

# the Weekly

Seattle's Newsmagazine

April 29-May 5, 1987

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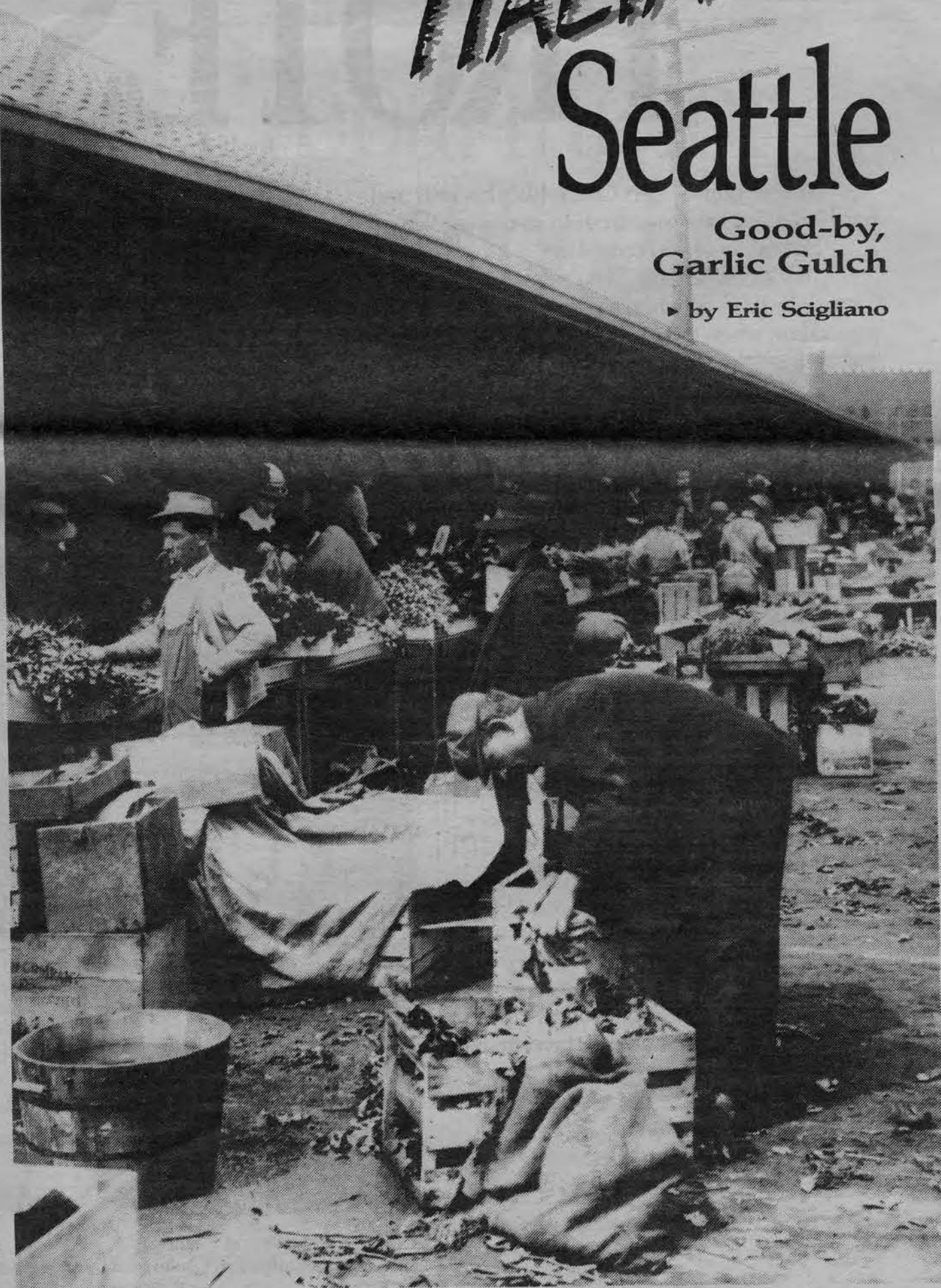
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## ITALIAN Seattle

Good-by,  
Garlic Gulch

► by Eric Scigliano



ITALIAN FARMERS AND GROCERS GATHER AT THE OLD MARKET.



# Italians in Seattle



*Scattered by the highway builders, absorbed into the mainstream, Seattle's Italian community still cherishes a proud tradition.*

*By Eric Scigliano*

Pete Kuhns



ED DE ROCCO AND FAMILY, 1987, AND IMMIGRANT BARBER VINCENT AMATO AND FAMILY, CIRCA 1900: THE SPIRIT SURVIVES.  
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## BACK IN 1905,

A young Boston legislator named George Scigliano came out to Portland, Oregon, to help cut the ribbon on the Massachusetts pavilion at the Lewis and Clark Exposition. It was the first and last time George Scigliano left the East, but he returned to Boston singing the glories of the West, just as an earlier vanguard had returned to their villages in Italy telling of promise and plenty in the new land of America.

Out West, Scigliano wrote in the Italian-language *Araldo*, lay "the future of the Italian settlements": clean, open country and vast fertile lands waiting to be tilled. Farmhand jobs went begging, even though employers guaranteed ten months' work at the princely rate of \$1.65 a day plus room and board. "Imagine what a boon this would be for thousands of our countrymen now crowded into the big cities of the East," Scigliano rhapsodized. Finally they might escape the poverty, filth, crime, and exploitive *padroni* labor bosses of the Eastern slums.

George Scigliano was a great-uncle who died 46 years before I was born. I learned of him only after I'd moved out West myself. I can't help feeling a bit of a glow as I read his words today—see, Uncle George, I did as you said! Maybe it's appropriate that he should kick off this look back at Seattle's Italian community, a community that I come to as a stranger, and yet with a sense of familiarity and return. Italian-American histories seem inevitably tinged with such familial nostalgia. The longings, struggles, and triumphs of the past are heirlooms that we of the third and fourth generations cling to, even if we knew none of them ourselves.

The movement that George Scigliano invoked, the second ripple of Italian emigration from the East to the West, has shaped Seattle in uncounted ways. Diffused by assimilation and mainstream success, scattered by highway builders' bulldozers, Seattle's Italian community can easily escape notice now. "What Italian community?" I've heard new arrivals from New York and Boston exclaim, looking in vain for Seattle's Mulberry or Sullivan Street, for processions of celebrants pinning dollars to statues of saints, for old ladies sitting in lawn chairs on tenement sidewalks, and for tough skinny young guys and tough fat old guys hanging out on street corners in white T-shirts.

These disappointed Easterners fail to notice that Italian Seattle, like all the other Seattles, doesn't show itself brazenly. Seattle is not quite the classic melting pot (an image abandoned by most academics anyway). It's not a gaudy buffet either. Think of it rather as a stew, where various components mix like peppers and potatoes, share their juices, and yet retain their distinct though muted flavors. Italian-Americans, because they're the largest national group in the great immigration of 1880 to 1920, are the academics' favorite model for studying the tension between assimilation and preservation of ethnic identity. As the Italians go, so will go the other ingredients simmering and softening in the stewpot.

**SEATTLE'S ITALIAN HERITAGE** has antecedents in the first European settlement of the land that would become Washington—indeed, in the first European exploration of the continent. Cristoforo Colombo, Amerigo Vespucci, and Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot—even then Italians found it expedient to Anglicize their names) unveiled the New World. A smattering of Italian republicans and adventurers—most notably Filippo Mazzei, who was appointed a sort of ambassador at large for the Continental Congress—arrived in the colonies and joined in the Revolution. And while Arthur Denny and his fellow dour Midwesterners were chopping their towns out of the Puget Sound forests,

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Italian Jesuit priests were establishing missions in the wild interior of the territory.

The unified kingdom that Italy's republicans reluctantly instituted pushed to industrialize the North, while forgoing land and social reform in the South. It instituted taxes on food that fell heaviest on the peasants. Add to this a draft demanding eight years' military service, and any able-bodied man who could scrape together the \$30 for steerage might look toward a better chance in America.

