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TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW WITH

Nellie Mercante
Rose Bernardo
105 Murphy Road
Wilmington, Del.

Daughters of
Ralph Bernardo
(Prominent in early
Italian community)

Interviewed by
Francis J. Fierro
June 22, 1967

Transcribed by
Irene H. Long
Winter, 1968

Well, do you want to tell it?

Well, you can tell it.

(FR.) First.....

Well no, wait, first let him ask the questions.

All right go ahead.

(FR.) Where in Wilmington did you live?

(NEL.) Well, we lived in Wilmington, in, in a Wilmington,
course a....

(ROSE) When we first came, you live on Tenth Street, didn't
you?

(NEL.) Well a my, my, see I was born afterwards. When my
mother first came to Italy, first came to America, she lived at
Ten, at Eleventh and Lincoln.

(ROSE) But for most of their life.

(NEL.) She lived between....

(ROSE) Sixth and Lincoln.

(NEL.) No, wait a minute, she lived between...a... on Lincoln
Street, between Ninth and Tenth. There was a little house there
and she lived there. From there, they moved....then....a, that's
when my....from there they to Ninth Street, Nineteen hundred and
what?

(ROSE) Well, just on Ninth Street.

(NEL.) On Ninth Street in the Nineteen hundred block.

(ROSE) In the same area.

(NEL.) Of Ninth, of Ninth Street between Lincoln and Union,
that's where we lived.

(ROSE) But for the greatest part of our life in Wilmington we
lived at Sixth and Lincoln on one corner and then my hou....then

my father had the house built on the other corner where Rachel lives now. Nineteen hundred West Sixth.

(FR.) And that was at.....

(ROSE) A....yes....

(NEL) Now my.....

(ROSE) And when he had the house built, back in about 1910.

(NEL) Yes, but my brother, wait a minute, wait, just wait a minute now....

(ROSE) I know but.....

(NEL) Me....

(ROSE) Uh..

(NEL) Now wait a minute, me, Annie, John, and Tony were all born on Ninth Street.

(ROSE) Yeh, I know that but for the most part of our life, for the great part....

(NEL) Yes.

(ROSE) Of our life, we lived at Sixth and Lincoln, first at 1841 West Sixth. And then my father bought a lot on the corner across the street that still, where Rachel still lives.

(NEL) In 1900, that was.

(ROSE) In 1900. Well, I guess I was a, in 1910 the house was built and my father was so against electricity because he said we read too much and would ruin our eyes that he only had electric light put in the hall. There was no electric light in the bedrooms.

(FR) Uh huh.

(ROSE) And I remember then my sister Nellie, who is an avid reader, used to read by candle light and we had no light upstairs, electric light, which was in all the houses. Also he did not believe in heat. (Laughter) And heat was coming into use. So the builder would have given him the house for the same price with electricity

all over and with...a...pipe for heat, but he would not have heat. We had no heat and we only had electric in the hall upstairs and the downstairs rooms.

(FR) What was his reason for not having heat? Was it unhealthy?

(ROSE) It wasn't healthy.

(FR) It wasn't healthy, I see.

(ROSE) And we had the...about the first bathroom in Little Italy. I think the first indoor bath tub in Little Italy. (Laughs)

(FR) What a, what did you use for heat?

(ROSE) Nothing, we just a....

(NEL) Oh, you mean we had heat downstairs, you mean.

(ROSE) The coal stove.

(FR) The coal stove.in the kitchen?

(NEL) The coal stove.

(ROSE) And then we had the parlor stove and....

(FR) Uh huh.

(ROSE) And then, of course,

(NEL) But upstairs we had no heat.

(ROSE) We had no heat.

(FR) What are your earliest recollections of that general area, the area of Little Italy? Now when we speak of Little Italy, a, we'll put some a boundaries on it. Shall we say it started at Fourth Street?

(ROSE) A, well, this side of Fourth Street, yeh, because mostly on Fourth Street other nationalities lived and then when a...

(FR) This side of Fourth Street then.

(ROSE) Yeh, the south side.

(FR) About how far up did it go.

(ROSE) About...a.... to Eighth, about to Ninth anyway.

(NEL) Well, Chickadel lived on Tenth.

(ROSE) Tenth Street.

(FR) And then it was bounded on a east and west by what streets?

(ROSE) By...a...well I guess...by Scott, wasn't it because duPont Street still had different nationalities.

(NEL) Well, now a duPont Street on....that had the DeLuca's.

(ROSE) Yeh, they were....

(NEL) The DeLucas were on duPont Street.

(ROSE) And then as far out as like Rodney Street, wasn't it Nellie?

(NEL) Oh yeh, that was...a...

(ROSE) Where the bridges are Rodney Street, the other side ...

(FR) Yes.

(ROSE) It was a different, see that was a - what did they call it, Silverbrook?

(NEL) Silverbrook.

(ROSE) They called it Silverbrook.

(NEL) They called it Silverbrook.

(FR) What was the area like? Now it's all built of course.

(ROSE) Yeh.

(FR) There are houses all over. You couldn't find an empty lot anywhere today.

(ROSE) No.

(FR) But how, how was it then? The streets were unpaved...a....?

(ROSE) No, well uh....I remember when Sixth Street was unpaved, but there were trolley tracks down the center of it.

(NEL) Yes. And the first builder that I remember that started to build houses was Mr. Nicholas Fidance.

(ROSE) Yeh, he built those houses on....

(NEL) He built those houses on Sixth Street and on Scott Street.

(FR) Ah, on Sixth Street between Scott and Lincoln.

(NEL) Scott and Lincoln and he built houses on Scott Street also, between Lincoln and I mean between a, a, Sixth and Seventh.

(ROSE) Sixth and Seventh.

(NEL) Also the houses across the street and he was also baker.

(FR) I see.

(NEL) He was also a baker.

(FR) Your father was rather prominent in the Italian community?

(NEL) Yes, he was.

(FR) How did he acquire his position of prominence?

(NEL) Well, he was quite a talker. He was more, was more a, he was a good talker and he was a..a..very strong Democrat.

(ROSE) And he learned English fast. That was another reason.

(NEL) And he spoke English.

(ROSE) And we had a, we had a, I guess the first citizenship classes in this area in our house.

(FR) Oh really? This is the house on Sixth and Lincoln?

(NEL) Yeh.

(ROSE) At Sixth and Lincoln, before a, before you know they used to have an Americanization classes and the classes to instruct people for citizenship to get their papers, you know. Well, then my father used....Nellie used to teach them there.

(NEL) I used to teach there.

(ROSE) There, there.....

(NEL) Teach them there a...a.....

(ROSE) We didn't charge them anything.

(NEL) We didn't charge them anything.

(ROSE) But even me, I would teach somebody to write their name which, you know, they had to be able at least to write their name. And some of these that came from Italy couldn't write their name; and they would go over it, and over it, and over it. And that was kind a like my job. Nellie used to hear their....."Who was the President?"

(NEL) "Who was the President? Who was the first President?"

(ROSE) President and the Preamble to the Constitution.

(NEL) Preamble to the Consitution.

(ROSE) Which was what they had to know.

(FR) I bet you got some interesting versions, huh? (Laughter)

(ROSE) Yes we did. But they had to know who was the first. President of the United States, "a Georga Washi-ing-ton." They had to know that, you know. And they had to know, you know, because the judge would always ask them some questions and so and, "How would you had to be, to be the first, the President of the United States." These kind of questions they had to know.

(FR) A, what sort, what sort of work did your father do? Did he a have the store there or did he work?

(NEL) We had the store and my father always had a little job like he used always to be like foreman of road....

(ROSE) Construction.

(NEL) Construction gang like on the streets and things like that. He had a very good mind where in building was, not, not building homes but building roads.

(FR) Uh huh.

(NEL) Like in building roads like.

(ROSE) Well, the first a, one of the first people he worked for was a big construction firm from New York, and they used to send

him over cause, you know, he was - could speak Italian and English. And he worked in New York for awhile; he worked in Virginia. In fact when I was small, I remember him being away from home quite a bit, you know, during the summer months. Then in winter, of course, there was no work in those days.

(FR) In other words he would travel quite a bit?

(ROSE) Yeh, he was.....

(FR) This was rather unusual for that particular time.

(ROSE) Yeh, but he used to go wherever he could a make a few dollars.

(FR) Uh huh. Sure. When a, where did he come from? He did come from Italy but what part of Italy?

(ROSE) Castellammare. Morrone

(FR) Castellammare. Morrone

(ROSE) Which is the province of Caserta, you know, which is outside...well...a...it's all..a..well, it's all province of Caserta but it's not too far from Naples. It's in that general area.

(FR) Now why did he a come to the United States?

(NEL) To better his position.

(FR) To better his position.

(NEL) To better his position.

(FR) In other words he was dissatisfied with conditions in Italy and a....

(NEL) Yeh, everyone had said that a he, he always use to pay, that everybody had told him what wonderful wages people made here. So he thought he would come over here and try too. And he only had a one child when he came here and his father was, and he had his father and mother and my...his wife, naturally. And, of course, I told you that his father.....

(ROSE) He came alone first.

(NEL) He came alone first and his father came looking, came here to locate him and got - they hadn't heard from him for three or four months and they got worried and he went a to Virginia. There he got....they give him whiskey to drink, made him sick and he died. And he's buried some place in Virginia and which we don't know where. We never did find out where.

