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Interview with Mr. Anthony A. Covelli, 1615 Chestnut Street, Wilmington, Delaware, April 25, 1969, by Francis J. fierro. Mr. Covelli is an Italian immigrant.

Q This is an interview with Mr. Anthony Covelli, 1615 Chestnut Street, in Wilmington, Delaware. Mr. Covelli, where were you born?

A Italy.

Q In Italy. Where in Italy where you born?

A North Italy, you know. Abruzzi.

Q In north Italy? In Abruzzi. What part of Abruzzi?

A Well, we were a little close to the Adriatic Sea, town it was named Castel'alto.

Q Castel'alto. Let me see if I can spell this--C-a-s-t-e-l, with an apostrophe, a-l-t-o?

A Yeah.

Q That's how you spell it? O.K.

A See, castel is a little town on top of the hill, alto mean high, that's what it is.

Q In other words, high castle.

A High castle, that's it. And then we never seemed like part of the town, see, closer than any town, but we live outside of town.

Q In other words, you lived on the outskirts of town, you didn't live right in the middle of town.

A No, no, no, no. See, like Wilmington, we live in the suburbs, we had a farm.

Q Uh huh. In other words, you lived on a farm right outside of town. Well, was your house right on the farm that you worked?

A Yeah. I come over to this country because we done good on the farm, we work hard, but we make good living, you know. Then sometime the dry weather, same like the farms in this country, maybe too--maybe sometime too much rain, anything like that, you know, destroyed everything.

Q In other words, too much rain or not enough rain, the storms . . .

A Yeah, the storm . . . destroyed everything. Sometime maybe the crop would come good like that, no? We'd raise a lot of stuff like that, you know. We make good living, we had everything. We sell the stuff. Nobody had to buy, we sell it. We had enough for the family--I had a--we was nine children

and a father and mother in my house.

Q There were nine children in your family.

A Yeah. I'm the second boy. My mother had nine children.

Q I see. What year were you born?

A 1895.

Q In 1895?

A Yes, on January the 19th.

Q Tell me, your father, then, was a farmer in Italy.

A Yes.

Q That's it, and of course you worked on the farm, you were the second child, and . . .

A Oh yeah, sure, well, I was a boy, you know--I was 16 years old when I came to this country. I'd do it again.

Q Did you go to school in Italy at all?

A No.

Q You didn't go to school at all?

A I don't go to school at all. I don't know what school look like, none of 'em over there. The people--you know what I mean, the people, them days, the people who lived close and inside the town, you're going to school. Not forced to, they want to go. But on a farm, everybody got a lot of work on the farm and they know that I was a boy but we'd do light jobs to help the father, see. That's the reason I didn't have no school at all. And when I came to this country, I was the age of 16 or 17, I go to night school over here, I learn a little bit, you know, we do--I do what I can, see. Then 1922 I become naturalized.

Q Well, tell me, why did you come to the United States?

A Well, I come to the United States to make better home, a better living.

Q Did you come by yourself?

A I had my cousin's husband. I had to come with him because I'm underage, see. Then I had a cousin, first cousin, in New Castle--he's supposed to keep me for five years.

Q In other words, he signed an agreement saying that he would keep you for five years.

A Yeah. I didn't have no job because I was young and like that. [Inaudible] . . . you can't buy a job in those days.

- Q But whatever made you think about coming to the United States?
- A Oh, you know, I was of age everybody started coming to this country, you know . . .
- Q Oh, in other words, everybody in the town where you were living was coming to the United States.
- A Yeah, a lot of people started coming.
- Q And you thought you'd come too.
- A And then they was talking about the war . . . the First World War, you know. My brother agreed to go you know [inaudible] . . . I escape that war. And then trouble again, so that's the reason I come to this country.
- Q Well, tell me, how did you leave Abruzzi to come to the United States? Did you have to go someplace to catch a train first then go to a port somewhere?
- A No, we had a train close to us.
- Q You had a train real close?
- A Yeah, he come from Naples. We catch a boat in Naples. I leave at night, about 4:00, I get to Naples--we traveled all night, it's about a couple of hundred miles, and we get to Naples I say about 4:00 in the morning. About two days in Naples, then get everything and like that, you know, clothes and name and like that, you know, and next day we get the boat to this country.
- Q I see. Now, do you remember the name of the ship?
- A Alcona.
- Q Alcona? A-l-c-o-n-a? Is that an Italian ship?
- A That's an Italian ship. The one the Austrians sunk in the World War.
- Q It was sunk during the First World War by Austrians. Uh huh. When you came to the United States aboard this ship, were there mostly Italian people on it?
- A Well, there was some people like maybe--what's the name--Spanish, Portuguese, [inaudible], there was a few of 'em. Lot of Italian.
- Q Did the ship come straight to the United States or did it stop anywhere?
- A No, just first stop in New York.
- Q It didn't stop over, didn't stop in Gibraltar or anyplace?
- A No, no.
- Q It came straight from Naples right straight to New York.

