



Citation for this collection:

MSS 179 Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

Contact:

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library
181 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19717-5267
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec>
askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Terms governing use and reproduction:

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

A note about transcriptions:

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

Mr. Frank Marra

[00:00:00]

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Mr. Marra: Italy.

Interviewer: Where in Italy were you born?

Mr. Marra: Castel Morrone.

Interviewer: Where is Castel Morrone located?

Mr. Marra: Provincia Caserta.

Interviewer: The province of Caserta. In what area of Italy is the province of Caserta?
It's in Campania isn't it?

Mr. Marra: I'll say it's about 10 miles from Caserta.

Interviewer: Castel Morrone is about 10 miles from the City of Caserta.

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: Which also is about 10 miles or 15 miles from Naples, right?

Mr. Marra: From Caserta to Naples?

Interviewer: Yes it's about 10 or 15 miles, right?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: And this whole area is known as Campania?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: Now this is where you were born?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: Now, what did you do in Castel Morrone? Did you go to school when you were a youngster?

Mr. Marra: Yes I did.

Interviewer: How old were you when you started school?

Mr. Marra: Six years old.

Interviewer: And how long did you go to school?

Mr. Marra: I went to school up to the time I came to the United States, which may be 15 years old, from six to 15.

Interviewer: From the age of six to the age of 15?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: So you were nine years in school?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: How many grades did you cover in that time?

Mr. Marra: I covered four which I was on the fifth grade when I come over, which over there the fifth grade concern of high school.

Interviewer: The equal of the high school here? Fifth grade?

Mr. Marra: Right, the beginning of the high school.

Interviewer: The beginning, in other words you would say you completed elementary and junior high school?

Mr. Marra: Elementary and junior high, that's right.

Interviewer: Right and it was all included in five years of schooling?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: What did they cover in these schools, what sort of study did you do?

Mr. Marra: In the school what you study is there is no such a thing as French or any foreign language, you learn how to read and write, arithmetic, conversation and that's about.

Interviewer: And the history of the country?

Mr. Marra: And the history of course, the history of it.

Interviewer: Did you do anything else while you were going to school? Did you start to learn a trade at the same time or did you just go to school during the day and come home and do nothing else?

Mr. Marra: Yes, I started to learn my trade as a shoe maker as at six years old.

Interviewer: When you were six you started?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: At the same time that you started school?

Mr. Marra: That's right, that's correct.

Interviewer: Now how much time did you spend in school during these days?

Mr. Marra: In school we used to start at nine and go home at two. From nine to two.

Interviewer: And then after you got home you went to the...

Mr. Marra: I went to the shoe maker to learn my trade.

Interviewer: In other words you worked in an apprentice program with a master shoemaker, is it?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now you learnt how to make shoes from scratch it wasn't just about repairing shoes?

Mr. Marra: Not shoe repair, a shoemaker from scratch.

Interviewer: Shoemaker, you made shoes.

Mr. Marra: made shoes.

Interviewer: Did you get paid in this apprenticeship program or did you have to pay the master shoemaker to learn?

Mr. Marra: Well id didn't pay with by money but my people paid my instructor in different way, over there it's not like here you have to pay a certain amount of money. Over there it's more in trade like food.

Interviewer: You gave him farm products, is that it?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Your parents were farmers then?

Mr. Marra: Not exactly a farmer, we had a little ground and we grew a little something and we used to give it to the instructor. Not too often, but whatever we had he would contribute to give him some of the stuff that we grew.

Interviewer: I see. How did your father earn his living in Italy?

Mr. Marra: He was a police force in a way; he used to take care all the grounds of the mayor of that city.

Interviewer: Was he like a watchman or something?

Mr. Marra: Watchman, yes.

Interviewer: I see. Now you said you came to this country when you were 15 years old?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: Was this a decision of yours to come here or was it a decision of your parents or how did you come about the...?

Mr. Marra: The decision when we came over was seven of us, the whole family. But previous to that I has my oldest brother in United States, my second brother in United States and my older sister. My parents want them to come back to the old country but they wrote and told my parents if my parents want to see them once more for them to sell the property over there and come to the United States to see them once more.

Interviewer: And this is what they did?

Mr. Marra: And this is what they did, sold the property and we came over.

Interviewer: So it was a decision of your parents to come to the United States?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: And they brought with them all of their children.

Mr. Marra: The whole family came too.

Interviewer: Now what did they have to go through in order to get the United States, do you remember?

[00:05:00]

Mr. Marra: Yes I do. Now my parents went to the Italian council and he made all the arrangements, papers and all then we had to wait for the quarter.

Interviewer: Right there was a court order at that time?

Mr. Marra: Yes there was.

Interviewer: Now what year was that?

Mr. Marra: That was in 1921.