(FR) You never did find out where?

(NEL) No, we tried, we tried, you know, to find out where. Now my sister was five years old when she came from Italy.

(FR) I see. Now when did your father come here? Do you remember?

(NEL) Well now, let me see.

(ROSE) He came when, when you were born, Nellie.

(NEL) I was born in 1894, so consequently.....

(ROSE) He came about 1890, I think, because his citizenship paper was 1896. That's when he became a citizen and you had to be in America at least six years. So he came in either, in either 1889 or 1890.

(FR) I see. Why did he come to Wilmington. Do you have any ideas as to why he came to Wilmington?

(ROSE) I don't know. Because he was in Boston....

(NEL) Oh, I never knew that.

(ROSE) Well didn't, well didn't, isn't that where he shot his thumb off?

(NEL) I never knew that.

(ROSE) He wanted to be a policeman. He shot his thumb off.

(NEL) That I don't.....

(FR) Oh really, in.....

(ROSE) Yeh, my father didn't have the nail on one hand cause he went, he took a, you know, he was going to try for, to be a police-

man and....

(NEL) I never knew that.

(ROSE) Or some kind of a guard. I don't think a policeman because he wasn't a citizen.

(NEL) That's the first time I heard that story.

(ROSE) But a guard in some place and he shot his thumb off. So that was the end of that.

(NEL) But I don't know why.

(ROSE) But why he came to Wilmington I don't know except that probably hethe B&O was being built down here. He may have come with them although I never heard of him working with the B&O, did you?

(NEL) Oh, yes....wait a minute. I don't know if he worked for the B&O, but it seems, seems to me as though he was a connected with it somehow because he used to get everybody jobs on the B&O.

(ROSE) B&O. See, the B&O was being built here and he have through a paisano or somebody come down here because of that - because this was where the work was at that time.

(FR) Right! Going back to your days as a child, uh, what was the Italian's social and economic position in Wilmington? This would be going back to the early 1900's.

(ROSE) Yeh, well, yeh. Well, we could be going in ----- it was.

(NEL) They always had a social club in the way that it was like aDemocrats or the Republican club. And they always had a club and now where the Neighborhood House is, my father was instrumental in building that. That was not the original Neighborhood House.

(FR) This is the same place where the a present Neighborhood House is.

(NEL) Where the present West End Neighborhood House is.

(FR) Lincoln Street between Seventh and Eighth.

(NEL) That was supposed to be the Democratic Club, the Italian Democratic Club, Social Club. That was to be their meeting place.

(FR) I see. But, but other than this....I

(NEL) Other than that....

(FR) I'm speaking in relation to the community in general.

(NEL) Yes, they had....

(ROSE) Oh, you mean....

(NEL) My uncle, wait a minute. Then my Uncle Charlie came on the scene and they used to dabble in, in theatricals. Like they used to get a show down once in awhile. I'll tell you who was here to sing which ought to be interesting for you

(FR) *Geselmina Grammi*

(NEL) Now she is a great opera, she is an opera singer. Isn't she, Rose?

(ROSE) Now, but a, well I mean....now, Nellie, I don't know now because she

(NEL) She sang in, she sang when she was about a fifteen or sixteen years old.

(FR) When was this? Do you remember approximately what year this was?

(NEL) Well, no. I, I, yes, I can because I was only about fourteen or fifteen myself. So that would have 1894 take, put on fifteen on that. How much was that?

(FR) Well, that would be about a 1910, I guess.

(NEL) Now then....

(FR) Around then, you know.

(NEL) And my.....they used to have, they used to bring thsese

people down from Philadelphia and give these shows, and they used to give them in this, this Democratic Club and.....

(ROSE) And they usually boarded them at our house. (Laughter)

(NEL) And they used to sleep at out house over night.

(Laughter)

(ROSE) I was very small but that I remember, I remember.

(NEL) Yeh, they did do this; and, of course, my father used to go all out. When they didn't make money, why he would take it from the store and a, and a foot the bills and everything else and feed them and everything else. He was very a large-handed that way.

(FR) Well, how did the Italians - when I speak of their social status in the city of Wilmington?

(ROSE) Oh well.

(FR) How were they accepted a by other people in Wilmington? A did they consider.....

(ROSE) Do you mean non-Italians?

(FR) Yes.

(ROSE) Well, why not at all I would say.

(NEL) They had to stay to themselves mostly..

(ROSE) They were, they had a life of their own. They were very happy amongst themselves and made their own life and tried to improve their station but they were not accepted. In fact there was quite a bit of discrimination. For instance when Union Park Gardens was built in 1918, no Italians could live there. See.

(NEL) That's true.

(ROSE) And, of course, Westover Hills you couldn't even buy a plot of ground. That was much later.

(NEL) I looked for years.

(ROSE) There were many areas. You couldn't even move on

duPont Street in some sections.

(NEL) Well, how about for years they weren't allowed there in back, in the Flats. See!

(ROSE) Flats.

(FR) Flats.

(ROSE) And the other side. They could live this side of Union Street, but they dare not cross the line and go to Bayard Avenue and Ferris.

(NEL) -----

(ROSE) Now in school, you had the same thing, but they try, but they pulled themselves up by their own boot straps.

(NEL) I'll tell you a little story. When my brother Tony was born, he was to be christened, to be baptized. So my father called Father Dougherty at St. Peter's or Monsignor Hein or one of them and he said yes. When he went down there, he had said no. So then my father took him to St. Ann's and they said you don't belong here ^{bish-blah}----- . So they took him out. So they said they wouldn't baptize him. So he went back to St. Peter's. I, I think he took him to another church, I don't remember which other church. So then he took him back to St. Peter's, and this priest he said, "No, you don't belong to this. I can't baptize." "Very well, then I'll take him to a Protestant church and that's that and it will be on your head." So then he said, "O.K., I'll baptize him." So that's how my brother was baptized.

(ROSE) But we were discriminated against in church because they had what they called the nine o'clock Mass for Italians. I wasn't an Italian. I wasn't born here...a...born in Italy. I was born in America. I was much as American as any Irish person that ever came from Ireland or was born here or any other nationality, and yet in St. Thomas's Church I couldn't go to any Mass but the

Italian Mass, and in St. Peter's the, the priest would stand at the door, and if you don't belong here. And it's only because our mother and father's faith was strong that we had to be Catholics that we are Catholics. And a lot of early Italians that turned to the Protestant Church, this is why. They were literally thrown out of the Catholic churches when the, when the a...priest...a...a those, those Irish priests were in power, and it was terrible.

(NEL) Well, I...I...we always went to St. Thomas's. Although the priests oftentimes made a..... we were very, very friendly. My father was very friendly with Father Connolly.

(ROSE) Yeh, well, when he came but oh when.....

(NEL) Very, very friendly with Father Connolly, but at the same time if he ever did feel like giving a dig to the Italians, he did, he did! He was right there at Mass which would embarrass you no end.

(ROSE) Yeh, you got it from all. I'm telling you, you really got it. (laughter)

(NEL) But a, but a they did. But a.....

(FR) In other words you didn't ever enjoy second class citizenship.

(ROSE) No, we didn't even have any.....

(FR) Second class. Great Scott!

(NEL) And a it was, it was very hard. It was very hard.

(ROSE) And you had the same thing in school. You had the "guinea" thing and the "wop" thing in school.

(ROSE) School....I must say it was only a very, very small number of people that were that way. But it was veryin school. I can't say there was a large number. It might have been....

(ROSE) Yeh, well, the teachers mostly were very understanding.

(NEL) It must have been one or two who were very, very ignorant. But as far as the whole general class, it wouldn't be -

it wasn't that way, you know, it wasn't that they were all against you, not, not all of them.

(ROSE) No, but in my high school when I graduated from high school in a very small class of twenty five people, this is, this is what happened to me. I was, I was a very good student and a so naturally I was chosen on to be one of the ten that would edit the year book and get it out. So I went to the first meeting and the president of the class said, "I think this group is too big to work with," he says. "Now we're going to weed some people out," he said. "The ones whose name I read can stay and everybody else can go." And he read everybody's name but mine.

(FR) Really?

(NEL) Oh yes.

(ROSE) This actually happened to me.

(NEL) Well, you must have had a very bad impression -----.

(ROSE) Yeh, that was, that was Albert Haddock, the head of Haddock Construction Company. I never forget him. Huh! Huh! So that happened to me. I mean it isn't anything I heard. That actually hap....that kind of discrimination we had. (Chuckles)

(NEL) Course when we lived on Ninth Street one time, I'll tell you this little story, just a story. My grandmother, you know they were very kind, they were very, very kind. And so two hobos came and they wanted something to eat, you know. So my grandmother said a, "Nellie, see what they want." I says, "They said they, could you give them a something to eat?" My mother - grandmother said, "Yeh, tell them to come." So they were sitting down there. So she's go in with....she comes out with a great big loaf of bread and she has a great big butcher knife. (Laughter) They see her with a butcher knife. "Never mind! Never mind!" (Much laughter) They run! She says, "What's the matter with them?" she says. "They think you're going to kill them,,,they just.... " Oh, gosh!

(ROSE) We didn't get many of them.

(NEL) Well, any how....

(FR) Now that a we know pretty much what the status was..

(ROSE) We know what the status was. (Laughing)

(FR) Yeh, we know what the status was. How did the Italian people feel about this? Certainly they weren't pleased with it, but a did they accept it a quietly or did they protest about it?