**THOSE WHO COULD AFFORD** to bring their families tended to settle in the Little Italies that burgeoned in the old cities of the East and Midwest. Though most Southern Italians had rural roots, they settled overwhelmingly—in a far higher percentage than the American average—in the cities. In the cities they could duplicate their lost village life by clustering with others from their home regions—not just Little Italies but little Cosenzas and Tarantos and Avellinos. Thus they were cushioned from the shocks of the new land and allowed to continue speaking their exclusive, often mutually unintelligible local dialects.

Often a single ticket was all a peasant could raise by hocking his house or farm and disposing of his other scanty assets. So he would defer marriage or leave his wife and kids with relatives while he tried to earn their passage in America. A restless subclass of itinerant laborers trickled West, following the jobs. They were the most adventurous and enterprising of their immigrant generation, undaunted by the vast, strange land before them, recapturing the spirit of the earlier American generations who broke the frontier they now traversed. Often they would follow the railroads, traveling in pairs or small work crews of *paesani* from the same Italian districts. Italian sweat finished and tended the network of railroads laid by Irish and Chinese labor a generation before. According to Nicandri, all but a few of the Italian workers were consigned to the lowest-paying jobs, in road maintenance, for \$1.25 a day in 1900.

"My old man was in Pennsylvania, then came here to work on the railroad," recalls John Croce of Seattle. His father stayed in Seattle to do "pick and shovel" (a term that recurs like a church litany among local Italians describing their parents' lives). "He sent away to the old country for a bride—didn't know who he'd get." Son John now operates Pacific Importers, a successful wholesale food business which grew from a first-generation shop he bought in the center of Seattle's main Italian settlement. His business has taken him all over the region and beyond, and in each little Montana town he hits he finds Italians whose fathers came to build the railroad and who now run the local food businesses. "Wherever the railroad went through, you'll find Italians living."

The railroad was especially crucial to the growth of vibrant Italian communities in railroad hubs like Spokane. Another, more glamorous lure drew young fortune seekers, of Italian and every other origin, to Seattle: the 1897 Alaskan gold rush, to which Seattle was the gate. Most of the Italians, however, arrived too late for the big bonanza. Ed De Rocco, a Mercer Island schoolteacher, still has a couple of nuggets from his father's tardy foray to the goldfields in 1921; the elder De Rocco brought back souvenirs rather than a fortune.

Many would-be gold seekers got no farther than Seattle. Alice Traverso Longo of Seattle tells a typical tale of her grandfather Giacomo Traverso and his three brothers-in-law (likewise named Traverso, though unrelated except by marriage). In the 1890s, word of gold in Alaska reached all the way to their hometown of Pentema, near Genoa. They sailed from there with hopes of striking it rich

in the goldfields. Once in Seattle, however, they saw "all of the opportunities right here," in a town that was growing like Topsy on the Alaska trade. Her grandfather and one brother-in-law, Cesare, headed for the Black Diamond coal country. The two other brothers, Giuseppe and another Giacomo, opened one of Seattle's first Italian restaurants, the Fiore d'Italia Cafe, near Pioneer Square.

Such was the inherent prudence or conservatism of the immigrants. They started out to seek risky fortunes, and at the last moment balked and settled for more modest, surer work—often at "pick and shovel," laying the streets and sewers of a city rising from its frontier mud and planks. Others took one look at the rich flatlands of the Duwamish Valley and visions of spinach and onions danced in their heads. Hundreds went where the readiest work was: the coal mines of the Carbon River, Renton, Roslyn, Maple Valley, and Black Diamond.

**IN SEATTLE, THE IMMIGRANTS** often found a happy balance between country and city. There were plenty of jobs on the street crews, on the garbage wagons, and in the steel mills. At the same time, in this land of single-family homes, a working man could have a yard as big as many peasants' plots in the old country and transform it into a cornucopia of vegetables, grapes, and other fruit. I can only imagine what my grandfather, who grew tomatoes and greens in trash cans in the alley behind his plumbing shop in Boston and raised grapevined trellises above them, would have done with a few thousand square feet of good Rainier Valley dirt.

Food was not only the elixir of Italian society but a main ladder of upward mobility for the immigrants. Italian cooking was the first exotic style to gain popularity in America (remember when it was the standard of spiciness, before the Mexican and Thai invasions?). Spaghetti houses spread across the country like sauce through noodles in the 1920s. Years before, they dotted downtown Seattle.

The immigrant peasants were reborn in the promised land as truck gardeners. The most complete account of early Italian Seattle (albeit one tinged with the well-meaning biases of the time) is a University of Washington thesis, *The Italian Immigrant in Seattle*, written in 1915 by Nellie Roe. Roe presented the best estimate available, from leading truck farmer Fred Marino, that 200 to 300 Italians were then in the business, most eking out a marginal income from small leased plots. They could wrest crops from "astonishingly small patches... clinging to the hillsides in the most precarious positions... the early lettuce and onions crowding up to the very doorsteps." The Italian farmers' stiffest competition was the Japanese immigrants, the only people who would work as hard and sell cheaper. "The Italians say that the Japanese are taking an unfair advantage," noted Roe, "and the Japs [*sic*] that the Italians bring dirty vegetables."

Another, merchant class took root as refugees from the coal mines and rail yards started importing olive oil and sardines and making noodles and sausage to fill the cravings of their countrymen. Gradually the demand spread to the mainstream market, and household names were born: Oberto's and Gavosto's Torino sausages, DeLaurenti's, Magnano's, and Borracchini's food shops, Merlino's olive oil and pasta.

In popular memory, Seattle's Italians are entirely associated with "Garlic Gulch," the enclave that centered on the junction of Rainier Avenue and Atlantic Street and stretched up the slope of Beacon Hill. It was, by all accounts, a vibrant Northwest version of the classic Little Italy, with four Italian food stores, two barbershops, a pharmacy, and a

saloon all clustered at the corner of Rainier and Atlantic. That saloon, the New Italian Cafe, with game tables in the back and, farther back, another building housing an Italian-language school, was the main social club of the community.

Nick Paoella's drugstore at Rainier and Atlantic was an institution whose influence extended far beyond the dispensations of prescriptions. Paoella was a key figure in the community partly because so many immigrants were too abashed to go to a doctor who could not speak Italian, and would turn to a countryman pharmacist instead. "People used to go to him for all kinds of advice," recalls one son of Garlic Gulch, "even about whom they should marry." Paoella was the first president of the Italian Commercial Club (his son is president of the successor Italian Club) and a liaison to the mainstream business community. He also founded and published the larger of Seattle's two Italian-language weeklies, *La Gazzetta Italiana*, and hosted the *Italian Hour* on local radio each Sunday in the 1930s and '40s, when the talking boxes sounded in unison from the living rooms of Garlic Gulch.

The most important institution in Garlic Gulch—indeed, in all Italian Seattle—was Our Lady of Mount Virgin Church, a half-mile up the Mount Baker slope. Mount Virgin was a rare institution, Seattle's only "national" church. Its parish embraced not just a particular geographic confine, but the entire Italian people—any Italian who landed in town was welcome as a member.

Mount Virgin also had a way of extending an unshakable welcome to priests who only intended to sojourn there briefly. Its first pastor, Father Lodovico Caramello, was on his way to a foreign mission in 1913 when the immigrants who were building the church requested an Italian priest to help them get it running. Caramello consented to stop over—

and stayed until his death in 1949, becoming a revered shepherd to three generations of immigrants and their children.

His successor, Father Gerard Evoy, was supposed to come for just three weeks to clean up the church building. "I hadn't gotten far," Evoy recalls with a chuckle. "We got a few people together and started to fix things up. After six months, [my superiors] said, 'Aren't you done yet?' I stayed for seven years." Far from languishing in the beloved Father Caramello's shadow, Evoy found himself irresistibly drawn into the community, which he came to love for its hard work and honest values. After seven years, he says, "I thought I left. In reality I didn't. The people stayed with me." Now teaching at Seattle University, Evoy is still an honored guest at Italian community functions, and he still helps in Mount Virgin's fund-raising.

