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## A note about transcriptions:

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. [askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu](mailto:askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu)

Throughout the transcript, all references to *Castell' Morrone/Castell' Marrone* should be *Castel Morrone*. Thanks to Davide Bernardo and Mariano Villano, RcmLive (<http://www.radiorcmlive.it/>), for the corrections.

TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW

Ralph Parisi  
1833 W. 2nd Street  
Wilmington, Del.

Interviewed by  
Franis J. Fierro  
March 4, 1968

Transcribed by  
Irene H. Long  
August, 1969

Where were you born, Mr. Parisi?

In Newtown, Connecticut. In.....

In Newtown, Connecticut?

Yes, United States of America.

What year were you born?

In 1913.

1913? Now a, how long did you live in Newtown, Connecticut?

A....from....a...until four years old.

Until you were four years old?

Yeh, from then we went to New Haven, the city of New Haven.

In 1917?

1917.

And a how long did you stay in New Haven?

Until I was a seven years. I went to the grade school for two years over there in New Haven.

All right now, what did your father do when you lived in Connecticut?

He was workin' on the railroad.

Your father was a railroad worker?

He was, yes.

Was he a railroad worker in Newtown also?

He a....he covered the area Newtown, New Haven....a... Bridgeport and so forth there.

In other words the company moved your father around?

Well, he was...a...he start as a laborer and then he

came up as ...a...like an inspector on a railroad.

So he was just moved from place to place?

Yeh.

And the family?

That's right.

Was your mother in this country, too?

Yes.

Now a.... how long did your father stay in New Haven?

Until 1921.

Until 1921, where did he go then?

He went back to Italy. We all went back to Italy.

First us in 1920 and later, year later my father.

Now when you say "first us," who do you mean?

My mother and, and four kids, myself, my brother and two sisters.

Now you all went back to Italy? Where in Italy did you go back?

In a Castell' Morrone.

Castell' Marrone? Now where is Castell' Marrone?

A near Caserta.

And Caserta is near what?

And it's a.... it's a near Naples.

Near Naples. Now why did your father decide to send the family back to Italy?

We went back for while - not to stay. While he was over there, the immigration closed and not one of us could come back. I was the only one come back in 1930.

Now a..... if the immigration closed, how did the immigration affect you because you were born in this country and you were.....

Not affect me, that's why I come back alone at the age of sixteen.

Well, how about your brothers? Were they born here, too?

Yes, one of them and he's already here.

He's here now?

He's here.

Now a..... what was, what did you say the reason was for you all going back, just for a visit?

For a visit with the a mother and father.

In other words that's your grandmother and grandfather?

My grandmother and grandfather on both sides.

All right now, what year again was this that you went back?

In 19..... we left in the United States 1919; we arrived in Italy in 1920, January the sixth of 1920.

Now a..... when you got back to Italy in 1920, were you living with your grandparents there?

Yes.

A..... what did you do a when you were stuck back in Italy so that you couldn't come back to the United States?

I went to school there for awhile.

And....a... after you finished school there, what did you do?

I was working on a farm.

You worked on a farm?

Yes.

What sort of work did you do on a farm?

All sort of work, like a laborer.

I see.

We had our own farm.

Oh, I..... so it was a family farm?

Family farm, yes.

You farmed for yourself? I want to ask you one question going back a little bit further, going back to the time before you went back to Italy.

Yes.

While you were living in the United States in Connecticut, while you were a living in Connecticut and a going to school, how were you treated?

I was treated all right at that time.

Uh huh. When you say at that time, what, why did you say "at that time?" Is it because ..... some particular reason?

Yes, it was not like a today.

A..... the school where you went, were they mostly all Italians?

No, they were mixed. They were mixed - all whites.

They were all white but were they mostly of Italian descent or.....

Well, they were all nationality there as I remember because I was only seven years old.

I see. Now a.... when you were in Italy - I'm going back to Italy now - after you were caught over there, you were working on the farm and so forth, Mussolini came to power.

Yes, I was, I was going on to school at that time.

What was the a in Castell' Marrone about Mussolini, did people like him there or did they dislike him?

Well, they had a..... there was two parties there - one favored the king and the one favored Mussolini. But Mussolini was a more, more power than the king at that time, when I used to go to school there.

