

The Italians of the South Village

Report by: Mary Elizabeth Brown, Ph.D.

Edited by: Rafaele Fierro, Ph.D.

Commissioned by:

the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation

232 E. 11th Street, New York, NY 10003 ♦ 212-475-9585 ♦ www.gvshp.org

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Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation

232 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003

212-475-9585

212-475-9582 Fax

www.gvshp.org

gvshp@gvshp.org

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Foreword

In the 2000 census, more New York City and State residents listed Italy as their country of ancestry than any other, and more of the estimated 5.3 million Italians who immigrated to the United States over the last two centuries came through New York City than any other port of entry. And while nationally Italy ranked seventh among countries of ancestry in the 2000 census, with some 6% of the country claiming this lineage, to this day the greatest concentration of Americans of Italian descent can be found in and around New York City. Our city is truly the Italian-American capital of the United States.

Like many immigrants to New York City, Italians originally coalesced into well-defined communities in Lower Manhattan. The South Village, along with what is now known as Little Italy, was the most prominent of these. While few of these immigrant neighborhoods from the last great wave of immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries remain intact today, perhaps unique among them the South Village has managed to maintain a clear - and some would argue organic - connection to its past, including its immigrant and ethnic past. Whole streets of the South Village look more or less the same today as they did one hundred years ago, lined with the same tenements and small storefronts which catered to turn-of-the-century immigrants. And while only a fraction of the current occupants of these buildings are first-generation Italian immigrants or their descendants, the South Village retains a modesty found in few other surrounding neighborhoods in Manhattan, and tends to draw those who appreciate the same down-to-earth qualities and bustling mom and pop shop-filled streets that have characterized this neighborhood for generations.

Many of the defining institutions of the old South Village continue on today as well, retaining their connection to their roots in service to immigrants and to the social services developed for newcomers to this country. St. Anthony of Padua Church (the oldest extant Italian church in the Americas), Little Red School House, Our Lady of Pompeii Church, the Children's Aid Society, the Tony Dapolito (formerly Carmine Street) Recreation Center, and Judson Memorial Church all remain in active service in the South Village, welcoming both the descendants of those they were founded to serve and newcomers as well. And for those defining figures of the South Village's history that have passed on, their memories live on in the neighborhood's streets. LaGuardia Place honors the first Italian-American mayor of New York City, born to immigrant parents just one block west, while the open piazza in the heart of the South Village known as Father Demo Square honors the memory of the beloved pastor of Our Lady of

Pompeii church, who tended to the families of the victims of the nearby Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, many of whom were parishioners of his church.

The South Village is also beloved for neighborhood institutions and historic sites of a more gustatorial sort. Raffetto's Pasta, Florence Prime Meats, O. Ottomanelli & Sons, Rocco's Pastry Shop, Vesuvio Bakery, Faicco's Italian Sausage, and Porto Rico Importing Co. are just some of the venerable and defining businesses still operating in the South Village, some of which are more than one hundred years old and remain in the hands of their founding families.

But perhaps even more important than the South Village's bricks and mortar, or its institutions and businesses, are its people. Since the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHHP) formally launched its South Village preservation effort in late 2003 and posted an "Historic South Village virtual tour" on its website (www.gvshp.org/south_villageenter.htm), we have received e-mails and phone calls from people who currently live in all five boroughs, across the United States, and as far away as Australia and Argentina who trace their family roots to this neighborhood. Many were struck by the stories and images of the South Village past and present, which in some cases were only vaguely known to them through their own family histories. Many of these offspring of the South Village have in turn been so kind as to share their own remembrances and memorabilia with us, further filling out the picture of the South Village's extended family.

In some ways even more surprising, however, has been the response from so many long-time Greenwich Village residents, whose memories of and attachment to the South Village run particularly deep. Perhaps this is because the South Village was a port of entry, a gateway to America for several generations of immigrants. Perhaps it was because it was such a tightly knit and vibrant community. Perhaps, however, it was also because to many the South Village was unquestionably the heart of Greenwich Village, with an accessibility, warmth, and lack of pretense stemming in many ways from its immigrant heritage and Italian-American roots. Many have been shocked to discover that this distinctive character and unique history has not been recognized or protected by New York City landmark designation, as much of the rest of Greenwich Village has been.

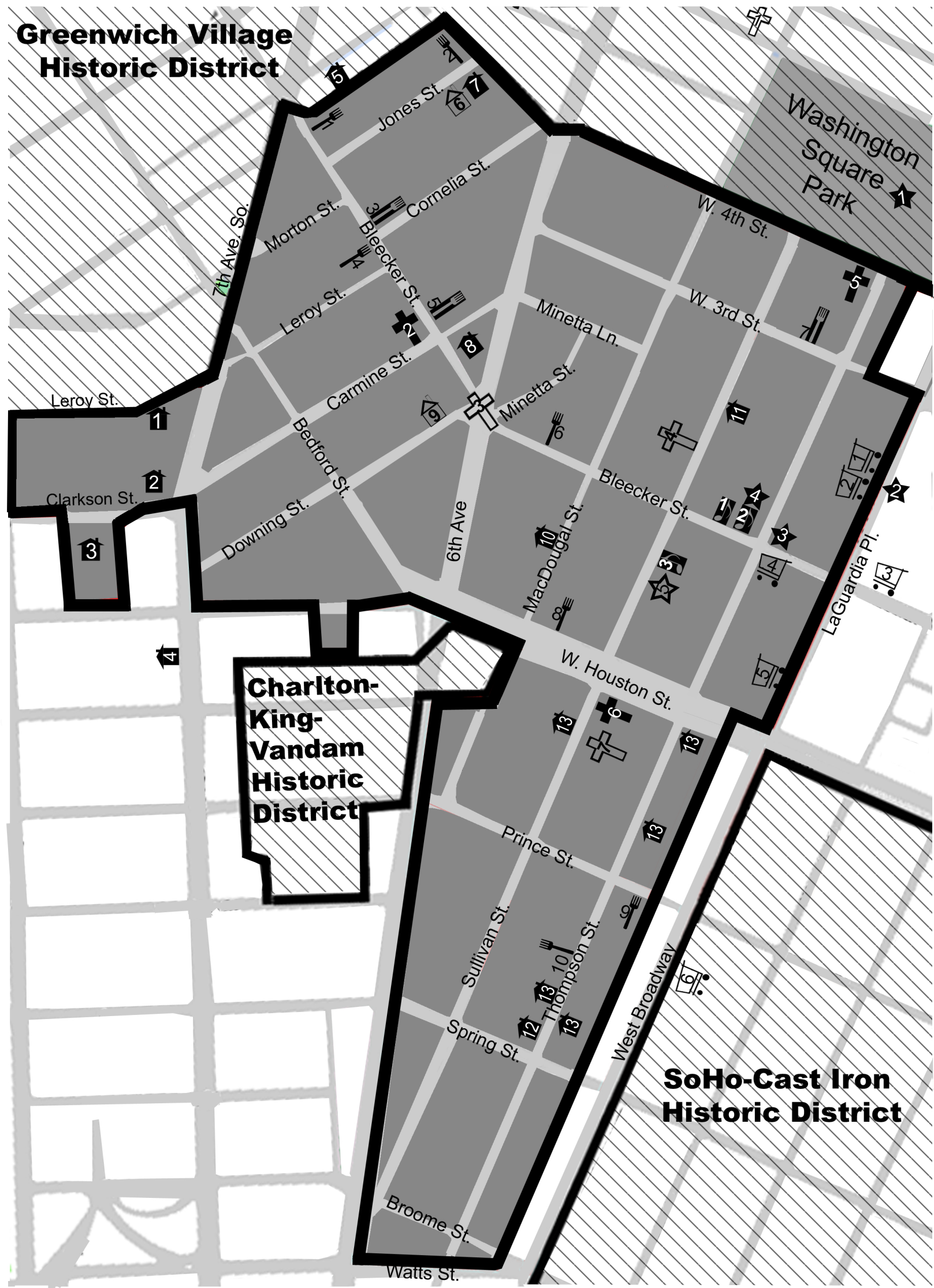
While these defining qualities of the South Village remain strong today, the winds of time and the pressure for change now have the power to erase them. That is why it is so important that this wonderful and too-often underappreciated history is now being documented and told, and advocacy is taking place to preserve it. As New York experiences its second great wave of immigration, there is no time like the present to

look back and recognize our forbearers, who built this city and left such a strong imprint upon neighborhoods like the South Village. Without a doubt, Italian immigrants, their children, and their children's children continue to help strongly define the character of our city and our neighborhood, and have left an indelible imprint upon our politics and government, theater, film, literature, education, and of course, our cuisine.

This wonderful report by Mary Elizabeth Brown follows the previously published history of the South Village commissioned by GVSHP and written by Andrew Dolkart, which also contained a proposal for a South Village Historic District (www.gvshp.org/documents/SouthVillageDolkartReportPDF.pdf). With these two reports, and further programming and advocacy, it is GVSHP's hope that the people, places, and culture of the South Village will finally get the recognition they deserve.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation
October, 2007

SITES IN THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN SOUTH VILLAGE



South Village/ Proposed South Village Historic District

- Churches: Existing and Former
1. Former Chapel of Our Lady of Pompeii (1892-95)
 2. Our Lady of Pompeii Church (existing)
 3. Former church of Our Lady of Pompeii (1898-1927)
 4. Former church of Our Lady of Pompeii (1895-97)
 5. Judson Memorial Church
 6. St. Anthony of Padua Church (existing)
 7. Former church of St. Anthony of Padua (1866-88)

- Historic Italian-owned business
1. Quirino Vincenzo Parodi and Marcello Ermino's food and lumber export business
 2. Pietro Campomenosi flower factory
 3. Girolamo Sardi's flower factory
 4. Hotel Campidoglio
 5. Joseph Personeni's medical import business
 6. L Gandolfi and Ettore Grassi's wine and liquor

Institutions/Civic Sites: Existing and Former

1. Hudson Park Branch, New York Public Library
2. Tony Dapolito Recreation Center (formerly Carmine Street Recreation Center)
3. P.S. 95 (now City As School)
4. Varick Street Post Office
5. Greenwich House
6. Greenwich House's first location
7. Greenwich House Pottery
8. Father Demo Square
9. Public School on Downing Street
10. Tiro a Segno
11. Children's Aid Society
12. Vesuvio Playground
13. Reform Housing

Former Entertainment Establishments

1. Amato Opera (later Circle in the Square Theatre)
2. Pietro De Silvestri's bar
3. Ferrando's Hall

Sites of Historical Note: Existing and Former

1. Garibaldi Statue
2. LaGuardia Place and Statue
3. Home of Luigi Fugazy
4. Home of Luigi Fugazy
5. Fiorello LaGuardia's birthplace
6. Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire building

Restaurants/Food Shops: Existing and Former

1. O. Ottomanelli & Sons
2. Florence Prime Meat Market
3. Zito's
4. Faicco's
5. Ruggiero's Fish Shop
6. Porto Rico Importing Co. (Bleecker St. location)
7. Bertolotti's restaurant
8. Raffetto's
9. Vesuvio
10. Porto Rico Importing Co. (Thompson St. location)

The Italians of the South Village

Beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the southern part of Greenwich Village, known as the South Village, became a bustling Italian enclave. Between the 1880s and the 1920s, over 50,000 Italians settled in this area south of Washington Square Park [Figure 1]. These immigrants occupied the newly-built tenements and the converted old row houses, raised their families, attended one of the two Italian Catholic churches in the area, worked in the neighboring manufacturing districts, and opened their own businesses, establishing a community of Italian immigrants and Italian-Americans, all of whom have contributed greatly to the history of Greenwich Village. This essay will explain the conditions in Italy which prompted these immigrants to come to America, their journey to the South Village, and the formation of a viable Italian-American culture that had an important impact on Greenwich Village throughout the twentieth century and even into the twenty-first century.

Italian Immigration to America

The Industrial Revolution started late and spread slowly in Italy.¹ While England was the first nation to industrialize starting in the late eighteenth century, major industrial change occurred on the Italian peninsula only by the late nineteenth century. Northern Italy was the first to undergo this process with cities such as Genoa, Milan, and Turin leading the way. The industrial transformation resulted in the creation of the Italian nation-state, which occurred under the auspices of the northern political elite that guided the unification process.² In many ways, Italy's political leaders spearheaded a superficial creation, attempting to unite people from diverse backgrounds and areas into one national identity.

¹ Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*, Harvard Economic Studies No. XX (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), pp. 51-126.

² Gabriella Gribaudi, "Images of the South: The Mezzogiorno as Seen by Insiders and Outsiders," in Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris, eds., *The New History of the Italian South: The Mezzogiorno Revisited* (Exeter, England: Exeter University Press England, 1997), p. 87.



Figure 1. A 1920 map of Manhattan shows the major hub of the Italian neighborhood of the South Village and Little Italy. (Ohman Map Co. *Map of the Borough of Manhattan and Part of the Bronx Showing Location and Extent of Racial Colonies*, 1920. Reprinted with permission from the Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)

In the late nineteenth century, many Italians still identified with their city, town, or village rather than with a national entity. Neapolitans considered themselves Neapolitans, Sicilians saw themselves as Sicilian, etc. National political leaders—disproportionately northerners—levied taxes and instituted a military draft, but neglected the population’s needs, especially in southern Italy, an area known as the *Mezzogiorno*, and in Sicily.³ The same elite considered southern Italians racially inferior and biologically and culturally backward as compared to their northern counterparts. The neglect of southern peasants in particular, the scarcity of farming and other jobs, and the absence of government assistance caused many southern Italians to migrate to other parts of Italy, and then to emigrate out of the country. The poor, entrepreneurs, and professionals left in significant numbers.⁴

The Industrial Revolution also uprooted families whose members did not necessarily migrate together. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, for example, impoverished parents indentured their children to work as street musicians in western cities such as Paris and New York.⁵ In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, men, first from northern Italy and then from the south, left their home each spring in search of seasonal labor and returned in the autumn with their earnings. The migrants circled Italy, expanded their search for work to northern Europe and North Africa, and, in the 1880s, found labor opportunities in the Americas.

The vast majority of those who left Italy were male and a good portion settled in the United States. From the 1880s through the 1910s, immigration from Italy to the United States was over 77 percent male. The years 1900 to 1910 brought more Italian

³ See John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1890* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999).

⁴ See, for example, Samuel L. Baily and Franco Ramella, eds., *One Family, Two Worlds: An Italian Family's Correspondence Across the Atlantic, 1901-1922*, John Lenaghan, translator (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988). The family in question had two sons who found their fortunes as a labor contractor and a factory engineer in early twentieth-century Argentina. One European observer said that “Italy ends at Naples and ends badly. The rest of it belongs to Africa.” See Dickie, *Darkest Italy*.

⁵ John E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Paris, London, and New York*, McGill-Queen’s Studies in Ethnic History. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992).

men to the United States than any other decade in history.⁶ Only as Italy's economy continued to stagnate in subsequent decades did more women and children journey across the Atlantic to join their adult male counterparts. By the 1930s, family units dominated these Italian-American communities in the United States. The immigrants from northern and southern Italy would ultimately create Italian enclaves in many U.S. cities including New York. By the mid-1920s, Italian immigration to the United States was still about two-thirds male and one-third female.⁷

Federal and State Government Immigration Policies

The U.S. Government did little to stem the tide of Italian immigration in the late nineteenth century and instead adopted a laissez-faire attitude in which factory owners dictated the rules of the economy. In such an economic climate, industrial leaders hired immigrants as cheap laborers with few regulations handed down from above. Immigration policy was aimed primarily to prevent the spread of contagious diseases and to protect ship passengers from overcrowding. These limited restrictions notwithstanding, a free flow of immigration from Europe made the four decades after 1880 the most substantial in American history. Southern Italians, in particular, comprised a major part of this mass movement.

The exception to the U.S. Government's limited restrictive measures for immigration in the late nineteenth century occurred in 1882 when Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act barring Chinese laborers from entering the country. The federal government also worked to exclude certain types of undesirable residents, such as those plagued by contagious diseases, workers who had already signed labor contracts, and immigrants who were likely to become public charges. Under the government's "hands off" policy, European immigration to the United States increased yearly. As a result, Italian immigration increased from tens of thousands per year in the 1890s to hundreds of thousands per year in the early twentieth century.

⁶ Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991).

⁷ Silvano Tomasi, *Piety and Power: The Role of the Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area, 1880-1930* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1975), Table 5, p. 22.

The dramatic increase in the number of southern and eastern Europeans in general, and Italians in particular, combined with pressures placed on immigrants to assimilate in the World War I era, led the U.S. Government on a path toward more severe restrictions. In 1924 Congress passed the National Origins Act, which placed quotas on immigrants based on national identity. The formula the legislative branch created significantly limited the number of southern and eastern Europeans who could enter the country. As a result, a mere 5,000 Italians came to America annually after 1924. The National Origins Act remained in place until 1965 when Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1965, effectively ending the quota system. By this time, of course, the main period of Italian immigration had ended and dozens of Italian enclaves had become well established throughout American cities, particularly New York City.

Because New York City dominated U.S. shipping until after World War II, it was the most logical port of entry for Italian immigrants. A large number of ships sailed between New York City and Europe each year. The earliest Italian immigrants traveled to the United States aboard ships that on eastbound voyages carried raw materials destined for European factories. By the early twentieth century, immigration was so important to the shipping business that ships were constructed with a “third class,” replete with dormitories and dining rooms for the immigrant passengers.⁸

Once immigrants landed in New York, the city’s economic opportunities made it logical for many of them to settle there. The segmented labor market catered to a diverse workforce that included young and old, black and white, men and women, and Italians and non-Italians. This meant that a poor family with unskilled laborers did not have to depend only on one breadwinner’s fortunes. Those with money, professional training, or talent could also find employment in New York City’s diverse economy. Historian Howard R. Marraro counted 1,862 Italian names in the city’s 1860 census and found Italians on all rungs of the socioeconomic ladder even before the main influx of Italian immigrants.⁹ Of the nearly 4 million Italian immigrants who came to America between 1880 and 1920, a sizeable number never left New York City because of the

⁸ Philip Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the U.S.A.* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), pp. 131-166.