(ROSE) Well..a....

(NEL) I think they were a happy lot.

(ROSE) They were happy. They didn't care who said what they just.....

(NEL) They didn't give a hoot.

(ROSE) They didn't give a hoot, but, you know, there was a lot of feeling like when.... well, now I remember this vaguely when they....when that Italian man - what did he do, shoot that boy that?

(NEL) Oh, I was going to school.....

(ROSE) That was very sad.

(NEL) I was going to school and this a....there was a high - there was a....football boy, baseball or football, you know. And he was like the hero of the class, you know. And he started throwing snow...a...snow balls at this Mr. Russo, Carmella Russo's - Carmella Marra's husband.

(ROSE) Father.

(NEL) Her first husband, Russo was his name or father. And a he, he got so upset that he threw snowballs and told him to stop that he turned around and shot him. So I'm telling you everybody got out of high school except me and Rose Milano. We were the only two left because they made it very, very miserable for the Italians. They kept saying that the Italians have ...a...shot this boy which

was terrible. He was only seventeen or eighteen.

(ROSE) It was a bad thing.

(NEL) A very bad thing.

(ROSE) But.....

(FR) One of those things, yes. My uncle did tell me that a when he went to work that a hardly a day went by that he wasn't set upon by these groups of boys hanging on corners and so forth.

(ROSE) Yeh, well....

(FR) They beat him every time every day that they were going to work. He said that in the winter time they would throw snowballs at them with stones in them.

(NEL) Your Uncle Joe?

(FR) Yes, and this might very well be the reason....I think I heard this story before about this man shooting a boy and this is the reason for it, I believe.

(ROSE) Yeh.

(NEL) Now, your Uncle Joe, your Uncle Joe was one of those a classic examples of wanting to learn. When he came from Italy, he didn't know how to read or write. So my father....and he said to my father....something about wanting to learn, you know. And I forget who taught him. I don't know whether he went to school or whether my father taught him. That man by his own will power taught himself and with my father's help and all he learned how to read and write. Your Uncle Joe didn't know one thing. He didn't know how to read or write when he came from Italy and he was a man full grown.

(FR) Well, I think he was seventeen years old when he came here.

(NEL) But I think, but when he started to learn, he was older than that.

(FR) Yes, well....

(NEL) Because a not too long after that, he married Annie.

(FR) Well, this was during the Second World War, First World War then?

(NEL & ROSE) Yeh.

(FR) Oh, that was quite some time. I, I didn't realize he had gone that long.

(NEL & ROSE) Yes, yes.

(FR) How did the Italian express himself to the community in general? Did he have any.....

(ROSE) He had no voice.

(FR) No voice at all?

(ROSE) The only time....

(FR) In other words he was completely detached. He was like a community within a community.

(ROSE) Yeh, then like every time...well, like when the elections came round like. And they wanted a vote from the citizens then they would either come to my father or some other leader. Mr. Corletta was for the Republican side....

(NEL) And Mr. Giamatteo.

(ROSE) And Mr. Giamatteo.

(NEL) And Mr. ...a....Mr. DiOrio.

(ROSE) And they would go around and get the people to vote, you know. And they would try, but as far as having any status, they had none.

(NEL) Now, the people in town seemed to be closer to the to have a little status.

(ROSE) Yeh, well they had been here longer. See and they were better assimilated.

(FR) When you say the people in town.....

(ROSE) We mean on Madison Street. (Laughs)

(FR) On Madison Street.

(NEL) On Madison Street on now like a..a... we had a cop
Mr. DiMoro.^{Mauvo}

(ROSE) Yeh. D'Amico

(NEL) And Mr. DiMico, he was an interpreter in the court
and then we had a.....

(FR) Wasn't your father a court interpreter also?

(NEL) No.

(ROSE) No, he was just a.....

(NEL) But he used to go with people. Like if persons got.....

(ROSE) He was the Avvocato dei poverelli as they called it.

(FR) The poor man's lawyer, huh?

(ROSE) He went with everybody every place.

(NEL) And...and he had friends that were like he was a
Judge friend and he was a.....who was that other judge?

(ROSE) Judge Cochran.

(NEL) Judge Cochran was his friend and he... I don't say
that they were completely isolated. I won't say that.

(ROSE) I don't know, but they didn't have any status, Nellie.

(NEL) No, they didn't have any status, but I think that
they, they weren't completely isolated. Now when my brother John,
for instance, when he..a..left school and he wanted to go to work
and then when he a wanted a to come back. He had found a good
friend, a Jewish man named Mr. Henderson. "You're making a sad
mistake," he said, "by not having your son go back to school."
He says, "He made the mistake of bagging school but now he wants
to go back to school."

(ROSE) Yeh, but the Jews were in our community too, that's
why.

(NEL) So then a, so then a my father says, "How will he do it?" He says, "Leave it to me." So he went to Miss Windish which probably you may, may have heard of her. She used to be in Number 28 School and a she was. So they said, "Well, if he can pass the test." He had quit in the third grammar, a fourth grammar class and, "If he can pass from the fourth to the sixth, I'll coach him all during the summer; and if he can pass from the fourth and go into the first grade high, then he will, he will not have lost that much." And he did pass with high marks, and I mean to say you did find friends here and there. I mean, I mean they weren't all....I mean it wasn't just a general a.....

(ROSE) No,

(NEL) It wasn't a general...

(ROSE) Oh well, naturally but those were the exceptions.

(FR) Did the Italian have any way of making his needs and his wants known to the community.

(ROSE) You mean did they, did they have any politician to speak for them?

(FR) That's right. Did they?

(NEL) Well, they had my father. They had Sam Morano...a Sam Moran's father....a...Mr. ^{D'Amico} DiMico was as I say, he was also in the court and there was also - who was the judge at that time, who was a man in politics? I can't remember. Do you remember?

(ROSE) No, I don't remember because the earliest politician I remember that came through the ranks was Dutchie Corsano.

(NEL) Oh no!

(ROSE) (Laughter)

(NEL) That's way, way - that's way, way

(FR) That's quite some time a later.

(NEL) And Mr. ^{Granovate} DiMateo was always in the courts around.

That's Anthony ^{Giannandrea} Di-Mateo.

(ROSE) Yeh, well yeh. They were our own people that a.....

(NEL) But they, they were very a ..and Mr. Di Orio also, they seemed to have an "in" like a....

(ROSE) But they didn't have any political office.

(FR) In other words, yes but

(NEL) Yes, they didn't have political office but they - like for instance, they weren't ...a... for instance they weren't shunted. If they went for something, they weren't turned away. That's what I wanted to say.

(FR) I see. Now was this a result of their influence with the Italian community in swinging votes or was it because of personal friendships with the people who were in power.

(NEL) No, I think it was with their influence with swinging votes.

(ROSE) Votes, that's all, yeh.

(FR) That was it.

(NEL) This is it.

(FR) That was it.

(ROSE) That was it.

(NEL) They, they really had...it was, it all really depended on votes.

(ROSE) It all stemmed on that.

(NEL) On politics.

(FR) In other words the community in so far as the Italian people were concerned didn't care about them one way or another. Would you say that was a pretty accurate statement?

(NEL) Yeh.

(ROSE) Yeh. I don't think they cared too much about.....

(FR) Politicians only cared about election time to get the votes.

(ROSE) That's right. That was, that's a pretty good picture because.... at that time, yeh.

(FR) At that time, right. And this time is..a time prior to World War One.

(ROSE) This is all prior to World War One, yes.

(FR) And...a...the only time the a politicians made any effort to satisfy their wants or need was right around election time.

(ROSE) Well, yeh, I would say that, yeh.

(FR) Would you say that.....eh, now?

(ROSE) Course they weren't much for asking for things because they were pretty much self-sufficient, you know. They would just live on what they had and a....that was it.

(FR) In other words Italians were not a burden on the community.

(ROSE) No, they were not.

(NEL) No.

(FR) In any sense of the word.

(ROSE) They worked hard. They had their little gardens; and if they had to eat beans and bread, they ate beans and bread and that was it. They didn't go asking for charity to anybody.

(FR) And in so far as the old people were concerned, everybody took care of his own.

(NEL) Took care of his own.

(ROSE) That's right. That's right.

(NEL) There was no, no one sent their old people away, no.

(ROSE) No, they took care of their people. They took care of their families.

(NEL) They took care of their families.

(ROSE) And that was it.....and.....you know they did the

best they could. They helped each other and they helped themselves.

(FR) Well, you know, it is documented and I've, I've seen this I don't know exactly who did the work digging out the statistics, but I think the statistics apply to a New York or perhaps Boston area - that there were fewer Italians who were a wards of the state than a people of any other nationality in the country.

(ROSE) Well, I believe that.

(FR) This was in the early 1900's.

(ROSE) Yeh, I believe that because that was, that was true here cause when they came over from Italy, other people, even though they had nothing, somebody took care of them.

(FR) Yes.

(ROSE) Till they were ready to a, you know, till they could pay it back.

(FR) How did the people live in general? Now you told me that they made do with what they have.

(ROSE) Yeh.

(FR) Well, what did they have? How did they live in so far as lodging is concerned, food....?

(ROSE) Yeh.

(NEL) Well, I'll tell you something. A lady would take in a couple boarders. And I remember they only used to pay them (Chuckles) like for instance.....

(ROSE) Five dollars a week.