The surrounding neighborhood was as communal and charged with hearty camaraderie as the villages of the old country. Indeed, says meat wholesaler Don Vey, it was like a little village, full of gardens and chicken coops and rabbit hutches. "On Sunday," recalls Vey, "when you went to 10 o'clock mass, you'd come out and you could smell *sauce* on the air," as the families prepared their big spaghetti feeds. Attorney Dominick Driano remembers how families would stroll around endlessly, visiting each other. "Other than going downtown, I can't recall going outside the neighborhood."

**GARLIC GULCH WAS THE** largest but not the only hub of Italian life in Seattle. In 1915 Nellie Roe counted 214 families in the Rainier Valley, about 70 each in Georgetown and around Jackson Street, with smaller enclaves at South Park, South Lake Union, Youngstown, and First Hill. Others escaped her notice or grew afterward.

Many Italian workers in the Duwamish steel mills settled in West Seattle. They found—



BOEING PRESIDENT CLAIRE EGTVEDT HONORS JOE DESIMONE, 1937: THE FARMER GIVES HIS LAND.



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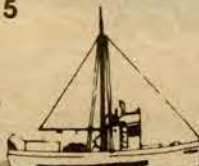
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## ► ITALIAN SEATTLE

ed one of the city's earliest Italian associations, the Westside Italian Civic Club, which continues to this day, though it now draws its membership from a broader area. Evelyn Cassini recalls that her Tuscan family moved from South Seattle to East Queen Anne, where she still lives, when her father got a job driving a garbage wagon. "The garbage people all lived here on Queen Anne or on Denny Hill," she recalls. "The office was at Westlake and Roy, where they kept the horses. Mr. Donella had a big bocce place down on Dexter Avenue where all the garbage workers would go on Sunday afternoons. Only a couple of them are left now." No sign remains of Donella's or the other bocce courts that helped pass so many Sunday afternoons across the city.

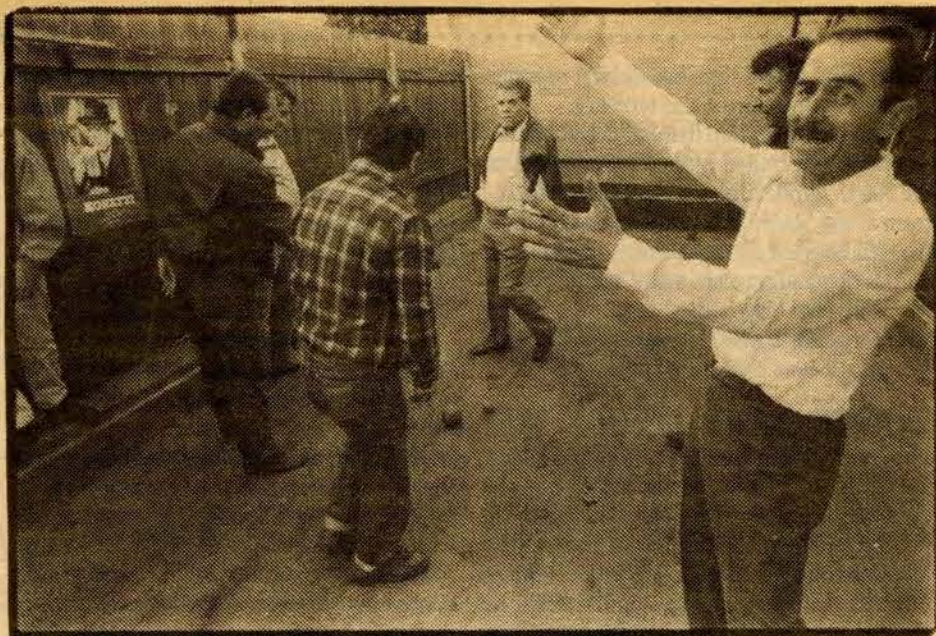
"There was a lot of Italian people in Ballard, scattered around," recalls Alice Longo, who lives there still. Many were fishermen from Genoa, the home of those earlier mariners Columbus and Cabot. One, Teodoro Favale, dared to compete with the seafaring Scandinavians on their home turf: he operated a fish market at Ballard Avenue and Dock Place. Longo recalls Favale would also deliver his catch, from a scow he kept anchored in Vancouver, around the neighborhood in a wagon pulled by a pony named Rapuzzi. Her father had his own garbage route in Ballard, and kept his horses in a barn behind Favale's shop. The Italian ways survived even in Little Norway. Longo recalls that her father would make five or six 50-gallon barrels of wine each fall, and they'd all be drunk by the next harvest. Today, at 73, she still speaks the Genovese dialect, translates letters from the homeland for friends who've not kept up that skill, and is a fixture playing accordion at Italian get-togethers. Her son sings at the local church with a voice, the proud mom avows, that "Pavarotti don't get near."

An Italian community grew in Tacoma about a third the size (1,102 in 1910) of Seattle's. It was born in similar fashion: laborers drifted in with the railroad and down from the mines of Carbonado and Pierce County's other raw coal towns. In Tacoma and Fife, as along the Duwamish, the truck farmers staked out their plots. Tacoma's Italians likewise acquired their own national church. They congregated in their own neighborhood, around K Street just a few blocks up the bluff from downtown. That neighborhood has been spared by freeway builders, one reason some in Seattle look, enviously, upon Tacoma's Italian community as more intact and cohesive.

In Tacoma as elsewhere, the Italian merchant class grew up around food shops and importing. Thus it was with the Rosellinis, three brothers who came from the village of Chiesina near Florence around 1902, working on the rail lines. Their brother-in-law Peter Pagni founded the "Little Country Grocery Store," which, as the second generation's Albert Rosellini recalls, became quite a "gathering place," and made Pagni a man of influence. The rest of the tale is familiar: Albert came to Seattle, worked his way through law school, and became the state's first and only governor of Italian descent, and one of the first in the nation. One cousin, Leo, became a doctor; and another, Victor, married a daughter of the Gasparetti restaurant family and became Seattle's foremost restaurateur.

**WHEN POSSIBLE, THE IMMIGRANTS** clustered in residence and work, with paesani from their home districts, even villages. Thus Al Rosellini recalls his parents "stuck with other Toscani," the largest Italian group in Tacoma. (The Toscani, of whom my grandmother is also one, are notorious for considering themselves so perfectly Italian they're not at all like the other Italians.)

A recent myth perpetuated by those who



BOCCE BEHIND FILIBERTO'S: KEEPING THE GANG TOGETHER.

would elevate the local Italian community's social stature has it that it was peopled mostly by immigrants from the snootier North rather than the peasant South. That seems a bushel-size exaggeration with a grain of truth. In 1915 Nellie Roe found that 85 percent of Seattle's immigrants were from Central or Southern Italy. A random sampling of their descendants indicates they came from a broad swath of Italy's regions. Don Vey, who grew up in Garlic Gulch, recalls "a lot of San Marchese/Foggiani, Barese, Calabrese [all from the South], and Genovese there," confirming my own sampling. John Croce has catalogued regions of origin more closely than most. "The people in South Park were all from Naples," he says. The coal mines were filled with Toscani and Piedmontese, from the North. The Foggiani settled up the hill from Garlic Gulch toward Mount Baker. And the Bruzzese, from the central province of Abruzzi, concentrated on Beacon Hill and "all worked in the steel mill because of Dominick Caccione, the superintendent of Washington Iron Works, who was Bruzzese and hired all Italians, 200 or 300 of them."

Seattle conspicuously lacked Siciliani, from the most isolated, poorest, and most oppressed of the major regions. With their heightened clannishness and suspicion of outsiders, they tended to stay in New York. Their absence meant a local dearth of good cannoli, the exquisite Sicilian pastry, but it may also explain the fact that the Mafia never became a force in Seattle.

The divisions of culture and caste between Italy's regions were echoed even in egalitarian Seattle. Architect Fred Bassetti recalls that his father, an educated Torinese who acquired Paoletta's *Gazzetta* and kept it going till 1961, always looked down a bit upon the Southern throngs.

