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November 1999
A STUDY IN DEPTH
OF
ITALIAN WEDDING PHOTOS OF MIDDLETOWN FAMILIES

Collected, Narrated, and Produced by
Sheila Wrang Farrell
and
Annette DiMauro Grimaldi

prepared for
Italian-American Ethnic Heritage Program
Graduate Liberal Studies Program
Wesleyan University -1980
Dr. Salvatore J. LaQuamina, Professor
The exhibit of Italian-American Photos is an attempt to visually illustrate the steady, slow process of acculturation of the Italian immigrant into the life of Middletown, Connecticut while retaining the wedding ceremonies and customs of the old-world traditions of Sicily and other parts of Italy. Middletown, is presently the home of an estimated 22,000 Italians and their descendants. The uniqueness of Middletown immigrants is that the majority have come from Melilli. According to Walter Sangree in his thesis of the people of Middletown of Sicilian extraction, "Middletown is the only town in the USA to which there has been a large Mileneese immigration." (pg. 25)

Melilli dates back to 726 B.C., then called Iblea, as was the chain of mountains near Siracusa. Iblea was later occupied by the nearby Megarese of Megara, ruled by the war-like King Lampo. The town then became known as Megara-Iblea, which gradually evolved in the name Me-ybila, or Melilli.

In the Italian-American Wedding Project compiled and narrated by Annette Grimaldi and Sheila Farrell, it was found that early Italian immigrants did not marry outside their nationality. In the early years, families arranged their childrens' marriages. Mothers were usually the "match-makers". The girl's family usually was in charge of the arrangements and provided not only the dowry but also the means for housing. Girls were usually several years younger than their spouses, waiting for the intended to complete his schooling, military service or establish
himself in business. One woman who was interviewed related that her family would not allow her to marry the man of her choice because he had not served in the Italian army and thus could not travel to his native homeland without fear of being drafted.

There were numerous things that seemed to stand out in our interviews of the people who submitted their photos. An example of the ideal serieta' may be seen in the facial expressions of Italian Mezzogiorno women in their wedding photographs. In examining a selection of photos from 1900 to 1920, one finds the bride more than the groom, wearing a grim, humorless look which was interpreted as the ideal serieta'. The expressions changed in the 1920's to a look of pleasant, conservative seriousness, but still nothing that might be interpreted as a frivolous smile. The outright smiles were allowed in the 1940's, as the second, third, and fourth generation women began to reject the ideal of serieta', and gradually accepted the American ideal of freedom to display the sensuality and happiness they were feeling. Eventually, with the construction of St. Sebastian's Church, courtships were arranged during the Mass. These meetings were in the back of the Church - much to the dismay of the priest!

Brides and bridesmaids dressed in yards and yards of gleaming white lace and silk and the grooms and their best men wore cutaways. Weddings were usually early on a Saturday morning (9:30 a.m.) followed by an afternoon wedding reception and evening party that lasted until late at night with much dancing, feasting,
and drinking - women were usually excluded from the later!

In Middletown, the tendency to marry someone from an Italian background provided a source of strength as it was the basis for compatible communal living. Ethnic neighborhoods supplied a means for many to live an Italian life in Middletown. They could read Italian papers, congregate with Italian neighbors, and shop in Italian stores. If per-chance a young Italian woman had to move to an Irish neighborhood, her peers were quick to see and reject the young brides adherence to the old culture. The family was made to feel shame and often had to submit to ethnic slurs.