- A To New York. It take us 11 days to get to New York. And then we stay one day in New York and then we left New York, we come to Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia.
- Q Tell me, what were the conditions aboard ship like?
- A Oh, they was good.
- Q The conditions were good?
- A Oh, yeah, it was a brand-new ship. I think the ship was about five or six years old, it was a brand-new ship.
- Q And then--good food?
- A Oh, yeah.
- Q Did they have you in cabins?
- A It wasn't like now--we gotta get a dish like that, we gotta eat ourself in [inaudible] you know.
- Q Oh, in other words, you stayed in one big room, like a lot of men were in there. And when it was time to go to dinner, one man would go and get the potful for about five or six other people and you shared it?
- A Yeah, there was a big line. Sometime you gotta wait about a half hour to get to that.
- Q Uh huh. But still the food was pretty good.
- A Oh, yeah, the food was good. No like today, you know.
- Q Tell me, how were you met in New York? When the ship pulled into New York, what happened to you?
- A That surprised me. You know I was surprised when I saw--the first time I saw colored people, New York. On top of the ship . . . we stayed all day in there . . .
- Q You stayed all day aboard ship.
- A On top of the ship, and we saw the colored people down on [inaudible] . . . and boy, I was scared, myself. That's the first time I saw 'em.
- Q You had never seen any colored people.
- A I'd never seen any--never saw 'em.
- Q That's the first time you'd ever seen them.
- A No. I heard there was a colored man over in this country, but I never see any.

- Q You never saw any. That was the first time you'd ever seen any, then. What else happened in New York when you landed in New York?
- A Well, New York was just--they don't ask nothing of us, just take all the stuff that get off at New York, all the people in New York, and [inaudible] they come to Philadelphia.
- Q Oh, in other words, you stayed aboard ship and the ship went to Philadelphia.
- A Yeah the same ship, we stayed right on top of the ship, yeah.
- Q Oh, you stayed on the ship and the ship went--oh, I see.
- A See, the people that come to New York, they get off in New York. The people coming to Pennsylvania or part of Delaware over here, Maryland, they come over here.
- Q Yes, you came to Philadelphia. O.K., when you landed in Philadelphia, did you have any of your friends or your relatives meet you?
- A Oh, yeah, my cousin come to see me.
- Q Your cousin came there to pick you up.
- A Oh, yeah, sure, right in the gate.
- Q Uh huh. Did you have any trouble leaving the port, going through customs or anything?
- A No, no, no.
- Q Now, when you met your cousin, where did your cousin live?
- A He was living in New Castle.
- Q He lived in New Castle. Did you come down to New Castle with him?
- A Yeah, I stayed with him--oh, pretty near five, six year or more.
- Q Was he married?
- A Oh, yeah, yeah, had children.
- Q He was married and had children. Tell me, when you first got here, you say you were 17 years old. Were you able to find a job right away?
- A No, no. See, I get here about the 11th of October. Then the first job I find--a fellow here--then there was nothing, 1914--and some friend of mine was working the railroad and they had a lot of big gang--he had over 100 men there, what was called a [sounds like "Fortner"] gang . . .
- Q A what kind?
- A Fortner [?] gang, be a lot of people, you know, big gang, you know.

Q A Fortner gang?

A Yeah, Fortner gang. They came over and worked the train, you know, worked in a lot of different place like that.

Q Oh, you were in one of these gangs.

A Yeah, just for a while. Then one other boss, one friend of mine, he was a boss in there, and he told the big boss, he says, "I got a friend of mine, a neighbor . . . we want to get him a job." "How old is he?" "Well, 17, 18 [inaudible]." Then he says, "I don't know. That's a heavy job for a boy like that. We can't find a job like that--give him a job as a water boy." So I work at a job like that--I don't know, not quite year, I guess.

Q You were a water boy there for about a year with this Fortner gang.

A Yeah [inaudible] . . . they were laying off a lot of people, they laid off me, too. Then he called me again. Off and on like that, you know what I mean. You no have no steady job in them days.

Q How was it when you did work there, did they treat you all right?

A Oh yeah, sure.

Q In this gang, were they mostly all Italians?

A Italians, any kind . . . the parts of town . . . Europe, you know--Sicily, Calabrise [sp], Naples, Abruzzi . . .

Q But they were all Italians.

A Oh yeah, in those days, all of 'em. Sure.

Q Oh, then you didn't have anybody but Italians on the gang.

A That's all. Because he got them from places like that, they can't talk English like that, you know. So that's the reason we try to get a job on that. And then another thing, too. We can't get in the plant a good job like that, you know, 'cause we were Italian like that, you know, and they--the Italian people they not treated very good.

Q They didn't treat Italians very good. Now, you couldn't get a better job.

A No, couldn't get no better job, no. We try to get--I don't blame him in one way because he can't talk to 'em, like that you know? They try to get the job, but they ask you to do something like that, you want to get 'em to do something, he don't understand what he gonna do. You lost the time like that, you know? They was right.

Q So they couldn't give an Italian a good job because he didn't speak English.