⁹ Howard R. Marraro, “Italians in New York in the Eighteen-Fifties,” *New York History* XXX (1949), p. 181.

economic possibilities the city afforded them. This is reflected in the fact that the 2000 Census indicates that Italy remains the most common country of ancestral origin listed for residents of New York State.

The South Village before Italian Immigration

The South Village neighborhood began to develop centuries before the arrival of Italian immigrants. In the eighteenth century, soil suitable for farming, access to Minetta Creek water, and transportation via the Hudson River encouraged the creation of estates. In the early nineteenth century, estate owners began selling to housing developers, who built Federal and then Greek Revival-style row houses. Many of the South Village streets predate the Commissioner's Plan of 1811, which established the street grid for Manhattan. The neighborhood therefore follows its own street plan, with different street patterns east and west of present-day Sixth Avenue, indicating the different farms originally present. To the east, the north-south streets are named for Revolutionary war heroes such as Greene, Mercer, Sullivan, Thompson, and MacDougal. Other streets are named for local land owners and wealthy families, such as Bleecker, Cornelia, and Jones Streets.

The Village had a significant black population initially brought over by Dutch slave traders in the mid-1600s. In 1643, the New Amsterdam government freed a handful of African slaves and granted them farm plots near what is today Washington Square Park. Although blacks lost their land in the eighteenth century under English rule, they remained in the South Village neighborhood, particularly around the Minetta Creek marsh (near where Minetta Street and Minetta Lane are today). "Little Africa" survived as late as the 1880s, when blacks began moving to the Tenderloin district on the west side of Manhattan from about 23rd to 42nd street, and Italians became a larger presence in the neighborhood.¹⁰ Records indicate that blacks and whites lived together in the neighborhood, sometimes in the same houses. Middle-class families lived in single-family houses, with backyards for outbuildings and gardens, parlors and formal dining rooms for entertaining, and separate bedrooms for different family members.

¹⁰ Emily Kies Folpe. *It Happened on Washington Square* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 54-55.

Some blacks worked as live-in servants in these houses. Others lived nearby in boarding houses and tenements, and drew clients from a number of families, taking in laundry or doing heavy cleaning.¹¹ There was some socioeconomic mobility among the black population, as some went into low-capital, labor-intensive businesses such as restaurants; it is possible that Downing Street derived its name from such an entrepreneur.¹² A number of social and religious institutions existed for blacks in the Village, including Saint Benedict the Moor, a Roman Catholic Church on Bleecker and Downing Streets, which opened in 1883 in a former Unitarian Universalist church.¹³

Around the 1850s, Irish immigrants who fled the potato famine began to settle in the South Village neighborhood. They arrived in New York in such large numbers that the city expanded to accommodate them. By the Civil War, New York City began to envelop what in the early nineteenth century had been a separate Village. Some Irish immigrants displaced blacks as domestic servants, and lived under the same roofs as the native-born middle class. Poor immigrants lived in former single-family houses that had been subdivided for tenants. Those immigrants who made it into the middle class lived in the same types of houses as their native-born neighbors.¹⁴ By the middle of the nineteenth century, tenement buildings were constructed cheaply and quickly to house the city's poor.

The post-Civil War period brought rapid change to the South Village neighborhood. By the 1890s, buildings three times the height of the older buildings loomed over the same narrow streets: nine-story lofts instead of three-story row houses, and six-story tenements instead of two-and-a-half story Federal homes. The immigrants provided labor for the port, which included work in construction and the light industry sectors of New York's economy. Simultaneously, they became consumers for the city's housing, food, and ready-to-wear sectors. Blacks were shut out of the new

¹¹ Gerald W. McFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village: A New York City Neighborhood, 1898-1918* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2001), pp. 11-25.

¹² Henry Moscow, *The Street Book: An Encyclopedia of Manhattan Street Names and Their Origins* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1978), p. 44.

¹³ George Coll, T.O.R., *Pioneer Church: A Brief History of the Church of Saint Benedict the Moor in the City of New York, U.S.A.* (Elizabeth, New Jersey: Privately published, 1993), pp. 30-40.

¹⁴ McFarland, pp. 36-48.

industrial economy, but the native white and Irish immigrant populations could not supply all of the labor, so Italians eventually took up the slack.

The Growing Italian Population of the South Village

Italians by Numbers

From 1790 to 1850, the federal census counted the number of people in the United States, but did not identify people by ethnicity. In the late nineteenth century New York State census records and the federal government census published results that were insufficiently categorized to specify how many people of a particular ethnic group lived in a particular place within New York City. Nonetheless, these censuses give an estimate of the growth of the Italian community in New York City.

The 1855 New York State Census counted only 1,039 Italian-born persons living in New York City and Brooklyn. The 1860 federal census counted 1,067. After 1860, the number of Italian-born persons in New York City came close to tripling every ten years: 3,017 in 1870; 13,411 in 1880; 49,514 in 1890; and 145,433 in 1900.¹⁵ Thereafter, the numbers are more precise. Sociologist Carolyn Ware counted 61,000 residents of Greenwich Village in 1910. A near majority of the population was Italian: 17,000 Italian-born and another 8,000 second-generation Italians. The children of American-born parents constituted the second-largest group at 13,000. The third largest group consisted of people born in Ireland and their children, a total of 12,000 people. Another 4,000 were made up of Germans or second-generation Germans, a thousand French-born or American-born of French parents, another thousand Russian-born or American-born of Russian parents, and nearly five thousand born in other countries, or born of parents who were born in other countries. Thus there was a mix of ethnic groups in the South Village to greet Italians when they began arriving in large numbers by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹⁵ Carol Groneman and David M. Reimers, "Immigration," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, edited by Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press and the New-York Historical Society, 1995), p. 584. The 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1890 data includes Manhattan (and later part of the Bronx) and Brooklyn, while the 1900 data includes all of New York City after consolidation, including the villages of Queens and Staten Island. However, since most Italian immigrants settled in either Manhattan or Brooklyn, these figures are still a good comparison.

By 1920, Italians increased their numbers in the South Village as other groups decreased. A total of 47,000 residents lived in the Village in 1920. The number of Italian-born had slipped below 15,000, but the number of Americans of Italian descent had climbed to 11,000, a total of 26,000 for the Italian community. American-born of native stock had dipped to 9,000, and the combination of Irish-born and American-born of Irish descent had dropped to 7,000. Russian-born and American-born of Russian descent had gained slightly, but all other groups lost slightly. During the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, Houston Street was widened and Sixth Avenue and Seventh Avenue were extended, which meant the tearing down of some housing and a reduction in the Village's population. In 1930, there were 37,000 residents of Greenwich Village. The Italians still held a near majority: 7,000 Italian-born people and 9,000 American-born of Italian descent. The number of American-born of American descent had risen slightly, to 11,000. The number of Irish and second-generation Irish had shrunk to 4,000. All other ethnic groups also showed declines.¹⁶ These trends continued for much of the first half of the twentieth century.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, the Italian population continued to dwindle; there were 8,944 Italians and Italian-Americans in the Village in 1960.¹⁷ The 1980 and 1990 federal censuses showed that less than 2 percent of the population in the two ZIP codes that cover the South Village was foreign-born.¹⁸ The 2000 federal census showed that the number of Italian-born persons in the two ZIP codes in the South Village and Greenwich Village were statistically insignificant with only 1,335 persons who spoke Italian at home.¹⁹

¹⁶ Caroline F. Ware, *Greenwich Village, 1920-1930: A Comment on American Civilization in the Post-War Years*, foreword by Deborah Dash Moore (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 39. Originally published in 1935.

¹⁷ Donald Tricarico, *The Italians of Greenwich Village: The Social Structure and Transformation of an Ethnic Community* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1984), p. 15.

¹⁸ *The Newest New Yorkers, 1990-1994: An Analysis of Immigration to New York City in the Early 1990s*. (New York: Department of City Planning, 1996), p. 29.

¹⁹ "Language Spoken at Home by Neighborhood/ZIP Codes of Residence in Excel Format," *The Newest New Yorkers 2000* (New York: Department of City Planning, 2005), <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/nyy.shtml> (January 22, 2006).

Northern and Southern Italians

Two important trends of Italian immigration nationally occurred locally in the South Village. The earliest Italian immigrants—those leaving in the mid nineteenth century—came from northern Italy, which at that time had better transportation connections. These immigrants tended to be men of at least moderate wealth and status. After unification in 1870, the Italian national government developed policies detrimental to the southern Italian economy, and shipping lines began to stop at Naples and Palermo; thus southern emigration increased. Additionally, industrialization caused significant unemployment, which forced southern Italians out of their homeland. By the end of the era of Italian migration in the 1920s, the United States had received far more immigrants from southern than from northern Italy, and undoubtedly many of these southern Italians eventually made their way to the South Village.

Another feature of Italian immigration was chain migration. These birds of passage tended to flock together because they came from the same villages in southern Italy.²⁰ There are recorded instances of residents of one Italian village in Italy moving together to the same streets in New York City. The same phenomenon exists for the South Village where an increasing southern Italian presence could be seen by the start of the twentieth century.

South Village baptismal records reveal the general north-south Italian breakdown. Because canon law required parishes to record the place of baptism of all persons presenting themselves for marriage or their children for baptism, the South Village's Catholic parishes are good sources of information on neighborhood demographics. Of the two South Village parishes serving Italian Catholics—Saint Anthony of Padua on Sullivan Street and Our Lady of Pompeii on Carmine Street—the records of Our Lady of Pompeii have been more thoroughly studied. When Our Lady of Pompeii opened in 1892, its marrying-and-childbearing population (which was probably the bulk of parishioners, as few senior citizens migrated and few children migrated alone) was 81.5 percent northern Italian. Within the northern Italian group,

²⁰ John Horace Mariano, *The Italian Contribution to American Democracy* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1921), p. 19.

the largest subgroup was from Liguria, on Italy's northwest coast.²¹ The largest subgroup came from Chiavari, south of Liguria's chief city, Genoa.²² In 1893, the first full year of Pompeii's operation, southern Italian marriages and baptisms accounted for only 15.9 percent of the marriages and 5.2 percent of the baptisms. Five years later, southern Italians accounted for over one-third of both marriages and baptisms. Southern Italians remained the single largest group at Pompeii, and in the South Village, until 1928. That year, they still accounted for 26.3 percent of the parents presenting infants for baptism, but another group was catching up to them: American-born Italians accounted for 41.5 percent of all persons married at Pompeii that year. Five years later, as immigration slowed, American-born Italians accounted for a majority of both marriages and baptisms.

At least one Italian entertainment establishment, Ferrando's Hall (later Villa Manganaro), catered to both northern and southern Italians, as well as to English-speaking New Yorkers. The theater had performances in both northern and southern Italian dialects, but also advertised in English to attract a wider crowd.²³ Further research is required to determine if the same cultural tensions that existed throughout American cities between northern and southern Italians on the one hand and conflict between native-born whites and southern Italians on the other occurred in the South Village. However, if national trends are any indication, in the South Village northern and southern Italians were hostile to one another and native-born whites were less antagonistic toward northern than southern Italians.²⁴

Little Italy and the South Village

The first Italians in New York probably settled in the Five Points neighborhood, centered at the modern intersection of Baxter Street, Mulberry, Worth, Park, and Little

²¹ Patrizia Salvetti, "Una parrocchia italiana di New York e i suoi fedeli: Nostra Signora di Pompeii (1892-1933), *Studi Emigrazione* XXI:73 (March 1984), p. 51.

²² Mary Elizabeth Brown, *From Italian Villages to Greenwich Village: Our Lady of Pompeii, 1892-1992* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1992), p. 16.

²³ Emelise Aleandri, *The Italian-American Immigrant Theatre of New York City* (New York: Arcadia, 1999).

²⁴ David A.J. Richards, *Italian-American: The Racializing of an Ethnic Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 170-184.

Water Streets, where Columbus Park is today.²⁵ The Five Points began to develop in the early to mid nineteenth century as a working-class neighborhood that housed various ethnic groups. It became identified with the Irish during the famine migration that began in the mid-1840s. As early as the 1850s, there were some Italians in the Five Points. The Italians became more visible in New York's immigrant neighborhoods in the 1870s, as the area that is now Little Italy grew out of the Five Points neighborhood. At its height, Little Italy expanded east toward the Bowery, west to Mott Street, and north to Houston Street, and Italians and Italian-Americans dominated the neighborhood until the 1940s. Commercial development along Broadway prevented the immigrant residential neighborhoods of Little Italy and the South Village from actually abutting, but people raised in one neighborhood lived their adult lives in the other.

For instance, Italian-born real estate developer Dominick Abbate worked as a newsboy and attended school on Leonard Street a block northwest of Five Points. As an adult, he and Rocco Maria Marasco built apartments on West Houston, and at one time or another he owned properties at a number of addresses in the South Village, including 26 Thompson Street (1899, owned with Marasco); 110 and 116 MacDougal (in 1903); 156-158 and 160 Sullivan (1904, owned with Pietro Alvino); 173 Bleecker (1908, with Alvino); 64-66 MacDougal (1909, with Alvino); and 519 Broome (1914).²⁶ Circa 1911, Abbate formed the Citizens Investing Company, and through the company, he commissioned five unusual reform tenements in the South Village, each designed by Louis Sheinert and each constructed of white glazed brick: 150-152 Sullivan Street, 1911; 90-92 Thompson Street, 1913; 132-136 Thompson Street, 1912; 152-154 Thompson Street, 1913; and 101-103 Thompson Street, 1914 (constructed under the auspices of Abbate's

²⁵ Compare the maps in Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The Nineteenth-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. vii-ix, to Norval White and Elliot Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City*, fourth edition (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), p. 81.

²⁶ For Spring Street address, see *Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America* (New York: Italian-American Chamber of Commerce, 1906), pp. 183-184. For list of addresses, see Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP) spreadsheet. For other biographical information, see "Dominick Abbate, 70, a Realty Man, Dies," *New York Times*, December 31, 1939. In ProQuest. Cited February 21, 2005.

Thompson Construction Company). These tenements provided improved living conditions for area residents.

In other cases, a person might have learned a trade in Little Italy but found greater opportunities to practice it in the South Village. Giovanni Battista Perazzo, who owned a funeral parlor, the façade of which is still visible at 199 Bleecker Street, learned the trade from his brother-in-law, Charles Baciagalupo of 26½ Mulberry Street.²⁷

Italian Entrepreneurs and Laborers

Padrone

The first recorded Italian presence in the South Village was that of the middleman, otherwise known as the *padrone*, which literally means “boss or lord.” Immigration statistics suggest many early Italian immigrants generally were working-class men who did not speak English and did not read or write Italian.²⁸ Most likely, the same could be said of South Village Italians, and therefore their best chance of making it into the public record would have been through the census records and not through their own writings. They lived near to where they worked to cut down on transportation expenses. They moved into the new tenements and found work on the docks, in construction, or in the light industries in the nearby loft buildings. Thus the new industrial economy made Italians a very important part of the population.

Working-class Italians solicited the assistance of fellow Italians who owned businesses or earned their livings as contractors, and rented rooms from other compatriots who ran boarding and lodging houses. They worked at unskilled jobs for other Italians, for which they were often paid in cash. Some spent their pay immediately on consumer goods. If they wanted to send money home, they turned again to their compatriots, who sent the remittances to Italy accompanied by a letter written in Italian. Whether the men returned to Italy or brought their families to the

²⁷ For Baciagalupo’s address, see *Gli italiani negli Stati Uniti*, p. 199. For Perazzo’s career, see *Village Bells* (Winter 1983), p. 3. *Village Bells* is a publication of Our Lady of Pompeii parish.

²⁸ A handy source of tables compiled from immigration statistics (as distinct from census information) is Tomasi, *Piety and Power*, Chapter II.

United States, they eventually purchased more steamship tickets, usually from fellow Italians employed in that business.

Every immigrant group had a middleman; historian Victor Greene produced a book of biographies of such men, drawn from different ethnic groups in different parts of the United States.²⁹ Italian *padroni* had a reputation for being especially sinister, as there were situations in which they could exploit their working-class compatriots.³⁰ However, they also could provide noble community services. The evidence from the South Village suggests that the ambition that spurred its *padroni* to fame and fortune also spurred them to community service and leadership. The best known *padrone* in South Village history was Luigi Fugazy [Figure 2].

Little is known of Fugazy's life in Italy except that he was born in Liguria and served with Giuseppe Garibaldi in the fight to unite Italy. In 1869 he immigrated to New York, settling at 153 Bleeker Street between Thompson and LaGuardia Place (then Laurens Street), in a building that no longer exists. On September 21, 1904, he took possession of 157 Bleeker Street, and lived there until his death in 1930.³¹ Fugazy performed a variety of services for his fellow Italians: he sold steamship tickets so they could go home to Italy or bring relatives to the South Village, remitted their money to relatives, notarized their documents, recommended them for jobs, joined with others to incorporate businesses, and served as a trustee to Italian-American charities. Like many *padroni*, he reportedly had ties to the political machine known as Tammany Hall, but Fugazy did not mobilize Italians to vote him into office.

The typical *padrone* also fostered a sense of nationalism among Italians who otherwise saw themselves in a much more provincial manner. *Campanilismo* (literally translated as the bell tower) was a phenomenon in which Italians identified themselves

²⁹ Victor R. Greene, *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910: Marginality and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

³⁰ Humbert S. Nelli, "The Economic Activities of Italian Americans," Winston Van Horne and Thomas V. Tonnesen, eds., *Ethnicity in the Work Force* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 193-207.

³¹ GVSHP real estate transfer chart.