In speaking to those people who generously donated their pictures to the exhibit, we found several important facts. In the early 1900's the husband usually immigrated to Middletown and then sent for his wife and family after finding gainful employment. These first immigrants also came with the dream of returning to their birthplace. The god-parents chosen for the children had and still have, a financial and social responsibility for their god-child. In the naming of children, the first son was named after the paternal grandfather and the first daughter usually after the paternal grandmother. The second son, more often than not, after the maternal grandfather and the second daughter, after the maternal grandmother. In order to discriminate one family from another, a descriptive nickname was used to identify one family from another. This nickname usually stemmed from a
particular characteristic. (See wedding photo notes.) In the early 1920's, marriages with people from other parts of Italy were not too infrequent. Cases of intermarriage between Italian and Irish (which most of our photo's were) or Polish or infrequently Jews or Yankees caused quite a stir among the different nationalities. This was not only because of a fear of not knowing the blood line but also regional differences between cooking and household management. This occurred because often the young couple had to live with their in-laws for the first few years. One older woman told us that when she became infatuated with a boy beneath her station and not of Italian background, her parents used the stratagem of inviting him to a rather formal dinner. She immediately saw his unfitness for symbolically important occasions and the courtship was ended. If the parents strongly objected to the marriage, the child was not only disowned but often considered "dead"! In at least three interviews, we found that daughters often rejected their parents choice of a suitor and showed their independence by immigrating to America and living with a relative in order to "follow their heart" and marry their choice, thus losing their dowry and often as was mentioned, the rejection of their family.

"PICTURE BRIDE" JILTS HIM.

Girl Chooses Deportation Rather Than Be Married to Minor.

Protesting that she wouldn't marry a coal miner and that she didn't like his looks anyway, Ruth Ann Marraccini, "a picture bride" who came to this country from Italy to marry, refused to go through with the ceremony when she saw her prospective husband for the first time in the marriage license bureau in the Municipal Building yesterday. The coal miner of Masontown, Pa. was the jilted bridgroom.

The young woman told the agent of the Travelers' Aid Society, in whose custody that she was, that she was educated and was used to living in genteel and refined surroundings.

When told she would be deported unless she married, she consented to the wedding. Then she thought again and withdrew her consent.

The girl was taken back to Ellis Island. She will be deported unless she can get some friends or relatives to help her get in."

May 4, 1921 (pg. 62)

Although we interviewed mainly women, men felt strongly about "marrying a nice Italian girl". However, they found there wasn't enough of the kind they wished to go around. Faced with the choices of marrying out of their nationality, or not marrying at all, many of them married out.
In conclusion, we found that ethnicity was and is a source of pride and not embarrassment. We met and interviewed many. More than likely, we formed lasting friendships. Those who participated in the Irish/Italian Heritage Celebration and the interested spectators expressed the hope that such a program would be an annual affair.

Our project was a complete investigation, comparision and analysis of Italian marriages in Middletown. The marriages embodied both ancient traditions and novel responses to our changing times.
ITALIAN WEDDING PHOTO EXHIBIT OF MIDDLETOWN FAMILIES

Collected, Narrated, and Produced by

Sheila Wrang Farrell
and
Annette DiMauro Grimaldi

(Ethnic Culture Program of Wesleyan University - 1980)

Chronological Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Family Name 1</th>
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<td>Capasso</td>
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<td>Pulino</td>
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Salvatore Scionti and Rosa DiFalco

Chiesa Madre Melilli 1892

Sal worked at the Russell Company after immigrating to Middletown with Rosa and two young sons. They are the parents of Mary Perruccio, Grace Scionti, Minnie LaPila, Joseph Scionti, Harry and Paul.

Salvatore Gallitto and Sebastiana Sequenzia

St. John's Church 1905

Mr. Gallitto emigrated from Sicily in 1904 and worked as a mason/laborer for the Mazzotta Construction Company. His wife was kept busy with their nine children.

Salvatore Mazzotta and Angelina DiStefano

Melilli 1907

Mr. Mazzotta was a prominent contractor who built many structures, including the Rocky Hill Veteran's Home, Connecticut Valley Hospital, and St. Sebastian's Church. They are the parents of Nella Kelly and Sebastian G. Mazzotta.