(NEL) They would only pay them like - five dollars a week! Are you out of you mind? You're out of your mind!

(FR) My uncle told me he used to pay two dollars a month.

(NEL) Two or three dollars a month and then he would buy his own stuff. He would have, he would buy....a....we used to have so many in our store. They would come and they would buy like.....

(FR) Their own food?

(NEL) They would buy whatever they did and this woman where they lived had to buy, cook his food for him for that little bit. Course food was cheap and a lot of things were cheap at that time as I remember. I don't know what.....

(ROSE) But she did his wash.

(NEL) But she did his wash and everything else for maybe for three or four dollars a month.

(FR) Wash, housekeeping and cooking for three or four dollars a month.

(NEL) Now if they eat with the family then that cost a little bit more.

(FR) Oh, really?

(NEL) Yeh.

(ROSE) Well, most....

(NEL) And then if they eat with the family, for instance, if she cooked for herself and then he ate with them that would cost a little bit more. It would cost say, for instance, three or four dollars a week or two dollars a week instead of two dollars a month.

(FR) Right, because then she would be supplying the food.

(ROSE) Yeh.

(NEL) Well, some people would only spend like two or three dollars a month for their food and you don't know what they would buy. They would buy like a pound of beans and...a...two or three pounds, two or three pounds pasta or, or something like that. And that's how it is. They used to save their money so that they could send it to their folks back in the old country or else save their money so that they could bring their folks back from.....

(FR) And, and their diet in other words must have been a very poor diet.

(NEL) It was a very poor diet, but they sur....they, they thrived on it. They thrived on it.

(FR) Did they ^{ever} eat meat?

(NEL) Well, once a week.

(ROSE) Laughs)

(FR) Once a week, they ate meat once a week?

(ROSE) They had a lot of beans.

(FR) They had lots of beans.

(NEL) Beans, bread.

(FR) Beans and bread, huh?

(NEL) Beans, bread, greens - all kinds of greens, if the woman was willing to, a to clean ----- and all. But that's how and some times some women, a who were some of the younger women, they used to have, they used to have, they used to call them like a cots. "-----" they used to call them and they used to have three or four in a room. And they would have three or four boarders in a corner room or five in a room, and she could have that much more money a month.

(FR) Now most of the men who....that came in the early days would come alone, is that it?

(NEL) Yeh.

(ROSE) Yeh. Before they sent for their families so they could make a home for them first.

(FR) Did many of the men who came here return to Italy, not to come back to the United States?

(ROSE) Not too many that I know of.

(NEL) Yeh, well now, I now, well some of them did.

(ROSE) Yeh, some did.

(NEL) Some of them did.

(ROSE) But not too many.

(NEL) Not too many.

(ROSE) No.

(NEL) Some of them did like for instance Stephen Sparco's uncle, for instance. He came and he was the tightest man and he, he, he's one of those who ate just so sparingly. He never came back. Pete ^{Papa} Pop's brother never came back.

(ROSE) No.

(FR) I remember him. I saw him.

(ROSE) Nick, yeh.

(FR) I met him in Italy when I ...a...was in the Navy.

(ROSE) Yeh.

(FR) I don't know, is he still alive?

(ROSE) No, he died.

(NEL) And a....

(FR) He was quite famous in that Castellammare, wasn't he? ^(A or FINE)

(ROSE) Yeh, he had a nice home and a....

(FR) When he got angry - yes, but - when he got angry, he used to cuss in English they said.

(ROSE) Yeh. (Chuckles)

(FR) He, he was well-educated.

(ROSE) And Dominic Bernard's brother went back.

(NEL) Oh, did he go back?

(ROSE) Yeh, remember I saw him in Italy. He had gone back and didn't come.

(NEL) Well, some of them.....

(FR) Why did these people never come back when they'd go back, do you have any idea?

(NEL) Well, I don't know.

(ROSE) Well, a lot of them weren't happy. Some people weren't happy here.

(NEL) But my mother-in-law was here and she went back. She, well she died, but she said she'd never come back.

(ROSE) Some people weren't happy here for some reason or another.

(NEL) They said people worked too hard here.

(ROSE) (Laughs)

(FR) Yes. (Laughs) Did many people leave Wilmington to go other parts of the United States. (Long pause) Did many that you know ofdid any that you...a...

(ROSE) I know very few myself because most of the people that came here, stayed here and had their families here.

(FR) Now the ones who did come here and stay, what sort of work did they do?

(ROSE) Well, most of them were laborers; some of them went into building.

(NEL) I knew a lot of people that worked in...the..the in a leather factories. I knew an awful lot of people that worked in the leather factory I knew personally.

(FR) Leather factories?

(ROSE) Yeh.

(FR) Fiber factories?

(ROSE) And Bancroft's.

(NEL) And a lot of people worked in Bancroft's.

(ROSE) And a...lot of the men went in....were now like when DiSabatino's came. Of course, they were builders. I guess they were stone masons over in Italy, too.

(NEL) Yeh, and a lot of them took up the building trade and learned the building trade.

(ROSE) And then they imported a lot of their people. You know, they sent for their relations from Abruzzi and everything like that. Then some of them were carpenters, see.

(NEL) And some of them that came over that were shoemakers, they opened their shoemaker's shop. Take Mr. DiGenova, for instance, he was ...a...a... tailor and a barber over in Italy. So when he came here, he wasn't...a...he had...he was a...he opened a barber shop. At the same time he took in a little mending when he first started - when he very, very first started. But then he just took up barbering, but they all took up two trades when they were a barber.

(ROSE) Yeh.

(NEL) Barbering, they took up tailoring and they took up barbering. I....someone told me this and I didn't know whether, didn't promise to be the truth or not, but that's what they told me.

(FR) Well, I know that my father tells me that...a...that a when he was learning to be a shoemaker...a...the man under whom he was learning the, the trade was also a barber.

(ROSE) Yeh, well see.

(FR) So he had a cobbler's shop, a shoemaking shop because they actually made the shoes and also a barber shop - a combination.

(ROSE & NEL) Yeh.

(NEL) They all had two.

(ROSE) Two trades.

(NEL) Now my husband, he was a...a..cabinet maker. He was a cabinet maker..... Now my father, my father was a....

(ROSE) Lumberjack.

(NEL) Lumberjack.

(ROSE) That's what was his trade in Italy.

(NEL) In Italy, he cut down trees.

(ROSE) When he came here, here he belonged to the Forresters of America. (Chuckles)

(FR) Oh, really?

(ROSE) Yeh.

(FR) Was that an Italian organization?

(ROSE) No, no, it was a, it was a organization, it was like a beneficial society. The a loggers society, you know, the a lumberjacks.

(FR) Uh huh.

(ROSE) Like a union. It wasn't a union but it was like... They used to pay dues and then they'd pay them death benefits, but then he went out of that because he didn't, he didn't stick to that over here.

(FR) What were, were the Italian's chances for advancement a in whatever job he happened to hold? Could he ...a was it possible for him to move up the ladder from common laborer to perhaps a position of some authority or responsibility?

(ROSE) Oh, my father did.

(NEL) Not unless he had the brains, unless had the brains. I'll tell you the truth now. But we know a lot of people who did ----(advance) and then, and then if they knew a secret, they guarded it with their life. Take for instance ..a..a..Nick a..Caserta's ..a... father.

(ROSE) Yeh.

(NEL) Now he found out a secret formula how to treat those skins, your father probably has told you this.

(FR) No, he never has actually.

(NEL) Well, well, he didn't know how to read or write.

(ROSE) Oh, you're not talking about Nick..a.. Your're talking about your brother-in-law.

(NEL) Not my brother- no, I'm not, I'm talking about Nick's father.

(ROSE) Oh.

(NEL) Now when he worked, he worked for the...the...lumber

for the fiber mill, I menan fiber.

(ROSE) You mean the fiber mill, that's why I thought you were talking about.....

(NEL) I meant the fiber mill. Well, he found out a way how to dry these, these fiber, these slabs of fiber, and how to cure them so quick; but he wouldn't tell anybody. I don't, I think the secret died with him because he knew that if he ever told it, he would lose his job. For instance, I don't know if he would lose his job or not, but what, what a, what security did he have? He didn't know how to read or write, understand?

(FR) Yeh.

(NEL) The same way with my brother-in-law, the one who just died. He, he worked in the leather factory. He didn't know how to read and write, but a but Nick's father taken a job as a foreman, see. And Nick, my brother-in-law Nick, he had taken a job as a foreman, too; and he didn't know how to read and write but he a, he had worked out this formula how to cure leather which he passed on to his son ^M----- who now works at the Amalgamated, a no, it's Allied Kid.

(FR) Allied Kid?

(NEL) Allied Kid. See. So these but, of course, he knows how to read and write, but Nick didn't know how to read and write. He could have made almost anything, you know.

(FR) Yes.

(NEL) But see a....they never told their secret because they were a - they knew that was.....

(ROSE) They were afraid.

(NEL) They were afraid that's how this, that's how they would, that's how they got there where they got because they, their minds, they, they found out with their minds what to do.

(FR) Yes.

(NEL) You know what I....you understand me?

(FR) Yes, I understand. A, what would you say was the average educational level of these people?

(ROSE) The ones who came over?

(FR) The ones who came over.

(ROSE) Well, I'd say they went to a grade school.

(FR) Grade school?

(ROSE) Grade school level.

