

# Italian Immigrants in the Lake Superior Basin

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From 1870 through 1920 hundreds of thousands of Italians arrived in the United States and Canada seeking economic opportunity and better lives. They were attracted to cities of the Midwest – Minneapolis-St. Paul, Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland – and eastern Canada – Montréal and Toronto -- where as cheap labor they found jobs in factories, railroads, urban construction, and service businesses and created new lives in the Midwest.<sup>1</sup>

Less known and understood was the emigration of Italians to the immense Lake Superior Basin, a rugged forest realm encompassing 31,700 square miles with a shoreline of 2,726 miles. It was into this region that the first Italians arrived as individuals and then in groups starting in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately given the isolated nature of the region cut by the United States-Canadian boundary and a collection of state borders, little is known beyond the immediate communities about the Italian immigration to the area from the 1860s to its resultant contemporary legacy.

Within the Basin there are five urban centers - Duluth-Superior, Thunder Bay (formerly Fort William and Port Arthur) and the American and Canadian Sault Ste. Maries. Elsewhere the region is composed of numerous small communities. In 1910-1911 the total population of the region was 661,935 and there were 16,862 Italian-born residents not counting their offspring with 13,546 on the American side of the border and another 3,316 in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Although the larger immigrant Italian story commences in the mid-nineteenth century, it had its origins in the colonial era. Enrico (soldier, explorer, fur trader) and Alfonso (soldier and administrator) de Tonti were active in the area in the late seventeenth century. In 1791 Count Paolo Andreani of Milan, while on a scientific expedition to the Basin to study the shape of the earth, was the first known European to make a continuous circumnavigation of the lake. Two Italian missionaries, from Milan, Reverend Samuel Mazzuchelli, OP (1830-1833) followed by Reverend Toussaint Santelli (1838-1843) were stationed at Ste. Anne church on Mackinac Island. In the decades from 1820 through 1850 a small number of Italian names appear in the censuses, which unfortunately lack their origins or occupations. Given the fur trading economy that was probably their occupation. In 1850 there were at least two Italians in the UP: 62-year old Pascal Augustine who was a fisherman on Mackinac Island and living at Sault Ste. Marie a 63-year old retiree, F.B. Braso.<sup>3</sup>

The main reason for immigration to the western and central Upper Peninsula of Michigan was the demand for large numbers of unskilled laborers of many nationalities to work in the copper and iron mines. The earliest Italians into the Basin – the vanguard of Italian immigration – began to arrive on the eve of the Civil War. By the spring of 1860 a small group of Piedmontese from northwestern Italy was living in the Copper Country having arrived through Canada. By 1910 due to chain migration there were 2,041 Italians living in Houghton County interconnected by efficient rail and interurban systems, which allowed these Italian colonies to easily interact.<sup>4</sup>

Some of these early arrivals mastered the language and rapidly moved from underground mining to become entrepreneurs and valued members of the community. This was true of Bart Quello (1837-1919) who farmed, developed a logging business providing timbers for Calumet & Hecla Mining Company, served the community and invested in real estate. On the Marquette Iron Range, Philip and Josephine Marchetti/Marketty from the isle of Corsica (politically French

but ethnically Italian) arrived in the summer of 1864, farmed and engaged in real estate, as did the Barasa family who arrived in the 1870s and eventually opened an iron mine.

In the Upper Peninsula, the Italian communities were scattered in numerous communities interconnected by railroads and followed by automobiles. By 1910 on the Marquette Iron Range there were Italians at Gwinn (394), Ishpeming (185), and Negaunee (504) for a total 1,083. Many families had strong connections with families in Calumet ninety miles to the northwest. The Menominee Ranges, which had developed in the 1880s, included Dickinson (1,210 Italians) and Iron (743 Italians) counties. Within Dickinson County on the eastern part of the range there were 450 Tyrolese Italians, one of the larger concentration of these immigrants in the United States. They were ethnically Italian but subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and 53 percent of them were employed in the iron mines. Iron Mountain with its 1,041 Italians along with Calumet was the second dominant community of Italians. Finally the Gogebic Iron Range in the western UP, which blossomed in the 1890s, attracted 844 Italians to Bessemer, 450 to Ironwood and 181 to Wakefield.

The first Italians were not attracted to northeast Minnesota by mining but found jobs in lumbering, shipping and most important in railroad construction centered at the rail hub of Duluth. Here the Italian colonies resided near the Northern Pacific roundhouse and eventually Italians obtained industrial jobs. The Minnesota Iron Range's Vermilion Range located some 64 miles to the north of Duluth, first shipped iron ore in 1884 followed by the Mesabi Range in 1892. Italian communities grew along the Duluth, Missabe & Iron Range and the Great Northern Railroads and their feeder lines and then they found jobs in underground and open pit iron mines. By 1910 there were 648 Italians in Duluth and 3,536 on the Minnesota Iron Range.