Similar distinctions arose among the various Italian sub-neighborhoods. John DiJulio, one of the most respected patriarchs of today's Italian community, grew up on Mount Baker. "We thought we were better than the people down in the valley," he recalls, "more reserved, more churchgoers." Georgetown was the opposite sort of fringe community. The earliest settlement in Seattle, it preserved its frontier rivertown rowdiness well into this century. Here, a new generation of small-time Italian bootleggers and gamblers fit right in. "Georgetown was just another Las Vegas," says pilot Jim Dileonardo, who grew up there in the 1930s and '40s but saw it from a different view; his father, James Dileonardo Sr., was a deputy sheriff, one of the few Italians to get onto police forces. "Prostitution was rampant. Every one of these buildings had a gambling room on top or in back. In 1949 or '50, they sawed off the upper half of one tavern and kicked these enormous, beautiful roulette wheels out onto the street. My father said the Seattle police would come out in wagons to

change shifts, and the toughs would drag those wagons away. I'd go somewhere and people would say, 'Oh, you're from Georgetown?' They didn't want you in the house."

South Park, the most agrarian Italian neighborhood, was perhaps the most traditional. Printer and art director Tony Ferrucci, the son of the legendary Market herb queen Angela Maria Ferrucci, recalls that "people came from all over for St. Anthony's Day at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, from as far away as Bellingham. The Seattle Parks band played while the procession circled the church grounds and grotto. There were food and game counters. Everyone was sick when it ended. After the war we tried to revive it for a couple years. But they wouldn't let us shoot fireworks anymore. And people had moved away."

**SEATTLE'S ITALIAN SUBCOMMUNITIES** grew like snowballs: one man would arrive and, if he made it, lure relatives and paesani from his village. The process, and the bonds that were transferred across the ocean, continue to this day. Take the district of Mirabella Eclano in Avellino province near Naples. It's so small it doesn't appear even on the Michelin map of Italy, but it has given Seattle enough to merit sister-city status. The first to come from Mirabella was Domenico Vacca, in 1887, who started one of the first truck farms in the Duwamish Valley. More from the village followed—Vaccas and Durantes and Genzales and Desimones. They became the core of the Georgetown and South Park vegetable belt, and in turn of the farmers' market at Pike Place.

The Mirabella connection is still sustained by new arrivals, drawn by old family links. Filiberto Genzale, scion of a restaurant family in Mirabella, is here now because in the 1950s a cousin, Luigi Desimone, came back from Seattle to visit. Desimone invited Genzale's sister Filomena to visit Seattle; she did, met her husband here, and stayed. When Filiberto Genzale came to Boston in 1966 to continue his biology studies, he came here to visit his sister and various relatives. They persuaded him to stay, and he wound up running a deli. Homesick, he returned to Mirabella, then came back here with a wife from a nearby village and opened a restaurant with his sister and brother Alfonso.

That restaurant, Filiberto's in Burien, may well be the most authentic Italian eatery in Seattle. Certainly it's the only one with a tournament-size bocce court in back—one device by which Genzale tries to recapture some of the world he left behind and rekindle the community spirit he sees vanishing from Seattle's Italian scene. He estimates "an easy 200 people from the Mirabella area are here. We stick together. Forty to 50 just came in the last 15 years."

One son of Mirabella, the first Desimone to arrive, was a giant in physical stature, a

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flamboyant personality, and a figure in the whole city's affairs. No one who knew Joe Desimone has forgotten the spectacle: 6 foot 2, over 300 pounds, a roaring, stomping tornado of a farmer, tycoon, and showman. He arrived in this country in 1897 with 50 cents in his pocket, according to his sister-in-law Teresina Durante Desimone. He first went to work slopping hogs in Rhode Island. When he heard from his uncle about the fertile farmland along the Duwamish, he came out to work for the Vaccas and soon after married one of their daughters.

Joe Desimone brought the classic peasant's reverence and lust for land, from a country where it was scarce and its tillers often indentured to it. To this he added an ambition and capacity for work that were phenomenal even by the standards of the immigrant farmers, whose standard workday was "from too dark to too dark." In *The Pike Place Market: People, Politics, and Produce*, Alice Shorett and Murray Morgan describe Desimone rising at 2am to ready his horses and wagon for the trip down to his Market stall, from which he returned at 9pm, "in time to do a little work in the field, check on the produce, unload the wagon, and put in fresh produce before dinner and bed."

Joe's brother Aurelio, who arrived to work at the Market for Rafaelo Vacca in 1923, is the last survivor of the original Desimone generation. He and his wife Teresina recall vividly the hardships of those days. They would sell every bit of produce that was fit to sell, and eat what wasn't—"potatoes so mushy you couldn't cut them, with the eyes this long," says Teresina Desimone, spreading her fingers a foot apart. One harvest season, their peas threatened to rot for lack of money to pay the pickers, so they sold their car for \$61 to get the crop in. Aurelio, like Joe before, met with stony stares from the bankers when he went to borrow money. "They wouldn't give us no money on our land or truck—say, 'If you had a car, we'd give you money.'" So he went to the sharks to borrow at 8.5 percent interest, when the going rate was 2.5.

"One time in 1942," recalls Teresina Desimone, "I was selling spinach five pounds for ten cents, just to get rid of it. A businessman, all nicely dressed, said he'd buy it six pounds for ten cents. I said OK, and then he kept trying to get me to put more in the bag. I told him, 'There's gonna come a time when the Italian people no gonna work like this, and spinach is gonna cost a dollar a bunch.'"

**At a critical time for keeping Boeing in Seattle, Joe Desimone offered the company free land. It worked, but it also ensured the doom of Duwamish truck farming.**



The Desimones sweated and saved, building up their holdings acre by acre, draining the Duwamish swamps to create prime fields. Joe became a fixture around town, delivering vegetables in his Model T truck. He is often credited with being "the founder of the Pike Place Market," but he was just one of the farmers queuing up when the city dedicated Pike Place to farmers' wagons in 1907 to break the commission wholesalers' stranglehold on farmers and consumers. By the time the Market's owners, the Goodwins, opened the upper stalls in 1922, Desimone was, according to Shorett and Morgan, "the only producer ready to pungle up \$75 a month to rent one." He bought his first shares of the Market's stock in 1925, and as the Goodwin proprietorship disintegrated, he assumed more ownership and even more control.

The Desimone stewardship, which continued under Joe's sons after he died in 1946, has been criticized for letting the Market run down and obstructing its revival under public ownership. His heirs, along with such leading Market merchants as Pete DeLaurenti, even joined with development interests in opposing the 1971 voters' initiative for public acquisition. But the Market's decline was due to broader forces: the growth of chain supermarkets after World War II and the loss of nearby farmland. By skimping on maintenance, Joe Desimone sheltered the farmers with favorable rents. With his bullying bluster and his compassion and generosity, he ensured that the Market would survive. His will forbade his heirs from selling it off, so it could not be dismembered.

**AND IF DESIMONE GETS** too much credit for "founding" Seattle's Market, he may get too little for helping to save the city's key industry. In 1936, he gave Boeing several acres on West Marginal Way—for a token \$1—so it could erect its Building 2. The plane company, which would soon embark on a new boom in defense contracts, was feeling cramped in Seattle and scouting the country for new sites. Mike Pavone, a neighbor of the Desimones who went to work for Boeing to escape the drudgery of truck farming, says a California group was courting Boeing assiduously and offered it 20 acres of free land. Desimone offered his land "because he wanted to make sure Boeing stayed in Seattle." His generosity paid off in the end; various Desimones have since leased many acres to the company at more lucrative rates. Pavone declares that Desimone's community-spirited altruism was real, and effective. Also ironic: by keeping Boeing in Seattle, Desimone ensured the industrial growth that would doom Duwamish truck farming.

The final curtain fell on the Desimone era of the Market last year, when Aurelio had to abandon his table at the farmers' market. Not that, at 84, he couldn't still grow vegetables; but with one eye gone blind, he could no

longer drive them down there. Aurelio Desimone is living testimony to the endurance of the peasant work ethic that made South Park bloom—and to its value as a source of longevity. He still tills an immaculately tended acre of vegetables behind his house in Burien and sells them through a neighborhood fruit stand. Money is hardly the motive for a man who gets \$6,000 a month from one Boeing lease. But, he says with a grin, "I cannot stay in the house and sleep, just because I'm old. I need the fresh air." Thinking back over the 64 years since he got out of the Italian army and emigrated, he says simply, with a grin: "America's the best!"