(FR) The average Italian who came here was not illiterate, was he? Would you say he was illiterate?

(ROSE) No, I wouldn't say the average one was illiterate, no.

(NEL) There were quite a few.

(ROSE) There were a few because there was no compulsory education in Italy at that time.

(NEL) But there was this for them that as soon as they came over and found out that that that, that that meant something, they all took, tried to go to little night schools and things like that. In fact I had five or six pupils myself, trying to teach them English which I and in the end I even gave up because it seemed an almost impossible. Now this is the truth.

(FR) Yes, I....

(ROSE) See, they didn't have the....

(NEL) I even taught Pete ^{Papa} Pop.

(FR) Really?

(NEL) Yeh, I did.

(ROSE) But you see a they a were eager to learn.

(NEL) They were eager to learn.

(ROSE) But they did not have the opportunities.

(NEL) See they didn't know ...a...a..I mean they knew as soon as they got over here that that was a necessity.

(FR) Eh, well in other words they were eager to grasp this thing they never had an opportunity to get before.

(NEL) Oh yes. Oh yes.

(ROSE) To get it, no.

(FR) In Italy...they really didn't have an opportunity.

(ROSE) No, they didn't.

(NEL) That's it. That's it.

(FR) In the old days were there ever any well-educated or professional people who came here from Italy?

(NEL) Well, there were a few.

(ROSE) There were a couple, yes.

(NEL) Now, now what was the name of that man?

(ROSE) Oh, Vera Teti

(NEL) Vera Teti grandfather ..or...

(ROSE) Father, yeh.

(NEL) And he, they said, he was a count. I don't know of what in the heck he was.

(ROSE) There was Mr. Tarantino was quite educated. He had....

(FR) He was a count, you say?

(NEL) Wasn't he?

(ROSE) They said he was a count....well, he was some kind of nobility - impoverished nobility.

(NEL) Yeh.

(ROSE) And he was quite educated.

(FR) Now did he have any profession at all or at all was he, did he just have a good liberal education?

(NEL) He had a good education.

(ROSE) He had a good education. He wasn't a lawyer or anything like that, no. There weren't any lawyers or doctors that came over from Italy.

(FR) Now when you say these people were well-educated,

now what....

(NEL) They had a college education.

(FR) They, they had a...

(ROSE) Now Florence's husband was an engineer from college.

(NEL) Florence's husband went to college in Italy.

(ROSE) See, he was the, he was the black sheep of his family and he was sent over.

(NEL) But he was a college graduate.

(ROSE) But he was a college graduate, graduate in engineering, see.

(FR) Now...we know why he came here, because he's the black sheep of his family - but how about some....

(ROSE) They sent....

(FR) Of these others. Normally if a especially those days, if one could afford a good education in Italy, this was tantamount to a saying or you might say he was well-off financially.

(ROSE) Yeh.

(FR) And if a person's well-off financially in his own country, he doesn't leave.

(ROSE) No, he wouldn't leave. So we didn't have too many. A, the few that were here, were here for some reason or another, see. They were here, you know, because they had family trouble or.... because they were trying to escape from something over there....or something like that.

(FR) How did most of these people get to Wilmington, do you have any idea?

(ROSE) I don't have any idea how they came unless they told....

(NEL) The ones who were within our knowledge, the ones who were within our knowledge, we'll say that - my father had ...a.. little, little - what would you call it? He used to make out thesea.... oh "procura" what they call "procura."

(ROSE) Oh, well, like passports and things.

(NEL) Like passports and things like that. He used to.. somebody would come and say, "I'd like my brother to come over." So my father would, would get the necessary papers and everything else, and some times even lend them money. Although very few times he lent them money, but he did, it did cost him money to go back and forth to do these things which he would do willingly so that they would come over, people that he knew, paisans especially.

(ROSE) Yeh and ----- most of them came.

(NEL) And he would send for them.

(FR) You said he would go back and forth, back and forth to where?

(NEL) Well, to the city hall....a... to the court or something.

(ROSE) To the consul in Philadelphia or places like that.

(NEL) Philadelphia, consul in Philadelphia or something like that.

(ROSE) Because we had no consul here, you had to go to Philadelphia.

(NEL) We had no consul here. We had to have these papers signed, signed a had to have....a...oh going on. So then he would send for these people. After they came here, he would lodge them in the house because they had no place to go until they found a place to go.

(FR) In other words some of these people would send for their relatives and would not have any place to keep them when they got here.

(ROSE) No, no.

(NEL) No, no, they would start talking with my father and say, "Oh, I have a brother that would like to come over." And this and that and the other. "Well, do you have any money?" "I have so much." "Well, then I'll see if, what I can do." And he a he

would probably lend it. "I'll lend you so and so." That's the reason we don't have any money today, I guess. (Laughter)

(ROSE) No.

(NEL) And so, "I will lend you so much." And he would send for them and they would come over here and they would stay in the house.

(ROSE) And he would feed them too, see.

(NEL) And feed them and everything else till they got on their feet and then they were on their way.

(FR) When we speak of...a..this great immigration we seem to concentrate on men. A...what was the role of the women? Now certainly there had to be some women who came over.

(ROSE) Oh yeh, well the men.....

(FR) What was their role?

(NEL) Well.

(FR) In the family or in the community.

(NEL) A man wanted a wife so then somebody would say, "So and so is a nice lady." And the letters would go back and forth, back and forth. Pictures would go back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. So this person would make up their mind. Finally this was....

(FR) It was almost Sears and Roebuck type thing, huh?

(ROSE) (Laughing) Tell him about Rose Frank.

(NEL) Rose Frank?

(ROSE) Yeh...a...her and her husband.

(NEL) Rose Frank, you mean a....

(FR. & ROSE) Rose Brank.

(NEL) Oh, Rose Brank.

(ROSE) That's a good story.

(NEL) I'll tell him another one. I'll tell him about a

Pete Pakeen. Pete Pakeen sent for a girl thing. And...a..and everything else so she was supposed to go to a

(ROSE) I think that's the best....

(NEL) It's the ...a...my father...a...Carpenter Station, you know. So....

(FR) -----

(NEL) Not Pete Pakeen, ^{Carlo} Piro Pakeen*his name was and he wasn't a very good looking fella. She was a nice looking.. Well, when she came over on the boat, she met somebody that she liked better, and so when the, my father said a...my father, I think was instrumental in letting her come, you know. So when they went to Carpenter Station, I don't know what happened.

(FR) Where was Carpenter Station?

(ROSE) Up Claymont.

(NEL) Out near Claymont.

(FR) Uh huh.

(NEL) And uh, they were, he was all dressed up and everything else, and they, they were a - it's dark up there, you know. So she got down in New York. He says he knows that something was wrong and everything else, and when he brought her down here, I don't know what happened, but the bride disappeared and poor Carlo went back without the bride. She, when she ^{saw} say him she...."Nothing doing." She went back with the one she met on the boat.

(FR) Really?

(NEL) Yeh, what are you talking about Rose Brank?

(ROSE) Well, I know that a Rose Brank ...a...a..you know she was one that was sent for and her husband was a

(NEL) She was pretty.

(ROSE) She was a beautiful woman and her husband was about,

I guess maybe, thirty or forty years older than her. But he kept

*This name should be corrected as Carlo Bocchino .

sending these pictures of when he was younger. (Much laughter)
 And when she came over, when he went up to meet her, she didn't want to marry him. So she was running away and they caught her and brought her back. And they made her marry this po - this old man. He was terrible. He looked like her father.

(NEL) Oh, always looked like her father.

(ROSE) But she cheated on him all her life. (Laughter)

(NEL) Everybody was sorry that he... that a he died so old because.... (Laughter)

(ROSE) By the time he died, she was old too.

(FR) Oh, my gosh.

(NEL) Uh huh.

(ROSE) But that was, but that's the kind of thing they used to do. See, they'd send these pictures of when they were younger.

(FR) Yes.

(ROSE) Or, or some and even the, they'd send movie actresses' pictures and movie actors' pictures that would have nothing to do with the case. With these mail order marriages.

(FR) Then a, then the life of the a women in this country - really, when they first came - what were their daily activities?

(ROSE) They kept house and a, oh, they, they

(NEL) Of course everything was done by hand. They didn't have the conveniences they have today.

(ROSE) Yeh, they worked hard. They worked hard. They washed by hand. They kept their homes clean. They raised their children and a.....

(NEL) What time is it Francis, please?

(FR) It's a eight thirty-five.

(NEL) That's all right. I have to wait for nine o'clock. I have to ...is it nine o'clock or ten? I have to put a program on for Mary. David Suskind. You can see it too. (Chuckles)

(ROSE) But they...a...

(NEL) I, I ...if he doesn't have it on, we won't watch it.

(ROSE) Well, they were, they were in general a happy lot.

(NEL) Yeh, I think so.

(ROSE) And a, and a they were good women - good, good living women who raised their families and kept them clean, well-fed on what they had.

(NEL) Well, a lot of them had a star boarder. (Laughter)

(FR) Now when the Italians, I'm speaking of the men, when they were not working, how did they entertain themselves?

(ROSE) Oh gosh.

(NEL) Telling stories. (Laughs)

(ROSE) Telling stories. Well, they played cards a lot.

(NEL) Oh my, played cards a lot.

(FR) Where would they play cards?

(NEL) On the kitchen table.