Francesco D'Agostino and Diana Capasso

Rome, Italy 1910

Dr. D'Agostino, a physician in Rome and New Haven, Conn. and his bride Diana, are the deceased parents of Olga D'Agostino Roccapiore.
Salvatore Grimaldi and Sebastiana (Anna) Campisi

St. John's Church 1912

Sal was a 1904 immigrant to Middletown. He became a successful building contractor in partnership with Santi Annino. Among others they built the former Kabatznick Furniture building on the corner of Main St. and Rapallo Avenue, St. Aloysius Hall on Main Street, Alfredo's Riverside Restaurant, and the former Rose Garden on Stack Street. He was also a clarinetist in the Irish and Italian marching Old Guard Band.

Amedeo D'Amico and Maria Marino

St. John's 1914

Amedeo and his bride are pictured with her family, the Marinos, who are prominent in the largest bakery and restaurant business in Middletown. "Noc" was a well-known entertainer in minstrels and local radio. Vincent was Chief of Police. Among others in the family were a carpenter, a nurseryman, a musician, and a rooming house owner.

Sebastino Campisi and Carmela Monarca

St. John's Church 1915

Upon arrival in Middletown, Seb worked as a laborer and mason, then obtained employment at the Russell Company. He retired from A.N. Pierson, Inc. - horticulturists. This photo is through the courtesy of their daughter, Gaetina.

Salvatore DiMauro and Maria Morello

St. John's Church 1916

Salvatore immigrated to Middletown, worked as a laborer, married, and returned to Italy to his beloved farm. All of their children are permanent residents of Middletown.
Sebastiano Corsino and Giuseppa Fargione  
Chiesa Madre  Melilli, Italy  1919

This photo was taken a week after the wedding while on their honeymoon in the nearest large city, Siracusa. The photo was donated through the courtesy of their granddaughter, Lina Petruzzello Spada.

Floyd (Fiorante) Magnano and Rose Marie Bianchi  
St. John's Church  1919

Floyd was an automobile mechanic and owner of Floyd's Garage on Spring Street. Rose Marie was intellectually inclined and active in local civic organizations. Their children are Vincentine (Babe), Floyd, and Edward.

Sebastiano DiMauro and Maria Marchese  
St. John's Church  1923

"Mike" entered first the delicatessen business, then his trade, the shoe repair business. He drove a model "T" Ford with the name Shu-Fix painted on the sides. Maria took lessons in hat-cleaning to attract more business. Felt hats and straw "Panamas" were much in vogue then. They are the parents of Annette Grimaldi, Elena Rossitto, and Salvatore DiMauro.

Mayor Salvatore Cubeta and Marion Bacon

Mayor Cubeta held office on the G.O.P. ticket for three terms during the 40's and 50's. When retired from politics, he served as President of Cubeta Bros. Inc., Fruit and Produce Wholesalers and Retailers. Marion's family dates back to the 1700's in the Westfield section of Middletown.
Emanuele Grimaldi and Rosa LaBella

St. John's Church 1925

As was the custom, Rosa and Emanuele invited their close relatives as attendants. Young girls were always invited. Dr. Louis O. LaBella is the first on the left in the back row. They are the parents of Connie McCoy and Lucy Iskra.

William Wrang (Terragna) M.D. and Catharine Lee

St. Patrick's Cathedral Norwich 1925

Dr. Wrang, a well-beloved physician, was born and educated in Middletown. He practiced medicine for over 40 years, until his death in 1965. He was selected "Man of the Year" by the Kiwanis Club in 1957. His immigrant father was advised to change his family name of Terragna to Wrang to avoid discrimination and for business purposes. Their children, William Jr., Lonore Schumann and Sheila Farrell are all residents of Middletown.