Other observers saw in these immigrants' patient, hard work and steady progress a sort of poverty-blessed idyll. "In spite of the difficulties to make ends meet, they all seem happy-go-lucky and care-free," Nellie Roe wrote in 1915, in language recalling old Southern accounts of the happy darkies down on the farm. "Those from Southern Italy are as sunny in disposition as the climate from which they came, and never look into the future, tho their brothers from the North are more provident. They are like children in their simplicity, and in their trusting always to luck and living ever in the present. As I have gone about among them it seems that their two main characteristics are ignorance and optimism."

Roe was savvy enough to note that "this surface affability... is often hard to penetrate to discover and meet their real attitude and needs." Indeed, Italians are masters of playing the clown, the "professional Italian," especially when set upon the stage of a strange land. I remember a friend in New Mexico, an artist who'd emigrated from Florence 30 years before, who was always the life of the party, singing and strutting and slinging the *vino* and spaghetti with grand theatrical gaiety. All this masked a deep, abiding melancholy.

**JUST SO, IMMIGRATION** imposed psychological hardships at least as painful as the physical ones. Many of the early male immigrants "got depressed and lonely,"

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## ► ITALIAN SEATTLE

recalls Jim Dileonardo; his own father debated packing it in and going home. Thousands of others actually did so, and King County's and Washington's Italian-born populations declined significantly from 1910 to 1920. Others stayed but, never managing to build a family nest, lingered on as bachelors, or even husbands and fathers, in exile. "I remember my grandmother taking in two or three boarders at a time," says Don Vey, "construction workers and cement finishers. It was a funny setup. A lot of them were waiting for their wives to come from Italy. Many never got them here."

There was no easy solution for families split between two continents. Alice Longo's father had studied for the priesthood, the proudest goal for an eldest son. Then his father got into financial trouble in Black Diamond, and he came over to bail him out. He never entered the priesthood, never returned to Italy, and never saw his mother again. "It broke her heart," recalls Longo.

For all the fond invocations of the unshakable Italian family, separation could strain its loyalties to the breaking point. Nicolletta d'Aurelio, now 88, recalls that her father was 16 and had just married when his father brought him to Seattle to escape an eight-year army hitch. "My father left my mother pregnant with me in Italy. She wouldn't hold me, had it in for me because he'd left her. Five years later he got enough money to bring us over." Still an unloved orphan within her own family, d'Aurelio was given to the Mission Sisters on Beacon Hill. When she was 15, she was taken from the convent and married to a man she'd never met, who was so jealous he tried to keep her from even leaving the house. But duress bred perseverance. Over her husband's objections, she started a little store in Georgetown,

sold vegetables from her backyard garden, and was the first woman in the state to get a meat cutter's license. When her husband was disabled, she was able to support both of them.

The inevitable loneliness and dislocation of immigrant life was exacerbated by the helplessness of being unable to speak the host language. Provedina Navone remembers the terror of arriving from Genoa in the non-Italian North End in 1927. "I didn't talk to any of my neighbors for a year. I was too ashamed to go out of the house even to hang up my laundry, because I couldn't talk to anyone." Once she did learn English, many of her friends, who'd been in America much longer, would ask her to accompany them to the doctor to translate for them.

**THOUGH THEIR ISOLATION** might have been greater, the immigrants to Seattle did not suffer discrimination and persecution as virulent as that in some Southern and Eastern states. South Carolina passed a law banning Italian immigration. Dozens of Italians were lynched in the South—11 in the most famous instance, in 1891 in New Orleans, after they were accused, apparently falsely, of a "mafia" plot to murder the police chief. Initially the unions lobbied against hiring Italians and other foreign-born "job-stealers." They unsuccessfully pushed the city government of Spokane not to hire immigrants; according to Nicandri, Spokane's mayor made it a policy not to hire Catholics.

As the immigrants settled in, however, they found their way into the labor movement, especially the coal miners from industrial Lombardy and Tuscany. They soon came to be perceived as agents of labor unrest and anarchism: witness the furor over the Sacco-Vanzetti trial in Massachusetts. In Washing-



AURELIO AND TERESINA DESIMONE: HARD WORK.

ton, the German-language *Wacht am Sunde* reported the arrest of 300 suspected anarchists in Spokane and other Northwest cities in 1917 as an Italian-colored event.

In 1903 *The Seattle Mail and Herald* inveighed against the "unfortunate" number and character of the immigrants, especially the Italians, arriving here. "No more restless class of people exists on the face of the earth than the Italian. They are the lost tribe of Caesar," it intoned. "Great acumen is not required on the reader's part to discover in the foregoing condition the necessity of greater vigilance in the question of immigration." Fourteen years later, immigration quotas squelched the flood of immigrants from Southern and Central Europe. For the most part the Seattle press seems to have been relatively temperate in its treatment of the Italians.

Immigrants and their children who grew up in Garlic Gulch and South Park, where they had strength in numbers, recall little serious prejudice, beyond the usual schoolyard taunts. Alice Longo says things were rougher in Ballard. "They'd beat us up and call us 'wop' and 'dago' all the time. We couldn't leave the yard unless we brought the dog. One threw a rock at me—I still have the mark. But when my brothers grew up, oh, they were powerful. They kicked the you-know-what out of those guys. They used to call them the Traverso Brothers of Ballard." Humor was as essential a defense as fisticuffs. Longo's husband was always teased because his last name, Cinquegraneli, was "too long"—*troppo lungo*. So he changed it to Longo.

No subject touches more raw nerves in any discussion of Italian-American life than crime, in particular organized crime. The Washington gubernatorial campaign of 1972 provided a textbook illustration of that truism. Former governor Albert Rosellini had made a surprising comeback, sweeping the Democratic primary to stand against Governor Dan Evans. But one past connection came back to haunt Rosellini: his association with convicted racketeer and topless-club operator Frank Colacurcio, the extent of which he and critics still dispute. "I had represented [Colacurcio's] folks 25 years before," Rosellini recalls; as an early Italian entrant to the bar, he got a lot of Italian and other immigrant clients. He declared then, and still insists now, that the only time he ever represented Colacurcio was on a teen-age charge of statutory rape, for which he bargained a plea. Rosellini concedes talking to Hawaiian officials on behalf of another Colacurcio brother, who was meeting resistance in his "legitimate" attempt to buy a go-go club there. The license went through. "I didn't even charge a fee," says Rosellini.



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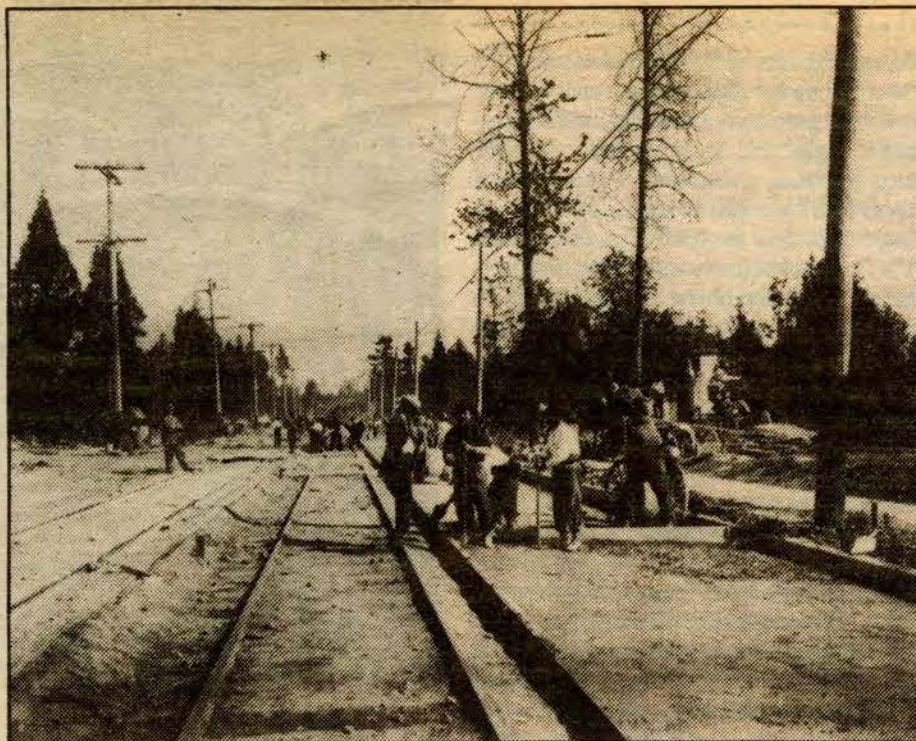
But on the eve of the election, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* dropped this story in a form that hit the Rosellini campaign like a ton of terra cotta. The banner front-page story detailed Rosellini's assistance in the Hawaiian club transfer and similar jawboning on behalf of a Seattle bingo and club operator tied to Colacurcio. The melodramatic story included no response from Rosellini. It carried an unusual and prominent byline: "Lou Guzzo, P-I Executive Editor."