Figure 2. Luigi Fugazy was the South Village Italians' best-known middleman and community leader. (*Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America*. New York: Italian-American Chamber of Commerce, 1906, p. 291.)

by the village from which they came. While acknowledging the Italians' hometown loyalties, in America the *padroni* encouraged all the organizations with ties to a particular hometown to celebrate Italian national events together such as Columbus Day parades and celebrations. They also helped Italians to make a home in America by creating the circumstances in which a modicum of success could occur: a viable neighborhood in which people could live, work, shop, start businesses, find social services, and join with others to accomplish their goals.³²

Italian Businesses and Businessmen

Fugazy was the most famous *padrone*, but there were other influential and affluent Italian immigrants in the South Village, proving that not all Italian immigrants were poor and laborers as stereotypes suggest. For instance, Italian businessmen played an important role in the community, not only employing working-class Italians but also often giving back to the neighborhood in the form of charity. Angelo and Pietro Alpi were two brothers well-known in the South Village. They were born in Piacenza, in northwest Italy. Angelo's birthdate is unknown; Pietro was born in 1869.³³ Most *padroni* found jobs for men; the Alpis created jobs for women. They maintained an establishment at 69 West Houston Street, where they employed some Italian-born and Italian-American women to assemble artificial flowers at their shop while giving out silk and wire to other women who assembled the flowers in their homes [Figure 3].³⁴ They put some of their profits back into the community. In 1911, when Our Lady of Pompeii Italian Catholic parish established a kindergarten for the children of working mothers, the Alpis donated the seed money.³⁵

The Alpis were not the only South Villagers engaged in artificial flower making. It was fashionable for artificial flowers to be used as decorations in the early twentieth century, and Italians were in a position to supply the demand. Manufacturers imported silk from the silk industries in Milan and Japan, or they

³² Greene, pp. 122-137, 170-174.

³³ "Alpi" obituary, *New York Times*, March 10, 1918. In ProQuest. Cited February 23, 2005.

³⁴ *Gli italiani negli Stati Uniti*, pp. 195-196.

³⁵ *Souvenir Journal, Grand Bazaar, Church of Our Lady of Pompeii* (New York: L'Italiano in America, 1911).



Figure 3. In the workroom of A. Alpi and Co. at 69 West Houston Street, women, many of them Italian immigrants or daughters of Italian immigrants, assemble artificial flowers c. 1906. The artificial flower business was a popular mode of employment for Italian women. (*Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America*, New York: Italian-American Chamber of Commerce, 1906, p. 195.)

invested in Pennsylvania and New Jersey silk mills. They hired some employees to work in loft factories, and distributed the raw materials to other workers who would assemble the flowers at home [Figure 4]. These were usually married mothers needing the extra income who assembled flowers in between housekeeping and child care and often had their children help with the work. Transportation costs were low, as the ready-to-wear manufacturers who used the flowers were also located in New York. Besides the Alpis, artificial flower makers in the South Village included Girolamo Sardi, who was born at Santostefano, Val D'Aveto, Genoa, on October 19, 1855, came to New York City in 1872, and went into business at 55-57 West Third Street.³⁶ Another Italian artificial flower maker was Pietro Campomenosi, who was born in 1868, came to New York City in 1884, and began making artificial flowers in 1893 at 139 Bleecker Street. Ten years later Campomenosi moved to a shop at 542 West Broadway.³⁷

Joseph Personeni, who was born in Bergamo in north-central Italy on December 9, 1869, was not so much a community leader as the husband and father of community leaders. He was educated in Milan and first migrated to Buenos Aires before relocating to New York City, where he arrived on May 1, 1890. In New York City, he and his mother reconnected after years of being separated.³⁸ Thanks to having studied English in school, he landed a job at a pharmacy. In 1892 he went into business for himself, importing and retailing Italian medical goods from his shop in a building that he owned at 496-498 West Broadway (now LaGuardia Place) [Figure 5].³⁹ By 1905, he was sufficiently wealthy to have a summer home worth ten thousand dollars, which unfortunately burned to the ground.⁴⁰ Personeni performed community service in both the South Village Italian-American community and for the New York City government. He was a member of the New York Board of Trade and Transportation Committee on Streets.⁴¹

³⁶ *Gli italiani negli Stati Uniti*, pp. 398-400.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 236-238.

³⁸ "Personeni" obituary, *New York Times*, June 22, 1940. In ProQuest. Cited February 23, 2005.

³⁹ For Personeni's business, see *Gli italiani negli Stati Uniti*, pp. 388-391. For his ownership of the shop, see GVSHP spreadsheet.

⁴⁰ "Losses by Fire," *New York Times*, January 31, 1905. In ProQuest. Cited February 23, 2005.

⁴¹ "Aims to Make Streets More Presentable," *New York Times*, November 22, 1927. In ProQuest. Cited February 23, 2005.



Figure 4. An Italian family assembles artificial flowers in their rear tenement apartment at 106 Thompson Street. Piecework like this was a common way for Italian immigrant women to earn extra money for the family, and their children were frequently enlisted to help. The six-year old girl in the photograph, Julin, said that she made the flowers every day, "but not all day." (Lewis Wickes Hine photograph, 1912. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, National Child Labor Committee Collection, Reproduction Number LC-DIG-nclc-04132)



Figure 5. Joseph Personeni established a medical import business at 496-498 West Broadway in 1892. This photo of his store dates to c. 1905. (*Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America*. New York: Italian-American Chamber of Commerce, 1906, p. 388.)

Mrs. Personeni and her daughter Josephine frequently organized charitable events.⁴² Thus they resembled middle-class women of other ethnic groups, devoting their free time to charity, a common activity among that particular group.

Many Italian entrepreneurs must have employed their working-class compatriots who recently arrived from Italy. Quirino Vincenzo Parodi and his partner Marcello Erminio, originally from Genoa, employed workers in several locales. Through an office at 550 West Broadway (now LaGuardia Place), they imported food and exported lumber from Arkansas.⁴³ L. Gandolfi and Ettore Grassi employed labor moving barrels of wine and liquor at their warehouse at 427-431 West Broadway [Figure 6].⁴⁴ Pietro De Silvestri, born in Arona in north-central Italy in 1866, ran a bar at 157 Bleecker Street from 1901 to 1904, in the same building out of which Luigi Fugazy had once worked.⁴⁵

Other Italian entrepreneurs employed their own families. This seems to have been especially common in food businesses wherein skills had to be taught. For example, bakers taught their children the industry and eventually moved them from unskilled to skilled work. Nunzio and Jennie Dapolito migrated from Naples to the South Village and opened the Vesuvio Bakery, named for the volcano near Naples, at 160 Prince Street in 1920. They had five sons, and they brought them into the business. Their eldest, Anthony, recalled that by age five, he was already carrying purchases to customers in nearby tenements. As an adolescent, he delivered bread in the family's horse-drawn wagon.⁴⁶ Antonio Zito started his bakery on Sullivan Street, and moved it to 259 Bleecker Street in 1924. He and his wife had three boys and two girls, and they all started working in the bakery before they were old enough to attend school.⁴⁷ Eventually, both Anthony Dapolito and Charles Zito learned to bake bread [Figure 7].

⁴² "Charities Enlist a Host of Workers," *New York Times*, November 4, 1928. "Tea on Liner *Roma* Today," *ibid.*, November 4, 1928; "Dance and Bridge on *Conte Grande*," *ibid.*, February 7, 1929; "Linen Shower to Aid Hospital," *ibid.*, April 17 1933; "Shipboard Party Planned," *ibid.*, May 14, 1933; and "Primavera Party to Aid Hospital," *ibid.*, May 9, 1938. In ProQuest. All cited February 2005.

⁴³ *Gli italiani negli Stati Uniti*, pp. 375-379.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 292-295.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 279.

⁴⁶ Kelly Crow, "The Mayor of Greenwich Village," *New York Times*, October 27, 2002. In Lexis-Nexis. Cited February 12, 2006.

⁴⁷ Barbara Stewart, "Charlie Zito, Village Figure and Baker, is Dead at 78," *New York Times*, October 1, 1998. In Lexis-Nexis. Cited February 12, 2006.



Figure 6. Luigi Gandolfi's wine import business was located at 427-431 West Broadway. This photo dates to c. 1905. (*Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America* (New York: Italian-American Chamber of Commerce, 1906, p. 292.)



Figure 7. Zito's at No. 259 was one of the many Italian food businesses on Bleecker Street. Anthony Zito, grandson of the bakery's founder, carried on the family tradition until the bakery closed in 2004. (Berenice Abbott photo, 1937. Reprinted with the permission of the Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)

Butchering was another skill passed on in families. Onofrio Ottomanelli learned the trade from his paternal grandmother in Bari, Italy. Although he was born in Manhattan in 1917, he was raised in Italy. Ottomanelli came back to the United States in 1938, in time to be drafted into World War II. Wounded during the war, he then resumed his training along with his brother Joseph at their uncle Joseph's shop, Joe's Quality Meats of Yorkville. He would later use these skills in Greenwich Village.⁴⁸ Ann Faicco was unusual in being a woman who learned her family's meat-processing skills. Her grandfather Edward Faicco came from Naples. The family made sausage, first on Elizabeth Street, then Thompson Street, and finally, at 260 Bleecker Street.⁴⁹ These were just some of the many skilled workers who earned a comfortable living by using their craft in the South Village.

Income and Spending of Working Class Families

By the early twentieth century, as Progressive reformers began to survey immigrant neighborhoods, more complete analyses of working-class Italians emerged. Two of the most informative works were Louise Boland More's 1907 depiction of a settlement house, Richmond Hill House, and Louise C. Odencrantz's 1919 publication for the years between 1911 and 1913 for the Russell Sage Foundation.⁵⁰ These studies indicate how working-class families got and spent their money and the extent to which they articulated a working-class consciousness. More and Odencrantz also place South Village Italians in the context of other New York City ethnic working-class groups.

New York City immigrants made their living in a variety of ways: through wage work, ownership of small businesses, and in trading services which were sometimes rendered in exchange for a place to stay. Many engaged in one type of manual labor or another. Two sources of income need special attention where South Village Italians are

⁴⁸ "Why Costs of Meat Soar Confound Butcher, Too," *New York Times*, April 5, 1973. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

⁴⁹ Craig Claiborne, "Just As It Was Back In 1900: Sausage Without Additives," *New York Times*, April 16, 1975. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

⁵⁰ Louise C. Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry: A Study of Conditions in New York City, Work: Its Rewards and Discontents* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1919; New York: Arno Press, 1977), p. 6.

concerned: boarders and lodgers on the one hand and crime as a means of making money on the other.

Immigrants increased their incomes by taking in boarders and lodgers, although this situation was less common than is widely believed. Studies indicate that a quarter of South Village families in the early 1910s had people living and eating with them, but they derived less than five percent of their income from these visitors.⁵¹ Families often took in boarders and lodgers for non-economic reasons. For example, Italian culture prohibited single women from striking out on their own, so if a young woman left her family in Italy, she moved in with relatives in America, who then charged her reduced rates because she was part of the extended family.⁵² In the early years of Italian immigration to the South Village, few people had enough living space to rent. There were exceptions such as Bartolomeo Bertini, who was born in Lucca in 1848 and came to New York in 1873. He amassed enough savings while working as a manual laborer in New York City to open a lodging house for his fellow workers at 59 Rose Street in lower Manhattan. His Rose Street earnings funded the Hotel Campidoglio, which he opened at 135 Bleecker Street.⁵³ In 1895, he moved to 154 Bleecker Street, a building owned by a German-born brewer and real estate investor named George Ehret.⁵⁴ The “hotel” performed many functions for the neighborhood. It housed bachelors and also married men who left their families in Italy while they traveled in search of work. Its restaurant provided them with home cooking. Its bar was a place for the men to relax and also to make the connections that might lead to work.

By the 1920s, a mass consumer culture was born in America. The prosperity brought about by the First World War, the mass production of consumer goods such as the radio and automobile, and increased wages led to unprecedented economic growth in which even the most recent newcomers participated. In this new economic climate,

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 187.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 224-225.

⁵³ Marilyn Andreini, “The Ippolitio Andreini Family: A Study of Transformation and Assimilation of An Italian Family in Greenwich Village, 1890-1910,” term paper, Lamar University Beaumont, April 16, 2002.

⁵⁴ Address history table from GVSHP; biographical information on Mr. Ehret from “Vast Ehret Estate Nears Settlement,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1930. In ProQuest. Cited February 5, 2006.

an increasing number of Italians bought real estate as an investment, derived income from it by renting it to others, and bridged the distance between poor and more affluent Italians. Many South Village Italians either earned their living in this manner or supplemented their income by renting parts of their home to others.

Crime in the South Village

Italians have long faced an association in some segment of the public's mind with criminal activity. This common belief became a stereotype within a stereotype: all Italians had a propensity to commit crime, and all Italian criminals made money from their illicit behavior. Such suspicions followed Italians to the South Village.

Italians who moved to the South Village had a pall of suspicion cast over them. The maps in Tim Gilfoyle's *City of Eros* indicate that there were brothels in the South Village from the 1830s through 1919, many operated by native-born and immigrant men of other ethnic groups.⁵⁵ In the 1870s, when the Italians began immigrating to New York City, Jacob Riis reported on the disreputable "black and tan" bars that violated liquor laws and permitted race mixing.⁵⁶ Italians who went into the restaurant business fell under the same suspicions as other South Village establishments. For example, in 1884, D.J. Whitney, Chairman of the Committee for the Enforcement of the Law, heard that Bartolomeo Bertini's Hotel Campidoglio, then on Wooster Street, was open all day Sunday despite state blue laws which forbade such activity, and that it permitted dancing and beer sales on the Sabbath. The police, though, vouched for Bertini as an honest man with a full license to sell liquor who occasionally hosted birthday parties in his private apartment on the premises.⁵⁷ Bertini may have been the exception, or perhaps the police were turning a blind eye, as was not uncommon for all sorts of drinking establishments run by native-born and immigrants alike. Nonetheless, many Italians were looked upon with suspicion for being criminal-minded.

⁵⁵ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), pp. 25, 31-33, 199-202, 213-215.

⁵⁶ Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, preface by Charles A. Madison (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), pp. 115-119.

⁵⁷ "Explanations By the Police," *New York Times*, April 3, 1884. In ProQuest. Cited March 13, 2005.

Italians have long suffered a reputation for organized crime as a means of upward mobility in particular. Films such as *The Godfather* and television series such as *The Sopranos* have reinforced the popular idea long held by many non-Italian Americans that Italians brought the Mafia from southern Italy to the urban areas of America. While it is true that Italians participated in organized crime, they were not the only ethnic group to do so, and such activity was common among immigrant groups of the time. Additionally, the number of Italians involved in Mafia-related activity in America has always been a small fraction of the overall Italian population.

Prior to the unification of Italy, Sicily and southern Italy had been the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, a possession of the Spanish Bourbons. As the royal rulers neglected their people, local gangs laid claim to particular areas, supporting themselves by kidnapping for ransom outsiders who came into “their” territory.⁵⁸ These gangs became popular with the average person who was oftentimes poor and desperate. The success of the Mafia in these locales all but guaranteed that the activity would be transported to America in some manifestation. In 1905, New York suffered a “Black Hand” scare. Reports surfaced that an organized group of Italian immigrants was systematically trying to extort money from business owners with threats of arson, kidnapping, and murder. Despite the rumors, the closest student of this incident, Thomas Pitkin, has concluded that individual criminals existed, but not any organized group.⁵⁹

Organized crime, when it did exist, was probably most prevalent during Prohibition in the 1920s, an era which cultivated organized crime activity of many sorts. By then, the South Village had a neighborhood full of Italians who knew how to make alcoholic beverages; Greenwich House investigator Caroline Ware noted that Italian families made their own wine long before Prohibition made that necessary.⁶⁰ Plus the neighborhood was near a port through which alcohol could be easily shipped. It was also a neighborhood of bars and other establishments that became illegal under

⁵⁸ Humbert Neilli, *The Business of Crime: Italians and Syndicate Crime in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), Chapter I.

⁵⁹ Thomas Monroe Pitkin, *The Black Hand: A Chapter in Ethnic Crime* (Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1977).

⁶⁰ Ware, *Greenwich Village*, p. 56.

Prohibition, but nonetheless stayed in business and needed supplies. Thus the Mafia became a presence in the neighborhood, picking up home brew, dropping off liquor at speakeasies, loading trucks to distribute liquor elsewhere, warding off rival gangs, and, above all, keeping the neighborhood as peaceful as possible so the police would not have occasion to discover what was going on. From illegal liquor, the Mafia later branched out into number-running, loan sharking, trafficking in stolen goods, and, in the 1960s, selling heroin.⁶¹

The presence of the Mafia in the South Village is a matter of perspective. If one was planning an outdoor street festival in the 1970s—a common occurrence by then—and needed licenses, permits and vendors, the Mafia could be a source of assistance or obstruction. If one was walking to work early in the morning in the 1920s, one tried not to seem too aware of the trucks that parked at shuttered storefronts. The Mafia was also a common subject of discourse among working-class families that lived in early twentieth century tenement buildings. Though organized criminal elements were real, the more accurate stereotype is that of the close-knit Italian family.

Home and Family Life

It is important to note that the vast majority of Italians in the South Village, as elsewhere, were strongly family-oriented [Figure 8]. Most South Village Italian families earned a living through wage work, and theirs was a family income governed by the rules of the household economy. Men were the traditional breadwinners, and women sometimes supplemented the family income even as they maintained the home. Originally, however, Italian immigration consisted of men traveling to do unskilled labor during good weather and returning to Italy with their savings to spend the winter with their families. One study has indicated that Italian men repatriated back to Italy more so than any other ethnic group.⁶² When men brought their families to the South Village, the other family members had to work. In such an environment where every

⁶¹ Tricarico, *The Italians of Greenwich Village*, p. 62-71.

⁶² Betty Boyd Caroli, *The Italian Repatriation from the United States, 1900-1914* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1973).



Figure 8. These Italian-Americans on MacDougal Street on a Sunday afternoon in 1942 epitomize the daily life of the family-oriented Italians of the South Village. (Marjory Collins photograph, 1942. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Reproduction Number LC-USW3-006876-E).

penny counted, few educational opportunities presented themselves to Italian children. Married mothers were the least likely to work outside their households. In the absence of labor-saving devices they had plenty of work to do at home. However, stay-at-home mothers had ways to supplement family income: thrifty housekeeping, the aforementioned taking in of boarders and lodgers, and piecework such as assembling artificial flowers or dolls [Figure 9].

