many had to withdraw and go to work to supplement the family income. The people sacrificed to keep their children in school. World War I brought wealth, and school attendance increased. Those who could, went beyond grade school. Many of them entered teaching because of the nearby Academy.

The Americans of Italian ancestry valued highly their Roman Catholic religion. In 1900, the people attended Mass in Union Hall as no Catholic church existed in the village. A priest from the Missionaries of St. Charles Barromeo of St. Anthony's Church in Buffalo periodically came to Fredonia to conduct services.

St. Joseph's Church, erected in 1902, under the leadership of Father Clark, welcomed all the Catholics in Fredonia. As the Italian population in the community increased, the need for an Italian speaking priest who could better understand the new arrivals became evident.

The language barrier, overcrowded conditions at St. Joseph's, and a preference for their own church led to the formation of the St. Anthony's Society. The Society made plans for a church of its own, and became incorporated on December 2, 1905. Participating at the joyous affair were Rt. Rev. Charles H. Colton, Bishop of Buffalo; Rt. Rev. Nelson H. Baker, Vicar-General, Diocese of Buffalo; and Rev. Bernardo Casassa, Rector. Peter Elardo and Joseph L. Lazarony were the local trustees.

The St. Anthony's Society then assumed the task of digging a cellar for the church. The members organized in groups, donating their spare time to complete this part of the construction. Just before the dedication of the church, the Society held a two week bazaar and presented the first organ. "On March 25, 1906, the Feast of Annunciation, the dream of a new church, a fulfillment of a fervent desire manifested by the people, became a reality in its dedication by Bishop Colton, of the Buffalo diocese, in honor of St. Anthony of Padua." St. Anthony's was also the name of the church in Vailledolmo.

The church was assigned to the Scalabrini Fathers, whose specific purpose was to administer the sacraments to the Italian-American immigrants. Father Teofilo Glesa P.S.S.C. was the first pastor.

He completely dedicated himself to the welfare of the people and the organization of church societies. In 1911, Father Prossida P.S.S.C., became the second pastor and continued the work of his predecessor until 1915. In succession Father Arnaldo Vanole P.S.S.C. became pastor, then Father Lugigi Zeleanix D. in 1920, and Father Dominico Billiotti P.S.S.C. in 1921.

The common bond of the Roman Catholic faith held the people together. They found it difficult to join the political and civic organizations of Fredonia. After the establishment of their own church, St. Anthony's in 1906, many religious organizations emerged. The Holy Name Society, one of the oldest in the parish, acted as the pastor's lay assistants. They also sponsored lawn fetes, festivals, ham smokers and card parties. Organized shortly after the church was built, the Children of Mary Sodality assisted in the church devotions and in the instruction of the children in Sunday School. The St. Joseph's Society, founded in the parish in 1917, initiated and promoted with the other societies, parish events and assistance to the pastor. Other organizations formed around this time included St. Anthony's Society, The Crucifix Society, Blessed Sacrament Society, the Knights of Columbus and the Altar Boys Club. In addition St. Anthony's Church sponsored a very successful basketball team.

People with an interest in music formed choirs and bands. Frank Drago organized the first band of Fredonia. The players included his children, cousins, and friends. The Imperial Band was organized by Thomas Costellano. This music added to the gaiety and color to the feasts, parades and parties.

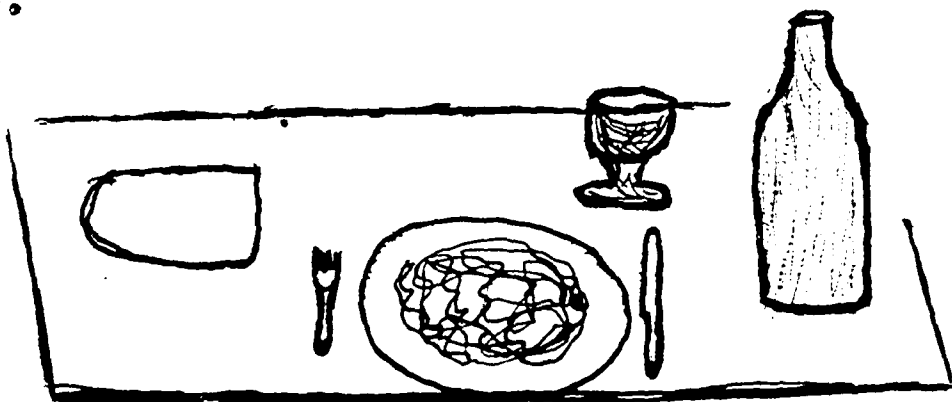
The church records revealed the number of baptisms and marriages of Italian descent. The St. Joseph Church records started in 1899, when two babies were baptized. It is of interest to note that between 1900 and 1905, 317 baptisms occurred and 63 entered marriage. This was the largest number of Italian-Americans receiving the sacraments

at St. Joseph's. In 1905-1910, twenty-six received baptism, seven between 1910-1920 and three between 1921-1925. Seven became married between 1905-1915 and three between 1915-1925. The number decreased after St. Anthony's was built in 1906.