A That's right, sure. And little by little [inaudible] . . . and I got different

job in 1914, I was back--another boss, maybe he had another different job putting away [inaudible], it was Italian boss--that's all you can do them days. And I worked hard on these jobs about a year and a half and then he laid me off. I didn't have no job. Then I had . . .

Q Excuse me, I just wanted to ask one other question here. By this time, by the time you were laid off, had the war already started in Europe?

A No, not yet.

Q Oh, the First World War hadn't started? O.K.

A So then some friend of mine who was living in Philadelphia and he was working on a stone mine.

Q A stone quarry?

A Yeah, uh huh. Then we had--I had a nice job over there. Good money.

Q You went up to Philadelphia then and went to work with this friend of yours.

A Yeah, that's right. They give me nice easy job because I was a boy, like that, young boy, you know. They give a job with a horse and a wagon, carrying the stone to different place like that, you know?

Q Oh, were you driving the horse?

A Driving the horse, two-wheel wagon. \$1.00 a day, ten hour.

Q \$1.00 a day you were getting there, for ten hours a day. How much did you get when you worked for the railroad?

A 13¢ an hour.

Q 13¢ an hour there for the railroad. That was a ten hour day?

A Um hmm.

Q How many days a week was it with them?

A Oh, we get about \$15.00 a week.

Q But how many days a week did you work?

A Oh, for a while there, sometime only about five days, sometimes three days, sometimes four days. . . .

Q When you went to the quarry, how many days a week did you work there? You worked ten hours a day . . .

A It was a full week over there.

Q You worked a full week? What, seven days?

A Just Saturday--five days and . . .



Q Five and a half days. Did you knock off at 12:00 on Saturdays?

A Yeah, that's it.

Q And you just drove the wagon, carried stuff from one place to another, is that it? Somebody else loaded the wagon, you just carried it, and they unloaded it.

A That's right. For \$1.00. I was glad to get it at that time, you can't buy a job them days. My God, things was tough. And then I stay over there at that job about a year like that. And then my cousin in New Castle, he call me back and says, "Come back over to New Castle, I got a better job for you." Better steady job and better money. I was working in a steel plant with a [inaudible] and like that, you know.

Q What was that?

A In a steel plant.

Q In a steel plant?

A Uh huh.

Q You were working in a steel plant where, in Pennsylvania?

A No, New Castle.

Q In other words, you left the job in Pennsylvania and you came back to New Castle in the steel plant.

A Yeah, my cousin called me back. He was a boss on that job.

Q Oh, he was a boss. What was the name of the steel plant, do you remember?

A Baltz.

Q Baltz? B-a-l-t-z?

A Yeah, uh huh.

Q Baltz Steel.

A Then they pay about 15¢ an hour.

Q 15¢ an hour. And how many hours a day? 10 hours?

A Oh, we work about five days, six days sometime.

Q But how many hours a day?

A Ten.

Q Ten hours a day?

A Oh, everybody.

- Q Everybody worked ten hours a day. So you were making what, about a dollar and a half a day then.
- A That's all, that's all.
- Q For five or six days a week.
- A Well, yeah . . . we make good living. We don't get much, but the stuff was cheap. With a dollar, my God, you could buy a lot of stuff.
- Q Yes, for a dollar you could fill a house with food, couldn't you?
- A Yeah, sure. The people that wants to work. The people that don't want to work, sure it was hard. But [inaudible] . . . since 1913 I been in this country, I go different jobs like that or any kind of a job I can do, I try to do, when they have a slow-down like that, you know, maybe a place where I was working laid me off and I go look all around and I try anything to earn a dollar, I making a good living, see? Then when the war come in, in 1915--about yeah, in '15--and the job they pick up like that, you know? I got the job at Eastern Malleable [sp?] Iron down here . . .
- Q Eastern Malleable Iron?
- A Yeah, down at the Marine Terminal, you know, the Marine Terminal. I work for the government down there.
- Q What kind of work were you doing?
- A I was a core maker.
- Q A coal maker?
- A Core maker. Make--dig the sand like that, you know, make a cast in the center [inaudible] . . .
- Q So you made the center of a cast?
- A Yeah, [inaudible] . . . that's what you call the core maker. And sometimes it was day work, sometimes it was piecework, but I always make good money.
- Q What was the difference in your pay between just before the war started and during the war? Do you remember?
- A Oh, before the war it was a little hard . . .
- Q About 15¢ an hour, yeah.
- A And then it started picking up, little by little, see. Same like the Second War, same as everything. [Inaudible] . . . then there wasn't the amount of population like today over in the Delaware, see.
- Q Yes, well tell me something. When the war started in Italy, did you ever get a call from the Italian government to go back to Italy?
- A Oh yeah, I gotta register over here.