The paradox of the South Village job market was that there were many different kinds of jobs, but the segmented labor market limited who could apply for which job. Louise Boland More's study emphasized the variety of jobs available: artificial flower makers, barbers, bookkeepers, bootblacks, candy makers, carpenters, clerks, firefighters, longshoremen, paper-box makers, petty shopkeepers, police officers, porters, postal workers, truck drivers, waiters, and wholesale and retail sales personnel.⁶³ Odenrantz's study, however, emphasized how the segmented market limited opportunity. Italian women furnished 93.6 percent of all workers in New York's hand embroidery shops. Although Jewish women dominated the garment industry and thus became the founders of such labor unions, Italian women provided 75.3 percent of the laborers in men's and boys' clothing and 67.7 percent of the laborers in women's ready-to-wear industry [Figure 10]. Italian women constituted 57.7 percent of the workers in the laundry business, a field traditionally associated with black women, though not in the South Village.⁶⁴ It is not clear whether the core issue was that employers discriminated against black workers or the housing market discriminated against black tenants, thus stranding blacks far away from the jobs in the South Village. What is clear is that many Italian men and women used the job market to bolster the family income.

Much of the money South Village Italians earned by the early twentieth century was spent on consumer goods, especially food. The More and Odenrantz studies both show similar findings on how the Italians in the South Village spent their

⁶³ Louise Boland More, *Wage-earners' Budgets: A Study of Standards and Cost of Living in New York City*, with a preface by Franklin H. Giddings, Greenwich House Series of Social Studies No. 1 (New York: H. Holt, 1907), pp. 11-12.

⁶⁴ Odenrantz, p. 60.



Figure 9. The Cattena family at 71 Sullivan Street worked, along with their downstairs neighbor Tessie (on the right), on making legs for the Campbell Kids dolls in 1912. The children, who range in age from 9 to 14, worked with their mother on the dolls after school to earn extra money for the family. Often the family did not finish until after 10 pm. (Lewis Wickes Hine photograph, 1912. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, National Child Labor Committee Collection, Reproduction Number LC-DIG-nclc-04143)



Figure 10. Italian women were adept at embroidery and constituted a large part of the garment industry's workforce. While single women may have worked in nearby factories, married women, like Philomena Grande, who lived at 218 Thompson Street, did piecework in their homes. Philomena's children, aged 9 and 13, helped their mother with the work. (Hiram Myers photograph, 1922. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, National Child Labor Committee Collection, Reproduction Number LC-DIG-nclc-04137.)

money.⁶⁵ The smallest percentage of income, an average of 2 percent in Odencrantz's study, went to insurance. The next-smallest, an average of 4 percent, went to utilities. Rents took an average of 14 percent in both studies. More's study differentiated between clothing and other miscellaneous expenses, and her families spent an average of 15.4 and 15.9 percent of income, respectively, on these. Odencrantz included clothing as a miscellaneous expense, on which her families spent an average of 35 percent. Both studies found the single most expensive item was food, an average of 45 percent of total income in Odencrantz's study. These findings are important because they suggest that even impoverished Italians living in the South Village could afford to spend a significant amount of money on the things they needed.

The More and Odencrantz studies discuss life insurance, but not where it was obtained. Other sources, however, describe the existence of local Italian mutual benefit societies, which had their roots in Italy, where men organized at the village or town level. The men contributed to a common fund that paid for the contributors' extraordinary expenses, particularly for funerals. They also sponsored the annual feast of the local patron saint.⁶⁶ These feasts were important occasions in which town residents celebrated various saints that the Catholic Church made prominent.

Immigrants recreated mutual benefit societies in the United States. These societies in turn continued the tradition of sponsoring the feasts of their local patron saints [Figure 11], although Columbus Day celebrations eventually largely replaced such festivities. Mutual aid societies also played an important role in helping Italians purchase life insurance and other necessities. In the nineteenth century outsiders often commented on the amount impoverished Italians spent on funerals, and an examination of Italian documents confirm these observations. Most Italians were Roman Catholic, and taking money merely for performing the sacraments was considered simony. However, when priests did something extra, such

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁶⁶ The Italian roots and American manifestations of the system are described in John W. Briggs, *An Italian Passage: Immigrants in Three American Cities, 1890-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).



Figure 11. The feast of Santa Filomena was celebrated on Sullivan Street by the Italian parishioners of St. Anthony of Padua in 1927. Feast day celebrations were popular in the Italian-American community. (Percy Loomis Sperr photo, 1927. Reprinted with the permission of the Milstein Division of United States History, Local History, and Genealogy, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)

as sing High Mass rather than just sermonize, they expected to receive “stole fees,” so-called for the stole, or symbol of office, priests wore with their vestments. There seems to have been considerable cultural pressure to spend the money for High Mass. Father Giacomo Gambera, who lived in the South Village in the 1930s, commented that immigrants from Genoa “avoid vain outward appearances, but they want the religious ceremonies to be solemn and devout.”⁶⁷ Muriel Deane, a Charity Organization Society social worker in the South Village, once sent one of the neighborhood priests a note telling him of an impoverished, uninsured, and grieving family in need of a grave. She had explained the city would bury the deceased in a pauper’s grave for free, but the family would not hear of it.⁶⁸

Housing in the South Village

Families spent very little money on utilities in the early twentieth century. Tenements were lit with kerosene lamps and gas lights, and homes were heated and food was cooked with coal- or wood-burning stoves that Italians purchased and installed themselves. The families’ small children were often sent out to scavenge for coal and wood to further reduce heating expenses. The building’s owner paid for the water. Telephones were not common until the 1920s in immigrant households, and many Italian-Americans remained completely unfamiliar with them. David Von Drehle’s account of the 1910 garment workers’ strike, for example, explains that after seamstresses spontaneously walked off their jobs, they had to find coworkers who knew how to use telephones to call the Women’s Trade Union League to make plans.⁶⁹

New York has long had a reputation for high rents. However, Italian-Americans still managed to keep down the proportion of income devoted to this expense, and some managed to eliminate the expense altogether. For instance, each tenement building needed a janitor, so those lucky enough to have such a job did not pay for their housing. Other Italians began purchasing South Village real estate in the 1920s. What

⁶⁷ Giacomo Gambera, *A Migrant Missionary Story: The Autobiography of Giacomo Gambera*, trans. Thomas Carlesimo, C.S., ed., Mary Elizabeth Brown (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1994), p. 116.

⁶⁸ Muriel H. Deane, to Antonio Demo, New York City, undated business card, Center for Migration Studies Collection #037, Box 3, Folder 21.

⁶⁹ David Von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), p. 59.

they spent on housing in this case came back to them in the form of rental income and equity. Still other South Village Italians kept down their rent by what Stephen Thernstrom called “ruthless underconsumption,” which included the ability to be sternly frugal. Oftentimes several Italians rented out a small apartment for which they could divide the cost of rent many times over. In fact, this cost-cutting method was a phenomenon that many ethnic groups employed.

Donna Gabbaccia’s study of Sicilians on Little Italy’s Elizabeth Street chronicles why Italians in many instances believed rent was a superfluous charge. Italians were not used to paying any rent until they came to the United States. In Italy, they lived in houses that their families had owned for generations. Lower East Side social worker Lillian Betts explained that “rent is the outlay they resent,” and therefore they tried to keep as much as possible away from the landlord sacrificing their comfort in the process.⁷⁰

Paying little for their rent, South Village Italian-Americans did not have quality housing in the late nineteenth century. They, like many immigrants groups, lived in subdivided single-family dwellings erected before the rise of indoor plumbing or in tenement dwellings that also frequently did not have indoor plumbing. Their flats were cold in the winter, airless in the summer, dark day and night, inconveniently laid out, and often required trips outdoors for the restroom or for water.⁷¹ Building owners made only legally mandated improvements, which meant that they cut transoms to encourage air flow to interior rooms and built fire escapes in 1867 on buildings over three stories and in 1871 on buildings over two stories. Owners built as inexpensively as the law allowed, erecting tenements with richly ornamented exteriors, but with dark, dank, and depressing interiors. Steep stairs, small rooms with little sunlight and ventilation, and shared toilets in dimly lit hallways were not uncommon.

By the early twentieth century, neighborhoods like the Upper West Side were filling up with apartment buildings full of light, airy rooms with indoor plumbing in

⁷⁰ Donna R. Gabbaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930*, SUNY Series in American Social History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 75.

⁷¹ The Sicilian-American term for bathroom is “baccausu,” which is a corruption of the word “backhouse.” Oftentimes the restrooms were placed behind the house, hence the term backhouse.

every unit; all accessed by elevators and with chutes and dumbwaiters to help with trash disposal. However, only the middle class could afford to live in them.⁷² Well-built apartments housed the middle and upper classes on inexpensive land uptown, while inexpensive construction on expensive land downtown housed the poor, working, and immigrant classes. What type of dwelling a South Village Italian lived in depended largely on whether he or she was poor or affluent. However, most Italians in the South Village lived in tenement conditions. The 1901 “New” Tenement Law, which required improved lighting, ventilation, and toilet facilities for tenements built after that year, vastly improved the standards of new tenements, but did little to improve the existing conditions of the substandard housing in the neighborhood. It was difficult to find an apartment that was only modestly better than a tenement and cost only a small amount more.

Food and Clothing

If housing a century ago seems inexpensive to modern eyes, food was relatively costly. Distribution and preservation of food contributed to its relatively high price. The producer brought foodstuffs to the wholesaler, who then sold it to shop-owning retailers. In such a transaction no economy of scale existed. Without refrigeration, moreover, unsold food had to be discarded at day’s end. Lack of refrigeration also meant that housekeepers had to shop daily. For every grocer who threw out spoiled food there was someone who sold it at a discount. For instance, when immigrants went grocery shopping they brought small containers with them to carry their bargain-priced broken eggs.⁷³

Something was always cooking in a South Village Italian immigrant household. Housekeepers went shopping every day, and then went home to find temporary storage for their purchases. Live fish went into a sink of water. In cold weather, items that needed refrigeration could sit on a windowsill; in hot weather, it was best not to

⁷² Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins and David Fishman, *New York, 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999), pp. 498-514.

⁷³ New York Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor, *Forty-third Annual Report* (New York: Privately published, 1886), pp. 45-46, 51-52.

buy them unless they were cooked and immediately eaten. While the housekeeper cared for children at home, she also cleaned, ironed, did piecework, and had a pot of water, meat, and vegetables on the stove to simmer into soup. On special occasions, cooking started early. The first step was to start simmering tomato sauce. Some women made pasta; others bought it from importers or manufacturers, like Raffetto's, which opened in 1906 and which still continues to make and sell fresh pasta at 144 West Houston Street [Figures 12 & 13]. Women occasionally baked bread at home, but they often bought it at a bakery, thus saving time without sacrificing quality. Closer to dinner time, greens were tossed with oil and vinegar, garlic, and salt. Jarred peppers, roasted eggplant slices, and olives, all of which could be preserved in oil, were arranged with slices of fresh mozzarella and preserved meat. Broccoli, broccoli rabe, escarole, or spinach was sautéed just before serving time. Dessert included fancy pastries purchased at a bakery. Bowls of fruit and nuts served with home made coffee rounded out the meal.

Clothing was an added expense. Immigrants, even the clergy, wanted to conform to American styles. When an Italian priest asked to visit home after serving in a South Village parish, his superior warned, "I say frankly however that it would be my desire that while he is in Italy he dresses in a long cassock. In this country [Italy] much criticism is made, above all, of the clergy in bourgeois dress, and bourgeois dress with those short little jackets—they certainly don't speak well of them."⁷⁴ Italians of all other walks of life embraced the consumer culture of America, particularly in the 1920s, which is why clothing expenses could be significant.

The change in women's fashion mirrored the transformation of America in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Typical turn of the century Italian rural women wore linen undergarments made from locally grown flax, heavy, opaque linen blouses, gathered skirts, stockings, and heavy shoes. They covered their dresses with aprons to keep them clean, their bodies with shawls to protect them from cold, and their

⁷⁴ Domenico Vicentini to Antonio Demo, Rome, March 10, 1912, Center for Migration Studies Collection #078B, Box 1, Records of Fr. Antonio Demo—1912 folder. The priest in question was Father Pio Parolin (1879-1970), and the Center for Migration Studies preserves photographs of him in his Italian clerical dress and his American suit, topped with a straw boater on his head.



Figure 12. Marcello Raffetto opened his pasta and sausage shop at 144 West Houston Street in 1906. A century later, Marcello's grandsons, Richard and Andrew Raffetto, are still running the business, with the help of their mother, Romana.



Figure 13. Raffetto's still uses a replica of a 1916 "guillotine-style" pasta machine to cut pasta to order. Romana Raffetto demonstrates the pasta-making process here.

heads with scarves to ward off the sun. They sewed their own clothing and decorated it with their own embroidery, a skill that, as mentioned previously, created employment opportunities in the South Village. By the 1920s young women in particular bought American clothes: dark skirts with less fabric than Italian ones; “waists” made of such translucent cotton that modesty as well as style demanded multiple layers, frills, pleats, bows, big collars, and other decorative elements; corsets, petticoats, and lightweight stockings; and more comfortable (partly because they were lighter weight) shoes.⁷⁵ Italian women tended to wear relatively cheap articles of clothing because they could not afford anything else. Their stockings were too flimsy to withstand darning, their shoes wore out quickly from pedal-operated machinery at their factories, and their clothing ripped from all the bending and stretching at work.

Italian immigrant clothing reflected how deeply they embraced American consumer values. More’s figures, in fact, indicate that South Village Italians made a conscious effort to be consumers. Her analysis of two families with eight members each demonstrates her point. One family spent \$160 on food while the other spent \$624, nearly four times as much. A close analysis revealed that the breadwinner of the family who spent \$160 was a clothes presser and made only \$436 in the year under study, while the breadwinner of the family who spent \$624 was a bartender with an annual income of \$1,500.⁷⁶ Odenrantz similarly noted that “it was only the lower paid who endured the poorer living conditions—the better paid had better homes, food and clothing.” She concluded with the assertion that “given a living wage, the Italian can be depended upon to maintain a standard of decent living,” countering many widely-held stereotypes about Italian-Americans.⁷⁷

Italians in the Inter-War Years

Historians generally contend that Italians, like other immigrants, strived for upward mobility, which inexorably caused them to move out of impoverished neighborhoods. As soon as immigrants or their children could afford to do so, they left

⁷⁵ Odenrantz, pp. 229-232.

⁷⁶ More, Cases No. 137 and 174.

⁷⁷ Odenrantz, p. 240.

the urban ethnic enclave for the suburbs, which had begun to appear by the 1920s but became much more prominent a generation later.

The South Village, on the other hand, was different. Italian immigration to the United States fell sharply during World War I, and the downward trend continued through the twenties as the government implemented its more restrictive immigration policies. A number of people were displaced in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s by the widening of Houston Street and the extension of Sixth and Seventh Avenues. For those who remained, the neighborhood was severely divided and segmented in a way that it never had been.

These developments, however, destroyed neither the Italian enclave nor the community spirit that existed within its borders. By the 1920s, Italians had built churches, formed civic associations, and generally unified the enclave, which might have shrunk, but did not disappear. Individual Italians, once they migrated to the Village, often stayed permanently. Some of their offspring also stayed and earned their livings in the South Village, thus keeping alive the community spirit engendered by the founding Italian generations. The continuing Italian presence shaped the future changes to the neighborhood.

Italian Institutions in the South Village

The two oldest and most important social institutions in the South Village were the Catholic Church and civic associations, both of which were spurred by the Italian middle class. Usually the development of Italian Catholicism in a New York neighborhood began when people from a particular part of Italy, under the leadership of a mutual benefit society, celebrated the annual feast day of the hometown patron saint, which Church officials then used as a starting point for gathering a congregation and founding a parish.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Robert Orsi described how lay celebrations of Our Lady of Mount Carmel led to the founding of a parish with that name, see *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1930* (New York: Yale University Press, 1985). Visitors to the San Gennaro Festival may have noted the shrine of San Gennaro in the Church of the Most Precious Blood, 113 Baxter Street.

St. Anthony of Padua

When the Archdiocese of New York formed Saint Joseph's parish in 1829, Greenwich Village had so few Catholics of any ethnic background that the congregation rented a hall under the leadership of a nonresident priest. On March 16, 1834, the congregation celebrated the dedication of the Greek Revival Church it built across Sixth Avenue from its former rented room. At first, Saint Joseph's served all Catholics in the area, not one specific ethnic group. As Irish immigrants poured into the city, however, Saint Joseph's served primarily Irish-American parishioners.⁷⁹ In the 1850s, when Greenwich Village became more densely populated, the Archdiocese of New York sought to divide Saint Joseph's into geographically smaller parishes. Catholic leaders feared that if the Church did not provide sermons in the languages spoken by these diverse immigrants, Protestant churches would. To cater to the growing Italian population, in 1859 the archdiocese incorporated a parish dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua, who had been born in Lisbon, made his reputation in Italy, and was venerated by Italians the world over. By dedicating the new parish to him, the archdiocese was aiming to attract Italians while not excluding other Catholics. The new parish, however, still did not yet have a permanent home.

In the mid nineteenth century, Italian missionaries began immigrating to countries such as the United States. Local governments in Italy had ended their traditional subsidization of religious orders that provided community service, leaving the missionaries to find other ways of supporting themselves while providing educational or charitable services. The United States was a young country that needed both education and charity. In 1855, a community of Italian Franciscans came to Buffalo, New York, to establish Saint Bonaventure University. In 1866, Archbishop John McCloskey contacted these Franciscans about applying their linguistic skills to the pastoral care of compatriots in New York City.

That same year, Father Leone Pacilio left Buffalo and came to New York City to rent what had been a Methodist church on Sullivan Street between Prince and Houston

⁷⁹ Thomas J. Shelley, *Greenwich Village Catholics: Saint Joseph's Church and the Evolution of an Urban Faith Community, 1829-2002* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003).