And you say he had more power?

Yes.

Was this in the village that you lived he had more power?

Yes.

Uh... did the...a... the people - then they apparently supported Mussolini?

Well, the majority of them had to whether they like it or not, had to. But as I remember when he went into power, he did a lot of good for the people.

What sort of changes did you see in the village where you lived?

That village before it no have no electricity and Mussolini put electricity there. That particular village was dirty and filthy and Mussolini swepted the street. He employed people to sweep the street and it was a, a dirt road. He swept them a out because there is a lot of animals used to go there: sheep, cattle, horses and all that. And a make sure that the place were a kept clean.

Uh huh.

He employ a lot of a people throughout the a, the a little town to sweep and clean and keep her clean.

And then according to what you're saying right now, the man certainly wasn't the tyrant ...a... you speak of a dicta- to as being a bad man. He wasn't the bad man.

He was not the bad man, no. Lot of them they say they should need one of them of each little town like there. They need a Mussolini in each town to keep the place right, cl...clean and put people to work.

Now a.... certainly in this area he did a lot of good. Did you or were you acquainted with anybody who was in any politics at that time?

No, I was only a kid.

You were just a young kid?

Just, just, just a telling you what I used to hear.

I see. Didn't you ever hear of anyone talk against Mussolini there?

Oh, there was a lot of them used to talk against, yes.

Do you remember what kind of people they were who talked against him?

Mostly the one who had a lot of money.

In other words the wealthy people in the country?

The wealthy people, yes.

But the poor people thought he was pretty good?

But the poor people was mostly for.

I see. Now a.... going up to 1930 now, during the period - when did Italy invade Ethiopia, do you remember?

Well, I was here at that time.

You were here? Well, how about a... well, Albania, when did they invade Albania? Were you in Italy when they invaded Albania?

I.... it was after '30, isn't it?

After '30's? I believe so?

Yes, because I was here.

Yes, how did you a decide to come back to the United States?

Because I don't want to stay to Italy any more.

A.... why did....why din't you want to stay in Italy?

Because I want to come back here. It's my country here.

This was your country?

That's right.

But your whole family was over there, right?

Don't make any difference. I wanted the whole family to come over here. They couldn't come here. I inquire the Foreign Affairs Board, the Foreign - the one take care the citizen abroad - I couldn't do nothing. My mother, my father had to be sixty years of age for me to bring them over here and I couldn't do it.

In other words, they wouldn't let any of them come over.

No, no.

Now when you decided ...a... to come back anyhow, how did you go about making arrangements to come to the United, the United States?

My father had to find two men to take care of me here until I was twenty-one because I was a minor. One of them on the ship which his name was Frank Frisco. He took care of me on the ship till I docked in New York City. From New York City, of course, we all come here to Wilmington now also Frank Frisco. We all came a together. But he was responsible for me on the boat. The American Consul suggest all that.

I see. Now.....

Because I was a minor.

O.K. Where di you catch the ship to come over to the United States?

In Naples.

In Naples. Do you remember the name of the ship?

Volcania.

Volcania? That was an Italian ship?

An Italian liner, yes.

A.... how long did it take to come across.

Twelve days.

It took twelve days? Now a did it stop anywhere along

the way or did it come straight across?

Yeh, it stopped at Gibraltar.

Just a Gibraltar?

That's all.

Did it pick up anybody else at Gibraltar or did it just pick up or drop cargo?

A..... I didn't see it. I didn't remember that but they, they stop there for cargo or maybe they pick up some passengers. I don't know.

Now, in so far as passengers aboard the Volcania, were they almost all Italians on board?

There were some Americans.

Some Am..... but were these Italian-Americans or.....

A..... some were American, real Americans. Some of them were Italian-Americans, yes.

I see. Now, how were the conditions aboard the ship?

It was perfect. It was good.

Good conditions. Did they have everybody in cabins and so forth?

Yes.

They didn't have any steerage, did they?

No, we have all cabins.

All cabins. All right now, once you came to the United States, you came with this Frank Frisca, you say?

Yeh, came right in Delaware here.

Was this man a relative of yours?

No relative at all. Just from same a town in Italy.

Oh, he had already been in this country?