Italian immigration to Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario was slower than in the United States. Italians were attracted to the United States, Argentina and Brazil and by-passed Canada who had an exclusive social and economic policy to attract farmers. At first there were neither mines nor industries to attract large numbers of unskilled Italian laborers.

The city of Thunder Bay consisted of Fort William and Port Arthur and was created by amalgamation in 1970. The city developed as a major rail hub for the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways beginning in 1875. It attracted laborers to work as navvies on the railways and then as laborers for the railroads as coal dock handlers. The first Italians attracted by this industrial development first arrived in small numbers in the 1880s and by 1901 out of a total population of about 7,200 there were only 160 Italians in the cities while 244 Italians were employed at mining operations in the vicinity.

During the great economic boom of 1905-1915 more Italians arrived, first as single males and then with families. The majority worked with their backs as laborers in the Canadian Pacific sheds, as grain and coal handlers, checkers, and truckers. Some found jobs with the city governments and in local industry like Canada Iron Corporation and Ogilvie Flour Company. By 1921 there were approximately 2,000 in the Lakehead with 1,400 northern Italians attracted to Fort William and 700 southern Italians living in Port Arthur. In both locations they created their own colonies or "Little Italies" where they congregated around service businesses – groceries, confectioneries, tailor and barber shops – fraternal societies like the Italian Mutual Benefit Society of Port Arthur and Italian Catholic parishes.

Facing the language barrier and a new and different society some immigrants met the challenge and joined the entrepreneur class. Barretta Bernardi arrived in Fort William and opened an ice cream parlor in 1906. Soon after he expanded into a grocery store and within a few years the Wayland Hotel was added to his business enterprises.<sup>5</sup> Vincenzo and Giovanni Veltri,

railway contractors and mining promoters were from Calabria. They created the R.F. Welch Company, based in Thunder Bay and recruited thousands of Italian railway laborers, which aided in the development of Canadian infrastructure. In the process they broke prejudice against Italians with the business community.<sup>6</sup>

The Italian settlements at the two Sault Ste. Maries developed as one entity separated by a quick ferry trip across the St. Mary's River and the international boundary that was never seen as an obstacle. At first hundreds of Italians were attracted by railway construction jobs in the Ontario wilderness where there were more Italians "in the bush north of Sault Ste. Marie than in all of southern Ontario."<sup>7</sup> On the American side of the riverine border, the Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic and Canadian Pacific Railroads hired Italian navvies as they developed trackage from the Soo to Duluth during the 1880s.

The expansion of the American locks at the St. Mary's River Canal along with the development of a power canal from 1890 through World War I attracted Italian workers from New York. Then an enthusiastic entrepreneur, Francis H. Clergue, arrived and stimulated industrialization on both sides of the river. He developed the electrical power supply and then proceeded to construct the Sault Ste. Marie Pulp and Paper Company, developed iron ore bodies at Michipicoten to the north (now Wawa), and in 1901 formed Algoma Steel. Italian workers, who did transient work on the railroads and canals, found permanent jobs in both cities and settled down with families.

The Italian community at Sault Ste. Marie-Steelton, Ontario developed in an area known as the "West End" surrounded by the towering steel mill complex, the paper plant and various rail yards.<sup>8</sup> By 1915 the total population of the Soo stood at 18,000 people while there were 3,000 Italians with a transient rail labor force of between 600 and 800 Italians.

Algoma Steel hired 400-500 Italians out of 3,000 laborers while at the Lake Superior Paper Mill Company half of the 500 workers were Italian. There were also Italians working at the local brewery, sawmill and in a brick factory. Algoma Central Railway employed 200 Italians during the summer and the Canadian Pacific Railway hired another hundred to load and unload coal and freight.

In the American Soo, Italians readily found employment at Soo Woolen Mills, Northwestern Leather Company and Union Carbide, which opened between 1898 and 1903. The Italians developed a small "Little Italy" on Brown Street just off of Ashmun Street that was anchored by the Christopher Columbus Italian American Society hall established in 1930. As with their Canadian brethren they developed service businesses – groceries, bakeries, confectioneries, pasta factory, shoe repair, cigar makers, and tailor shops, bricklaying.