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Marra: So he went over and made all the arrangements and then we waited for the call from the consulate. So finally the notice came February the 17th of 1921, we got on a boat in Naples.

Interviewer: Okay now before you got to Naples, you were in Castel Morrone, right?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: And how did you get from Castel Morrone to Naples?

Mr. Marra: We went to Caserta.

Interviewer: Okay now how did you get to Caserta?

Mr. Marra: By wagons.

Interviewer: I see you went in wagon, was it like a stage coach, just an open farm kind of wagon?

Mr. Marra: It was an open farm wagon.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Marra: From there we went to the station and they put us on a train, from Caserta to Naples. We got to Naples and we lined up for an examination, so everything went alright, everybody was in good health. We got vaccinated and all what goes with the shots and everything that goes with it, then they come over and put us on a boat. The boat didn't leave at that time which they usually leave at nights. What time it was at night I really don't know.

Interviewer: So the ship left at night, it does not leave in the day?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Do you remember what ship it was?

Mr. Marra: Yes, Fredich. A German Liner.

Interviewer: A German Liner?

Mr. Marra: German Liner.

Interviewer: Now on this ship were there only Italians or were there people from all over Europe?

Mr. Marra: They were all Italians.

Interviewer: All Italians?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: Now what was the accommodations like aboard this ship?

Mr. Marra: The accommodation was very poor.

Interviewer: Could you give me some description?

Mr. Marra: Yes. They had what they called bumps stacked up pretty high. For each we had the one up for the buckets to go over to the kitchen which I'd say

about a block long. We had to go over with our buckets, the cooks they put food in a buckets and we had the steel plates. We go back to the bunks, we sit on the bunks. There were no tables, no dining room and we used to eat our lunch, supper and breakfast.

Interviewer: *[inaudible]* [0:07:58] in other words you just went with the pail, did one person for each family go with the pail and bring back enough for everyone?

Mr. Marra: They could have went as many as they wanted but one stood in line and the others stood on the side so help carry whatever because it was a loaf of bread, maybe a pot of wine and macaronis and beans which one person could not carry from the kitchen to the area where we were stationed.

Interviewer: Now you said where you slept and everything it had bunks stacked pretty high.

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Was it one large open compartment or was it just a compartment for your family and then a compartment for a few other people or was everybody in one area?

Mr. Marra: No sir, the area where I was were all men. Then they had another compartment for all women. So everything was open which no women were allowed at sleeping time where the men's quarters were.

Interviewer: I see. Now how about the children, with whom did the children stay with. The mothers or with the fathers?

Mr. Marra: With the fathers.

Interviewer: The children stayed with the fathers? All the children?

Mr. Marra: With the fathers.

Interviewer: All the children regardless?

Mr. Marra: The boys.

Interviewer: Now was there an age limit on this?

Mr. Marra: No sir. No age limit.

Interviewer: In other words boys who might be two or three stay with the father?

Mr. Marra: Not that young, now in that respect I really don't know what they did the small ones. But there were no small children where I was with my father and my brother.

Interviewer: Alright. Do you think we might assume that the real small children say five under were with their mothers?

Mr. Marra: With the mothers.

Interviewer: Okay. How long did it take you to cross from say from Naples to New York? I assume you landed in New York?

Mr. Marra: No sir, Boston, Massachusetts.

Interviewer: You landed in Boston?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: This is interesting.

Mr. Marra: We left Naples as I said before February the 17th of 1921 we landed in Boston March the 3rd of 1921.

[00:10:09]

Interviewer: That was quite long, did you stop anywhere along the way?

Mr. Marra: Yes we did, we stopped in Gibraltar for a little while. Well little while I'd say half a day. I'm pretty sure that's the only place we stopped.

Interviewer: That's the only stop?

Mr. Marra: Yeah the only stop.

Interviewer: Well that was a very long cross session. Now when you landed in Boston how were you received? First of all was anyone waiting for you there?

Mr. Marra: Was supposed to. My oldest brother that had been here for many years he was supposed to come over to Boston but there was some mix up that he could not get there. Luckily we find a man who talked very good Italian and he stopped my father. And he told him not to worry about anything,

he was going to get the baggage and take him to the railroad station in Boston so we could come to Wilmington.

Interviewer: I see. Now when you did land in Boston how were you received officially? I mean by the government? I mean did you have to go through anything there?

Mr. Marra: We just went to the customs house to inspect the baggage, to see if there was any contraband. That's all.

Interviewer: Did they give you a physical examination?

Mr. Marra: No Physical whatsoever.

Interviewer: No physical at all? And you were not detained at all? They just checked your baggage and just let you go, correct?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now when you caught the train in Boston did you have any difficulty there?

Mr. Marra: We had a little difficulty in Boston about heat.

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Marra: Would you want me to explain that?

Interviewer: Yes, please.