He had already been here, yes.

And he went for a visit?

For a visit, yes.

Did he have a family in this country?

A....not... he had a.... his uncle. His mother and his father wer, were living in Italy at that time. And that's who he went to visit, his own a mother and father.

Did he have a wife and children over here?

He got mar....he got married over there and he left his wife there and his wife came to the United States early thirties.

In the early thirties?

Yeh, '31, '32, somewhere like that. '33 maybe, I don't remember exactly a.....

A now, once you came here, who was responsible for you here?

Well, I had a, a uncle. His name was Alex Mauro and a Alex Rella(?).

Were they both your uncles?

No, just one of them was my uncle. The other one was a friend of the family.

I see. Now, when you said they were responsible for you in this country, in what way were they responsible for you?

The reason I was, I was a minor.

Yes, you were a minor.

And the United States Government will not support anybody as a minor. That's a why you have to have these persons to guarantee for me if I need anything until I became a man. Which I didn't need them at all.

Now, when you first came here - well, when you first came here along in 1930, where did you live?

With Louie DiCessapolla(?).

With Louie DiCessapolla? Now, when you lived with Louie,

did you have a job at that time? Do you remember?

Yes, I was work at the leather factory.

Did you speak English at that time?

A.... few words.

Just very little?

Very little.

How, how did you get along at the leather factory?

I got along pretty good.

A.... were there other Italians who worked there?

Yes, mixed.

Did they help you?

No, they didn't. They used to stop me working. I was too fast for them.

Oh, really?

Yeh.

In other words they used to try to hold you back?

Yeh, that's right.

Now...a... how did you get the job? Did you ...a.....

Alex----- got me the job.

Alex Rella (?) got you the job?

Yes.

How long did you work at the leather factory?

I work over there off and on five years. For one whole year straight and the rest was a couple days a month because there was a depression here at that time.

I see.

There was no work at all.

A....after the Depression started to ease up a bit, did you continue working at the leather factory?

Yes, I went to work at Bloomenthall's.

At Bloomenthal's?

Yes.

Where was, where was this?

That's on a Front and Monroe Street.

Front and Monroe?

Yes.

Was that also a leather factory?

Yes.

Where did you work before? What was the leather factory that you a were you wo.....

A... the name was a.... the leather factory where I was workin' at before, it wa s name was a..... I can't remember. It's a really funny name.

Where was it located?

It's located 208 West Fourth Street. It's no longer there. It went out of business during the Depression.

I see.

It was a name that it's hard to remember so many years past.

Right now during that time, during the Depression in the early thirties, what did you do for entertainment when you weren't working? Now you were a young man.

A..... we do nothing. I no have no money to do anything.

A..... there's, there was absolutely nothing you could do.

Nothing to do.

A..... what did you do, just associate with friends and talk and.....

That's all.

That was it?

Just friends. That's it because you no have no money to go anywhere.

I see. Did you ever join any clubs like Sons of Italy and Sons of Columbus or.....

No, I used to go there but I'm not a member.

Uh huh. How about a church? Did you used to belong to any organizations of the church?

Yes, I used to belong to the St. Anthony's, St. Anthony's Club.

St. Anthony's Club?

I belong to the American Legion.

Now, but you didn't belong to the American Legion then did you?

Not then, but I am now.

All right now, when we came out of the Depression, you went to work at this leather factory at Fourth and a.....

Yes.

Fourth and Monroe you say? No, Front and Monroe.

Front and Monroe.

How long did you stay there?

I stay over there, it was about ...a... eight or nine months. Then from there I went to work at the Allied Kid on Fifth and Church. I work there about seven years.

How were the working conditions there?

It was all right.

Now, you say you worked there about seven years?

Yeh.

What year was it that you quit work there, that you left?

When I went the army, in the army in 1942.

In 1942? Were you drafted in the army?

Yes.

A.... how were conditions when you went in the army?

That was all right.

Did you enjoy working in the army?

Well, I was drilling there.

Well, you didn't have much choice. What was your job in the army?

I was a corporal.

A corporal, a corporal of what? What a.....

A drill, drilling man.

In drilling?

Yeh.

O.K. Now....a.... most poeple got a specialty of some sort in the army. Were you a in the signal corps, infantry, or.....