- Q You had to register over here--where, the Italian Embassy in Philadelphia?
- A Yes, sir. No, in Delaware over here.
- Q In Delaware--what did they have, a consulate here? And you had to register with the consulate.
- A They had an Italian consulate and an English one here. Then they told me I gotta sign there every week, they want to know what-are you going to do, you want to go back to Europe or do you want to stay in this country, you want a job in this country. I told 'em, that's the way it is. I said, "My God, I just get here, I like to stay here." Well, you gotta register with the United States--I say, "Sure, I do that." Then the First World War, I gotta work for the government, that's all.
- Q So you worked for the government.
- A For the government, yeah.
- Q Well, tell me, did you stay with this job at . . .
- A Oh, yeah.
- Q During the whole war?
- A Whole war.
- Q Well, did the American government every try to draft you?
- A No, you can't. You know why, because I wasn't American citizen.
- Q You were not an American citizen, so they couldn't draft you.
- A No. '22 I become naturalized, you know, after the war. He told me over there, he says, "I can't draft you and that's all you can do, you gotta go back to Europe." But you gotta work for the government, he told me. I said, "Sure, why not?" I glad to work for government.
- Q When the war was on, when the--during the First World War, did you hear anything from your parents, how they were, how your family in Italy was?
- A Oh yeah, sure. I send 'em a letter all the time.
- Q How was life for them over there at that time?
- A Oh, it was hard over there.
- Q It was hard for them?
- A Yeah, you know my first brother told me, he had to serve two year in the army over there and he was--when they started the war he was already serve two years anyhow. And then when the war was started up, he had to stay another four years in the army. He got hurt two times.

Q Really? What, was he wounded twice?

A Two times, yeah.

Q In other words, he was in the army for six years, then, wasn't he?

A Yeah, that's it. When I heard that, my God, I say to myself I was glad to stay over here. If I came back to Europe, they'd draft me right away. He told me over here, he said, "Well if you want to--you gotta decide if you want to go back or if you want to stay here, one of the two. It don't make no difference to us, or to Italy either." He say, "You gotta stay anywhere you want to, but you gotta work for the government." And then he can't draft me because he [sic] can't talk English, you know, and I'm not naturalized--he can't draft me, see. And I was young [inaudible] too--that's when I was about 18.

Q Well tell me something, how was life here when you first got here, what was it like?

A It was a little hard where we were. It was hard--there were girls, they picked up English like that, you know, and some of the girls would go to town, would go together like that, they'd have a good time. Every week we would meet one another like that.

Q Where did you go to have a good time?

A Oh, we went over to Scott Street over here and down on the east side. I used to live on the east side. I was living with some friends of mine.

Q I see. What were the houses like in those days when you first got here?

A Good home.

Q They were O.K.?

A Yeah, where I was living, we had a good home . . .

Q But what was the inside of the house like? Certainly it's different than it is today.

A Oh, bare floor and everything.

Q Bare floor--not too much furniture, huh?

A No convenient at all.

Q Any electricity in the house?

A No, no.

Q No electricity. Plumbing in the house?

A Some of them after the war started, they had the money, they put the electric

in the house. They had gas them days. All through the war they had gas lights, things like that.

Q How about plumbing? Any plumbing in the house?

A Some of 'em. Some of 'em even had a bathroom, and in others you had to go outside.

Q Yeah, the bathroom was outside, but how about the kitchen, did they have a sink in the kitchen?

A Yeah, just a little bowl like that.

Q Just a bowl with water in it.

A Yeah, sometimes you had to get the water outside.

Q How about heating in the house? Did you have any central heating?

A Some of them had heaters. Some of them you got the heat from the stove.

Q In other words, the stove in the kitchen.

A That's all.

Q No heat in the bedrooms.

A Um-umm.

Q No heat in the bedrooms, huh.

A Yeah, it was a tough life. It was pretty tough.

Q Well, I guess you were used to it though . . .

A Oh yeah. When I was in Europe, all day I stay outside all the time. You know, I was young, like that--I don't mind to be cold. We put a lot of clothes on, you know, we don't ever catch cold. Them days was when you had a lot of snows, too--cold, colder than today.

Q It really was colder, you say.

A Yeah [inaudible]. . . . I had a good life in this country. And I get along good with the people, I respect everybody, and [inaudible] . . . and I was dressed good. But that was work. I do what I can, I was young, you know. You can't go out like that--like a wagon man, you know--and in them days a suit of clothes was cheap.

Q How much did it cost you for room and board in those days?

A Well, just to live in a house, \$3.00 a month.

Q \$3.00 a month.