Sebastiano (Mike) Marino and Carmelina Carta

St. John's Church 1926

Mike's father was an 1898 immigrant who manufactured macaroni and was a charter member of the Sons of Italy Society, which was founded in 1902. In 1905, his mother opened the first Melilresse grocery store on Water Street. Mike, instrumental in building St. Sebastian's Church, is retired as Supervisor of Data Processing in the State Comptroller's Office. Carmelina's father, who had been a career musician in the Italian Army, played cornet at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

Luige Marchese and Lucia Sbona

St. John's Church 1928

Luigi, born in Melilli, was a skilled weaver with the Russell Mfg. Co., now Fenner-America. Lucia was born in Middletown. They are the parents of Peter, a teacher of electronics, and Sal, artistic director of The Producer's Guild in Hartford.
Castor Caiazzza and Concetta (Connie) D'Aquila

St. Sebastian's Church 1935

Casto is a graduate of Wesleyan University in 1928, and of the Middlebury School of Languages. He is enjoying his retirement as the former President of The Caiazzo Insurance and Travel Agency. Before her marriage, Connie was a secretary with The Industrial Bank of Commerce, now of New York. Retirement of secretaries upon marriage was mandatory at that time. They are the parents of one daughter, Camille Fritz.

Nicholas Emme and Grace LaMotta

St. Sebastian's Church 1935

Grace's father was the first Italian photographer in Middletown. Nick was the owner of a plumbing business. They are the parents of Patricia Emme McKenna.

Salvatore Parruccio and Grace Sarcia

St. Sebastian's Church 1936

Sal is prominent in the Middletown business circle as the owner of the Lyngrace Dress Manufacturing Co. He employs many recent immigrants skilled as seamstresses. He and Grace are the parents of Connie Powers.

Judge James Kelly and Emanuela (Nella) Mazzotta

St. John's Church 1938

Both Nella and Jim were born in Middletown. Nella attended the Julliard School of Music and was a teacher of piano. Jim was a graduate of Wesleyan and Yale University Law School. He was a practicing attorney in Middletown and was also elected Judge of Probate.
Sebastian (Nuzzy) Mazzotta and Gertrude Pagano  
St. Sebastian's Church  
1939
Sebastian is the son of contractor Salvatore Mazzotta. He and Gert are the parents of four children. Seb is the President of M.A&M Construction Company.

Benjamin Roccapriore, M.D. and Olga D'Agostino  
New Haven  
1940
Dr. Roccapriore, a Middletown native, was a much respected physician. He practiced general medicine and delivered and cared for many Middletown residents. The Wesleyan Art Gallery is located on the premises of their former home on Washington Terrace.

Salvatore D'Amico and Josephine (Pippi) Sbona  
St. Sebastian's Church  
1940
Both Pippie and Sal were born in Middletown of immigrant parents, and educated in local schools. Sal is enjoying retirement from Conn. Valley Hospital and Pippie as Supervisor of an office of the Actna Insurance Company. They have one daughter, Maria.

Mario (Slim) Gullitti (Gallitto) and Vincentine (Babe) Magnano  
St. Sebastian's Church  
1944
Babe and Slim were married during World War II, and both the groom and his best man, Floyd Magnano, were in uniform. Slim is now the President of the firm of Mario Gullitti and Son, Contractors. They have a son Jean Paul.

Judge Joseph Adorno and Mary D'Apice  
Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church  
Meriden  
1946
Judge Adorno's distinguished career includes being the former State Treasurer, Deputy Attorney General, Judge of Probate, and currently Superior Court Judge. Mary, active in civic organizations, was the B'nai Brith Woman of the Year in 1967.
Dante Aiudi and Dorothy Bredanini

St. Anne's Church    New Britain    1950

Dan is presently Principal of Keigwin Middle School and was the first principal of Italian heritage to be appointed in the Middletown School System. Dottie is a Registered Nurse in a local hospital. They are the parents of three children.

Frank J. Grimaldi and Annette DiMauro

St. Sebastian's Church    1951

Annette, Co-producer of this Italian-American Wedding Photo Exhibit, is a student in the Wesleyan Ethnic Studies Program, as well as being a teacher of English as a Second Language. Her husband, Frank, is employed at Middlesex Memorial Hospital. Our thanks to Frank, our local historian.