Rosellini contends the story was carefully planted and orchestrated, the latest of many such innuendos and wop-baitings that had dogged his career. "It caused my defeat. At the same time, *The Godfather* was playing all over the state. The Republicans came out with a bumper sticker saying, 'Washington State does not need a godfather.' Over that weekend, I dropped 15 percent in the polls."

Guzzo, now a commentator on KIRO-TV, says, "I was proud to write that story. I put that byline on it on purpose, to show both sides of the problem—that not all Italians are crooked. You've got a guy like him making all of us look bad. Al simply happened to be the kind of Italian I'd been fighting all my life."

**CONNECTIONS BETWEEN** crime and Italians in the popular imagination of the immigration era are not born out by statistics. In Seattle as elsewhere, Nellie Roe found after reviewing 1914 police reports, "the percentage of Italians convicted of crime is very low, and more than 2 percent less than that of any other nationality"—with one striking exception: Seattle's Japanese were less than half as likely as its Italians to be arrested. The Italians' arrest rate was only three-fifths that of the Chinese and two-fifths that of the blacks. (Of course, police may have come down harder on the Chinese and blacks, then the most persecuted minorities.)

Roe found the Italian reputation for crimes of passion or victimless indulgence confirmed by Seattle police: "75 percent of Italian arrests are due to 'shooting or stabbing scrapes' and to gambling or selling liquor without a license." Liquor violations were the most usual crimes in the Italian community in the ensuing decades, according to John Anthony, the son of an Italian immigrant and a longtime sher-



LAYING THE MOUNT BAKER STREETCAR TRACK.

iff's deputy.

Even many of the most respectable and otherwise law-abiding Italians could never see bootlegging or, to a lesser extent, gambling as real crimes. Again and again, the old-timers say the only thing about America that just didn't make sense was Prohibition. As a result, a bootlegging bust was not the blot on one's reputation that another crime would be. "They'd say a fellow who'd been to prison for it had 'been to college,'" recalls former Mount Virgin pastor Evoy. With good reason: "A number of them spent time in the library in those prisons and came back educated. One learned to read blueprints there and became an architect and builder."

Despite their poverty, the Italians in 1915 very rarely turned to the public dole. That was partly thanks to their thrift and penchant for saving, and partly due to their reluctance to take charity from strangers. Children were almost never entirely orphaned; often they'd even be farmed out to relatives when a household got too crowded or hungry. The Italian community also achieved self-reliance through the early institution of mutual aid societies,

grassroots-level charities. These societies became superfluous as the immigrants moved into the mainstream, and as the New Deal brought social security and workmen's insurance.

**PROSPERITY, NOT POVERTY**, is the great enemy of ethnic communities' cohesion; it frees immigrants from the need to cling together. As they acquire the financial and cultural means to live where they choose, the kids inevitably trickle away, coming back on Sundays to visit the folks. That slow process of dispersion is only chipping away at the Little Italies of the East. Garlic Gulch collapsed much faster—not through any internal disintegration, but under the battering of the freeway builders, an onslaught of concrete spaghetti that began in the 1940s and continues to this day.

John Croce is one of the stubborn hangers-on in the old Rainier-Atlantic district, but he's not under any illusions about the neighborhood's survival. "When they put the first floating bridge in, that really screwed up the neighborhood. Then the bridge over Rainier Avenue

killed it. This latest thing [the completion of I-90] put the final lid on it." The interstate runs right along Atlantic Street, through the heart of Garlic Gulch. The successive stages of construction have swept out the old community with what seems almost a mischievous malevolence. "My grandmother's house was taken in 1938 for the floating bridge," says Don Vey. "They moved across the street—and then the tunnel took that house." Some who weren't uprooted by that highway sold their homes when the (since-aborted) R.H. Thomson Freeway was to come through them. Others just cleared out when there was no neighborhood left to stay for, heading for Mercer Island, Magnolia, Bellevue, and the South End.

Garlic Gulch suffered its final indignity last year, when the old, abandoned New Italian Cafe was leveled. Nothing remains of the once-humming Italian commercial district except a latter-generation bakery and food shop, Remo Borracchini's, a few blocks down Rainier on the edge of fast-food land. The real goods are still there—but the people behind the counter are decidedly non-Italian, and just stare dumbly when you say "capocollo" or "provolone."

Considering the physical havoc, it's remarkable how many old neighborhood bonds have survived. The exiles still return from their suburban diaspora to Our Lady of Mount Virgin, at least for holidays and weddings and communions if not for weekly Mass. They praise the young Irish priest, Father Thomas O'Callahan, who arrived there five years ago, just as they cherished Fathers Caramello and Evoy. But though the spirit survives, Italian attendance has inevitably slackened, and been replaced by a new influx of Catholic Southeast Asians. Some of the old guard nervously wonder whether and when the Seattle Archdiocese will lift Mount Virgin's Italian national status, or close the church entirely. The archdiocese's chancellor, Michael Ryan, tells them not to worry. There was talk a decade back of doing away with this and the other anachronistic national parishes—Italian and Polish in Tacoma, Slovak in Aberdeen. But the idea's been dropped. Meanwhile, falling attendance has forced the transfer of Mount Virgin's school from the parish to a private, secular operator. ►

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**CAP**



## ► ITALIAN SEATTLE

The clubs that grew from the old mutual aid societies are still active: the Italian Club, the Westside Italian Civic Club, three area lodges of the Sons of Italy, and the oldest of all, the Italian Independent Society. The clubs now serve social rather than practical functions, but they still reflect the segments of the community in which they began (with considerable overlap). The Italian Club began in 1920 as the Italian Commercial Club, a sort of Italian Chamber of Commerce. In the 1930s it took the side of the angels by vigorously protesting the Mussolini government's persecution of Italian Jews. The Italian Club is still the special, though not exclusive, province of the Merlinos and Obertos and other business leaders. Not surprisingly, it has the biggest treasure chest, and the door-prize raffles at its quarterly luncheon get-togethers for the old guard are so lavishly stocked with its members' products that half the attendees seem to win prizes.

The Sons of Italy, here as elsewhere, is seen as more the workingmen's (and -women's) lodge. The Sons pride themselves on upholding the most authentic, earthy Italian spirit, not to mention throwing the best parties and cooking the best food. No hotel catering here, *grazie*—we'll cook our own *giambotta* feast! The peak of their season is a summer wine festival, at which scores of home vintners enter their handmade fermentations.