- A \$3.00 a month, just to wash your clothes and cook for you.
- Q In other words, she washed your clothes, cooked for you and you lived there, \$3.00 a month.
- A \$3.00 a month.
- Q That's pretty cheap.
- A Them days that poor woman worked like a slave . . .
- Q I imagine it was very tough on a woman. She had to wash clothes by hand and everything.
- A I tell you, my mother, she don't went through--maybe went through a little bit, but [inaudible] . . .
- Q She never had to go through that.
- A No, no, no. See, after the war, they started to pick up [inaudible], but slow. But that poor woman you know, her husband wasn't making much, she make money, I guess--that poor woman worked sometimes 15 hours . . . and she started to cook for the men--he had about five, six men inside the house. He had her cooking, washing, things like that. She started 5:00 in the morning to about 10:00 at night, that poor woman. [Inaudible] . . . some people . . . would give her a dollar . . . what the hell, \$3.00 a month . . . do all that work . . . some people appreciate it, you know what I mean? Oh, the lady--I was in her house--she was the nicest woman. There was a little friend of mine was right close to the [inaudible]--but she'd take care like he was her own son. I take [inaudible] respect her like my mother. I boarded with her about 10 years.
- Q Oh, really? Well, this is where, in New Castle?
- A No, over here, south of Wilmington.
- Q In south Wilmington.
- A Yeah. Then after the war time I had a job the Eastern Malleable Iron. Then I find her, she was living right close. I [inaudible] . . . some friend of mine, you know, and we know one another. Her husband, he was boss on the railroad and we got along pretty good.
- Q Tell me, where you lived down there, were there mostly all Italians in that neighborhood?
- A Yes, it was about 10, 15 families--all mixed, Polish people, German people, like that, you know.
- Q Did you go to church in those days?
- A Oh, sure.
- Q Where did you go to church?

A St. Peter's, St. Mary's Church.

Q St. Peter's and St. Mary's?

A That's the closest churches.

Q Right. St. Mary's is the closest . . .

A And she had 9:00 Mass, 9:00 Mass at St. Peter's was just for Italian people.

Q Yes. Did you ever go to any Mass but the 9:00 Mass at St. Peter's?

A Yeah, sure.

Q Did they allow you to go to any other Mass besides the 9:00 Mass?

A Sure. Anyplace.

Q Uh huh. You could go to any Mass you wanted to. But the 9:00 Mass was in Italian, huh?

A Yeah. See now, St. Peter was Italian Mass at 9:00, just for Italian people, but [inaudible] you know, same like Europe. And St. Mary was different, was American, same like they have now. But they no stop you, you could go--same like St. Mary, it was our parish, you see, it was closer.

Q O.K. Now, did you ever belong to any clubs of any sort when you first came here?

A I belonged to American Legion--not American Legion, Eagles.

Q The Eagles. Did you join the Eagles when you first came to this country?

A No. After--I tell you, I don't know, it was 1924 or '25.

Q Yes. Did you ever belong to Sons of Italy or anything else?

A Sons of Columbus, like that?

Q Yes.

A I was tried . . . but I don't . . . see, the . . . I don't know, I don't have no mind because I was going with the Eagles like that, you know, and see, I never joined a club like that like a lot of people to have a good time and they'd drink at that club there. [Inaudible] . . . I never drink much you know--I go once in a while with a friend, but I never did belong.

Q I see. Now, what changes did you notice right after the First World War?

A Well, First World War--well, I got married in 1923--no, 1922 I get married. Then 1923, '24 I bought home on east side. I had a nice little home, you know, it was pretty-near new.

Q Were you still working for Eastern Malleable Iron?

A Yeah, I worked there 47 years in that place. I just quit when I retired. I had a good job over there, all the time. The first time I was working on a core maker, laborer, I was an electrician, I was--helped the mechanical machine, you know, fix it up, you know. I had a handyman--carpenter shop, like that, I help once in a while . . .

Q In other words, you were like a Jack-of-all-trades, you worked all over the place.

A Yeah. I was pretty handy man, that's the reason I never sorry. [Inaudible] . . . even I was a paper hanger on Sunday, through the Depression time.

Q Really.

A When Hoover was--do you remember Hoover?

Q Yes.

A Well, I had a pretty good life in this country myself. I never been sick, thanks to God, maybe a cold, you know what I mean, I never had an operation or anything like that. I bought a car--the first car I bought, it was in 1929, a used car like that, you know. I pay very cheap.

Q What was it, a 1929 model, you say?

A Yeah. No, I don't know, I think it was a 1915 model. It was--what's the name--Maxwell.

Q A Maxwell. Oh, really?

A Oh yeah. Oh boy, it make a lot of noise, an old car like that, but I never had any trouble.

Q Really?

A Yeah, it never stopped on me.

Q Tell me something. I want to ask you a couple of other questions here. What did you do as a young man for entertainment, you know, before you got married?

A Oh, we'd go around like that, you know, with a friend maybe, on a Sunday or like a Saturday you no work, play [inaudible, sounds like "vulche"] like that, you know. . .

Q Well, where did you use to play vulche [?]?

A Like a lot of Italians went over on Scott Street over here.

Q Right here on Scott Street in Little Italy. You used to play up around there.

A Mostly over here, yeah. That's what you call your Little Italy, that's where we would go a lot.