(ROSE) Well a, on the kitchen table, out on the street when it was warm.

(NEL) On the kitchen table, they just played cards.

(ROSE) And they had, they always made their own wine. They had a glass of their own wine and played cards; but a, but a the biggest a..a..way they entertained themselves was sit around talking.

(FR) Uh huh. In other words the art of conversation was pretty well-developed.

(ROSE) Yeh, that's right.

(NEL) Good gosh!

(FR) Where - did they go any place to spend their leisure time? For example today people go to the beach, they go to the mountains, and so forth. Did they ever go anywhere, even for a day trip?

(ROSE) Only to the club.

(NEL) Well, we had picnics two or three times a year.

(ROSE) Well, they had picnics, yeh.

(FR) Where were the picnics held?

(NEL) Well, one - Brandywine Springs, one...

(ROSE) (Laughs)

(NEL) And on St. Anthony's Day -you're going to laugh, you're going to laugh- they used to have a big picnic there on Fifth and duPont.

(ROSE) The brewery yard. They, they used to pack their lunch and go up there.

(NEL) Go up there.

(ROSE) And a....

(NEL) And we used to have a band and they had the tables, they had the tables there and...a... It was so close to home it seemed simple to pack a basket to go eat it up there, but that's where we went and that was it and...a...a.. We'd stay there all day, eating sandwiches and a....

(ROSE) Listening to the band.

(NEL) Sandwiches, it wasn't sandwiches. It was chicken or whatever you had, you know, and all.

(FR) Did the a.... did the community ever bring in any stage productions of any sort...a...a...musical shows or a....

(ROSE) Well, they had these a.....

(FR) Dramas or anything of this sort?

(NEL) I told you that my Uncle Charlie when he started he was, he was a nut for a..a..

(ROSE) The theater.

(NEL) The theater. So I don't know where you used to find these busy ladies(?) and they used to come down here and do both shows.

They were good shows and I told you one time he had that ----
----- . And I often think about her when she became a grand opera
star, and I said, "Can you imagine that?"

(ROSE) Then there was the movie, you know.

(NEL) Oh, and then the movies.

(ROSE) My father had the first movie machine, but he lost
a lot on it. And then Corletta set up the first movie house.

(FR) Where, where did they have this first movie house?

(ROSE) Well, a...

(NEL) At Fourth, at Sons of Columbus.

(ROSE) Well, my father had the first movie machine. He was
going to put it in a....where the Neighborhood House is now cause
that was his pet goal; but when a...then that didn't go over, but
a Corletta did have the first successful movie where a, where a
the Sons of Columbus is. That was the Broadway Theater.

(FR) How did the Italians behave a in the a - when they
had a stage play or.....

(NEL) They thoroughly enjoyed it.

(ROSE) Yeh, they

(NEL) They thoroughly enjoyed it!

(ROSE) They clapped or booed.

(NEL) They even brought a case (?) for the star. I'm...

(FR) Really?

(ROSE) (Laughs)

(NEL) They lived right up there with the people.

(FR) Really? They really participated openly whenever
they were watching?

(NEL) They really enjoyed it. I'm not kidding you it
was really something to see.

(FR) If they, if they had a, a production they did like,

do you recall of their ever not liking something they saw?

(NEL) Che porcheria?

(FR) Is that all? Did they ever throw anything?

(NEL) Oh no!

(FR) They never threw vegetables or anything?

(NEL) No, no.

(ROSE) No.

(FR) I was wondering because in Italy even today if they go to an opera and they don't like what's going on, they will not permit the show to proceed.

(NEL) No.

(ROSE) No, they weren't ever like that.

(FR) They weren't like that. In, in other words the ignorant Italian in those days was much better behaved than the intelligent Italian of today even then.

(ROSE) Well, they were.....

(NEL) They would just....

(ROSE) They like most everything though because, you know,

(NEL) You know, one time there was a...a..one...they were having this show, and she came down two or three times in succession to star, you know. And she was kind of plump and she was oh kicking her feet up there and all. And this old Mr. Borelli, he's dead now, you know the old man, oh he took a fancy ^{to her}. So he'd come sit up front, you know, and he had this great big bunch of flowers; and when she'd come out, he'd hand them to her. (Laughter) Well, everybody just roared. (Laughter) He was so old.

(FR) When she came out on the stage to perform, he'd walk up?

(NEL) No, after she got done performing, he'd hand her the flowers. Everybody just roared because he, he could hardly make it. (More laughter) Oh darn!

(FR) Now you mentioned that there were some Italian clubs, the Democratic Club?

(ROSE) Uh huh.

(NEL) Uh huh.

(FR) The Republican Club and so forth?

(NEL) St. Michael's, wasn't it, St. Michaels?

(ROSE) St. Michael's.

(NEL) What was the other one, do you remember? St. Anthony's always been St. Anthony's but not St. Anthony's up church.

(ROSE) No, no.

(NEL) A...a...then there was a Garibaldi.

(ROSE) There were two.

(NEL) My father belonged to the Garibaldi.

(ROSE) There were different societies, you know, and they had bands, you know, orchestras and bands.

(NEL) I'll tell you one of my very first....

(ROSE) ~~She~~ played in the band.

(NEL) Recollections.....my father belonged to the Garibaldi Society.

(FR) About how long ago was this, could you give me an approximate.....

(NEL) I wouldn'tby brother John was about six years old so that makes mewould make me about seven. That must have been about nineteen hundred and one. And my father, I can remember him so well, that he had the a red thing and all. And he was so proud and my brother John he had a suit modeled for him. And my father came down Ninth Street. We lived on Ninth Street and she wasn't born yet. And he, I can remember it because...a...you say how do you remember - I remember it, I don't know. But anyhow my bro....my father came down on a...a...a..horse and they had these

horses and that's how they marched in the parade. They had a parade on a.....

(FR) They all had red shirts.

(NEL) Red shirts.

(FR) Red.

(NEL) And my brother John had red shirts and he had something white here. It must have been white frogs or something. He was a little thing like that.

(ROSE) (Laughs)

(NEL) I'll never forget - course they didn't take pictures like that in...in those days like now. And another and my.....and that and there was a few years later, I, I should remember seeing my father come in. I screamed because he had only one-half a mustache...a...his...the one he voted for lost and he said if he would lose, he would cut off one-half his mustache and he-----.

(FR) He had one-half a mustache. What was the function of these clubs? Were they purely social...a...clubs?

(ROSE) Yes.

(NEL) Purely social. I don't think.....

(ROSE) Uh, till then in 1923 they go the beneficial societies.

(NEL) Yeh, I don't think they were benficial.

(FR) They were just social.

(ROSE) No.

(FR) Just social clubs. Uh, ex....I'm going to take a long jump now from then and go to Prohibition.

(NEL) Oh gosh.

(FR) How did Prohibition affect the Italian community?

(ROSE) Terrible! They didn't accept it.

(NEL) Terrible!

(FR) It was really disastrous and they did not accept it.

(ROSE) They wouldn't accept it.

(FR) And how did they demonstrate this refusal to accept.

(ROSE) Well, they just kept on making their wine which was against the law.

(NEL) There wasn't much else you could do, and of course everybody sold it.

(ROSE) Of course there.....some of the people sold it. They didn't see anything wrong in it. Of course a lot didn't. The bulk of the people didn't, but I'll say full ten percent did.

(NEL) Oh my, yes.

(ROSE) And a, and a that of course was disastrous.

(FR) In what way was it disastrous?

(ROSE) Well, because you see, I mean that, that was against the law.

(FR) Right.

(ROSE) Now you couldn't make them, some of these understand that it was against the law that, that especially since....well ... a...St. Anthony's was built by them and a Father Tucker, of course, was very much against Prohibition as were a lot of other people too, you know. They thought it was an unjust law and ...a...so ..a....I mean the, the fact that they....you know....like somemost of the people in the community were - I will say were - selling this a wine on a very small scale...and...a really I mean it was against the law and it was wrong, but they weren't really getting rich on it or doing anything that was terribly wrong. But then, then you had this fringe element, you know, who was going into bootlegging in a big, big way and in our own neighborhood. You know now where Fierro's is?

(FR) Yes.

(NEL) That was terrible.

(ROSE) That was the Republican Club. That was an awful place. That was called the Hotcha Club and it was one of the worst ...a... bootlegging places in the city.

(NEL) And, of course, you remember the Borecca boy went to jail.

(ROSE) The Boracca boy went to jail because.....

(NEL) He took a rap for somebody because they....

(ROSE) On account of Prohibition... they all....Prohibition officers were there all the time, you see.

(NEL) And he took the rap for somebody I.....

(ROSE) And then there were these young boys that, you know, got involved in it and all, you know.

(NEL) These -----

(ROSE) I think it was terrible. It was terrible. It was an awful time.

(FR) You say some were - were any of the a people from a the Italian community involved in this hijacking and so forth?

(NEL) Well.....

(ROSE) Some of them, yeh.

(FR) Some of them were.

(ROSE) Some of them.

(NEL) Yeh.

(FR) A....how bad did it really get...a..?

(NEL) It got so bad that people were afraid to go out on the street, Francis.

(ROSE) See, because they weren't our people that came in the neighborhood. They were people from all over the city.

(NEL) The people from the East Side and....

(ROSE) That would come out here. See from the East Side. I mean not especially Italians. People they would just come out

in the neighborhood to get liquor, see. So it became, from being a nice, good neighborhood to live in....