Mayor Anthony Sbana and Concetta (Connie) Morello

St. Sebastian's Church    1952

"Buddy" is the former Mayor of Middletown and currently Town Clerk. Connie's father was a well-known bone-setter who had learned the skill from childhood, setting animal bones on the farm in Melilli. He treated many members of the community, as well as the members of the Sons of Italy Football Team. His services were always donated and gratefully received.

Mayor Anthony Marino and Vergene Snowman

St. Sebastian's Church    1953

"Tony", Middletown's Mayor from 1975 to 1979, is now a Consultant with a developing firm and again actively involved in the Marino Plumbing and Heating Co. Vergene is a Registered Nurse at the Wesleyan Infirmary. They are presently enjoying their first grandchild.
Anthony LaBella and Mary Lynch  
St. Mary's Church  Portland  1958

Tony is presently the Principal of Farm Hill School. He was the first principal of Italian heritage, born in Middletown, to be appointed to such a position. Mary is the Guidance Counselor at Keigwin Middle School. They have one son, Joseph, a student at Notre Dame University.

Richard Dooley and Doris Bonvino  
St. Sebastian's Church  1960

Both Doris and Richard are natives of Middletown. Doris is a teacher at Snow School. Since being an outstanding athlete in high school, Dick has worked with children for many years as a coach in the local Little League Baseball and as a basketball coach at St. Pius Church.

William McKenna and Patricia Emme  
St. Sebastian's Church  1963

Pat is a well-known choreographer for local churches and civic organizations. Bill is Vice-Principal of Xavier High School. They are the parents of four children.

Giuseppe (Joe) Giurintano and Nella Salemi  
Chiesa Madre  Sortino, Italy  1964

Joe immigrated to Middletown in 1953. He returned to Italy ten years later and married Nella. Their two daughters are proud of the new van they bought to transport Nella, who uses a wheel chair since contracting Multiple Sclerosis.
Harold Farrell and Sheila Wrang (Terragna)

Sheila, Co-producer of this Italian-American Wedding Photo Exhibit, is a teacher in Middletown and a student in the Ethnic Heritage Program at Wesleyan University. She is the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Wrang. Harold is employed by Lindenmeyr Paper Corporation. Our thanks to Harold for his moral support.

Sebastiano Fazzina and Mariana LoGiudice

St. Sebastian's Church 1967

Mariana and Seb are recent immigrants to Middletown. Engaged in Priolo, they later married in Middletown. Seb works in construction and Mariana works as a seamstress. They had two children.

Carl Spada and Lina Pitruzzello

St. Sebastian's Church 1968

Lina's family immigrated when she was a child, and she attended local schools. Carl immigrated as a young man. He is in the construction business. This photo was taken in the rear of Wesleyan's Honors College, a favorite photographers' background.

Judge Joseph Milardo and Glenda LaPointe

St. John's Church 1971

Judge Milardo is a graduate of Fordham University and Suffolk Law School in Boston. He is a practicing attorney in Middletown and was elected as Judge of Probate in 1980. Glenda is a Registered Nurse at the Middlesex Memorial Hospital.
Filippo Buccheri and Filomena (Phyllis) Morello

St. Sebastian's Church 1979

Both Phyllis and Filippo immigrated as youths. Phyllis is employed as a secretary/interpreter at a local bank. Filippo completed his college education in Connecticut, having matriculated in Italy.

Maurizio Pugliares and Marisa Pulino

St. Sebastian's Church 1980

Maurizio immigrated with his family in 1972 from Augusta, Italy. He attended Middletown High School, as did Marisa. Marisa is a hairdresser and Maurizio is a machinist.
Bibliography


HISTORIC PHOTOS OF MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT
Oldershaw Photo Gallery. F. G. Santangelo Shoe Maker Shop, Fundywater Barber Shop. About 1886—now Shrock Block. In rear: Capt. M. Burnham Tavern, where first meeting of St. John's Lodge was held on February 20, 1754.
Middlesex Railroad Station—Razed trop

Open Trolley Car to Connecticut State Hospital