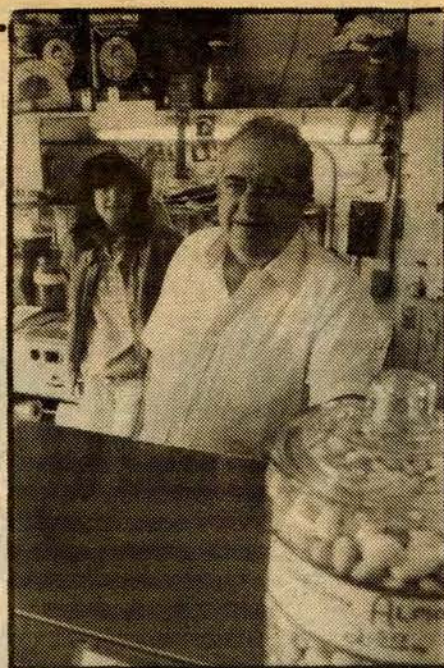
Far from declining, the number of associations actually grew in the 1970s. A new Sons of Italy Lodge was launched in Bellevue, in recognition of the exodus from the old neighborhoods to the Eastside. A chapter of the international Dante Alighieri Society was started in Seattle. The Dante Society, which began in Italy under government sponsorship, is odd club out among the local associations. Dedicated to the propagation of the Italian language (a lost tongue for most Italian Seat-

tleites) and culture, it is open to anyone with those interests, regardless of ancestry. Its members gather twice monthly for lectures—one in English and one in Italian—on art history, literature, and so on—or at least travel slides to fill the bill. Partisans of the other, larger clubs view the "Dantes" as effete snobs. The Dante members view the other groups as, in the joking term of one member, "spaghetti eaters." Not that the divisions are unbridgeable. One former Dante Society president, modern-day immigrant Quinto de Vitis, also spearheaded the founding of the Bellevue Sons of Italy.

Those additions might indicate that the Italian clubs, and by extension the Italian community, are a thriving, growing culture. But, as Quinto de Vitis says, "Go to any club and see the average age of the people at the meetings." The memberships are aging fast, and their gray heads must court new blood with desperate zeal. The big clubs have relaxed their admission standards, opening up to anyone who's one-quarter Italian by ancestry or married to someone who is. "In 15 years, the clubs will die," laments de Vitis, though he's worked as hard as anyone to preserve them. He points to the disappointment of the Italian Club, which "had a membership drive and recruited younger people—who drifted away. For \$15-a-year dues, they expect an athletic club that would cost \$500 a year."

### EVERYONE AGREES THAT

Seattle's Italian community, if it's to survive, needs a hall, a place of its own. There it could mount exhibitions and, more important, folks could meet up any old time, as they used to at the New Italian Cafe, instead of once a month in some rented hall. Boston's Italians are raising \$2 million for a museum/center. Vancouver's Italian community has its Leonardo da Vinci Center, complete with a fine restaurant. But Vancouver's Italian community is much larger and more vital than Seattle's,



THE CROCES: LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER.

partly because Canada didn't curtail immigration 67 years ago, as the United States did. The Seattle community for decades also had such a hall, Casa Italiana, at 18th and Madison. Even back in 1937, however, it was threatened by factionalism, so a new corporation formed to take it over in a friendly foreclosure. By 1968, Casa Italiana's directors found it impossible to keep it up, and sold the property to the phone company. A Casa Italiana board, loaded with estimable names, continues to this day, guarding the insufficient nest egg left from the sale and sponsoring other, smaller projects.

The obvious solution would be for all the clubs to pool their resources in a single center. The problem, as former Italian Club secretary Gino Alvan says, is, "You get three Italians together, you have an argument." In this unfortunate respect, the Seattle community is all too true to national tradition. However they may help each other out at the extended-family

and village levels, Italians are notoriously inept at larger scale collaboration. The factionalism in Seattle eerily recalls Italy's own musical-chairs system of government, or the chaos before the Risorgimento. "Everybody wants to be chief," says de Vitis sadly. "There's an old saying in Italy, 'Everyone wants to play the trumpet, and no one wants to play the drum.' The only way the Italian community can survive is to not have 15 factions, to meld together."

To build a common cultural center has become a life goal for Tony Ferrucci. Some whom he's hounded in his crusade think he's an inspiration, the sort of go-getter who can save the heritage if anything can; others dismiss him as a quixotic dreamer. Ferrucci for his part has grown disenchanted with the clubs and turned to quieter appeals to the younger business community.

The Sons of Italy and the Dante Alighieri Society, though they occupy two extremes of the cultural spectrum, have for several years joined in a booth at the city's annual Ethnic Heritage Festival. All the clubs join in a Columbus Day banquet—though its attendance is less than what the larger clubs muster for their solo gatherings.

The problem, says Sandra Bordin, who immigrated ten years ago to pursue medical research at UW, is that the diverse factions "grew up together, and carry on little fights from when they were children. It would take an outsider to unify all the groups and be accepted by everyone." As such, she was able to pull together the Ethnic Fest collaboration. Recalling the painstaking negotiations, she laughs, "I felt like Garibaldi."

**EVEN TO SOME OF THE** hardest-working boosters, such efforts seem as wishful as a search for an all-night restaurant in Rome. They are the hopeless guardians of a heritage that's being ineluctably erased by assimilation, a process that was only

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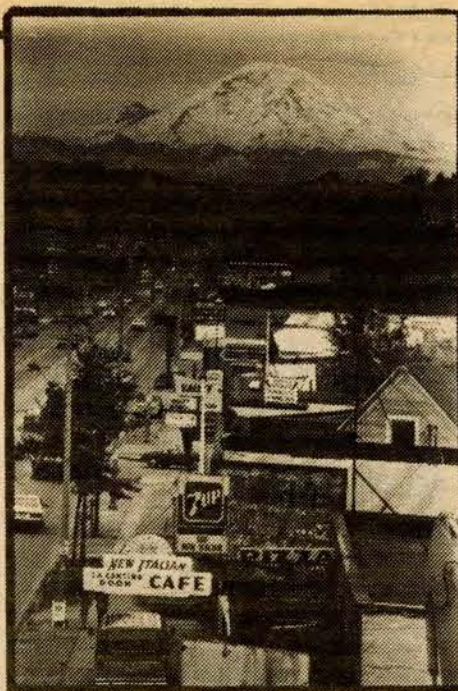


hastened by the break-up of Garlic Gulch.

Not that the infusion of immigrant blood has entirely stopped. Italians continue to trickle into the States, within the stringent immigration quotas. Often they shortcut the immigration red tape by coming through Canada and Vancouver. World War II provided an unexpected boost. Italian prisoners of war quartered at Fort Lawton and a camp on Marginal Way were welcomed into the bosom of the Seattle community. A few stayed on. Al Martinello was captured in Libya and nearly starved in imprisonment in South Africa. When he was shipped to Seattle, he almost felt he'd been freed. Working as an interpreter for the camp, he met a nice American girl named Ethel. Now they're happy stalwarts of the Italian Club and Sons of Italy.

The new immigrants tend to be professionals, academics, and businesspeople rather than the illiterate peasants of the old days. Many, like de Vitis, Martinello, Bordin, and Andrea Brass and Paola Martini of the Dante Alighieri Society, quickly assume leadership in the local clubs. Secure in their ability to compete in the mainstream, they feel less abashed than the early generations about proclaiming and sharing their heritage. At the same time, they find themselves so Americanized in a few years that they can't put up with the inconveniences and distractions of Italy for more than a visit. They revel in the openness and diverse opportunities of America, just as the early immigrants did. They grant that there's plenty of opportunity and wealth in Italy today, but less flexibility for the restless. In Italy, people still tend to root in one career, often one job, for life. "People there don't make leaps as they do in this country," says Clarissa Szabados, a versatile teacher/actress/administrator who emigrated from Hungary as an infant and from Italy when she was 15.

But that traditionalism, like everything else in Italy, is changing. De Vitis sees the con-



NEW ITALIAN CAFE, BEFORE ITS DEMISE.

tinuing Italian infusion tapering off: "Now people in Italy don't want to come to America. They say, no, America is *here*." As for those already here, only modern immigrants can spot the strange phenomenon: Italian-Americans, caught in a suspended evolution. "As Americans, we change," says Szabados. "But we remain Italians as we were when we emigrated." Bordin was startled to discover that the oldtimers and second generation here "still have traditions and words that have disappeared in Italy. The way they eat, talk—they still use the *noi* [an archaic personal pronoun]—things my grandmother told me about. They're preserving an Italy that doesn't exist in Italy."

But as Woody Allen would say, a culture is like a relationship is like a shark: if it stops moving, it dies. Behind the trappings of food and vino, the various club meetings grow more and more like any American gathering.

They're conducted entirely in English; even most of the second generation have lost what Italian they knew. Adult classes in Italian abound, but the last of a series of Italian schools the community operated for its children, which de Vitis directed, foundered after enrollment dropped and the Italian government withdrew its subsidy.