A number of individuals rose above businesses usually associated with immigrants. Charles Orazio DePaul who arrived in 1909 in the American Soo, developed movie theaters – Dreamland, Temple, Star, Princess – and beginning in 1926 organized the theaters around the Soo Amusement Company, which lasted into the 1970s. In Canada Frank Mantello was a jeweler and silversmith; Guglielmo Grassi operated the International Exchange and Steamship Line Agency (*Credito Italo-Canadese*) and in 1917 served as Italian consul while V. Vincenzetti was an Italian interpreter, real estate agent and bicycle dealer.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the Italians came from southern Italy: Calabria, Abruzzi, Sicily and many of the families – Greco, Mancuso, Nardi, Palumbo, Paris, Rafaelli, Ranieri, Talarico – were inter-related living on both sides of the border. They frequently crossed for family visits, holiday events and dinners at the social clubs, sporting events like ice hockey and saw the communities

as one. This was a unique situation only replicated by the Italian communities at Detroit, Michigan-Windsor, Ontario and Niagara Falls, Ontario-Buffalo, New York.<sup>10</sup>

The spirit of entrepreneurialism reached into the Italian communities and businesses developed, servicing the growing population. Among the more prominent was the saloonkeeper found in many communities because the saloon provided a refuge for the immigrant where a beverage, some food at the end of the bar and social interaction could be found. Some saloonkeepers became employment agents for new immigrants. In one exceptional community known for its saloons was Hurley Wisconsin where in 1912 out of a total of fifty-nine saloons, Italians owned twenty-three. In the western Upper Peninsula on the iron ranges and in the Copper Country there were eighty-three saloonkeepers. Twenty-four saloons were concentrated at Calumet in the heart of the Copper Country home to 384 Italian-born residents who were invited to come and enjoy fine liquor and conviviality. As they prospered some of the saloonkeepers expanded into liquor and beer distributorships and some of their descendants continue to operate throughout the Lake Superior Basin.

Immigrants found that they could open groceries with little capital, work long hours with family members and eventually develop a profitable business. These stores catered to customers seeking Italian food products such as dried salted cod/*baccalà*, pasta, polenta, cheese and olive oil. In Iron Mountain, Michigan a group formed the Capistrano Cooperative Grocery Store. Popular confectioneries were found in every community where candy and ice cream were in demand. The Italian bakery was an essential business in every community. Warm bread was delivered by wagon directly to homes and boarding houses in the summer or winter. The pasta manufacturers are gone from Hancock, Michigan and Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. However Baroni spaghetti sauce, first developed in Calumet in 1935 by Paul J. Baroni is readily available on-line and throughout the Upper Peninsula. The Stella Cheese Company was started in 1917 by Giulio Bolognesi, Italian consul-general at Chicago with his business partner, the consular agent at Duluth, Attilio Castigliano on 1,700 acres of pastureland at his estate on Lake Nebagamon in Douglas County, Wisconsin. He imported a skilled cheese maker, Frank Tescari who made Parmesan cheese, which was sold to Italians in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The Frigo cheese company also developed along the Michigan-Wisconsin border and introduced asiago cheese to America. Both of these companies introduced the production of Italian-style cheeses to Wisconsin cheese makers and to the American palate.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Lake Superior Basin is not considered an agrarian paradise because of the cold climate and thin soil, Italians developed large household gardens. Mining companies allowed miners to rent acreage to grow potatoes and hay for their cows. At the west side of the Canadian Soo in 1914, Calabrese farmers developed truck gardens supplying the city with fresh vegetables and there were farms in the environs of Thunder Bay. By early 1910 in Mackinac County's Marquette Township Italians found cheap fertile land and developed successful farms as they did in Wisconsin to the west of Hurley.<sup>12</sup>

There are a number of instances where Italian immigrants became commercial farmers and ranchers. The largest center of Italian farmers and dairymen was in the area between Calumet and Hancock home. Another large area was in the 20 miles from Iron Mountain eastward that attracted Tyrolean Italian farmers who were used to harsh winters and sandy soil in the Old Country. Prior to the 1920s John Battista Perona had left copper mining and developed a dairy farm and commercial flower garden in the vicinity of Calumet.<sup>13</sup> Contemporarily in Mellen, Wisconsin, Peter O'Divero developed a 1,500-acre cattle ranch and sold sides of beef to lumber camps and dairy products from his 150-cow herd. The family continues to operate the

farm-ranch and has received environmental awards from the state of Wisconsin for maintaining the land. To the east in Iron River (Iron County) Alfred and Elvira Angeli developed a 1,000-acre cattle ranch and by 1917 had created Angeli Foods where they sold fresh beef. By 1940 Elvira operated the Iron Inn, Iron River's leading hotel; Alfred became a director of the Iron River National Bank and was vice president of Northland Associate Grocers, Inc.<sup>14</sup>

On the Minnesota Iron Range Italians developed garden plots and farms, as did other immigrants. Herman Antonelli, a Hibbing entrepreneur, operated the Italian Mercantile Company and operated a farm in the vicinity where he harvested wheat. To the northeast in the Tower-Ely area a number of Italian farmers homesteaded farmland and were successful in their endeavors. However attempts at developing large Italian farm colonies at Hibbing in 1908 and Duluth in 1915 failed.<sup>15</sup>