(NEL) You'd see these drunks all over the place.

(ROSE) You'd see these drunks and people, you know, and it was terribly frightening.

(NEL) Awful! People were afraid - and I'm not kidding - people were really afraid .

(ROSE) It was an awful time.

(FR) In other words Prohibition certainly did have a tremendous impact on the Italian community.

(ROSE & NEL) Yeh, yeh, it did.

(FR) And it was not a good effect. I mean it was completely negative.

(ROSE & NEL) No, no.

(ROSE) It was a terrible thing.

(FR) In every way.

(ROSE) It was a terrible, terrible time.

(FR) All right now, I want to go back a little bit more and start on another aspect a...of..a..life in the community. And the thing I want to ask - we've hit on this already - but what were the educational opportunities for Italians, now not only for the immigrants but also for their children?

(ROSE) Well, they could go as far as....

(NEL) They could go as far as they went. Now people, people didn't - now our family, I'll tell you this much - our family and the Fidance's were two of the first families who took, who sent their children to school. The Fidance's sent their children to school.

(ROSE) Well, the DeLuca's did, too.

(NEL) And the DeLuca's sent their children to school and

our....we andour family sent their children to school but a lot of families didn't send their children to school.

(ROSE) Not to high school. They sent them as far as.....

(NEL) No, they sent them as far as.....

(ROSE) They sent them as far as they had to go which was fourteen years old.

(NEL) Fourteen years old and they put them in a factory.

(FR) I see...well...a

(ROSE) But if you wanted to persist, you know.....

(NEL) Nothing could stop you.

(ROSE) You could go and, and by making sacrifices and everything a lot of them got their children into school.

(FR) Why did the parents take the children out of school and send them to work, because they needed the money?

(ROSE) Economic reasons, mostly economic.

(FR) What was their attitude in general towards education? Did they feel it was important? Did they feel that they should get as much as possible?

(NEL) I don't....

(ROSE) Well, I don't think they thought too much about it like as far as the girls were concerned they thought they'd get married and they wouldn't need it, you know, passed a certain point.

(NEL) But a now you take for instance Dr. Fidance, he became a doctor. Now you know he died and he was in his eighties. Now you know that's pretty far back.

(ROSE) Far back.

(FR) Yes, but the attitude in general towards education was that it wasn't that important really.

(ROSE) Not that important, no.

(NEL) But to a.... but now like I say there were a few fami-

lies who thought that it really was important.

(FR) But by in large...a...I suppose this was the result of their not having too much education themselves.

(ROSE) Themselves.

(NEL) Probably, probably.

(FR) Maybe these other people that they felt that it wasn't that important to a.....

(ROSE) Important.

(FR) To have a lot of education. How far did you go with your education?

(ROSE) High school.

(FR) You went as far as high school. You never went to college or anything like that?

(NEL) I went to Goldey College. I graduated from Goldey's.

(FR) I see. And a we've already discussed the attitudes of the other pupils in school towards you as an Italian. Was it an oddity ...a...I guess it was an oddity -----.

(ROSE) I was the only one in my class.

(FR) In other words you just didn't see too many Italians in high school or -----

(NEL) There were quite a few Italians when I went to a Goldey's - not quite a few.

(ROSE) I mean Goldey's but.....

(NEL) In Goldey's there were three or four.

(ROSE) But in ...a....

(NEL) But in high school there was only Rose Milano - that's all.

(FR) You say there were three or four. There were quite a few? About how many?

(NEL) Dominic DiSabatino was one. No, there was only three

or four in Goldey's. That's all. I can't remember the other.

(FR) Did you remember approximately how many students were in the school at that time?

(NEL) Oh, a couple a.... little over a hundred. That's all.

(FR) A little over a hundred and there were about a maybe three or four Italians.

(NEL) Three or four Italians.

(FR) In other words, not too many.

(NEL) No.

(FR) And a how were you generally treated when you were in Goldey's ...a College?

(NEL) Fine. I wasn't treated a any different from any other student.

(FR) In other words you didn't run into the same sort of prejudice that you were going through high school?

(NEL) No, no, I didn't. No, I didn't.

(FR) In other words you had perhaps a better a well more educated people and.....

(NEL) They were - are. They still speak to me after so many years. If you meet someone, they ... I used to meet a young man in..a...in the A&P that Mr. Willis.

(ROSE) Uh huh.

(NEL) They, they were a little different, you know, and of course at at high school the ones that were the worse - a man named Walter Middleton and what was the name? What did I tell you the name of that ...a...drug store fellow was? He was terrible. They used to have a drug store on a..on Front and Union. And they were the two that made my life miserable when I went to school. That's all. A....otherwise...the girls, they were really nice, except,

you know...a....I....

(FR) If you were to pick up anyone segment of the community which the greatest pressure came on the Italians, what a part of the community?

(NEL) Forty Acres.

(FR) Forty Acres?

(ROSE) The Irish. (Chuckles)

(NEL) Forty Acres. I thought that was the worst.

(ROSE) That was.

(NEL) The very worst - around St. Ann's.

(ROSE) That's right.

(Nel) We went to St. Ann's once, me, my sister Annie, Jenny Dougherty, Jenny Terracottis and a...a... several other girls. So we didn't know about Sunday School. My mother said to me, "You ought to try to go to Sunday School," and all this, that and the other. And they told us, they told us they had Sunday School at St. Ann's. So we went in. So we went in and the nuns asked us something, you know, and they said, "How did they treat God, Jesus?" and this, that and the other. "Well, they threw stones and"..... Everybody started to laugh. So we never went any more. They, they were terrible. And when we went out, they all laughed at us. They laughed at us till, till we got home. That's the truth. That's, that's the truth about that. That was the worst section of the city. You used.....

(ROSE) Yeh.

(NEL) To avoid that like the plague.

(FR) All right now, I want to change the topic again and a I've got some general questions. Well really a little more specific than general. What was the atmosphere of the Italian community preceding, during, and right after World War One? What was the general atmosphere just before World War One, before the United States entered it? Now before the United States entered it, Italy was already

in the war. War was already going on in Europe. It had been going on for some time. Now a....what was the general attitude here? Were there many Italians who went back to Italy to fight in the Italian army?

(ROSE) No.

(FR) There were some, however, that did.

(NEL) There were some, but they had to.

(ROSE) There were a few but they had to. See, yeh.

(FR) They had to?

(NEL) Well, they had to because they weren't citizens and they were called, and of course....a....a...they could have gone in the American army but some of them felt as though they wanted to go back with their own army. Some of them did.

(FR) I see. Did the Italian government pay their way back to Italy?

(NEL) That I don't know.

(ROSE) I don't know either.

(NEL) I don't know.

(FR) Uh, well, during World War One after the United States got in it, what was the attitude in the Italian community? How did the Italians react to the American entry into World War One?

(NEL) They, they, the young, the young people just went, I mean....

(FR) Did they, did they go voluntarily?

(NEL) Voluntarily, yeh.

(ROSE) My brother volunteered.

(NEL) They all volun.....they all went in voluntarily.

Oh, yeah.

(FR) But was the spirit like....were they....?

(NEL) Well, I'll tell you if you remember...(I'm not going)*..

*(said aside)

(ROSE) You can't.....

(NEL) You see at that time that ...a...flu. Wasn't that time true also the time of the

(ROSE) Yeh.

(NEL) See, every, it was the time of the flu, too; and everything was awful. It was an awful time, awful period. People didn'tpeople were sad about everything, you know. And everybody was nobody was really...a...they didn't find time to find fault with anybody. I don't..... (Tape is turned)

(FR) You said there was a big.....

(ROSE) Yeh, and you had, you had a lot of these first generation ...a...Americans that were...a...you know...that were...a...very enthused and very patriotic like my brother and all his buddies and all. They were anxious to get in there. They were young, you know, like seventeen, eighteen and ...a...they went. They didn't wait for the draft. I...I...a ...don't know how he, he....

(NEL) Didn't go in the war.

(ROSE) No, because he couldn't go.

(NEL) But ----- Fidance, he died in the war.

(ROSE) Yeh.

(NEL) And he was one of, one of the first ones to die.

(ROSE) Died, see because.....

(NEL) He was very young.

(ROSE) They were, they were a oh, they were quite anxious to go.

(FR) I see.

(ROSE) And they didn't hold back.

(FR) What was it like right after the war when they started to come home?

(ROSE) Well.....

(NEL) I think everybody was jubilant.

(ROSE) Everybody was wild.

(NEL) Everybody was so happy that the war was over that
..a....

(ROSE) Over....

(NEL) I think it was, I think everybody felt as though they
were all brothers and sisters again.

(ROSE) (Laughs)

(FR) I see.

(ROSE) I tell you. I tell you. I just don't remember such,
I don't remember such a period of happiness in my life.

(FR) Now we've already spoken of the status of the Italian
in Wilmington in that he enjoyed something less than second class
citizenship. Were these men who just finished fighting a war, were
they willing to accept the status that they accepted without ques-
tion before..a..the war? Were they still willing to accept this?
Were they still willing

(NEL) Well, I don't know that they were treated that way
or not.

(ROSE) No, they weren't because.....

(FR) In other words the whole attitude, the whole attitude
changed.

(ROSE) The whole attitude changed.

(NEL) They whole attitude changed, then see then it seemed
like they were in clubs, in the in legions.