No, I was a when I first went in there, I was in infantry. I was in seven seventy-second. It was an MP battalion.

Uh huh.

And then from there I a I got transfered the medical corps. Then I used to drill a men there for awhile. Then when I was there awhile, they put me in a running a mess hall. Then I run a that a mess hall quite a bit, about seven months.

What were you doing when you were running a mess hall?

Well, I was doing everything there. I was handle men. I had seventeen men under me all the time.

Uh huh.

Others couldn't handle that mess hall. It was too big of a job and then they put me there till I got hurt over there.

I see. How did you get hurt, do you remember?

Well, I got pain in there, start to get dizzy, and I

pass out. I was in the hospital forty-two days.

I see. O.K. When did you come out of the army?

I was right around a Ju- July or August of 1943.

That you came out?

Yes.

Was this a due to this a injury you received?

Yes. I got a, I got a medical discharge.

I see. Now, when you came out, what did you a....  
wh...where did you go to work?

I went to work at the American Car and Foundry..

Yes.

And how long did you stay there?

A..... from 1943 to 1948.

I see.

I was in charge over there of reproduction ...a....  
department.

I see.

I went over there as a worker and then I got a, I came a  
on the top.

And what did you do after, after that?

The shu - the company shut down.

What did they do, go out of business here?

Yes, went out of business here, yes, in Delaware.

I see.

I went to work at a Edgemoor Iron Workers - the same  
job I went a work over there as a, as a worker and a I became the  
top man there, too.

I see and what sort of work were you doing there?

Reproduction, same thing.

Reproduction again?

Yes.

Now, a, this a pretty much a brings us up to a to around what, what year do you recall off hand?

A..... 1949 to 1953, then that company shut down also. I was the last man out of there.

Uh huh. And then what did you do after that?

Well, after that I went a work here and I went to work at Congoleum Iron and I got layed off from there. Then from there I went to work Wilmington Blueprint and Service.

Uh huh. That's, that Wilmington Blueprint Service, where was that, downtown in Wilmington?

Downtown, yes. It was same type of work, steel-iron.

O.K. a.....when you look back on a the years that you spent in this country, a... you were here, you were born here and then you left. How old were you again when you left here to go back to Italy for a visit?

Twenty-one years old.

No, when you left here to go back to Italy?

Yeh, I left here I was twenty, twenty-one years - 1937 about twenty-three years old. I took a trip in a 1937.

Oh, back to Italy again?

Yes, I went and visit my mother and father. I was a only was a living there for a forty days and I came back. I just went there for a visit.

Uh huh.

Not to stay, just a visit.

I mean when you went back with your mother when you were just a little boy. How old were you then?

Seven.

You were seven?

Yeh.

You went back there and you stayed how many years now?

A.... from '20 to '30 bout not quite ten years, about ten years.

Not quite. In other words you were seven.

Ten years, yeh.

Right, you were about seventeen when you came back.

I was not quite sevent- I was going to be seventeen in September and I got here in May.

Yes, in other words you came back here and you stayed here about four, five years and then you took another visit back to Italy?

Seven, yeh.

A..... to go back and see your parents. Have you ever been back since that time.

Since when, since 1937?

Since 1937, yes.

I went there to see them in 1951. Then we went there in 1960, me and my wife. Then I went in 1964 alone. She wan- she no want to come because she say she got sick on the other side.

I see...a... where you...a...you had an opportunity to see the United States at different periods of time with short separations in between and also you've had an opportunity to see Italy at different periods of time with separations. Now if you were to try to characterize some of the difference and changes that you've seen in Italy, how would you characterize it? Now, I'm, I'm speaking of the little town, Castell' Morrone, where your parents lived. How would you say...a... the town has changed over a period of years. You know.....

Oh yeh, it's changed a whole lot. Now they got water,

which they no have a before.

They have running water?

Running water, yes. A.... they have electricity, as I say. They no have a before, electric-electrical power. They have a mills which they grind wheat and corn and all. They no have before and they got it now.

How did they use to grind the a wheat before?

By water before. See, they have water they grind it. If they no have no water, that's it - just lay, lay there. Now it's everything by electricity now.... a.... it's a lot of difference between there and this thirty-five years ago.