St. Anthony's records started in March 1906. Santo Lazarone received the sacrament of holy baptism on March 25, 1906, being the first in the new church. The first wedding united Rosarro Provino and Francesca Grasso, March 26, 1906. Seventeen weddings and fifty-three baptisms occurred in 1906; 670 baptisms and 126 marriages between 1907-1912; 520 baptisms and 77 marriages 1913-1918; 411 baptisms and 125 marriages 1919-1924; and 330 baptisms and 107 marriages 1925-1930. These statistics give some idea of the number of Italian immigrants in Fredonia and how the majority attended St. Anthony's.

The many customs that they had practiced in Valledolmo they continued to observe in Fredonia. The people considered weddings a big event. In the early part of the century, young people married when only fifteen or sixteen. The parents arranged and carefully chaperoned all their dates. A couple saw each other only once or twice before the wedding, a custom which had changed with time. At the wedding, peanuts in the shell, Italian cookies, Ceci, singing, and dancing added to the festivities.

The kind of food which the Italians had brought to this country include spaghetti, macaroni, pizza, Italian bread, and Italian cheese. Some foods such as Fave beans, which are like lima beans and Ceci have also flourished in America. The Fave bean can be dried and eaten for snacks or served as a vegetable.



4. Political Changes

The turn of the century witnessed little change in the political status of Fredonia's population of Italian origin. After five years of residence in the United States, an immigrant could obtain American citizenship. This privilege helped to give him the right to vote. The acquiring of citizenship proved far less difficult than the exercising of his suffrage. Many of the "native" citizens refused to grant the "new" citizens political equality. However, a change came about when the village politicians discovered the voting potential of the newcomers.

Before the Literacy Test, voting was simple, and Election Day in Fredonia assumed an almost predictable pattern. Volunteers representing the various factions in the village began their work in the local bars before the polls opened and continued until the voting finished. After accepting several free drinks and a convincing, somewhat emotional argument in favor of a particular candidate, the new American felt somewhat obligated to prove



his patriotism and to exercise his voting privilege. Arriving at the polls, he found another "friend" conveniently waiting nearby to assure him that his "X" was placed in the right box. For many men, this represented their first and only expression of political responsibility until 1917 and the passage of the Literacy Act.

With 1891 came the birth of the two-party system in Fredonia. Prior to this date, a general caucus had been held and a ticket nominated; therefore, no competition occurred at the polls. A quarrel developed in the Taxpayer's Party in 1891. The dissatisfied members broke away and formed the Businessmen's Improvement Party. This split forced candidates to adopt platforms and to appeal to more voters, if they wished to gain public office. The political hopefuls, therefore, sought the votes of the new immigrants.

1904 was a milestone for the people from Valledolmo. Peter Elardo was chosen as a candidate for trustee at the Businessmen's Party caucus. A particularly large attendance of Italian-Americans heard Dr. Fenner, owner of the Dunkirk-Fredonia trolley system, speak of the increasing importance of the Italian citizens. By that date they constituted one-fifth of the population of the village. The Businessmen's Party lost, for the Taxpayer's Party achieved a clean sweep.

The new citizens in 1909 again attempted to secure representation in the village government. Dissatisfied with both parties, they formed the Citizen's Party with Peter Elardo, Guiseppe L. Lazzeroni, and Calogera Sperra as candidates. Each candidate obtained 150 votes but the Businessmen's Party took the rest of the 968 votes cast.

The influence of the new citizens was felt heavily in the election of 1912. Trustee Schifferli, in his previous term, had pushed through an ordinance stopping Sunday band concerts, which the new citizens had loved so much. In a Sunday after-

noon meeting, previous to election day, the Italian-Americans declared that Schifferli must be removed from office. They turned in a mass vote of 140 against the Clarke-Schifferli ticket, but still were not successful. The election did teach one lesson: the Italian vote was to be reckoned with in forthcoming years. After the election, Father Prosseda pointed out that he had christened 150 babies of Italian ancestry in the past year, and that his people would be in the majority before long.

Disappointment was evident after the Board of Education election in 1916. Anthony Castiglione was decisively beaten by the other two candidates. An editorial appeared in the Censor which protested:

If the voice of the People is the voice of God as used to be declared, that voice is evidently against any Italian being a member of the Fredonia Board of Education. Yet, Mr. Castiglione is a good citizen, an intelligent, capable businessman. It would be hard to discover any possible harm he could do to our school system, as one of a board of five, and he would represent a considerable portion of our school children. It is evident, however, that the intense prejudice against Mr. Castiglione's race and religion may not soon be dissipated.