- Q Oh, you used to go there a lot.
- A Used to be I know all Italian people in the neighborhood right here.
- Q In other words, you walked--everybody spoke Italian, everybody spoke to you. Tell me something, when you got married, today the custom is everybody goes on a honeymoon. Did you go on a honeymoon then, too?
- A Not in them days. You want to, but I was trying to go, then my wife, she changed her mind. [Inaudible] . . . in 1920 she came to this country, after the war, and she was afraid to travel.
- Q So you didn't go anywhere.
- A No.
- Q But was it the custom for people when they got married then to go on a honeymoon?
- A Oh yeah, sure.
- Q Where did they use to go, for example?
- A Like they go down to New York, you know, Philadelphia, maybe, and sometime maybe you go to Washington like that, you know. And that's all.
- Q And that was it.
- A You didn't go very far, you know, because [inaudible] like today, you know.
- Q Yeah. After you got married, what sort of things did you do, like a family, did you go on picnics and things like that?
- A Yeah. Of course the baby--maybe when it was first a baby, maybe a picnic sometime. We would go through the summer--Brandywine Spring, have you ever heard of that? That's the only park we had in them days.
- Q Uh huh, that was a big park where--what did they have, rides and everything there?
- A Yeah, yeah, that's all. And then we had another one--what's the name--where Sears Roebuck is--42 or . . .
- Q Where Sears is today.
- A Yeah, where Sears is now, yeah.
- Q What was that, Shellpot Park, wasn't it? Is that what it was called?
- A Yeah, that was a hell of a big place. Oh yeah, he had [inaudible] . . . .
- Q Well, tell me something else. You were naturalized in 1922, right? You went to night school. Did they teach you how to read and write a little bit there?

A Little bit, yeah.

Q Was it very hard to get your citizenship papers?

A No. Just talk and like that--they asked you questions and you gotta put [inaudible] . . . you know you can't read it on the paper like that you know. [Inaudible] . . . . The judge, he talked to me about a half hour.

Q Did he, he spoke to you about a half hour.

A He wants to know the day I left Europe. [Inaudible] . . . you know, to come to this country and like that, you know. [Inaudible] . . . "Why did you come over here?" And I had to answer what I came was to make a better home, a better living. That's what I told him. "Good, good." And then he asked about me and then he told a lot of different Constitution things, what's to know . . .

Q What, he asked you about the Constitution, about the government . . . .

A Yeah, sure. You had to know about what it is and like that, see. Then I done pretty good. "Oh, that's good." And they give the paper, I went to the judge, he told me to sign the paper, you know, to become naturalized like that, you know. He told me, he says, "Mr. Covelli, Anthony Covelli," he says--he had two flags, one Italian and one American--he says, "That's the Italian flag, your old flag, your [inaudible] flag; this is a new flag for you. You got a new one. But don't forget the name of your old flag," or [inaudible] respect, anything like that, you know. Oh yeah.

Q Do you remember the name of the judge?

A No.

Q But he told you that you should always respect your old flag and respect your new flag too.

A Oh yeah. He talked very nice. Really, you know, I was crying when he was talking like that; I was crying. And the way they talk to you like that, you know. I was learning to talk English pretty good like that, you know, and now, you know what I mean, that day when I--[inaudible] . . . but the judge [inaudible] . . . because you do the best, see. 50 years from then I understand everything.

Q Were there many people who got their citizenship paper the same time you did?

A Oh yeah. I think 49 people they got their paper that day the same time I did. You ever heard of Mrs. Burnett? She come from New York, she was a teacher for the night school over here for foreign people becoming naturalized here.

Q Oh, he used to teach you?

A Yeah, she was the head woman.

Q Oh, it was her, a woman. Mrs. Burnett, was it?

A Yeah, Mrs. Burnett, yeah. Margaret Burnett was her name. She was a lovely

woman.

Q Now, tell me something else. When you were working down at this iron--Eastern Malleable Iron Company, were you treated well down there?

A Oh, yeah.

Q Were there a lot of Italians who worked there?

A Not too many, but there were mostly Polish and Italian down there, a few colored, that's all. We get along nice.

Q O.K., now, as time went on and you got better off yourself, you know, your standard of living had changed and . . .

A Yes. Excuse me. When I was--the Second War, the law he come to me, he says, "You're too old for this war, but you gotta work for the government." Sure.

Q I want to ask you something else. When Prohibition started, Prohibition came in after the First World War . . .

A It was tough.

Q It was tough, you say? How was it tough? In what way was it tough?

A No work, no . . .

Q No, I don't mean the Depression, I mean Prohibition, you know, when they closed all the bars and everything.

A Yeah, when . . . the Hoover time.

Q Well, this is before Hoover. You know, when they closed the bars, it was against the law to sell liquor.

A Yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember, I remember.

Q How did this affect most of the people you knew?

A Oh, the people [inaudible] . . . figured a different way--make his own wine like that, you know, buy grape, but it had to ferment first.

Q Yeah, you had to ferment it.

A Oh yeah, make wine, yeah, homemade. We make wine just for the family like that. I think they charge you a dollar for the stamp. And that's all, you can make your own wine just for the family, but you can't sell it.

Q You couldn't sell it. Did you know any people who sold it?

A No, I heard, but I never [inaudible] . . .

Q In other words, you got this stamp and nobody ever bothered you, is that it?

A No. See a lot of people, you know why they sell 'em? Because they didn't

have no job. He had a family, he had to make a little bit of money for a living, for the children, like that. Now myself, I was a handyman like that, you know, I'd do anything--anybody who wanted a little job, even a couple hour job, he give me anything he wants, but you can make a quarter, 50¢. I can buy a quart of milk, loaf of bread, lunch meat for the--I had two children, see, in the Second War. But a job, he can't buy no job nowhere.