Before the last world war, the Italian government sponsored many such projects and maintained an active consulate in Seattle. That was trimmed back to a vice-consulate, and further undermined by scandal when honorary vice consul John Rosellini was caught mishandling trustee funds. The vice-consulate was maintained, with retired diplomat Mario Anziano of Vancouver volunteering as vice consul, until February, when it fell to Italy's budget paring. Anziano, whose affection for the Seattle community is obvious, vows to lobby for a full career diplomatic office here. Buy why should Italy fret about this backwater, 80 years removed, of Italian settlement?

**AND WHY SHOULD SEATTLE'S** Italians struggle to preserve a heritage that is an anachronism in both Italian and American terms? "In a couple generations there won't be any difference between people with Italian last names and anyone else," says de Vitis with sad resignation. Maybe.

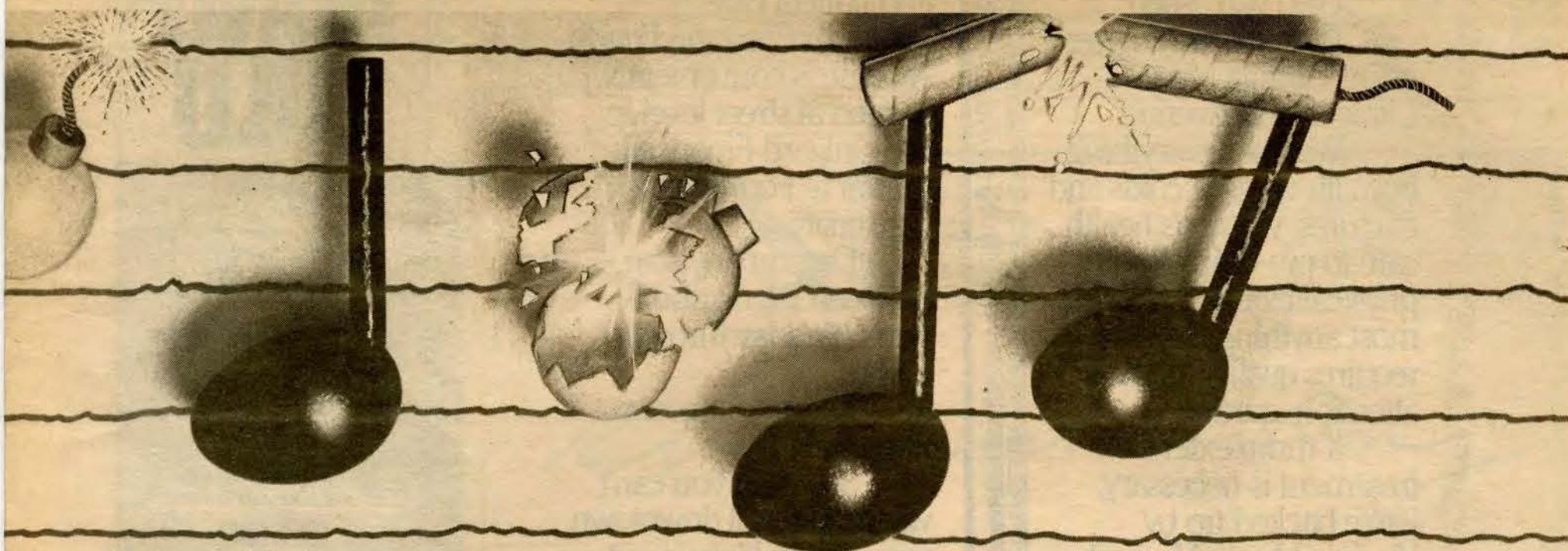
Census statistics suggest broad assimilation and contradict many ethnic stereotypes. A national survey by the Census Bureau in 1979 found that a larger percentage of Italian-Americans had foreign-born parents than did any of the other largest ancestry groups (English, German, Irish, Polish, and Spanish). A larger percentage was foreign-born than that of any group except the Spanish. Italians had attended college at a lower rate than any other group (22 percent versus nearly 39 percent of those reporting English descent). Only those claiming Spanish descent showed a

smaller portion graduating from college. In median family income, however, the Italians led those of English, Irish, and Spanish descent.

The 1980 census for Washington state shows an even stronger pattern of economic success, in keeping with the more rapid acceptance and assimilation characteristic of the West. The per-capita income of Washington's Italians surpasses, by at least 11 percent, that of all the other national descents surveyed—English, Germans, French, and Irish—except one, Polish. (Jews and the various Scandinavian nationalities, likely leaders, weren't included in the tally.) The distribution of Italians in the various trades and professions generally matches that of the other groups, with a few exceptions. Higher percentages are managers, administrators, and schoolteachers. A very low percentage work in farming, forestry, or fishing. Compared to our Irish, nearly half again as large a percentage of Washington's Italians are police or firefighters. So much for stereotypes.

The national education gap doesn't carry over to Washington. The median years' schooling of those 25 or older is virtually the same for Italians and all the other European groups. A higher percentages of young Italians—aged 18 to 24—are high-school graduates than those of any of the other groups. A larger percentage than of any other group, again excepting Poles, attend four years or more of college. The unemployment rate for Washington's Italians was lower than that of its French and Irish, higher than that of its English, Germans, and Poles. A smaller percentage of Italians than of any other group were inmates of penal or mental institutions—.8 percent, versus 1.2 percent of those of English descent.

The picture that emerges is of a group that's made it very nicely in the mainstream, thank you—too nicely to nurse any of that sense of exclusion upon which ethnic differences thrive. Except for the odd names, what's so



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Italian about Italian-Americans?

And yet. There are the young heirs like John Croce's daughter Cathy who defy what everybody says about kids these days and eagerly follow their parents in studying and reenacting the heritage. There are the thousands more of the third and fourth generations like me who save to visit an Italy our parents have hardly, if at all, seen and study to regain a language they never knew or long ago forgot.

Vanity is certainly part of the revival. It's easy to preen over a culture that's associated with great food, gorgeous fashions, sexy cars, and much of Europe's great art and ideas. Simple expediency would keep John Cabot, Tony Bennett, and Dean Martin from changing their names today. The new respectability coincides with the overdue entry of Italian-Americans into the nation's and many states'

politics (though it's hard to tell whether less-than-pristine pioneers like Geraldine Ferraro and Al Rosellini help or hurt the image).

But beneath all the posing and artifice of this, as of any, ethnic pride, there is a sense of homecoming in the simpler, less glamorous elements of Italian heritage, even for us at three generations' remove. I was surprised to feel it when, for the first time in two decades, I heard the clink of clay balls and raucous banter and took awkward aim at the *pallina* at Filiberto Genzale's bocce court. Suddenly I was back at the little court my grandfather used to keep in Boston till his cronies grew too old to play and a new generation of kids in the neighborhood trashed it.

We're dogged by the sense that being American doesn't quite explain what we are, that there must be something more. We still have

something to prove, we carry a little chip on our shoulder. I think back to Jimmy Doyle, the butcher who was my boss in my first high-school job, who called me "Shit-in-the-piano" and all the usual epithets. There was the Idaho professor who only last year said, upon introduction, "That's not an American name." And there was the college girlfriend's mother back in Teaneck, who screamed in horror over the phone when she learned her daughter's beau was a greaseball.

We hold such thin shreds of persecution as badges of honor rather than shame—a sure sign that prejudice has lost its force or moved on to other targets. My children, who will likely look even less "Italian" than I with my half share, won't enjoy even such little distinctions, even if they'll have to spell their name again and again. Where will they turn for the

myth of adversity that is so much a part of American aspiration? Will being American seem enough?

I hope they'll at least remember who their great-great-uncle George was, and how in a sense he prophesied that they'd be born in the West. Though I have no Garlic Gulch to give them, I like to think they'll look back just for a moment the way schoolteacher Ed De Rocco does. He moved away, but he's kept his family's old house on Hiawatha Street in Garlic Gulch, almost like a shrine, empty except for the huge garden. Only one of the old neighbors still lives nearby. But De Rocco, the man with his father's gold nuggets from Alaska, returns to tend the tomatoes and fava beans, relax, and think back. "I have a lot of old memories of the place," he says with sweet sorrow. ■

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