O.K. Now, how about this country?

Why this country?

What differences have you seen here? For example, you went back to Italy - well, you were born here in 1913?

Yeh.

And you went back to Italy in 1920, wasn't it 1920 you went back to Italy?

Yes, yes.

Uh huh and then you came back here in 1930?

Yes.

What differences did you, did you notice any differences between when you left in 1920 and when you came back in .... I realize you were just a little boy.

Oh yeh, there's a lot of difference. When I came here in 1930, in the house we got electric. In 19....20 we had a gas light in our house.

Uh huh.

In 1930 they start to come out with heat in the house here. In 1920 they use to have these grea' big, black stoves - coal.

Yes, in the kitchen.

In the kitchen, yes.

And that was the only place you had a stove, right?

Well, that's a, that's the way we use to live here.

I don't know about others because I was too small to know.

How about bathrooms in the house?

Well, I don't remember that. I was too small to remember that. But they must, they must have had in those days because they had a running water. They must have had that too, but I don't remember that.

Uh huh. Now, a you came back here, you came back here in 1930 to stay, right?

Yes.

And a now in 1930 you must, you were a young man. You were sixteen, seventeen years old. You certainly had some opinions formed as to how a man should live and everything else. What comparison could you make at that time between the way you lived here in this country and the way you lived in Italy?

Oh, one hundred percent better here.

Uh huh, how would you, why would you say that it was one hundred?

Because it's a more convenience here, better workin' condition here, and it's a better all the way around on my knowledge.

Uh huh, were you ever treated badly because you were an Italian?

A lot of places they did, yes. They used to call me - I was a "damn wop."

Uh huh, for what reason did they call you names?

We don't know.

No reason at all. They never gave you any reason?

No reason.

I see...a... could you think of any places that they called you names?

Well, while I'm on the job, when I used to work at leather factory, they used to call me that.

Really?

Yeh.

A lot of places.

What was your.....

Mostly on the job.

What was your reaction to this, when they called you names?

Well, I used to get mad. You....heh, heh.... you wanted to punch them in the mouth. That's what you want to do.

Uh huh. Did the ...a... officials of the company ever ..... did the boss on the job, did he ever...a.. make any comments to you or anything like that?

No, the bosses on the job, a lot of them didn't like a.... but...a.. if he was his own nationality, he let him a go. Other than his own nationality, he probably bawl him out.

Yes, I see. Now, if you were to look back a...a.... on your life in this country and think about various changes that have taken place and the various conditions that have changed in so far as your living is concerned, what would you characterize, what would you say was maybe the biggest change that took place in the years that you've lived in this country?

The biggest a change that a has been made was a Roosevelts a made them, he was the first one then Truman follow.

Well, what kind of changes were they?

He made a lot of changes - social security, money in the

bank has been saved a by the people that have a savings in the bank. If they a went out, the bank closed up, the money was guaranteed and give to the people - guaranteed by the government. And there's a lot, a lot of other things towards that, towards the poor working people. Has been lot, all those changes and all Roosevelt made those changes. As I remember, 1930 the banks used to close and they couldn't get the money. They were just out of luck. A lot of them became suicide as I remember. A lot of them jump out of the buildings. They lost all their money. A lot of them had a stocks and a stock a market and they a lot of them 'came suicide.

I see a lot of them.....

They no have no money at all any more - the survivor.

In other words you think the biggest change then is that a the a.... legislation that Roosevelt a.....

Roosevelt, yes.

Called for and a.... and some of the stuff he had pushed through has made life more secure and better for the American people?

That's right.

O.K. Is there anything else that you could say about your life in this country....a....

Well, the only thing I could say is I like this country much better than Italy.

Uh huh.

Even so that I am Italian descent, this, this is my country here, as I could say - America. I was born and raised here.

O.K. Do you have anything else that you, you have nothing else, that's it?

That's it.

O.K.

(TAPE OFF AND THEN ON)

A....how would a you describe your life in this country?  
Would you des....say that it has been an easy life or a hard life?