Q Well, this is when the Depression started. When the Depression started, did you lose your job at Eastern Malleable Iron?

A Yeah--well, I work about pretty near a year, getting shorter and shorter all the time.

Q Oh, did they keep cutting back on your hours?

A Yeah, cut me one day maybe one month, maybe two day the next month, like that, 'til the end of the year, I don't have no job at all. He told me, he said, "Mr. Covelli, I gotta lay you off. . . I got nothing for you to do."

Q How long did you stay laid off there?

A Oh, about two year and a half.

Q About two years and a half? When did you go back to work?

A The end of the election, when Roosevelt . . . 1933.

Q 1933 you went back to work. During the time that you were not working, how did you live?

A Well, the son he go around and do what he can and earn like that you know, and sometimes I go on a farm and help with the farm like that, maybe they give me eat and some stuff to take home for the children and like that, you know. It was pretty tough, you know. But some people they don't want to do, they don't give a [inaudible] . . . they don't make it work. There are a lot of people, you know, they had a big family, you know, and some of them, he'd get disgusted and he'd kill himself, he die himself with the gas, a lot of 'em would jump overboard. Some of 'em would be going down the railroad, there come a train, they lay down on top of the rail and kill himself. Oh, you never heard.

Q A lot of people, though, did this.

A Oh, my God, he didn't want to see his children suffering, didn't have anything to eat.

Q Was there anybody that you knew who did this?

A Well some knew friend like that, you know, but in them days, you know, that's a long time. . . . [Inaudible] like that, I don't want to tell you the name.

Q Well, now, things started to change for you when Roosevelt came in, right?

A Oh yeah. See, when Roosevelt come in, [inaudible] started to come up, from the [inaudible] of the ground, he go all the way up in the air. Never bother him again. And I pretty near lost my home, too. See, I had a few dollars

in the bank when I bought the home. I paid \$3,000 on that house, nice home, \$3,000. Well, I gave about \$1,000 cash, and the rest of it the Colonial Bank over there had the money.

Q It was Colonial Trust then, right?

A Yeah.

Q Not it's Colonial National Bank.

A Yeah. [Inaudible] . . . they take care of that, now. And he sell the house for me. And when I know I can't pay, I went up there he say, "Mr. Covelli, you don't have to pay no money, but you have to pay the interest, that's all. The rest of it," he say, "when you go back to work, you start it up again." And he give me a good break.

Q In the early '20s, Mussolini started coming to power in Italy. What did you hear about him in this country at that time?

A Well, that's all that people are talking about, Mussolini over there, all Europe, Italy. Oh, Mussolini want to run the country over there, the poor people don't have no job, don't do this, don't do that. Oh, but some people they say is good, some people say no.

Q Uh huh. What did you think about him from what you'd heard?

A I think that Mussolini was good for the country. I think he was good. He want to [inaudible] all them slaves. He want to try all the rich people, like some people went to the farm, they got to work 12 months, then 3/4 of the stuff they raise on the farm, the owner get the stuff, and 1/4 the poor family that work it got that.

Q In other words, people who worked on the land for the rich landowner would have to give about 3/4 of everything they grew to the landowner and they'd only keep 1/4 of it.

A Yeah.

Q And then he put a stop to this.

A Oh yeah, he stopped that.

Q In other words, he was good for poor people.

A Darn right. Oh yeah.

Q In other words, he did a lot of good for the poor people.

A Yeah. He told the rich man, "You got the farm, there's a man he gotta work hard, he got a living, too." So you can't raise everything like that after that. It was pretty good.

Q So he made some real changes then.

- A Oh yeah, he was good. [Inaudible] . . . . Oh boy, it was bad. . . .
- Q Do you remember Father Tucker?
- A Oh yeah, sure.
- Q What did you think of him?
- A He was good.
- Q A good man, huh?
- A Good man, oh yeah.
- Q And he did a lot of good for the Italians here, too, didn't he?
- A Oh, for the Italian people, for everybody. Everybody of the Catholic religion.
- Q Would you say that he probably did more to help the Italian people in this area than anybody else?
- A Anybody, anybody he belong to the parish like that, Catholic, he helped all of them. He was good to everybody.
- Q Did he ever come down to the east side and help the Italians down there too?
- A No.
- Q You never saw him come down to that end?
- A No, no. He was busy you know. The first time he came over here, you know, Delaware, he built a little frame church, little temporary church. And then Father [inaudible] . . . . And then he ask some of the people--he tried to do the best. He told 'em all about it. He says, "We got the church now just for temporary. We gotta build a big church over here, big." Everybody got to talking about this church, biggest church in Delaware, Catholic, yes it was. He no have no hard time at all. Everybody want an Italian contractor, you know, they give everything--a lot of stuff for free, free work, everybody helped. A lot of them they give cash money like that to buy the stuff. Anybody that can't afford, they got time, you know, go to work over there, he do anything, what he can. Oh yeah, he was darn good. Nobody can't beat him [inaudible] . . . that church had been built. He was very good.
- Q Yeah. I want to ask you another question about things that were happening in Italy. When Mussolini started to make war with Ethiopia and Albania and so forth, what did the people in this country, the people that you worked with, what did they think about this?
- A Well, you see, one way I think to myself he make a big mistake, he don't have no business doing this. You know why? Because he try to help the people, the poor people, like [inaudible] . . . same like--what the hell you call the other countries? He was [inaudible] . . . no school and no . . .
- Q What, in Ethiopia?