Among the first generation Italian immigrant population some of them entered the professional world. Between 1900 and 1910 in the Upper Peninsula and Duluth there were a number of Italian-born physicians practicing: Dr. Julius Menestrina (1866-1910) of Iron Mountain, Michigan; Dr. Charles E. Vercellini (1877-1962) of Calumet/Duluth who could speak Italian, French and English, and Dr. Joseph Vercellini of Negaunee/Duluth. In Calumet the Red Jacket Pharmacy opened by Dr. Vercellini advertised in the 1910 Italian directory as the *Farmacia Italiana*, which sold medicines from Italy and Europe and customers would be served by an Italian-speaking clerk.<sup>16</sup> In 1917 Guglielmo Grassi in the Canadian Soo and James Lisa in Calumet operated travel agencies. At the Soo V. Vincenzitti and at Negaunee, Batista Barasa and Philip Marchetti/Marketty became real estate agents. A group of Italians formed the Italian Mutual Fire Insurance Company in Laurium in 1898. Throughout the Lake Superior Basin banks seeking to attract immigrant customers hired bi-lingual Italian-Americans to work as cashiers. In Hurley, Wisconsin, a number of Italian businessmen incorporated the Hurley National Bank, which lasted nearly a decade before it was forced to close during the dark days of the Great Depression of the 1930s. A group of Italian businessmen in Calumet in 1909 developed the short-lived New Haven Coal Mine in Owosso in Lower Michigan and sold stock to many local residents and in Negaunee, Batista Barasa opened an iron mine but it never proved to be a commercial success.

One of the features of the region was that jobs in mining, logging, and railroading were transitory in nature. As wages and hours fluctuated, Italians on the Iron Range in 1907 joined Teofilo Petriella, a socialist labor leader for the Western Federation of Miners in an unsuccessful labor strike. A long strike in the Copper Country lasted from August 1913 into the spring of 1914 and saw Italians join the movement. However the publisher and editor of *Il Minatore Italiano* backed the companies. Seeking to avoid economic chaos, Italians like other ethnic laborers – Cornish, Irish, Swedes, Finns, Slovenians, Croatians - migrated to the copper mines of Butte, Montana; Globe, Arizona or to coal mines in Montana or Washington. Others in the United States and Canada followed railroad work and relocated on farms and orchards in the Pacific Northwest. The economic and social lure of Montréal and Toronto, the Twin Cities, Duluth, Chicago, or Milwaukee was always attractive.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the mining frontiers in the early twentieth century the role of women was limited to housekeeping and caring for their families. Married women and widows took in boarders that provided their families with annual financial returns that rivaled their husbands' wages. As with other immigrant women they kept cows and chickens providing the local community with dairy products and eggs.

The only industrial jobs available were connected with clothing manufacturers. The Calumet Garment Manufacturing Company (1914) hired women and the Gossard plant (1920-1976) in Ishpeming hired 650 employees and most of them were women and there was a branch in neighboring Gwinn.<sup>18</sup> After World War II, Cluett Peabody & Company moved into Eveleth to produce Arrow brand shirts and underwear. Before they ceased in operation in 1978 they provided jobs for women on the Iron Range.<sup>19</sup>

Outside of factory work, by 1910 Italian women worked as seamstresses and in millinery shops and some women, usually widows operated groceries, confectioneries and in Hurley, Wisconsin Mary Calligaro oversaw the Senate House saloon. Italian-Americans and Italian-Canadians found positions as clerks, nurses, office workers, stenographers, teachers, waitresses, and office workers.

Angelina Napolitano (1882-1932) was an immigrant to Canada who murdered her abusive husband in 1911 in Sault Ste. Marie. During her trial a public debate over domestic violence and the death penalty was ignited around the world. She was the first woman in Canada to use the battered woman defense on a murder charge. Her story was made into an award winning independent film, *Looking for Angelina*.<sup>20</sup>

From a very early period Italian immigrants became involved in local politics in the Basin, which was not characteristic in urban centers. As early as April 1875 Michael Borgo served on the first village council of Calumet where there was an Italian on every council until 1906. Batista Barasa in April 1891 was the first Italian to run for a seat on the Negaunee city council. Italians dominated city government of Bessemer and Ironwood in the 1920s and 1930s and have continued to do so.<sup>21</sup> Italian-Americans and Italian-Canadians have served as mayors, commissioners or councilors. At Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario since the 1980s Lorena Tridico, Ozzie Grandinetti, Christian Provenzano, Joe Fratesi have served in mayoral positions or as city councilors. Bill Mauro served as mayor of Thunder Bay in 2019 and John Fedo, as mayor of Duluth (1979-1992) revitalized the downtown area and promoted tourism.

Numerous Italian-Americans and Italian-Canadians went into the legal profession. Bernard P. Barasa (1878-1964) the son of the pioneer settler to Negaunee, attended Notre Dame University and became an attorney. He lived in Hancock before moving to Chicago and over the years served clients in the Upper Peninsula and Chicago. In 1923 he ran as a Republican in a mayoral primary and lost. Other lawyers have become judges like contemporary circuit judges Tony Stella in Hurley, Wisconsin and Jennifer Mazzuchi in Marquette.