Streets. He turned it into Saint Anthony's first home.⁸⁰ In 1882, the congregation purchased another parcel of land on the same block of Sullivan Street and hired architect Arthur Crooks to design a Romanesque church, dedicated on June 10, 1888 [Figure 14].⁸¹ It is difficult to say whether the choice of a Romanesque church was an attempt to attract Italian parishioners, to please Italian Franciscans, or just a reflection of the architectural fashion of the time (Saint Anthony's was originally in the middle of the block between Prince and Houston Streets, which was widened in the 1930s). When the church was dedicated, Saint Anthony's had permission to minister to Italians who lived anywhere in Manhattan. Interestingly, the Irish were its main source of financial support.⁸²

Garibaldi Statue and *Tiro a Segno*

The same week that Saint Anthony of Padua's parishioners dedicated their church building, another group of affluent Italians dedicated the statue of Giuseppe Garibaldi on the east-central side of Washington Square Park. Garibaldi, who along with Camillo Cavour helped unify the Italian peninsula in 1870, was born on the Fourth of July, in 1807, thus tying him to American Independence as well. He took refuge in New York when Italy's 1848 revolution failed. He lived with his compatriot Antonio Meucci at the latter's home on Staten Island and assisted him with his candle-making business (so far as is known, Garibaldi had nothing to do with Meucci's development of a working model telephone). Garibaldi left New York in April 1851 when he got an opportunity to resume his seafaring career and returned to Italy in 1854. From 1859 to 1867, he repeatedly organized volunteers into military units to participate in numerous battles designed to join Sicily with the Italian peninsula under the auspices of an Italian national government. He died on June 2, 1882 and is remembered as one of the Founding Fathers of the modern Italian nation-state.

⁸⁰ Cletus Della Iacona, O.F.M., "A History of the Franciscan Province of the Immaculate Conception, New York, U.S.A." typescript, 1959), pp. 11-18. Copy at the Archives of the Province of the Immaculate Conception, New York City.

⁸¹ *Saint Anthony of Padua Church* (Hackensack, New Jersey: Custombook, 1967), not paginated.

⁸² *Note di Cronaca sull'Origine e Progresso del Chiesa di S. Antonio* (Naples: Tipografia Pontifica M. D' Aria, 1925).



Figure 14. St. Anthony of Padua on Sullivan Street is one of the two Italian Catholic churches in the South Village and is the oldest existing Italian church in the Americas. The church was designed in 1886 by architect Arthur Crooks.

In the late nineteenth century, Carlo Barsotti and Luigi Roversi, editors of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, an Italian-language newspaper published in New York, began soliciting funds for a statue in Garibaldi's honor to be placed in Central Park. Barsotti and Roversi secured the services of Giovanni Turini, who had sculpted the bust of Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, already in Central Park. Turini proposed the statue would show Garibaldi in the act of drawing his sword from its scabbard, standing on a rock over the figures of two of his volunteer soldiers.⁸³ Turini finished the Garibaldi figure in 1885.⁸⁴ However, lack of funds led to changes in design, and the Park Commissioners, who had other plans for Central Park, offered a site in Washington Square.⁸⁵ The Italian community dedicated the statue on June 4, 1888 [Figure 15]. At the time, the *New York Times* reported: "Our adopted citizens do not forget the illustrious of their native lands, and feel a pride in associating their renown with this city of their choice."⁸⁶ Five years later, the Municipal Art Society was less sanguine: "Garibaldi Looks as if He Had Been Out All Night."⁸⁷

Later that summer, the oldest continuing South Village Italian organization was founded. *Tiro a Segno*, literally meaning "ready, aim, fire," was a rifle club organized on August 14, 1888 [Figure 16]. Its middle-class members met for business and social purposes in the South Village, and practiced at a clubhouse and shooting range at Fox Hills, Staten Island, near the present-day Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. During World War I, *Tiro a Segno* turned over its Staten Island land to the federal government, which eventually built Fox Hills Hospital on the site. In 1924, *Tiro a Segno* moved to its permanent headquarters at 77 MacDougal Street, where it continues as a philanthropic organization devoted to the dissemination of knowledge of Italian culture [Figure 17].⁸⁸

⁸³ "New Statue of Garibaldi," *New York Times*, May 3, 1896. In ProQuest. Cited March 9, 2005.

⁸⁴ "A Statue of Garibaldi," *New York Times*, September 9, 1885. In ProQuest. Cited March 9, 2005.

⁸⁵ "For funding, see "New Statue of Garibaldi," *supra*. For location, see "The Garibaldi Statue," *New York Times*, May 28, 1888. In ProQuest. Cited March 9, 2005.

⁸⁶ Untitled editorial, *New York Times*, June 4, 1888. ProQuest. Cited March 9, 2005.

⁸⁷ "To Make the City Beautiful," *New York Times*, April 20, 1887. In ProQuest. Cited March 9, 2005. See also Layton Crippen, "Unseen New York Statues," *New York Times*, May 7, 1899, and "City's Unseen Statues," *New York Times*, March 17, 1904. In ProQuest. Cited March 9, 2005.

⁸⁸ Tiro a Segno Chair, http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/italian/tiro_a_segno.htm (January 24, 2006). This website contains one odd and perhaps inaccurate bit of information, listing Garibaldi as an early member, although Garibaldi had died by the time the club was founded.



Figure 15. The statue of Garibaldi was installed in Washington Square Park, just north of the South Village, in 1888.



Figure 16. A delegation from *Tiro a Segno*, an Italian shooting club, are shown here dressed to march in a September 20, 1902, parade to commemorate the day in 1870 that Pope Pius IX handed over control of Rome to the forces of a United Italy. (*Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America*, New York: Italian-American Chamber of Commerce, 1906, p. 437.)



Figure 17. *Tiro a Segno* still maintains its headquarters at 77 MacDougal Street.

Our Lady of Pompeii

The origins of Our Lady of Pompeii, the South Village's other Italian-American parish, were quite different from those of Saint Anthony's Church. In 1892, Father Pietro Bandini came from Italy to rent the house at 113 Waverly Place as the headquarters for the New York branch of the Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants [Figure 18]. The society was an immigrant-aid organization founded in Piacenza, Italy, by Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, who had also founded the Society of Saint Charles, the community of priests to which Bandini belonged. Bandini used some floors of the townhouse for his residence and office, and in the parlor he opened a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Pompeii, named for the city near the famous volcano, which had been recently "discovered" and excavated and where there had recently opened a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. By the time Bandini left in 1895, the chapel intended for immigrants had developed into a congregation of local residents, reflecting the growing Italian presence in the Village. It was therefore separated from the Saint Raphael Society and given status as a parish, at that point under the leadership of Father Francisco Zaboglio. Zaboglio moved the new parish to 214 Sullivan Street between Houston and Bleecker Streets, where there was a church that had been erected in 1810 for an African-American Baptist congregation and which had since 1842 been Bethel Methodist Colored Church. On July 14, 1897, the newly-formed parish suffered a tragedy when Zaboglio and two men who worked in it accidentally ignited an explosion that destroyed the church, killed the two men, and left Zaboglio unable to work.

Not long after the tragedy, Father Anthony Demo became the official pastor of Our Lady of Pompeii. An Italian-born priest, Father Demo had recently immigrated to New York City by way of Boston [Figure 19]. Over the next thirty years, Father Demo would oversee the growth of Our Lady of Pompeii parish and the expansion of the parish's programs and charitable works. Father Demo's first order of business in 1898 was to find a new home for the burgeoning parish. Trustees of Saint Benedict the Moor, an African American Catholic congregation, sold Father Demo their former home in the Greek Revival Unitarian Universalist church at 210 Bleecker Street across from



Figure 18. Our Lady of Pompeii grew out of the Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants. This image from 1912 depicts Rocco Pasquiloccho marrying his fiancée, Luisa Corisi, at the society's chapel at 8-10 Charlton Street. (Società San Raffael per gl'Immigranti italiani, *XII Rapporto Annuale*, New York: Tipo-Litografia E. Rossotti, 1913, p. 20.)



Figure 19. Father Demo, Our Lady of Pompeii's longtime pastor, is seated behind the American flag in this 1928 photo of the members of the St. Joseph Society of Our Lady of Pompeii. Other notable men in the photo are undertaker Giovanni Battista Perazzo, standing third from the left in the back row, and John A. Perazzo (no relation), stalwart parishioner and Village resident, standing third from the right. (Center for Migration Studies Collection #037, Folder #140).

Minetta Street [Figures 20 & 21]. The parish continued to flourish on Bleecker Street, and in 1911, Father Demo organized a day nursery on Hancock Street.

When Father Demo learned in 1923 that Sixth Avenue was going to be extended through the parish's property, erasing completely Hancock Street and large sections of other streets as well, he led the congregation in purchasing land at the corner of Bleecker Street and Carmine Street. The church hired Italian-American architect Matthew W. Del Gaudio to design their new church. Del Gaudio, who lived in the Bronx and also had a Manhattan apartment, was the designer of many public and private buildings in New York City [Figure 22].⁸⁹ His name appears on many alteration permits in the South Village throughout the 1920s-1940s, often for buildings that were Italian-owned, suggesting he was a respected architect in the Italian community. Just a few years before his design of Our Lady of Pompeii, he designed a combination church and school for St. Joseph's on Catherine Street and Monroe Street, a parish staffed by the same religious order to which Father Demo belonged. Del Gaudio's design for Our Lady of Pompeii was complete with a *campanile*, or bell tower, akin to what existed in Italian villages. This feature, combined with the church's setting behind a public piazza later named for Father Demo, made Our Lady of Pompeii a welcoming place for the Italian community [Figure 23].

Once settled into their new church, Father Demo continued to lead the expansion of Our Lady of Pompeii's community service, opening a parochial school in the new church in 1930. He retired as pastor in 1933, and died just three years later in the Village. Thousands came to mourn Father Demo, including Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, whose wife had been consoled by Father Demo when she was ill with tuberculosis. Father Demo was officially memorialized by the City of New York in 1941 when the city renovated the irregular plot of land where Sixth Avenue, Bleecker Street, and Carmine Street merge and named the new plaza after Father Demo. Today, historians can thank Father Demo for his meticulous record keeping. Father Demo kept records of nearly every piece of paper that crossed his desk, including the many letters his parishioners sent him describing their problems, as well as notes and carbon copies of letters he sent.

⁸⁹ "M.W. Del Gaudio, Architect, Dies," *New York Times*, September 18, 1960. In ProQuest. Cited February 5, 2006.

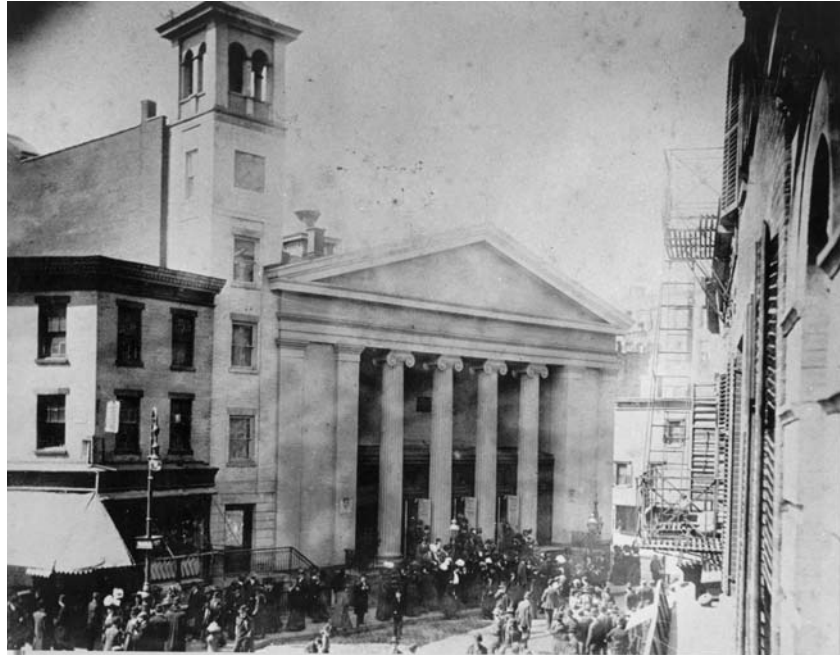


Figure 20. Our Lady of Pompeii occupied this church on Bleeker Street from 1898 until the 1920s. Previously, the Greek Revival church had housed a Unitarian Universalist church and later Saint Benedict the Moor, an African American Catholic congregation that sold the church to Our Lady of Pompeii. (Center for Migration Studies Collection #091, Photo #3150.)

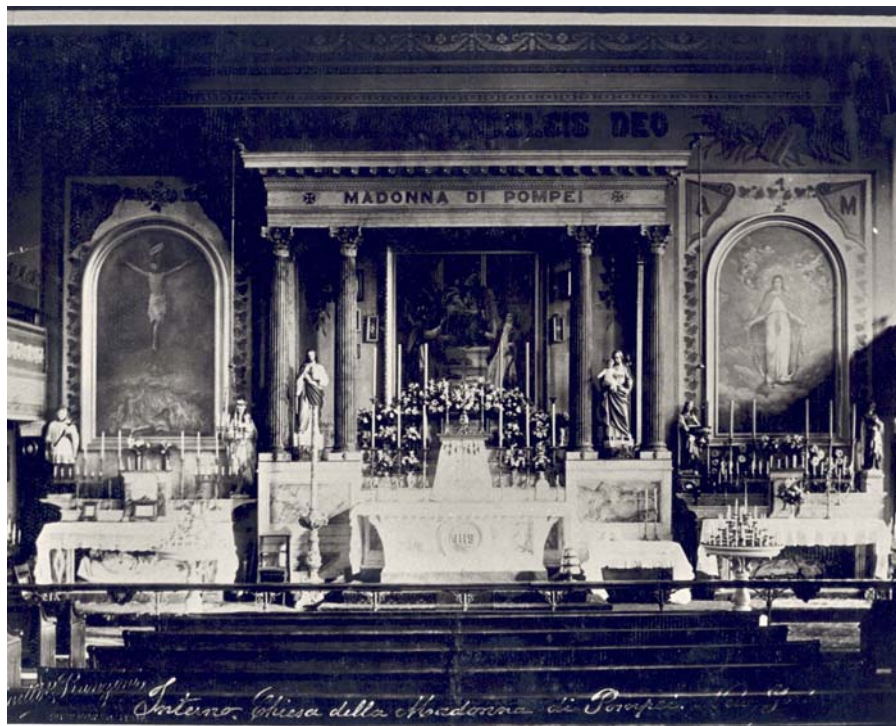


Figure 21. This image shows the interior of Our Lady of Pompeii's church at 210 Bleeker Street, which was demolished in the 1920s when Sixth Avenue was extended through the site. (Center for Migration Studies Collection #091, Photo #3151.)



Figure 22. The architect Matthew Del Gaudio designed Our Lady of Pompeii, as well as many alterations throughout the South Village for Italian building owners. (Program distributed at the dedication of Saint Joseph's Church, Catherine and Monroe Streets. New York: Press of Il carroccio Publishing Co., 1925. Unpaginated. Center for Migration Studies Collection.)



Figure 23. Our Lady of Pompeii's *campanile* and its location behind Father Demo Square give it a piazza-like setting fitting for this Italian Catholic Church.

Father Demo's letters are wonderful reminders of how he concerned himself with his parishioner's problems.

Other South Village Religious Institutions

In addition to the two major Italian Catholic parishes, four communities of Italian sisters also worked in the South Village at one time or another. The most famous was Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini, who in 1880 founded the first band of Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in her homeland of Italy. Nine years later Cabrini moved the order to New York to teach at Saint Joachim's in what is now Chinatown. It was her work at various hospitals and orphanages that brought Mother Cabrini to the South Village, where Miss Annie Leary, an Irish-American philanthropist, contributed financial support to Our Lady of Pompeii.⁹⁰ In 1898 Leary donated funds to enable Mother Cabrini to send Missionaries of the Sacred Heart to establish a school teaching a combination of sewing and catechism to Italian immigrant girls. It is unclear where the school was, but descriptions of the plan appear in the records of Our Lady of Pompeii when the congregation met at 214 Sullivan Street and at 210 Bleecker Street. In the early 1900s, both Mother Cabrini and Miss Leary went on to other projects outside of the South Village, and Mother Cabrini eventually became the first American citizen to be canonized as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church.⁹¹

After the creation of Our Lady of Pompeii, the Saint Raphael Society for Italian Immigrants continued to function as an immigrant aid agency. In 1903, Father Giacomo Gambera, who succeeded Bandini as Saint Raphael's chaplain, brought the Sisters of Charity Pallottine into the project. The sisters had since 1884 been teaching at the Italian parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in East Harlem. For \$22,000, Gambera purchased two houses at 8-10 Charlton Street (demolished, like Our Lady of Pompeii's second home at 210 Bleecker Street when Sixth Avenue was extended in the 1920s). From there, Gambera and his successor, Father Gaspare Moretto, visited Ellis Island,

⁹⁰ Mario Francesconi, C.S., *Storia della Congregazione Scalabriniana*, five volumes (Rome: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 1969-1975), vol. II, pp. 217-221.

⁹¹ Mary Louise Sullivan, M.S.C., *Mother Cabrini: "Italian Immigrant of the Century"* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1992), p. 176.

translating, exchanging lire into dollars, arranging further transportation, locating relatives and luggage, and performing the sacraments, while the sisters fed the immigrants, and housed the women and children temporarily. Saint Raphael ceased operation in 1921, when the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York took over the immigrant ministry, and the sisters went on to other missions.⁹²

The other two orders of sisters in the neighborhood taught Italian children. On April 3, 1910, Saint Anthony of Padua opened its parochial school, staffed by Franciscan Sisters of Allegheny, Italian nuns who had established themselves in the United States in 1859.⁹³ In 1930, when Our Lady of Pompeii opened its parochial school, Father Demo secured the services of the Missionary Zelatrices (now Apostles) of the Sacred Heart, a community founded in Italy and continued by the same Giovanni Battista Scalabrini who founded the Society of Saint Charles.