- A In Ethiopia over there, he was, yeah. People there, they don't have no clothes, nothing. Now, Mussolini send people over there to civilize them people, to bring them church, to learn them the religion like that, you know, anything like that, you know. Now the other countries, they got jealous. They got jealous because maybe some day Ethiopia belong to Italy, see. They make it big country. That's what it was figured. Then the goddamned Germans like that, you know, they're talking about you give 'em help, the people over there gonna start to make a revolution you know, they give what you need like that, you know, and Mussolini win. And then when they started to see another war--Turkey--that they would win . . . and then Germany went first and the Italian they had to go after them again, see, with the men. The Italians, they had a lot of men, but they didn't have no ammunition, no money or nothing. These people they don't want to spend no money. That's the trouble with the wars.
- Q O.K. Well how did--when World War II started, how did this affect you over here? Now, during the First World War, of course, the United States and Italy were on the same side. But when the Second World War started, we were on opposite sides. How did this affect you?
- A Well, I think Italy close to the side of the United States . . . was very close.
- Q I mean, Italy was fighting against us in the Second World War. Italy was with Germany in the Second World War.
- A I don't know. What I figure myself, Italy didn't want to go against the Germans, they didn't want to go against the United States, that's what I think myself. You think so?
- Q Well, I don't think the Italian people wanted to go in with the Germans, but the fact remains that Mussolini did ally Italy with Germany.
- A Oh yeah, he did that.
- Q And when we got into the war, I mean we were fighting against Italy and Germany.
- A That's the only trouble. I think it was a little jealousy went on, see.
- Q Uh huh. O.K. Now, if you were to think about the greatest change--now, there've been a lot of changes in this country since you came here. If you were to pick out one and say, "Well, the biggest change of all is this," what would you say it was--if you could pick out just one big change.
- A The Second War.
- Q That was the biggest change--it caused the biggest change?
- A It started [inaudible] . . . men, they go to work every day, and a lot of change of [sounds like "model"] like that, you know, a lot of different things like that. It just developed a lot of things.
- Q It just developed the whole country almost immediately, is that it?

A Oh, yeah. Much, much.

Q Have you ever regretted coming to the United States?

A Huh?

Q Have you ever regretted coming to the United States?

A Oh yeah, sure. Sure.

Q But you're happy that you came here, you were never sorry that you came here.

A Oh yes. No, hmm umm.

Q Did you ever want to go back to Italy?

A Well, yeah, I always wanted to go back just for a visit.

Q Just for a visit, you don't ever want to go back to live.

A No, no, no. When my father and mother was living like that, you know, see. And then the place where I used to work, Eastern Malleable Iron, see I was electrician then, see, and I had a pretty good job like that, you know, and the company liked me a lot because he talks to me and he was afraid I was going. And then we have three-week vacation and I told him, the head man, I said, "Listen, I got the father and mother in Europe, I not see since 1913, and they getting pretty old over there like that, you know, and I'd like to go back on vacation time just for a visit like that, you know, not for stay." "Oh, Mr. Covelli, I don't think it can be done." "Why?" "Who will I put on in place?" He could find--anybody he could put in my place for temporary like that. Suppose I quit? "That would be different." See, that's the answer he give me. Then if I go back to Europe, I gotta wait 'til 1961--'62 to go back to Europe. And I retired in 1960. In '62 I went to Europe, but my father and mother was gone, that's why I was sorry--feel sorry.

Q Yes, I imagine so.

A But I had a sister and brother--I got five sisters over there and three brothers. I don't know how many nieces I got. But I travel Italy a good bit. Lot of different places--I went to Naples, Rome, Venicia, travelled all Abruzzi, [inaudible] . . . I stay on the Adriatic Sea, you know, in the summer--I stay seven months over there. I really enjoyed myself.

Q Well, that's wonderful. Is there anything else you'd like to add to what we've already gone over?

A I'd like to go back now, but I'm pretty old now. I'd like to see my sisters and brothers. They say, "Tony, why don't you come back?" But it's not like go back now, [inaudible] . . . the age is up here, you know--I'm 74.

Q Really, you certainly don't look it.

A Thank you, but I feel it. Like a lot of people say, "Well, you look good,"



but you no feel good. Like I say, you know, life it changes like that, your system get weak like that. You like to try to do a lot of things, but you can't. You gotta do so much and you gotta stop.

Q Is there anything else you'd like to add to this? I don't have anymore questions.

A Well, that's all we can do today.

[END OF INTERVIEW]