(ROSE) They were in veterans' groups.

(NEL) In the veterans' ad...in the verterans and they had
these clubs and everything else. Then the whole thing, the whole
thing change.

(ROSE) The whole, yeh, that was when it started changing a lot.

(NEL) The whole thing changed.

(ROSE) And like in around 1920 or so.....

(NEL) Yeh, you couldn't tell one..a..from the other then.
You know what I mean, Francis.

(FR) Yes, however, up to this point you still pretty much had this ...a...a... Italians marrying Italians and not marrying Irish or a Polish.

(ROSE) Yeh..a...

(FR) You had very, very little of that.

(NEL) Very little of that, but then after that why everything changed, everything changed.

(FR) What occurred in the Italian community during Mussolini's rise to power? How was this accepted here? What was the reaction here?

(ROSE) Oh...

(NEL) Oh well, in the beginning they were all jubilant.

(ROSE) They all liked.....

(NEL) Because everybody thought it was wonderful, you know, and everybody thoughtgoodness...a...then well....I....well, Rose can tell you.

(ROSE) Every place you went they sang, you know "Facetta Nera" you know the Fascist ----- --, gave the Fascist salute.

(Laughs)

(NEL) But then afterwards well

(ROSE) And they gave their gold rings or you know their rings like a....he had asked the woman to give their rings and then they'd get this lead pan back.

(FR) Yes, they'd give their wedding rings and get a piece of iron back.

(ROSE) And oh, they were all for that. They were all for the whole thing because he was, he seemed to be, I mean from what

we heard to be doing great things. He was, he made compulsory education that was the first thing.

(NEL) And he made those roads.

(ROSE) Yeh, and he made those roads. Then he drained the Pontine Marshes, and you'd hear all these wonderful things. Then he signed the Vatican Treaty, you know. That really straightened things up. And then, you know, you'd hear all these wonderful things.

(FR) And then they'd see pictures of him flexing his muscles and here was a real superman.

(ROSE) Yeh, yeh and Italy was getting to be and everybody was real proud of Italy because it was getting put on the map. And it wasn't a, wasn't a, it wasn't despised any more and everything like that. And so they were all proud.

(NEL) Then look what happened.

(ROSE) Then what? Then, then it got defeated but a....

(FR) Is there any resemblance today to the Italian community as you knew it as a child? Is there any resemblance what so ever?

(ROSE) No, it's all gone.(slowly, sadly)

(FR) It's all gone. There's, there's no resemblance.. It seems to be a..a..time in history that is now completely lost.

(ROSE) It's gone. It's a time and space that's gone. I mean as we knew it. Isn't it? It's all gone.

(FR) O.K. now, in retrospect can you describe definite periods of time during which marked changes took place in the Italian community, in the community in general in so far as its relationship to the Italian community is concerned?

(ROSE) Well, I'd say the biggest change took place when St. Anthony's was built. That was the biggest step forward that ever happened in a, in the community of Wilmington and that was really I would say the big turning point from....

(NEL) I think it gave the Italians stature.

(ROSE) Yes, I think they had stature.

(NEL) When Father Tucker built St. Anthony's Church, it gave them stature. It made them hold their heads up high. We have our Church! Because first they had to go beg at St. Thomas's to do this. They had to go beg....if a wedding wasn't just right - if, if this wasn't just right, if that other one wasn't just right. They never got, they never got treated right.

(ROSE) And then they had a spokesman, you see, in Father Tucker.

(NEL) Yeh, spokesman because....

(ROSE) Who really defended them and, and, you know, always preached this doctrine of, of being proud of your heritage which of course had been, we...we...had been told this but still at the same time you almost thought as though there was something to be ashamed of there because nobody else believed it, you see.

(NEL) Of course, Father Tucker....he a.....whether he meant it or not, he always went to bat for you.

(ROSE) Yes.

(NEL) You see now, like for instance, somebody would die and ...a...if...if....they wanted....they wouldn't bury them if they weren't positive that he had had, had made his Easter duty. Well, now how do you know that he didn't make, make his Easter duty? I mean to say this man is dead. He can't ask you? Just because he didn't go to receive the last sacrament? He had a heart attack and he died. How do you know? Give him the benefit of the doubt. He's been a good man. Well, Jenny Corletta comes up with that every day now. As far as St. Anthony's, they'd give you the benefit of the doubt. I mean to say well, he's been a good man all his life and at St. An...St. Anthony's you, you could hold up your head up high

and you can go there, you can tell them your troubles cause that's your church.

(ROSE) I think that was the biggest.....

(NEL) I think that's what Father Tucker did for the Italians and we should never forget it. Should never, never, never and he was the one who made the first holy name. Before that we never had a holy name.

(ROSE) We couldn't belong to the others.

(FR) In other words he gave a, a sense of belonging really. He gave you something that was theirs. They belonged to something and they had something that belonged to them.

(ROSE) Yeh, right. Something to them.

(NEL) Now the other people go to St. Ann's, you know.

(FR) Yes.

(ROSE) But I think that was, I think that the big turning point all for everything.

(FR) Do you ever feel a longing for a return to - I say this in quotes - "the good old days?"

(NEL) Well, every once in a while.

(ROSE) Every once in a while.

(NEL) You feel like you'd like to hear - bet he'd like to hear Vera tell one of those ghost stories. (Much laughter)

(ROSE) Or else go up and walk along Sixth Street and smell everybody's sauce cooking on a Sunday morning. That's something you'll never find again.

(NEL) You know, you know there was, there was coal like and we had a coal stove and Benny - he wasn't married then - he lived, he lived in our house for a long time.

(FR) Benny, who's Benny?

(NEL) Benny Gazzillo. <

(FR) Oh yeh.

(NEL) And he would be....sit around there, you know, and he would be telling these stories. And he would be telling a story.

(ROSE) "Poma Rossa"

(NEL) About this apple....she....what's the name?

(ROSE) Snow White and Rose Red.

(NEL) Snow White and Rose Red, you know. "This ie Louis and this ie....." (Mimics story teller)

(ROSE) But he'd take his pipe out of his mouth and spit, "Pffft!" Pffft!" This ie Louie, pffft, pffft. This is....."

(Much laughter) It didn't even make sense. (Laughter)

(NEL) It was....they use to holler, "Oh hurry up, Benny, hurry up. Oh well now, tell that little fairy tale."

(FR) Uh huh.

(NEL) But, you know, oftentime you get nostalgic for those things.

(FR) Yes, you know, I asked my uncle the same question about the good old days and I said, "What do you think about people who talk about the 'good old days?'" He says, "They're liars." He says, "The 'good old days' were not good." He says, "They were bad old days."

(NEL) No.

(ROSE) Well, there were a lot that were good too.

(FR) I suppose it depends upon an individual's a.....experiences and....a pretty much.

(ROSE & NEL) Yeh, yeh.

(ROSE) They were happy times.

(NEL) We oftentimes will sit and think about a lot of things that happened...a..now ..a...like for instance....(chuckles)a... so many things I - there was - who, who a wanted to go with me for

instance, you know. And he came and lived in our house and I thought that he was the really and truthfully the worst insult that could have happened, you know. I thought, you know, because everybody had a little boarder or something, you know. So I came down one morning. You weren't allowed to come down unless you said good morning, you know. So I said, "I have to go downstairs and I have to say good morning to that man. How to get out of it?" So I came down and I said, "Good Morning! "Buon giorno a tuttoquanto sultanto a ^{tomaso.}" (Laughter) And my grandmother says, "Upstairs! Upstairs!" Upstairs I go. So I come down again and I says, "Good Morning to everybody." "Tomaso" So she says, "Upstairs!" So I came down. I had to say it, you know. And I says, "Well, if he's here tonight, I won't come home." Oh, they were going to kill me. They were going to kill me. But that's the way it was, you know. You had to...to...a Another time I sat on a corner of a table, you know. And you weren't allowed to sit on a table. That was a....I don't know what it..... I guess it was some kind of a sin. So my father comes out of the store and sees me on the table and he goes back and I thought why's he going back. When he comes back with this knife and I look at him and he says, "Get off that table." (Laughter) I says, "You wouldn't have stabbed me, Pa?" He says, "Yes, I would have." He says, "That's a - we eat on that table and you want to sit on it?" Oh my! I mean all those things come back to you. But I can remember my mother so patient, patching stockings, you know.

(FR) Yes.

(NEL) She would sit there by the hours, patching those stockings. How in the heck she can be so patient I'd say to myself. I'd throw them away. She wouldn't.

(ROSE) No, they wouldn't throw them. And my brother'd bring home these little birds.

(NEL) Ohhhhhh.

(ROSE) Reed(?) birds. I think she'd clean them for three or four hours. Clean all those birds. Every last feather'd be off those birds. But that's the way they were because of, you know, they were just - that's the way they spent their time, just a.....

(NEL) He'd like to fish, he'd like to fish. One day he brought home all these little fish. Oh my, little weenie fishes. So he says, "Mom, you don't clean these fish. You just cook them like that." So he put the fish in the pan. She put the fish in the pan. She was cooking them. Florence came in and took - Florence or Rose or somebody took two or three little fish. "Who's eating my fish? I don't want them any more." Threw them all out. (Laughter) Oh my.

(ROSE) Oh yeh. He was great. When he went frogging, he'd put them in the bathtub. You didn't know what morning you'd get up and find the bathtub full of frogs..... Oh well.