Saint Anthony's and Our Lady of Pompeii are within walking distance of each other, and it may have been even easier to get from one to the other prior to 1926, when Pompeii was on Bleecker Street across from the southern terminus of Minetta Street, and Houston Street had not yet been widened into a major thoroughfare for vehicles. Both are within walking distance of non-Italian parishes, including Saint Joseph's on Sixth Avenue and Saint Veronica's on Christopher Street.

In theory, English-speaking Catholics were supposed to attend the parish nearby their place of residence, while Italian-speaking Catholics had the option of attending a parish staffed by priests who spoke their language. In reality, a number of factors influenced one's decision of where to attend church. Luigi Fugazy, for example, demonstrated his commitment to community leadership by maintaining ties with both Italian parishes. He was on the original board of trustees that on March 7, 1898 signed the incorporation certificate for Our Lady of Pompeii.⁹⁴ However, his burial service was

⁹² Gambera, pp. 141-145. John Sloan's painting *Carmin Street Theatre* includes a Sister of Charity Pallottine as part of an urban streetscape set at the corner of Carmin and Bleecker Street prior to the construction of the present Pompeii church.

⁹³ *St. Anthony of Padua Church*, not paginated.

⁹⁴ Incorporation certificate 00174-08C*, on file at 31 Chambers Street, Room 703.

performed at Saint Anthony's.⁹⁵ In the 1930s, Caroline Ware reported that attendance at Saint Anthony's, the more established parish, also depended on one's socioeconomic status. This changed when Our Lady of Pompeii built its new more modern church, which then brought in more affluent parishioners.⁹⁶ The time of day masses were held, proximity to one's house, where one's friends attended, where one's children were enrolled in parochial school, and sometimes even aesthetic sensibility all influenced which church parishioners attended.

South Village Italians Within the Larger Greenwich Village Community

The Italians were integral to the development of the South Village. Their individual and collective economic struggles brought into the area a number of helping agencies. Their successes and failures were part of the web of neighborhood affairs that were shaped by national developments.

Public Education

The United States experienced a public school revolution between 1880 and 1920. In 1870 a mere 500 public schools existed in the country. By 1910, the number had climbed to 10,000. By the 1920s, at least one public school could be seen in every major and medium sized city in the United States. The Progressives tried to reform society and implement the idea that knowledge meant power by educating the nation's children, a significant portion of whom included the descendants of Italian immigrants.⁹⁷

Progressives were part of a broader movement that grew concerned about the so-called "immigrant problem." Nativist organizations such as the American Protective Association and the Immigration Restriction League sought to prevent them from

⁹⁵ Obituary, *The New York Times*, August 7, 1930, and "Thousands Mourn at Fugazy Funeral," August 10, 1930. In ProQuest. Cited January 29, 2006. Interestingly, given Mr. Fugazy's prominence and the huge number of people who attended the funeral, he was waked from home at 157 Bleecker Street.

⁹⁶ Ware, p. 312. Ware does not name the parishes, but the historical detail she gives makes it clear which is which.

⁹⁷ John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990).

entering the country. Members of Congress supported literacy tests to limit their numbers. Local law enforcement officials placed a disproportionate number of them in prison where they could be contained. The most sinister approach to the immigrant favored by Eugenicists was to forcibly sterilize them. Some Progressives favored any number of these approaches, but the most common response was to educate them and culturally strip them of their old-world identity. This reform spirit manifested itself in New York State where education of the state's immigrants took center stage.

A New York State law in effect between 1874 and 1936 required that children attend school until they reached grade 8A or age fourteen, whichever came first.⁹⁸ The state's political leaders passed the law because a significant portion of the state's children, especially the sons and daughters of immigrants, were not going to school. Even Italian-born educators such as Leonard Covello of East Harlem thought Italian immigrants did not take sufficient advantage of the educational system. Covello, whose professional work was with boys' education (he was the founding principal of Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem), offered an explanation for the lack of emphasis families, especially those from Southern Italy, placed on education. In Italy, the common person had to have so much schooling to see a return on one's investment that one might as well drop out and go to work early.⁹⁹ Historians have noted that between 1880 and 1915 children of the Italian-American community, perhaps prompted by Progressives and even other family members, began attending school for longer periods of time.¹⁰⁰ Schools across the country, moreover, began offering foreign language courses to cater to the increased number of immigrants.

By the time Italians settled in the South Village, New York City had a public school system, which afforded immigrants the opportunity to learn English. Area children attended a public school on Downing Street until it closed in 1912, and then

⁹⁸ Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973: A History of the Public Schools as Battlefield of Social Change* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 112; Miriam Cohen, *Workshop to Office: Two Generations of Italian Women in New York City, 1900-1950* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 159.

⁹⁹ Leonard Covello, *The Social Background of the Italo-American Child: A Study of the Southern Italian Family Mores and their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967).

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigration Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 90-99.

P.S. 3 on Hudson Street and P.S. 95 on Clarkson Street, now the City As School. Even girls whose traditional role had been to assist in household chores increasingly attended school by the Progressive Era. Historian Miriam Cohen explains why this development had taken place. In the first half of the twentieth century the clerical field opened up, especially to young women who could use their jobs to supplement the family income but also to establish networks to meet a more professional class of potential spouses. Girls stayed in school longer, and emerged ready to work in offices until marriage, still turning at least some pay over to their families until then. These trends held true for the South Village.

Public schools were only one of the government services South Village Italians could use. The New York Public Library, for example, began circulating books in 1901, and South Villagers borrowed books at the Hudson Park Branch at 66 Leroy Street after it was built in 1906. There were two prerequisites to Italians checking out books. First, in the days before driver's licenses, Social Security, and credit cards, a pastor or other community leader had to provide a letter for the library card carrier. Italians who could not read English requested Italian-language books, and the acquisitions librarian had to develop the collection accordingly. The library also offered classes in English language and citizenship for the neighborhood Italians [Figure 24]. While Italians probably used the Varick Street Post Office to mail letters, it was also a source of employment. John A. Perazzo, an usher at Our Lady of Pompeii, worked there [See Figure 19].¹⁰¹

Philanthropic and Religious Institutions

The federal government did not provide Social Security, disability pensions or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, nor did it sponsor any offices to assist youth, immigrants, or senior citizens until the New Deal laws of the 1930s. People who needed the government's help had to leave the South Village for institutional care. In the pre-New Deal era of laissez-faire economics, only the private philanthropies took care of people *in situ*. The earliest important philanthropy in the South Village was the Children's Aid Society, the creation of the Reverend Charles Loring Brace, born in

¹⁰¹ *Village Bells* (Fall 1984), pp. 3-4.



Figure 24. These Italian women are shown taking a citizenship and English class at the Hudson Park Branch of the New York Public Library in 1943. (Marjory Collins photograph, 1943. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Reproduction Number LC-USW3-013552 D)

Litchfield, Connecticut in 1826 and a graduate of Yale University in 1846. He came to New York to study at Union Theological Seminary and became interested in the ministry to impoverished boys. He founded the Children's Aid Society in 1853 and served as its executive director until his death in 1890.¹⁰²

Most historians' descriptions of Brace, however, are unflattering because of his tendency to proselytize and his unorthodox attempts to create a more moral society. He was convinced of the importance of conversion to Protestantism, a position Catholics and more secular-minded people criticized. He also separated children from the alleged bad influences of their own families, sending them far away on "orphan trains" to be "adopted," usually without enough scrutiny to ensure the children were not exploited for their labor. On the other hand, at least one Italian benefited from his efforts. The aforementioned real estate investor Dominick Abbate studied at the Society's Leonard Street school.

The Children's Aid Society in the South Village was based in a building designed in 1891 by architects Vaux and Radford and erected at 219 Sullivan Street [Figure 25]. Initially, the Children's Aid Society used the building for an industrial school. In the morning, children took the equivalent of the classes offered in the public school; after a hot lunch on the premises, the children took afternoon and evening vocational courses. The Children's Aid Society changed with the times. In 1924, the society replaced the industrial school with a program designed to meet community needs, including child health courses for immigrant mothers. The Children's Aid Society changed its program again in 1954, and used the building as headquarters for the Morisini Boys Club. In 1993, the Society renovated the building to provide new classrooms and studios for art, dance, photography, pottery, and woodworking.¹⁰³

Brace's closest successors in Protestant ministry to South Village Catholics were Edward Judson and John D. Rockefeller, Sr., who founded Judson Memorial Church, a Baptist congregation. It was Rockefeller who provided the funds for the new church,

¹⁰² s.v. "Brace, Charles Loring," in *The Encyclopedia of New York*, pp. 135.

¹⁰³ Children's Aid Society website, <http://childrensaidsociety.org/gvc/history> (January 29, 2006).



Figure 25. The Children's Aid Society on Sullivan Street served Italian immigrants and their children in the South Village by providing an industrial school and later, health courses for mothers.

while Judson served as its first pastor. The church was named for Judson's parents, the first U.S.-born overseas missionaries. Their son Edward Judson was a "home missionary," searching for converts in the United States. Rockefeller and Judson hired McKim, Mead and White in 1888 to design their church on Washington Square South. The design, completed in 1893, combined Italian Early Christian and Renaissance features and an Italianate *campanile*, like Our Lady of Pompeii, which perhaps reminded Italian immigrants of the churches they used to see in their homeland [Figure 26]. Judson adopted the methods of a late nineteenth century "institutional church." He not only held worship services, Sunday School, and Wednesday night meetings, but also set aside space and hired personnel for social services. Italians could come to Judson Memorial Church for non-religious studies or simply to use the recreational facilities. It did not convert that many Italians, and it is not clear how many it even reached.¹⁰⁴ However, its outreach to immigrants in the neighborhood made the church an important part of community life.

By the time Judson Memorial opened its doors, people with more secular objectives also worked to help South Village Italians. In 1882, Josephine Shaw Lowell, who had long been active in overseeing government-run charities, founded the Charity Organization Society (COS). This society aimed to screen applicants to prevent fraud, to direct the needy to the most effective source of assistance, to coordinate charities to prevent fraud at that level, and to reduce duplication and inefficiency.¹⁰⁵ For the purposes of screening and directing applicants, COS opened its offices at 47 and later 59 Morton Street. Poor Italians applied for work, food, health care, or funeral expenses. Social workers then ascertained applicants' needs and identified the agency or agencies that might meet them.

¹⁰⁴ Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: The Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson, the Dramatic Events of the First American Foreign Mission, and the Course of Evangelical Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Free Press, 1980).

¹⁰⁵ Joan Waugh, "'It Was a Sacrifice We Owed': The Shaw Family and the 59th Massachusetts Regiment," in Martin H. Blatt, Thomas J. Brown and Donald Yacavone, eds., *Hope and Glory: Essays on the Legacy of the 59th Massachusetts Regiment* (Amherst and Boston; University of Massachusetts and Massachusetts Historical Society, 2001), pp. 52-75.



Figure 26. Judson Memorial Church, designed by McKim Mead and White and commissioned by Edward Judson and John D. Rockefeller, Sr., was a Baptist church that provided social services to the neighborhood's Italian immigrants in addition to its ministry.

A final stage in the development of philanthropy during the time period was the settlement house movement, in which groups of young, single, native-born, college-educated middle-class women and some men “settled” among urban, working-class immigrant families to study and meet neighborhood needs. The most famous was Hull House in Chicago run by Jane Addams. The most successful settlement in the South Village was Greenwich House, founded by Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch in 1902 on Jones Street; it moved to its Barrow Street location in the 1920s. Greenwich House tried to bridge gaps between classes in the neighborhood. For example, by the time Greenwich House moved to its Barrow Street home, Greenwich Village was well-known as a center for the creative arts, but few working-class immigrant families had access to the world of the bohemians. Accordingly, Greenwich House offered art and music classes; this author once met a furniture upholsterer who learned his trade there as a youngster. During World War I, Greenwich House also disseminated patriotic information about the Federal Government’s role in the war effort.

One well-documented event brought these various organizations together. In 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire killed 146 people, most of whom were Italian and Jewish women and girls working on the top three floors of a loft building on the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street, just a few blocks from the northern section of the South Village. Historians Leon Stein and David Von Drehle argue that the fire led to many social changes in New York City. For instance, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union formed after the fire, and a brief cross-class alliance between working girls, the elite of the suffrage movement, and the Women’s Trade Union League was forged. The infamous political machine Tammany Hall, moreover, was forced to shift its tactics and become more responsive to its urban, immigrant, working-class constituency. Young Assemblyman Alfred E. Smith, who would later go on to become the governor of New York and first Catholic nominated by a major party for President, began to direct his attention to the potential for using government as an instrument of social reform.

However, for the South Village, the fire was also a communal tragedy that called for communal mourning. Father Demo organized a *Month’s Mind*, a Roman Catholic custom in which one month after a person’s death, mass is said for the repose of the

soul of the deceased. Family and friends of the eighteen Italian victims attended as a way of acknowledging that as time passed grief became less acute but still not assuaged. More importantly, however, Father Demo made printed announcements of the dedication in English, indicating he had a larger audience in mind.¹⁰⁶ The *New York Times* covered the event, noting that the Greek Revival church, which seated about eight hundred, was packed to the rafters, mostly with women in black.¹⁰⁷ It was customary to have a guest preacher at an important event, and for that purpose Father Demo secured the services of Father Ernesto Coppo, S.D.B., a Salesian missionary and pastor of the Church of the Transfiguration on Mott Street. When Father Coppo took to the pulpit and began to speak, his audience began to weep, and then they grew louder than their preacher, who had to stop, marooned in his high pulpit, until everyone recovered enough composure to go on. On their way out, the mourners found members of the Women's Trade Union League in front of the church, distributing pamphlets in English, Italian, and Yiddish on how to lobby the state government for factory fire safety laws; Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch of Greenwich House had organized them, with Father Demo's "cordial permission."¹⁰⁸ At a time when sharp tensions existed between Catholics, Protestants, and secular-based reformers, a brief period of unity took place among the different groups.

The South Village and Non-Italians

As immigration declined in the 1920s, the Italians who remained in the Village opened more and more businesses, became landlords, and generally moved up the social ladder and became an integral part of the life of the Village. Historically, their businesses were especially important in creating the communal atmosphere in which other residents of the Village interacted. A diverse group joined Italians in the South Village over the next several decades: bohemians in the 1920s, beatniks in the 1950s, gays in the 1970s, and yuppies in the 1980s. Italian entrepreneurs were a mainstay and

¹⁰⁶ The announcement is preserved at CMS, Coll. #037, Box #1, Folder #12.

¹⁰⁷ "Sobs Interrupted Sermon," *The New York Times*, April 27, 1911. In ProQuest. Cited January 29, 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood: My Story of Greenwich House* (New York: Norton, 1935), p. 162.

expanded beyond their Italian customer base to others who lived in the Village or visited the Village.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the bohemians had not yet achieved the fame that awaited them later in the twentieth century. They were, for the moment, local activists and artists talking over long dinners in inexpensive restaurants, including Maria's, run by Maria Daprato on West Twelfth Street; Renganeschi's at 139 West Tenth Street; and Gonfarone's, owned by a widow named Caterina Gonfarone and her business partner Anacleto Sermolino, at MacDougal and Eighth Streets.¹⁰⁹

These activists and artists, however, frequented an Italian restaurant owned by the Bertolottis more often than any other. Not much is known about Angelo Bertolotti. His wife Carolina ("Carrie") Monteverde was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, November 17, 1873. They came to the South Village, purchased 85 West Third Street (the same building in which Edgar Allen Poe had lived in the 1840s), and in c. 1897 opened their restaurant.¹¹⁰ The restaurant had two floors: a formal dining room accessed by a flight of stairs from the sidewalk to the front entrance, and a popular basement bar with bare tables and bottle-covered walls. It also had a back yard that could have made a nice garden for outdoor dining had the men not claimed it for a *bocce* court. The cuisine was northern Italian, including risotto or rice, made by sautéing rice kernels in aromatic vegetables, stirring in a ladle of white wine. Chicken broth was then added until the rice was cooked thoroughly. The dish was complemented by Parmesan cheese and vegetables.¹¹¹ Perhaps as much as the quality of the food, the bohemians enjoyed the cost: only thirty-five cents for dinner and three cents extra for dessert in the early

¹⁰⁹ Gerald W. MacFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village: A New York City Neighborhood, 1898-1918* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2001), pp. 173-175.

¹¹⁰ For Mrs. Bertolotti's birth date, see "Mother Bertolotti is 74," *New York Times*, November 16, 1947. In ProQuest. Cited January 29, 2006. For place of birth, see "Mrs. Angelo Bertolotti," *New York Times*, May 6, 1954. In ProQuest. Cited January 29, 2006. For nickname, see Jane Nickerson, "New of Food," *New York Times*, March 22, 1947. In ProQuest. Cited March 13, 2005. The nickname is important as a mark of Americanization. Americans create nicknames by using the first part of a name (e.g., Joseph becomes Joe). Italians create nicknames by using the end of a name (e.g., Giuseppe, the Italian equivalent of Joseph, become Beppe, pronounced Beppy). In Italy, the nickname for Carolina would be Lina.

¹¹¹ Anna Alice Chapin, *Greenwich Village* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1917), pp. 214-217.

twentieth century, the equivalent of \$5.78 in 2006.¹¹² Between Italian and bohemian patrons, Bertolotti's had loyal customers, making it one of the more popular eateries in the South Village.

However, an incident occurred at Bertolotti's in the 1920s era of prohibition that threatened the communal spirit the bohemians and others enjoyed and also played into the stereotype of the Italian as criminal. Police arrested Carrie Bertolotti on charges not only of selling liquor but of selling liquor tainted with poisonous wood alcohol.¹¹³ Four other women and nine men were arrested in the raid on the South Village, which was reported in the *New York Times* the following day. Clearly, this was an incident that brought unneeded attention not only to the restaurant but to the community.