The first immigrant to be elected to the Michigan House of Representatives was John Daprato (1852-1940), an Iron Mountain businessman and Republican. He was elected several times after his first election serving until 1920. Then in the 1930s he was once again elected. By the mid-century Dominic Jacobetti (1920-1994) of Sicilian ancestry from Negaunee worked his way from an iron miner, to presidency of the United Steel Workers Union to election to the Michigan House of Representatives. He was the longest serving member of the House (1955-1994) and as head of the appropriations committee brought benefits to his UP district. In Canada, Bill Mauro from Thunder Bay served as a Liberal member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario (2003-2018). David M. Oraziotti (B-1968) a Liberal member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario represented a Sault Ste. Marie riding (2003-2016). He was reelected in 2007, 2011, and 2014, becoming the first MPP (mixed member proportioned - one vote helps elect a local MP and other vote helps elect a regional MP from a region) in the riding's history to be reelected three times. Over the years Premier Kathleen Wynne appointed him to the cabinet as

Minister of Natural Resources, then as Minister of Government and Consumer Services and finally as Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

On the American Federal level descendants of Italian immigrants have been appointed to important offices. James H. Quello (1914-2010) of Laurium, Michigan and descendant of one of the first pioneers in the Copper Country, served as commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission (1974-1997).<sup>22</sup> Thomas Baldini (1943-2017) from Negaunee played an important role in local and state affairs in the Upper Peninsula. In 1994 he was appointed and reappointed as US chair of the International Joint Commission for Canada and the United States by President Bill Clinton.

Mutual benefit societies were common throughout the Basin beginning in the late nineteenth century, offering membership to Italians in general but some of them as in Calumet and Negaunee-Ishpeming, Michigan and Thunder Bay, Ontario restricted membership to Italians from certain Italian provinces and even specific communities. Monthly dues provided medical and death benefits and the societies allowed immigrants to socialize among country folk. The popularity of these societies can be seen in the Upper Peninsula where between the 1880s and the present 134 societies flourished for varying periods of time and on the Minnesota Iron Range about twenty flourished through the 1930s.<sup>23</sup>

Both Roman Catholic and Presbyterian national churches played a very important role in the life of the community as spiritual, social and educational centers. Churches sponsored youth clubs, women's leagues, dinners and were places where immigrants could gather and maintain their customs and language. Italian Roman Catholic churches in the Upper Peninsula were established at Calumet - St. Mary church (1897-1966) and at Iron Mountain - Immaculate Conception church (1902-present). At Duluth there was St. Peter Catholic Church (1926-2010) and most communities on The Iron Range had Italian parishes.

The first Italian Catholic church in Canada was established in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. It opened as Our Lady's church in 1910, was renamed Holy Rosary and in 1936 renamed again as Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Due to reorganization it was closed in 2010. In Thunder Bay, St. Anthony Italian Catholic church was established in 1912 and a new church constructed in 1992 where the strong religious-community of the Italian-Canadians continues to thrive. The other, St. Joseph church (later renamed St. Dominic) was established at the same time. Given the poverty of the congregants it took years to build up the facilities. In 1981 the parish was turned over to the Scalabrian fathers, whose ministry is to work with Italian immigrants and continues as a parish.<sup>24</sup>

The Presbyterian Church established programs to evangelize and assimilate Italians in the Lake Superior Basin. At Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario an Italian Presbyterian Mission was established and in 1917 Rev. Felix Cingolini was pastor. In Calumet Reverend Pasquale De Carlo established the Italian Presbyterian Mission in early 1909. It promoted assimilation and was so successful that there was hope that a separate Italian Presbyterian church could be established, but it never happened.<sup>25</sup> A similar development took place in Caspian, where a community center was founded and at Hurley where in 1919 Reverend Theodore Boretti was the pastor and offered Italian worship services. In 1931 when fifty Protestant men of Montreal and Hurley wanted to socialize they met at the Presbyterian Church.<sup>26</sup>

On the Minnesota Range, the First Presbyterian Church at Eveleth, Minnesota saw the arrival of Rev. Gaetano Lizzi by January 1914. He actively ministered to Italian Protestants throughout The Range. By the fall of 1916 Reverend Salvatore Terra, who was assigned to

Eveleth, assisted him on The Iron Range and Reverend Nicola Santella was assigned to Hibbing. Both men also covered churches outside of their home churches.<sup>27</sup>

The immigrants in the Upper Peninsula established a number of Italian language newspapers, which focused on local, national and international news of interest to the immigrant. In the Copper Country, the longest lasting was *Il Minatore Italiano* (The Italian Miner), which operated out of Laurium and existed for 40 years before shutting down in the 1930's. Two other newspapers *La Democrazia Italiana* (Italian Democracy) and *La Sentinella* (The Sentinel) were published in neighboring Calumet from around 1896 until around 1907. Under its editor and proprietor, Peter Jedda/Gedda in 1907 *La Sentinella* was listed as an "Italian socialist weekly." The paper took a pro-labor stand promoting radical labor ideas. In 1917 *L'Indipendente* (The Independent) was published in Hancock. *Nostra Terra* (Our Land) was published in Hurley, Wisconsin, from 1903 through 1913 when it became an English-language newspaper as immigrants assimilated. In Calumet, the Knights of Romulus published *Pro Nobis* (For Us), a monthly literary-cultural review, which sought to promote Italian culture and combat the objectionable view that Italians were "ignorant".