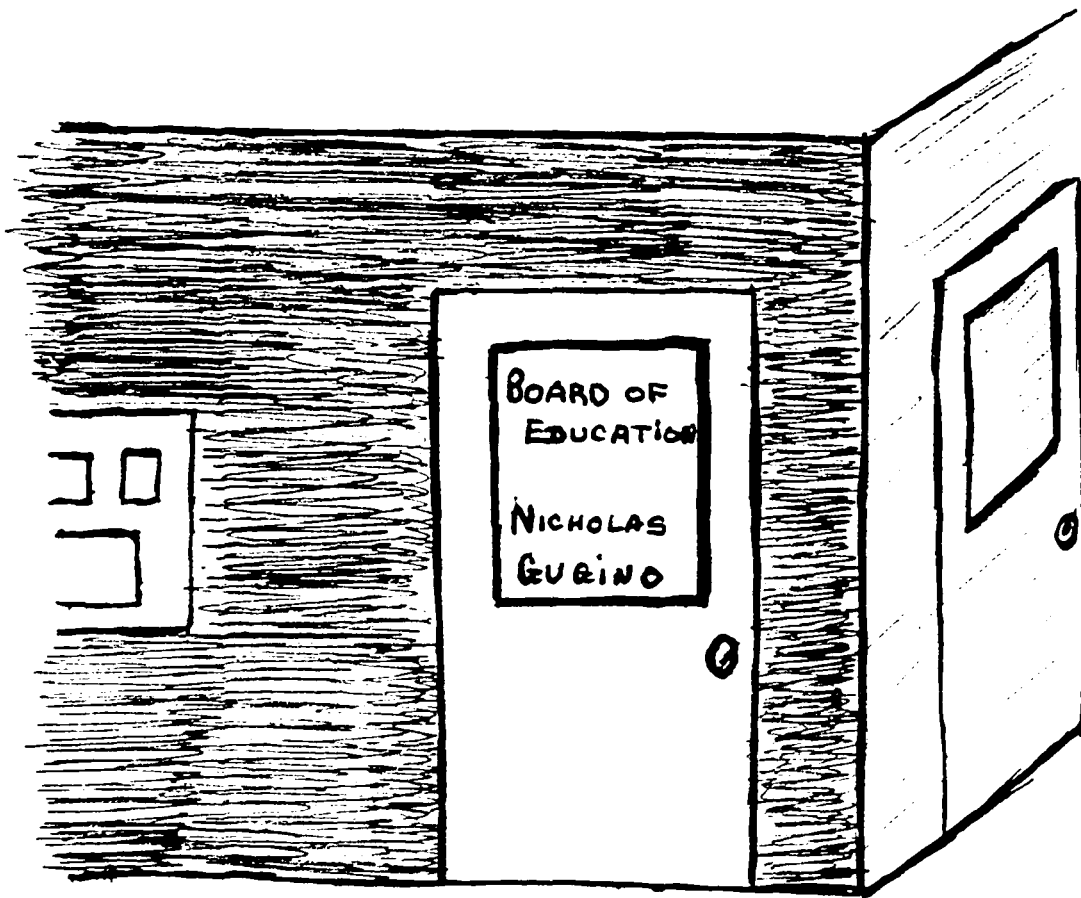
Success was finally achieved in 1921 when Anthony Sperra won on the Taxpayer's Party ticket in a record vote of 2,086. The victory pleased the Censor editor so much that he wrote:

The election of Mr. Sperra will be considered as a vindication of the principle that those of Italian birth and parentage are entitled to a representation in village affairs, and upon

the manner in which he acquits himself in the office will depend the reaffirmation of that principle in the future.

From 1921 forward, the Americans of Italian ancestry achieved more success in their bids for public office. In 1926, Nicholas Gugino became the first American from Italy to hold an office on the Board of Education. His campaign for membership for the Board was not without incident. During this period, he reported receiving three threatening letters from the Ku Klux Klan, and a number of other more subtle hints. Despite the threats, Mr. Gugino fought on and was successful. Later, the people elected him to the Board of Trustees.

The struggle for a voice in the affairs of the community was one of the many obstacles the Americans of Italian ancestry had to overcome. They have come a long way from that day in 1904, when Peter Elardo was chosen as a candidate. What symbol can speak better of this progress than Freedomia's first mayor of Italian ancestry, Russell Joy.



CONCLUSION

The tiny village of Valledolmo could no longer adequately supply the economic, political, and social needs of all its citizens. Economic despair, particularly, compelled many of the people of Valledolmo to search for a home elsewhere. The threat of a perilous journey, the crowded and primitive conditions on the boat, the lack of material wealth, and the general uncertainty did not prevent them from migrating to "the land of opportunity."

Their arrival in America marked only the beginning of numerous hardships. The new arrivals had much trouble securing jobs, housing, and a place of worship. Most important, they faced the difficulty of gaining acceptance in an unfamiliar community. However, with a willingness to work hard, a persevering attitude, and a treasured faith, these people overcame the personal taunts and local restrictions.

The contributed much to Fredonia by vitalizing industrial life, adding their warmth and gaiety, and, of course, introducing their delectable foods.

Remarkably, it took only forty years for this group to ascend from voyage-weary, insecure immigrants to economically sound and respected community leaders.

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