Well, I work hard all my life. Everything I have I work for. I ...a... workin' different places and now I am self-employed and the reason why I am self-employed a this present time, I couldn't get a job after I passed forty. It's tough for a person past forty to get a job so I was a forced to open a store. When the Edgemoor Iron Work close up, that I was workin' on reproduction, I ...a... became 'round forty, forty-one, or forty-two years of age, I went work the Bancroft in there. I went a work a Pennsylvania Railroad. I got layed off from there. I just couldn't hold a job anywhere because the Pennsylvania Railroad they keep you bumping when they get slack. And I was out of work and all these places that I go went to work, first man's get layed off it was the last man in because they have a union today. And they look after those things as age.

Ah, seniority on the job.

Seniority on the job and the age that means a whole lot.

Yes.

Once you get layed off of one job, you try to get another.  
After you past forty, you have a tough time to get one.

A..... when if you were to pick out any particular period of time since you've been here, when was your life the hardest?

The life of the hardest it was in early '30's.

In the early '30's?

Yes.

Why was it the hardest then?

Because at those days, there was no jobs, no jobs at all. You a couldn't even buy a job. And a, if there was any job around, they a used to prefer a married man. And a single person he was just

out of luck.

I see. When would you say your life has been the easiest?

Well.....

Now, I realize that a...a... you've always worked hard, but when I say when would you say that your life has been the easiest? When have things run the smoothest for you? When have you enjoyed your work the most?

At the time that I used to work in the office.

Where, where was this?

In a, since a 1943 to 1953.

You worked in the office?

In the office on a reproduction. They was my easy, easiest a and smoothest life I ever had it was time in there. I used to work hard but mostly it was a responsibility that I used to have, but I didn't mind a that at all.

You enjoyed having that responsibility?

I enjoyed, yes.

Do you think a, a this sense of responsibility that you have....a... the enjoyment a - one might say a pleasure in being a ...a responsible person, having responsibility, do you think this is one of the things that a pushed you into business a of your own?

No, no, what pushed me into business is the age. When these places shut down, I don't have no choice.

Yes.

I couldn't get a job.

Right.

It was tough for me to get a job. And couple, two or three different times, I was out of work at two or three months at the time before I got another one.

Uh huh.

And when they a - before they a hire a person a past forty, if they a can't a get a younger man and then they put the man in the forties to work.

I see.

Others you just don't have no chance whatsoever.

O.K. Now, in so far as your business is concerned, would you say it is a successful business?

Well..... a successful business belongs to people who have a money to spend.

Right.

If they have a no money, you just have to struggle along.

That's right. A..... would you say that you felt more secure now with your business? Would you say that you felt more secure working for yourself than working for someone else as you had before?

Well, I don't have any choice. I have to have the store because I'm fifty-four years old now - I just can't get a job no where.

Yeh, I know but I mean you enjoy having the store, don't you?

Yes.

You enjoy the work?

Yes.

You feel secure, I mean a here nobody can fire you or lay you off.

No, I'm my own boss.

You're your own bass, right.

Yes.

Do you think you prefer being your own boss to working for someone else?

Well, right now I have, ain't got no chance as I say. I have to be my own boss.

O.K.

I have to have the store.

All right now, in the years before you a came back to the United States a..... the religious life of many of the Italians was not the easiest thing in the world here in this area. For example if you go back to the early 1900's, you'll find that there were some churches that had an Italian Mass before St. Anthony's Church was founded and a..... the Italian could only go to that Italian Mass. They wouldn't let him in church for any other Mass. There were a couple of churches - did you ever run into any of that sort of discrimination in this country?

Yes, I did. A.... there was a woman one time....and a.... she used to go to St. Peter and she was a Italian descent, but she was born here in Delaware. She sits right a along side a this woman and she says, "Move over, wop."

In church?

In church. Until Italian people got their own church up St. Anthony and got Father Tucker ahead of them.

I see. What would you say your religious life was like in this country? Would you say it was a satisfactory experience for you?

Well, when I came here, I find St. Anthony's Church. For me was all right. I don't see no difference.

I see.

But the, the old Italian people they had the trouble.

So you really didn't experience any difficulties?

No.

Of this nature.

No, no, not me.

The whole time you were here?

I just a hear what they's a tell me.

I see.

That's the only experience I have, what they tell me.

All right, fine. Well, I think that about covers it.

(END OF TAPE)