There was a demand for an Italian language newspaper on the Minnesota Iron Range as early as 1910. In October when John Almangia, an agent for the leading Italian newspaper published in New York City visited Hibbing he obtained about 100 subscribers. By the fall of 1914 there were about 3,000 Italians in Duluth and more than 25,000 in the northwest when Vincenzo Cimino entered the picture. A former editor-in-chief of an Italian newspaper in Cincinnati, Ohio, he established *Il Corriere Italo Americano* (The Italian American Courier) in Duluth. Soon Cimino tried to extort local businessmen to advertise or face negative stories. The paper folded in the spring of 1915 when Cimino was sent to Leavenworth Prison due to mail fraud.<sup>28</sup> Italians in Port Arthur and Fort Williams could either subscribe to Italian newspapers published within the Basin or to Italian-Canadian weeklies from Toronto or Montréal. At Fort William, Jules J. De Moro established the short-lived *L'Aurora Coloniale* (The Colonial Aurora) in 1911.

There were two public libraries in the Copper Country at Calumet and Ramsey to the south that had collections of Italian language books available that were widely circulated and read, especially romantic novels enjoyed by housebound women. On the Minnesota Iron Range the Italian government donated Italian language books to all of the public libraries.<sup>29</sup>

Music was an important component of Italian life and this was brought to the Lake Superior Basin. In 1887 the Duluth Italian Band played at community events and by the 1930s Italian bands were a common feature throughout the Basin. On another cultural level operas and drama were performed to appreciative audiences. At Eveleth in October 1915 the Felice Caballotti Club gave a dramatic presentation of the opera *La Tosca* while in Negaunee the Italian Dramatic Club frequently gave Italian-language plays and at Hancock puppet shows delighted children and adults.<sup>30</sup>

Robert "Bobby" Curtola (1943-2016) whose home was Port Arthur, became Canada's first rock n' roll singer and teen idol without leaving Canada. After a stellar musical career he became a successful businessman. In 1998 he was made a member of the Order of Canada.<sup>31</sup> From Eleanor Albanese, a writer and stage producer to Rita Ubriaco, a writer and politician, over a dozen Italian-Canadians have distinguished themselves.

An outstanding Italian-Canadian writer is Frank G. Paci (B- 1948) who was born in Italy and raised in the West End of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. His novel *The Italians* (1978), a Canadian bestseller started his writing career. Over the years he has written ten novels and he in

many of them has used his life in the West End among immigrants as his base. Joseph Pivato in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* describes him as “the most important Italian-Canadian novelist writing in English, both because of the number of his publications and the consistent quality of his writings.”<sup>32</sup>

Sports always played an important role in the process of assimilating immigrant children into American and Canadian society and this was true for folks in the Basin. The traditional sports – baseball, football, and basketball – found immigrant players. Some Italian miners tried their hand at Cornish wrestling on the mining ranges and boxing clubs were popular. Naturally in the North Country ice hockey and skiing were popular with Italian-American and Italian-Canadian youth.

Focusing on Bessemer we obtain insights into Italian-Americans and sports. The Bessemer high school football and basketball teams were filled with Italian-American players, who were known as the “Fighting Italians.” In 1932 Marco Gotta and Herman “Baldo” Bartelli were members of the All U.P. Football Team. Bartelli went on to become an amateur boxer on the Gogebic Range and eventually left the range, turned professional in 1934 and joined a promoter in Chicago. In Atlantic Mine in the Copper Country, baseball was important for Louis Vizona and Guido Bianucci who later played in the UP League of Michigan.<sup>33</sup> On the Minnesota Iron Range in 1914 Scandinavians dominated the ski sport but Al Forti of Virginia was “perhaps . . . the only Italian to be classed with the ski leaders of the northwest.”<sup>34</sup> Similar examples could be found throughout the region.

From Iron Mountain, Nello “Jerry” Daprato attended Michigan State University and played football in the teens. In 1915 his teammates voted him the outstanding All-American football player, but over the years this designation was lost. It was “discovered” in the 1980s and he has been placed in the Michigan State University and Upper Peninsula Halls of Fame.