Prohibition and the Great Depression both slowed the success of the restaurant business. Long-time restaurant owners experimented with novelties to bring in crowds in response. William Bertolotti, one of Carrie's seven children, eventually took over 85 West Third Street from his parents and then purchased the lot at 83 West Third as well, to expand the kitchen space for the restaurant.¹¹⁴ In the late 1930s, he ran the establishment as a night club that featured bands, singing, and dancing.¹¹⁵

South Village Italian-Run Businesses

Indeed, Italian and Italian-American entrepreneurs continued to open new shops even after the Depression and World War II, and many of these shops survived throughout the rest of the twentieth century. Louis Balducci emigrated from Corato, Italy, in 1914, and opened his first grocery store in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. In 1948 he

¹¹² Edith Evans Asbury, "Unsinkable 'Village' Preserver Is Honored," *New York Times*, May 9, 1977. In ProQuest. Cited March 13, 2005. For conversion from early twentieth century to 2006, see <http://minneapolisfed.org/Research/data/us/calc/index.cfm> (January 29, 2006).

¹¹³ For raid, see "Village Raid Nets 4 Women and 9 Men," *New York Times*, February 5, 1923. For padlocking, see "Greenwich Village Cafés To Be Locked," *New York Times*, July 31, 1923, and "Four More Dry Padlocks," *New York Times*, January 10, 1924. For arrest, see "Whalen Spurs Raids on Speakeasies That Sell Poison Liquor," *New York Times*, January 3, 1929. In ProQuest. Cited March 13, 2005.

¹¹⁴ "Bertolotti Buys Plot in 'Village,'" *New York Times*, November 18, 1939. In ProQuest. Cited March 13, 2005.

¹¹⁵ "Night Clubs," *New York Times*, January 9, 1937, announces Jimmy Whalen's band at Bertolotti's. "Night Club Notes," *New York Times*, February 27, 1937, announces the singer Rita Eliscu. "Night Club Notes," *New York Times*, August 21, 1937, announces dancer Renee Villon. In ProQuest. Cited January 29, 2006.

rented space at 1 Greenwich Avenue, across from Sixth Avenue, and over the next 50 years, the Balducci family oversaw the growth of the store, which would become known world-wide for its selection of quality foods.¹¹⁶

Another well-known Village institution got its start when Onofrio Ottomanelli finished working at his uncle Joe's Quality Meats in Yorkville and opened his own shop, O. Ottomanelli and Sons, on Bleecker Street. Although the store has moved many times, it has always been located on Bleecker Street, fitting Ottomanelli's motto, "live, work and trade in the Village."¹¹⁷ Onofrio Ottomanelli passed away in 2000, but his sons and grandson keep the business going strong today at its location at 285 Bleecker Street [Figure 27]. Another butcher shop, Florence Prime Meat Market, on Jones Street, was opened in 1936 by Jack Ubaldi, and still retains its original narrow retail space, sawdust covered floors, and real butcher blocks [Figure 28]. Ubaldi's apprentice, Tony Pelligrino, purchased the business in 1976, and when it came time for Pelligrino to retire in 1996, he sold it to Benny Pizzuco. Pizzuco continues the shop's tradition of offering high quality meat by retaining relationships with the same wholesalers Ubaldi trusted decades ago.¹¹⁸ A native of Naples, Edward Faicco had an established pork store on Elizabeth Street in Little Italy in 1900 before his sons moved the shop to Thompson Street in the South Village in the late 1940s.¹¹⁹ Four years later, Edward Faicco's grandsons, Thomas and Edward J. Faicco, purchased 260 Bleecker Street from Howard J. May, and, with their sister Ann, made it the new home of their family's pork product shop, where it remains today [Figure 29].¹²⁰ These three Italian butcher shops were quickly discovered by non-Italians and today serve the local residents as well as people coming from all over the city for their products.

¹¹⁶ June Owen, "Food News: Fresh Fruit of the Finest," *New York Times*, June 3, 1960. For Balducci's birthplace and business history, see Susan Heller Anderson, "Louis Balducci, Grocer, Dies at 89, After Years as Chefs' Inspiration," *New York Times*, August 13, 1988. Both in ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹¹⁷ Diane Cardwell, "Onofrio Ottomanelli, 83, Dies; Ran a Venerated Meat Market," *New York Times*, December 20, 2000. In www.nytimes.com. Cited September 20, 2007.

¹¹⁸ Paul Lukas, "Prime Time: Tracking Down the Best Meat in the City," *New York Magazine*, May 31, 2004. www.nymag.com (Cited September 21, 2007).

¹¹⁹ "Golden Nominates Faicco's Pork Store for 2006 New York State Small Business Award," Press Release, New York State Senator Martin J. Golden, May 12, 2006, http://www.senatorgolden.com/press_archive_story.asp?id=13813 (Cited September 21, 2007)

¹²⁰ GVSHIP real estate transfers.



Figure 27. O. Ottomanelli & Sons prime meat market at 285 Bleeker Street is one of the many family-owned Italian food establishments in the South Village, attracting customers from all over the city.



Figure 28. Benny Pizzuco, pictured above, is the third owner of Florence Prime Meat Market, which originally opened in 1936. Pizzuco still uses real butcher blocks and keeps the floors of his narrow retail space covered with sawdust.

Ultimately, Italians ventured beyond the food business and contributed to a burst of entertainment initiatives in the South Village after World War II. The longest-lasting of these was the Amato Opera, which was the brainchild of Anthony Amato and his wife, the former Serafina (Sally) Bellantone born in Manhattan in 1917. Mr. Amato was born in 1920 in Southern Italy, and came to New Haven, Connecticut, with his family at age seven. His father intended him for business, but he studied singing, and eventually worked with the Philadelphia and Hartford Operas. The Amatos met in 1943 when playing *The Vagabond King* at the Paper Mill Playhouse; they married in 1945 [Figure 30]. The following year, Mr. Amato became Director of the Opera Workshop at the American Theater Wing. The couple started the Amato Opera in 1948, hoping to provide experience for his students and an opportunity for working-class people to attend the opera. The first local performance of Rossini's *Barber of Seville* took place at Our Lady of Pompeii in Greenwich Village.¹²¹ In May 1951, the Amatos purchased the Bleecker Playhouse Theater at 159-161 Bleecker Street for \$68,000, taking out mortgages of \$24,500 and \$22,000 to do so. They used the theater as a venue for their own operas and a source of income until August 1959, when Circle in the Square took a long-term lease on the space.¹²² The Amatos rented other places for their operas until September 1964, when they bought a building at 319 Bowery that they turned into a theater, opening with a performance of Puccini's *La Bohème*.¹²³ Throughout the years, Tony Amato selected the operas and rehearsed the cast, and Sally Amato sewed the costumes, seated the audience, and ran the light board during the show. She passed away at the age of 82 in 2000, but the Amato Opera continues its mission of making opera more accessible and nurturing new talent in the field.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Sondra Zuckerman Diaz, "From Dream to Reality: Fifty Years of the Amato Opera," <http://www.amato.org/amato9899/history2.html> (Cited February 12, 2006).

¹²² Louis Calta, "Circle in Square Gets New Home," *New York Times*, August 25, 1959. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹²³ "Theodore Strongin," "To Amato Opera, House is a Home," *New York Times*, September 12, 1964. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹²⁴ Allan Kozinn, "Sally Amato, 82, a Founder of an Intimate Opera Company," *New York Times*, August 18, 2000. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006; and Felicia R. Lee, "Coping: After a Death, the Song Remains the Same," *New York Times*, August 5, 2001. In Lexis-Nexis. Cited February 12, 2006.



Figure 29. The Faicco family has been selling pork from their shop at 260 Bleecker Street since the 1940s.



Figure 30. Married in 1945, Anthony and Serafina (Sally) Amato moved their Amato Opera to the Bleecker Playhouse Theater at 159-161 Bleecker Street in 1951. They later moved the opera to the Bowery, where it remains today. (<http://www.amato.org/>)

Shorter-lived initiatives were also important in turning the Village into a destination for those in search of food and fun. By the second half of the twentieth century, a new generation of Italians entered the restaurant business. One of the more successful efforts was that of the Cardia family. In 1951, Ubaldo Cardia, a veteran Italian Navy recruit, brought his bride, the former Elsie Garaventa, to the Village and opened a restaurant, the Beatrice Inn, at 285 West 12th Street.¹²⁵ A vivacious hostess, Mrs. Cardia helped attract workers from the nearby port facilities and factories during the day and politicians and other notables at night. She also went into local real estate, guiding the purchase of the building in which the Beatrice Inn was located, as well as other rental properties in the West Village.¹²⁶

In the 1950s, Italian restaurant families and real estate owners throughout the Village began serving beatniks, the descendants of the bohemians of the early twentieth century. Brothers Joe and Iggy Termini took over their family business on Third Avenue and St. Mark's Place and turned it into a jazz club known as the Five Spot, which became a well-known establishment where such jazz greats as Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, and Charles Mingus played. Frank and Jean Cantarino had attracted longshoremen to their bar on the corner of Hudson Street and Spring Street; in 1957 their son Mike turned the bar into a jazz club, with his father in the kitchen, his brother Sonny at the cash register, and his sister Rosemarie at the coat check.¹²⁷ In 1955, James Garafalo took advantage of the fact that jazz great Charlie Parker was staying with friends nearby to bring jazz to his restaurant, Café Bohemia at 15 Barrow Street.¹²⁸

While some Italians established jazz clubs, others featured folk music. Mike Porco owned Gerde's, a bar and restaurant at 11 West Fourth Street that catered to Italians and Italian-Americans working in the area's light industry. As that customer base dwindled, he began looking for another. At the same time, Izzy Young entered the

¹²⁵ "Directory to Dining Out in New York," December 15, 1967. In ProQuest. Cited February 3, 2006.

¹²⁶ Ed Gold, "Elsie Cardia, 77, restaurateur promoted Italian culture," *The Villager*, Vol. 74, No. 38, Jan. 26-Feb. 1, 2005.

¹²⁷ Paul Chevigny, *Gigs: Jazz and the Cabaret Laws in New York City* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 49-50; "'Village' Becomes Focal Center for Modern Jazz: Five Spot Café and the Half Note Spur Move Downtown," *New York Times*, October 27, 1960. In ProQuest. February 4, 2006.

¹²⁸ Ted Panken, "When Giants Walked the Village," *Downbeat* (June 2005), pp. 52-53, 56-57.

music industry, and in 1960 he and advertising executive Tom Prendergast made a deal with Porco to book folk acts for Gerde's in exchange for the gate receipts. The crowds came, but evaded the cover charges, which led to conflict between Prendergast, Young, and Porco. The latter eventually moved on to another booking agent, and Izzy Young focused on his Folklore Center on MacDougal Street.¹²⁹

In the 1950s and early 1960s, visitors went to dinner in the South Village, attended the opera, and frequented jazz clubs until the wee hours. By daylight, however, only Village residents could be seen. As sociologist Donald Tricarico described it, outside the highly visible but small group of business owners, the South Village consisted of a small group of working-class Italian-Americans clustered in low-paying positions in the clerical and retail sales fields, and a large group of elderly people living on fixed incomes. Their immediate surroundings were shabby: their homes old, cramped, and technologically backward. However, rent controls and low demand kept housing costs down by New York standards, so if people were not getting much for their housing, they were not spending much either. They thus used the disposable income on food.

By the 1950s, Italians were known for being expert cooks and making diverse food items palatable to American tastes. Media outlets assisted in bringing Italians the desired positive attention. In 1958, the *New York Times* wrote an article calling attention to the Italian specialty of roasted coffee beans available from Pasquale Albanese at the Porto Rico Importing Company, then located at 194 Bleecker Street.¹³⁰ In business since 1907, Porto Rico is still a fixture in the South Village, with two locations in the neighborhood at 107 Thompson Street and 201 Bleecker Street. For the last forty-seven years, the store has been owned by the Longo family, who keep the old world charm alive with coffee beans stored in big burlap sacks and loose teas kept in black canisters on shelves along the wall [Figures 31 & 32].

¹²⁹ David Hajdu, *Positively Fourth Street; The Lives and Times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Fariña and Richard Fariña* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 48-50.

¹³⁰ Mayburn Koss, "Freshly Roasted Beans Are Key to Good Cup of Coffee," *New York Times*, December 4, 1958. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.



Figures 31 & 32. Porto Rico has two stores in the South Village—one at 201 Bleecker Street (pictured above) and another at 107 Thompson Street. The first store was opened by Pasquale Albanese in 1907. For almost the last fifty years, the Longos have owned the company, continuing the tradition of keeping the coffee beans in big burlap sacks in the store.

In 1959, the *Times* carried a story describing the quality and variety of fruits and vegetables available at Louis Balducci's, still at 1 Greenwich Avenue. In 1966, Craig Claiborne took *Times* readers on a stroll along Bleecker Street, stopping at the corner of Carmine Street for Frank's pork products at No. 26 on that street, then Ruggiero's fish shop at 235 Bleecker Street, A. Zito & Sons bakery at 259, Faicco's pork products at 260, and Ottomanelli's butcher shop, with its specialty game meats, at 285 Bleecker.¹³¹ Mimi Sheraton, who has lived in the Village since 1945, also praised the food along Bleecker Street, stating "Still the heart of the Village's old Italian neighborhood, Bleecker Street excels in Italian food stores."¹³²

In 1971, New York lawmakers rezoned industrial loft areas to allow residential use. Rezoning attracted new residents, who filled the lofts and other spaces that opened in the older tenements, and in apartments carved out of private townhouses. The new residents were largely non-Italian, with better paying jobs and higher incomes than the resident Italians, but with a similar desire for a stable community.¹³³ Ann and Edward Faicco, for instance, previously accustomed to serving Italian customers middle-aged and older found that by the mid 1970s they were selling pork products and Italian imports to diverse people in their twenties and thirties.¹³⁴

The Faicco siblings were young enough to relate to the new customers. Other families were aging. The parents of the Bertolotti restaurant family moved to 147 West Fourth Street, but the children continued to run the restaurant at 85 Third Street until about March 1977. In this case, the restaurant was reopened as another Italian restaurant called *Volare*.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Craig Claiborne, "Bleecker Street Has Lost Its Pushcarts But Not Its Pungency," *New York Times*, June 1, 1967. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006. For other references to Claiborne articles to Bleecker Street food purveyors, see "Homemade Fare Distinguishes Shops in Greenwich Village," February 2, 1961, "To Baron, Life is a Feast for All Seasons," November 3, 1966, and "Eating Like a Roman," May 5, 1968.

¹³² Mimi Sheraton, "Food Guide to Stores and Dining," *New York Times*, May 27, 1977. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006

¹³³ Tricarico, pp. 79-80.

¹³⁴ Claiborne, "Sausage Just As It Was Back In 1900."

¹³⁵ Mimi Sheraton, "Restaurants," *New York Times*, June 2, 1978. In ProQuest. Cited February 3, 2006. The article mentions that *Volare* had been opened for fourteen months at the time of the review.

As the South Village changed, fewer enterprising Italians lived there to take advantage of new business opportunities, and so non-Italian entrepreneurs began to rent space, converting the area from solidly Italian to a diverse mix of cultures. Ten years after publishing Craig Claiborne's stroll through Bleecker Street, the *Times* wrote about the same neighborhood, this time noting that while the Italians still controlled the corner shops on Bleecker Street east of Sixth Avenue, other groups dominated the centers of the blocks, catering to tourists and the upper middle class.¹³⁶

The South Village business establishments catered to a wide variety of groups, a fact that underscores how the penchant for making money overcame the desire to discriminate. Beginning in the 1890s, homosexuals, a group that historically faced widespread discrimination, found a few hospitable commercial establishments in the Village.¹³⁷ In the 1920s, Prohibition outlawed alcoholic beverages, driving underground the sale and consumption of alcohol and the interactions that accompany it. When Prohibition ended in 1933, the tolerance previously extended to homosexuals socializing in public did not resume. Mafiosi (individuals with Mafia ties) took advantage of the situation by opening establishments catering to gays and lesbians. Several men affiliated with the Genovese crime family owned and operated the Stonewall Inn, the site of the 1969 protest that began the Gay Liberation Movement.¹³⁸ As restrictions on homosexuals waned, so too did the role of Mafiosi in providing the gay community with places to fraternize.

Politics in the South Village

South Village Italians were slow to take an interest in politics because other groups dominated the field. The Irish controlled politically the West Village and found in Tammany Hall champions for their causes. Native-born elites controlled Washington Square North and disdained Tammany. Similarly, Protestant churches and settlement

¹³⁶ Fred Ferretti, "Electric Eclectic Bleecker Weekend," *New York Times*, May 28, 1976. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006

¹³⁷ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), chapter 9.

¹³⁸ David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), pp. 5, 77-83.

houses thought the political machine used the poor for its own gain while ignoring systemic problems. These activists tended to support fusion candidates, reform parties, and Republicans.

Although the exception rather than the norm, some Italians in the South Village did involve themselves in politics. Luigi Fugazy, for instance, forged connections to Tammany Hall, although he never ran for office. Another well-known Italian politician was Antonio Zucca. Born in Trieste in 1851, he came to New York City in 1867 and joined his brother in business. He became politically active when he was appointed coroner. In 1897, he launched Zucca and Co., a food importation business. Between business and politics, he had reason to be, as his 1922 obituary said, “a member of every prominent Italian-American society in the city.”¹³⁹

Scattered throughout the Village were politically active bohemians who identified with no particular party or group. A handful of Italians, like the bohemians, were extremists politically especially in the early part of the twentieth century. For example, Carlo Tresca, an anarchist born in Italy in 1879, immigrated to the United States in 1904, and settled in New York City in 1913. He edited a series of Italian-language newspapers and became interested in the much publicized Paterson Strike in New Jersey. He worked with the bohemians and the Industrial Workers of the World in staging the Paterson Strike Pageant of June 7, 1913 in Madison Square Garden.¹⁴⁰ During the 1920s, Tresca defended Sacco and Vanzetti, the renowned anarchists who were executed in 1927 for a murder they may not have committed. He also opposed the rise of the Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini in Italy

Tresca, however, became involved in anti-Stalinist politics in the 1930s at a time when many on the Left glorified the Soviet dictator. In the 1940s, he argued for the exclusion of Communists from Italian politics, as many Italians and Italian-Americans had begun to do as they assisted in planning for post-war Italy. Given his long tenure and association with various causes, all of them controversial and unpopular in at least some quarters, he had, in the words of his biographer, “all the right enemies.” He was

¹³⁹ “Antonio Zucca,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1922. In ProQuest. Cited March 13, 2005.