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, provided the ice hockey world with the Esposito brothers. Phil Esposito OC (1942-) is a broadcaster and former professional ice hockey executive, coach and player and member of the Hockey Hall of Fame. He played eighteen seasons in the National Hockey League for the Chicago Black Hawks, Boston Bruins and New York Rangers. He is a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame and was made an officer of the Order of Canada. His brother, Anthony James “Tony O” (1942-2021) was a professional ice hockey goaltender, who played sixteen seasons in the National Hockey League, fifteen of them for the Chicago Black Hawks. He was one of the pioneers of the now popular butterfly style. He retired from professional play in 1985 and was named to the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1988. Tony O was educated at Michigan Technological University at Houghton, regarded as the birthplace of professional hockey.

The Minnesota Iron Range has produced a number of nationally known individuals. There was Luigino “Jeno” Paulucci (1918-2011) who in the 1940s developed Chun King canned Chinese food products and went on to develop Jeno’s Pizza Rolls, frozen pizza, and the Michelina’s brand of frozen food products. In 1966 Chun King was sold for \$63 million.<sup>35</sup> Robert Mondavi (1913-2008) moved to California and became a leading vineyard operator. Attorney and *New York Times* bestseller author, Vincent T. Bugliosi (1934-2015) is remembered as the prosecutor of the blood-thirsty Manson family. Bugliosi is not usually connected with the Iron Range, he was born in Hibbing and spent most of his childhood there. The Manson Family was a commune, gang, and cult led by Charles Manson that was active in California in the late 1960s and early 1970s. On August 8-9, 1969, the Manson Family, on orders from their leader,

murdered pregnant actress Sharon Tate and four others and a day later, murdered wealthy grocery store owners Leno and Rosemary LaBianca.

Preservation of Italian heritage in the region was begun in 1965 when Professor Rudolph Vecoli established the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. Since 1982 the Central Upper Peninsula and University Archives of Northern Michigan University at Marquette has gathered a significant collection of oral interviews and materials dealing with Italian immigration to the Upper Peninsula. In 1990 the Institute of Italian Studies at Lakehead University at Thunder Bay, Ontario was created and has been committed to a mission of preservation and publication.

Over the course of four generations Italian immigrants and their descendants have gone from being marginal laborers to entering the capitalist class and playing important roles in all aspects of the community life in the Lake Superior Basin.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The five major works for his study are: Robert F. Harney. "Men without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930," in Franca Iacovetta, editor. *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998; John Potestio. *The Italians of Thunder Bay*. Thunder Bay, Ont.: Lakehead University, The Chair of Italian Studies, 2005; Russell M. Magnaghi. *Miners, Merchants and Midwives: Michigan's Upper Peninsula Italians*. Marquette, Mich: Belle Fontaine Press, 1987; Mary Ellen Mancina-Batinich. *Italian Voices: Making Minnesota Our Home*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2007. The following is a comprehensive bibliography of Italian migration see: Magnaghi. "Italian Immigration in the Lake Superior Basin, A Bibliography," *Upper Country: Journal of the Lake Superior Basin* 7 (2019): no page.

<sup>2</sup> For population figures see: Russell M. Magnaghi. *Michigan's Upper Peninsula Immigrants and Their Occupations as Seen in the 1910 Federal Census*. (Marquette, Mich.: Northern Michigan University Center for Upper Peninsula Studies. 2010); Federal Census for Minnesota and Wisconsin, 1910, and Lore Ann Parent. "Ethnic Population along the Canadian North Shore of Lake Superior, 1911." (2019) located at the Central Upper Peninsula and University Archives, Northern Michigan University, Marquette, Michigan (Hereafter: CUPUA).

<sup>3</sup> US Federal Census, 1830 and 1840; 1850 Michigan, Mackinac, p. 78 and Chippewa, Sault Ste. Marie, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Magnaghi, compiler. *Michigan's Upper Peninsula Immigrants and Their Occupations as Seen in the 1910 Federal Census*. (Marquette: Center for Upper Peninsula Studies Northern Michigan University, 2010), Houghton and Keweenaw Counties.

<sup>5</sup> Potestio. *The Italians of Thunder Bay*, pp. 33-38, 43.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 213-218; Potestio. "From Navvies to Contractors: The History of Vincenzo and Giovanni Veltri, Founder of R.F. Welsh Limited, 1885-1931," MA Thesis, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Girolamo Moroni. "La provincial dell'Ontario (Canada)." *Bollettino dell'Emigrazione* No. 6 (1915), 70-71; Robert F. Harney. *Italians in Canada*. (Toronto: Multicultural Society of Ontario 1978), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Moroni. *Bollettino* No. 6, p. 76; I.A. Vannini, "Talk given on May 19, 1962 to the Study Group of the Duke of Edinburgh's 2nd Commonwealth Conference Visiting Sault Ste. Marie and Area," CUP.

<sup>9</sup> *Vernon's Sault Ste. Marie & Steelton Directory for the Year 1917*. (Hamilton, Ont.: Henry Vernon & Son, 1917), pp. 185, 191, 197, 201; George N. Fuller, ed. *Historic Michigan, Land of the Great Lakes*. (Dayton, Ohio: National Historical Association, 1924-1926), III: 165.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Fast. "Niagara Falls, 1901-1911: Immigration, Industrialization and the Creation of an Ethnically Diverse City," M.A. thesis, Brock University, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Simone Cinotto. *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City*. (Champagne-Urbana: University Illinois Press, 2013), p. 148; *L'Anse Sentinel* 18 May 1939.

<sup>12</sup> Federal Census, 1920, Wisconsin, Iron County, Kimball, District 0099; Bono Interview; Eugene Kompsie. "'Dago Valley' Nestles in a Finnish Community," 22 August 1952, Central Upper Peninsula and University Archives, Northern Michigan University, Marquette, Michigan (Hereafter CUPUA)

<sup>13</sup> Victoria Perona Bono, interviewed by Magnaghi, 10 December 1982, transcript. Magnaghi Papers, CUPUA.

<sup>14</sup> Peter E. O'Divero, interviewed by Magnaghi, 14 September 2019, CUPUA; 1920, 1930, 1940 Federal Census, Michigan, Iron County, Iron River.

<sup>15</sup> *Duluth News-Tribune* 9 July 1908, 25 August 1915; 26 May 1921; 10 September 1912. The Society of Vittorio Emmanuelle II was alleged a farmers' organization near Ely on the Vermilion Range in 1906 but specific data are lacking.

<sup>16</sup> *Guida degli Italiani del Copper Country*. (Laurium, Mich.: Il Minatore Italiano, 1910), p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Magnaghi. "From Michigan to Minnesota: The Internal Migration of Italian Miners," In *Entrepreneurs and Immigrants: Life on the Industrial Frontier of Northeastern Minnesota*. Edited by Michael G. Karni. (Chisholm, Minn: Iron Range Research Center, 1991); *Calumet News* 19 April 1910.

<sup>18</sup> Phyllis M. Wong. *We Kept Our Towns Going: The Gossard Girls of Michigan's Upper Peninsula*. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> David La Vigne. "More than Mines: Industrial Decline, Gender and the Iron Range's Cluett, Peabody & Company Arrow Factories, 1946-1979." *Minnesota History* 66:2 (Summer 2018): 54-65.

<sup>20</sup> Karen Dubinsky and Franca Iacovetta. "Murder, Womanly Virtue, and Motherhood: The Case of Angelina Napolitano, 1911-1922". *Canadian Historical Review* 72:4 (December 1991): 505-531.

<sup>21</sup> *Bessemer Herald* 16 March 1923, 28 March 1930, 16 March 1923.

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- <sup>22</sup> Federal Communications Commission. "Biography of James Quello." 03-08-2007.
- <sup>23</sup> Magnaghi. *Miners*, pp. 65-76.
- <sup>24</sup> Roy and Diane Piovesana. *St. Dominic Parish: A History, 1912-1987*. (Thunder Bay, Ont.: St. Dominic Parish, 1987).
- <sup>25</sup> *Calumet News* 15 October and 19 November 1909, 10 January and 18 February 1910, 19, 30 September 1912, 18 February 1910, 18 July 1914, 09 June and 18 September 1914.
- <sup>26</sup> *Iron County Miner* (Hurley, Wis.) 12 December 1919, 6 February 1931; *Vernon's Sault Ste. Marie*, p. 75.
- <sup>27</sup> *Duluth News-Tribune* 26 and 30 January, 15 June 1914, 30 July 1915, 29 November and 01 December 1916.
- <sup>28</sup> *Duluth News-Tribune* 12 October 1910, 17 November 1914; 15, 16, 22 May 1914; 15, 24, 28 July 1915,
- <sup>29</sup> Magnaghi. "The Italian Literary and Cultural Tradition in Upper Michigan," *Chronicle of the Historical Society of Michigan*. 21:1 (Spring 1985), 11-14; *Duluth News-Tribune* 9 September 1915.
- <sup>30</sup> *Duluth News-Tribune* 16 October 1915.
- <sup>31</sup> *The Globe and Mail* 5, 6, 16 June 2016; *Billboard Magazine* 6 June 2016.
- <sup>32</sup> Joseph Pivato, editor. *F.G. Paci: Essays on his Works*. (Toronto, Ont.: Guernica Editions, 2003), pp. 145-147.
- <sup>33</sup> *Bessemer Herald* 14 August 1925, 21 September 1928, 5 September 1930, 24 July 1931, 21 October 1931, 22 January 1932; Sandra Hollingsworth. *The Atlantic: Copper and Community South of Portage Lake*. (Houghton, Mich.: John H. Forster Press, 1978), p. 121.
- <sup>34</sup> *Virginia Enterprise* 27 February 1914.
- <sup>35</sup> *Washington Post* 20 November 2011.