¹⁴⁰ Martin Green, *New York, 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* (New York: Collier/MacMillan, 1988), pp. 195-215.

gunned down in front of his newspaper office at Fifth Avenue and 15th Street on January 11, 1943.¹⁴¹

Prior to Franklin Roosevelt's response to the Great Depression in the form of the New Deal, Italians nationwide had no particular affiliation with the Democratic Party. Because FDR's program assisted the working classes, however, a coalition of urban workers, southern and eastern European immigrants, and African Americans—known as the New Deal coalition—was born in 1936. Italians joined this coalition in large numbers nationwide and their allegiance to Democratic Party remained for at least another generation.

This nationwide political development also occurred in the South Village. The majority of South Village Italians who were politically active joined the Democratic Party around the same time, though not necessarily for their support of Roosevelt's policies alone. One particularly noteworthy Italian-American political figure was Village-born Carmine De Sapio. De Sapio held power over the New York County Democratic Committee beginning in 1949; he would end up being the last boss of Tammany Hall after he was defeated for the office of district leader in Greenwich Village in 1961 by reform-minded Democrats. De Sapio's reputation for corruption and affiliation with organized crime made him a shadowy figure in the minds of many.

Another politically active but less controversial Village Italian was Anthony Dapolito, introduced earlier as the son of the baker Nunzio Dapolito. Dapolito had taken over the bakery from his father, married Frances Bianco, also of Greenwich Village, and continued to live in the neighborhood. In 1951, he joined with other Villagers in preventing the construction of the Lower Manhattan Expressway, an effort that would have adversely affected the Italian community. The next year, he joined the new community board structure, specifically Community Board #2 in Lower Manhattan. He served on Community Board #2 for the next 52 years, mostly as chair of its committee on parks. He became one of the more respected citizens of Greenwich Village. His neighbors tried to honor him by renaming a pocket park on Thompson Street after him. When they discovered that the law forbade naming a park after a

¹⁴¹ Dorothy Gallagher, *All the Right Enemies: The Life and Murder of Carlo Tresca* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

living person, they chose the name Vesuvio, after the bakery, which in turn had been named after the volcano in the Dapolito's ancestral home.¹⁴² So beloved and respected was Tony Dapolito, even in the often factious community politics of the neighborhood, that he was often referred to as the "Mayor of Greenwich Village." After his death in 2003, the South Village's local municipal recreation center was renamed in honor of Dapolito.

The most famous South Village politician, though, was Fiorello LaGuardia. LaGuardia was born at 177 Sullivan Street on December 11, 1882. In 1885 his father joined the U.S. Army as a bandmaster, and so his firstborn son (LaGuardia's brother Richard was born in 1887) grew up in a family that moved continuously. He spent much of his youth in Prescott, Arizona. In 1898, he left high school because his family was moving to his mother's hometown of Trieste, a city then in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He returned to New York City in 1906 to work as an interpreter on Ellis Island and to attend New York University Law School. Upon graduation, he set himself up as an immigration lawyer, and became involved in local causes, including a 1912 garment workers' strike, the event that introduced him to his future wife Thea Almerigotti. In 1914 or 1915, the couple moved to 39 Charles Street.

As an ambitious young Italian, LaGuardia faced what his biographer called "slow going" on the path toward leadership.¹⁴³ Because he was interested in the plight of people typically neglected by politicians, LaGuardia concluded that Tammany Hall did not share his agenda. He therefore joined the Twenty-fifth Assembly District Republican Club, which was within the Fourteenth Congressional District.¹⁴⁴ He was elected to Congress from that district on his second try in 1916 and quickly took his seat that April when Woodrow Wilson had called Congress into session to ask for a declaration of war against Germany. Soon after that vote, LaGuardia took leave from Congress to serve the U.S. Army Signal Corps, the aviation unit at the time, and he

¹⁴² Kelly Crow, "The Mayor of Greenwich Village," *New York Times*, October 27, 2002. In Lexis-Nexis. Cited February 5, 2006.

¹⁴³ Ron Bayor, *Fiorello LaGuardia: Ethnicity and Reform*, American Biographical History Series (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1993), p. 23.

¹⁴⁴ Bayor, p. 24, identifies the Twenty-Fifth Assembly District as being in Lower Manhattan. Currently, the Assembly District is in Queens; see <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/maps.html> (February 5, 2006).

served until October 1918. After the war, he returned to politics, first as a member of the New York City Board of Alderman and then as a Congressman.

Ultimately, the Village was a place of tragedy for LaGuardia. His wife and infant daughter were diagnosed with tuberculosis in the early 1920s. As there were no antibiotics then, the only hope was to get them into fresh air, and LaGuardia relocated from Charles Street to 1852 University Avenue in Riverdale in the Bronx. It turned out to be a futile effort: his daughter died in May and his wife in November of 1921, just as his political career blossomed. One of the many papers Father Demo preserved was a handwritten note from LaGuardia sending a check to thank Father Demo for assisting his wife in her illness. Also remaining is a copy of Father Demo's letter returning the check and explaining to the non-Catholic LaGuardia (his father was a lapsed-Catholic and his mother was Jewish) that it would be improper for him to accept money for something done out of friendship and as a religious duty.¹⁴⁵

LaGuardia remained at his University Avenue address and reentered Congressional politics, being elected to the House of Representatives in 1922. He lost the seat in 1932, when Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats won in a landslide. In 1934, he became mayor after Jimmy Walker resigned in the wake of scandals in his administration. LaGuardia remained in that post until 1945, collaborating with President Roosevelt in bringing New Deal programs to New York City and in organizing civil defense for the city during World War II. He left office on December 31, 1945. He returned to Riverdale and died of pancreatic cancer on September 20, 1947.¹⁴⁶ In the Village, he is commemorated by a statue located on LaGuardia Place, the section of West Broadway renamed for the mayor.

South Village Italians in the Modern Era

Many South Village Italians were traditionally manual laborers in an industrial economy. Many more eventually owned their own homes and took great pride in them. They raised families and became consumers of goods that small businesses supplied to

¹⁴⁵ Fiorello LaGuardia to Antonio Demo, New York, December 10, 1921, and Antonio Demo to LaGuardia, December 24. Center for Migration Studies Collection #037, Box 3, Folder 26.

¹⁴⁶ s.v., "LaGuardia, Fiorello (Raffaele) H(enry)," in *Encyclopedia of New York City*, p. 651.

them. However a century after they entered the South Village, the area had become a service-sector economy divided between low-skill jobs with little security or opportunity for advancement and high-skill jobs with enormous potential. In such a new environment, education became all important. Rather than taking out a mortgage on a building they could rent, many decided to take loans out for an education that could put them on a path toward a service-sector career. Those Italians most adversely impacted by this new environment were the elderly.

The changing nature of the South Village economy hurt many Italian businesses. Charlie Zito died in 1998.¹⁴⁷ His nephew Anthony closed their eighty-year-old bakery in 2004, citing the drop in sales due to the popularity of the Atkins low-carbohydrate diet, the price of coal, and recent rent increases.¹⁴⁸ The storefront remained vacant, but across the street, another bakery opened, called “Amy’s,” one backed by capitalization from the owner’s other locations and sales of bread recipe books.

Other Italian businesses were able adjust in the short term, but not the long term. For instance, in 1966, Louis Balducci signed a five-year lease to rent a space on Greenwich Avenue for \$20,000 per year. When it came time to renew, the owners doubled the rent, but Balducci’s survived by moving to 424 Sixth Avenue.¹⁴⁹ In 1977, recognizing customer demand for exotic foods, he added a line of imported cheeses, and his store soon became famous for high quality food items. His Village location attracted celebrity customers such as Mayor Edward Koch, who lived in the area.¹⁵⁰ Mr. Balducci died in 1988. Eleven years later, his son Andy and daughter-in-law Nina sold the business to a Maryland-based firm, Sutton Gourmet. Andy Balducci’s sister, Grace Balducci Doria, had opened Grace’s food shop on Third Avenue at 71st Street in 1985 and was estranged from her brother. She considered exercising her option to purchase the business name, but decided not to match the \$26.5 million that Sutton Gourmet

¹⁴⁷ Barbara Stewart, “Charlie Zito, Village Figure and Baker, is Dead at 78,” *New York Times*, October 1, 1998. In Lexis-Nexis. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹⁴⁸ James Barron with Alex Mindlin, “A Landmark Bakery Closes in the Village,” *New York Times*, May 28, 2004. In Lexis-Nexis. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹⁴⁹ Alan S. Oser, “Higher Rents in Stores Stirs Shifts in City,” *New York Times*, December 28, 1969. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹⁵⁰ Anderson, “Louis Balducci.”

would pay.¹⁵¹ Without actual Balduccis working at the store, the name did not mean as much to the Village clientele, and its location on Sixth Avenue closed in 2003, although it has since reopened on Eighth Avenue and 14th Street.¹⁵² In the case of Balducci's, the family found personal financial security, but part of the Italian neighborhood was lost.

Other people managed the transition more smoothly. In 2002, Anthony Dapolito sold the Vesuvio Bakery he had inherited from his father to two friends, Lisa and Christine Gigante, because of ailing health, and he died the next year.¹⁵³ The Gigantes maintained the bakery décor, but renovated the business to include fashionable breads and a more diverse menu [Figure 33].¹⁵⁴ In this case, local investment maintained a part of the South Village, but this was certainly an exception to the rule.

Other family-owned businesses have managed to survive into the twenty-first century. As early as 1976, Citicorp tried to bring Faicco pork products to its indoor mall in Midtown. Ann Faicco enjoyed being wooed with meals at the Saint Regis but decided to stay in the Village.¹⁵⁵ Onofrio Ottomanelli died in 2000. His grandson Matthew stayed at the store during the funeral to fill the wholesale orders, noting this would be the way his grandfather wanted it.¹⁵⁶ In 1975, Angelo Longo owned and operated the Porto Rico Importing Company, but it looked as though his son Peter's life would be different, as the younger Longo was enrolled at the New School. However, Peter dropped out of school to try to expand his family's business.¹⁵⁷ By 1987, he had taken over the family business at 194 Bleecker Street.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵¹ Charles V. Bagli, "Talk of Selling Fabled Balducci's Reopens Family Wounds," *New York Times*, May 1, 1999. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹⁵² Marian Burros, "Balducci's: A House Divided Stands in Name Only," *New York Times*, June 28, 2000. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹⁵³ Douglas Martin, "Anthony Dapolito, 82, Community Advocate," *New York Times*, July 5, 2003. In Lexis-Nexis. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹⁵⁴ Florence Fabricant, "Food Stuff: A Venerable Bakery Gets a Makeover as a Café," *New York Times*, September 10, 2003. In Lexis-Nexis. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹⁵⁵ Ferretti, "Electric Eclectic Bleecker Weekend,"

¹⁵⁶ Diane Cardwell, "Onofrio Otomanelli, 83, Died; Ran a Venerated Meat Market," December 20, 2000. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹⁵⁷ Jean Hewitt, "Exotic Coffee Beans from All Over," *New York Times*, January 14, 1975. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.

¹⁵⁸ Trish Hall, "Waking Up to Dropping Coffee Prices," *New York Times*, March 18, 1987. In ProQuest. Cited February 12, 2006.



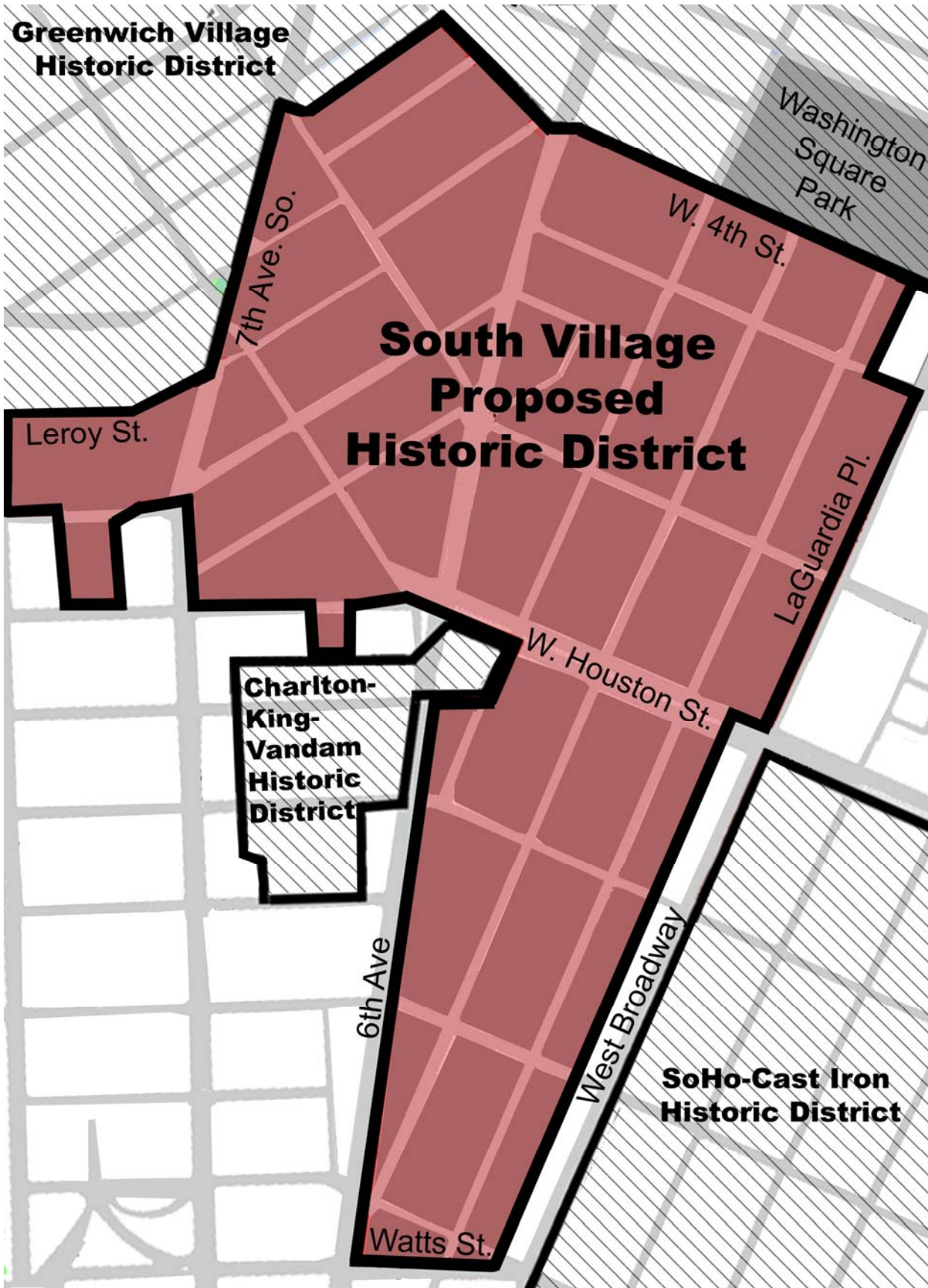
Figure 33. The Vesuvio Bakery at 160 Prince Street was opened by Nunzio and Jennie Dapolito in 1920. Their son, Anthony Dapolito, who was involved in the South Village's local community board and neighborhood parks, operated the bakery until 2002. The new owners, Lisa and Christine Gigante, have expanded the bakery's menu while keeping the spirit of the Dapolito's bakery alive.

Conclusion

The South Village Italian community illustrates the complexity of historical trends and how they impact traditional ethnic neighborhoods. Italians did not preserve all of their old ways. They came from small towns to the big city, from communities rooted in agriculture to a center of industry, from a place where some aspects of the economy were still not part of the cash nexus to a place where one could not live in a house that had been in the family for generations. They had to learn to live in tenements, work in factories, and become consumers. To the extent that they did these things, they learned to adjust to a constantly changing American environment, but the assimilation process was never completed.

For a time, they were distinguished by their poverty and by their occupations in two ways. They tended to be clustered in the unskilled working class. In terms of the South Village's business activities, they were noted for the number of entrepreneurs and workers engaged in the manufacture of artificial flowers and in their selling of a multitude of food items. They also remained distinctive for their cuisine and their religious practices. In short, South Village Italians were the embodiment not of an elusive assimilation that never takes place fully in America, but of a cultural pluralism that made it possible for them to be good Italians while becoming good Americans.

Together with the others who settled there, the Italians created something new in the South Village. Their real estate ventures helped create a diverse and dynamic community. Their restaurants provided the community with food and social venues. Their street activities inspired artists such as John Sloan. Their need for assistance inspired social reformers such as Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch. As their surroundings changed they adhered to their traditions to cope. They built social institutions, businesses, and strategies for economic security and survival. By building a viable community and interacting with those outside of it, the Italians contributed to the unique mix of Village life.



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The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation was founded in 1980, and works to preserve the special architectural character and cultural heritage of Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo.

GVSHP's Historic South Village Preservation Project endeavors to tell the story of the South Village through education, documentation, and programming, and advocates for the neighborhood's preservation through landmarking and other measures. The J.M. Kaplan Fund has provided the funding for this report.

Mary Elizabeth Brown is the archivist at Marymount Manhattan College and at the Center for Migration Studies in New York, and also teaches at Marymount Manhattan. She received her Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1987. She is the author of "From Italian Villages to Greenwich Village, Our Lady of Pompei 1892-1992," among other scholarly works on New York's Italian and Catholic communities.



**Greenwich Village Society
for Historic Preservation**

232 East 11th Street
New York, NY 10003

212-475-9585

www.gvshp.org