Mr. Marra: When this man left us at the station not knowing anybody, this man had to leave **[inaudible] [0:12:02]** because he was the man that would take care of the immigrant, take the baggage and take them to the station. So he left us all there. So me 15 years old I was so hungry which everybody was hungry. So I asked my father, dad I'm hungry. He said well we all are, he says well what are we going to do? And it was a stand in the middle of the railroad station which was some cakes and candies and cigarettes. I said to my father give me some money I'm going to get something to eat. And his reply was how are you going to get something to eat and you can't talk English?

So I said well I'll make him understand me I said now you give me some money. So he gave me a bill, I assume it was \$1 but I don't know at that time whether it was a one or a five I really don't know. And he gave me

some change. So I went to the place and I point to the man I want one of that, which was a big chocolate cake. And I pulled out both hands, showed the man the change. Whatever cost it was I really don't know but anyway I come back and my father said you really made it. So we all sat down at the station and ate the cake.

Interviewer: And this was your lunch?

Mr. Marra: That was a lunch.

Interviewer: Now when you got the train in Boston did that run straight through to Wilmington or did you have to make some changes?

Mr. Marra: We changed in *[inaudible] [0:13:32]* we got in the station and in the meantime this older brother came to Philly but by the time he got there we already was on a train. Was a lady that we didn't know what it was all about at the time, there was a man who was going around with a big funnel to announce the train certain time. But we could not understand.

Interviewer: That was what a megaphone?

Mr. Marra: Megatone.

Interviewer: Megatone.

Mr. Marra: Correct, right.

Interviewer: And he was shouting out the times of the train's destinations and the time they were leaving and so forth?

Mr. Marra: Correct. But we did not understand the man. So finally my father had the tickets for the train and he went over to this old lady and he pointed the tickets. So she said to my father not the one. I couldn't understand her but the way she emotion. So by three minutes before the time the train arrived for us to get on, she took the whole family, put us in a train and we start to come to Wilmington.

Interviewer: Now how did you know where to get off in Wilmington? Did the conductor know that you were getting off at Wilmington and did he call you to get off?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir, this lady evidently this lady she got on the train and must talk to the conductor to let us off at Wilmington Pennsylvania railroad station.

[00:15:04]

Interviewer: I see, so that's where you got off?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now once you got off at the railroad station at Wilmington, what happened?

Mr. Marra: We got off the train and we were standing on Front and French, we didn't know where to go or anything. so finally a man approached us with a young fellow and he came over to my father, he said to my father where are you going? My father says I'm going to the United States. So this man said well this is United States. My father said well there I am. Then he started a conversation and he asked my father if he had a son by name Joe. My father said yes, well he says your son married my daughter. So my father said well why didn't you tell me that before? He says well you gave me a sharp answer. He says well you gave me a ridiculous question, where you were going and I told you I was going to the United States. And that was so he put us on the trolley car and he told the motor man to leave us all at Eight and Scott. So we got off at Eight and Scott from there we met people from the old country and they took us over to my sister's house.

Interviewer: Where was your sister's house?

Mr. Marra: On 7th and between the Scott and Lincoln.

Interviewer: On 7th Street between Scott and Lincoln?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: And once you arrived you stayed with your sister?

Mr. Marra: For a while, yes.

Interviewer: How long did you stay with your sister?

Mr. Marra: I would say about three or four months.

Interviewer: Alright now, when you all arrived you were seven of you, your father, your mother, yourself and four brothers and sisters I assume. Were they all sisters or brothers and sisters?

Mr. Marra: No, three were here as I mentioned.

Interviewer: Three were already here?

Mr. Marra: One sister and two brothers. Our whole family consists of two brothers, three sisters, mother and dad, seven of us. And three were here.

Interviewer: I see. Now while you were staying with your sister you said it was three months?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: Now was your father able to find a job right away when he got here?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir he did. He went to work for DuPont Highway as a road worker.

Interviewer: How old was your father at that time?

Mr. Marra: At that time *[inaudible]* [0:17:54].

Interviewer: Well just approximately.

Mr. Marra: Approximately I would say about 52, 53.

Interviewer: So he was 52 years old at that time and he went to work as a laborer?

Mr. Marra: As a laborer.

Interviewer: On the highway?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: Now how about yourself, did you find a job also?

Mr. Marra: I certainly did I went to work March the 5th. I got here March the 3rd I went to work March the 5th as a shoe repair.

Interviewer: I see. Were you working for someone?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir.

Interviewer: Where was this?

Mr. Marra: 703 Orange Street.

Interviewer: 7th on Orange?

Mr. Marra: 7th on Orange.

Interviewer: Now while you were all living with your sister did you pay her rent?

Mr. Marra: No sir we didn't pay any rent, of course we paid for the food through my oldest brother but three months later they got us a home right across on 7th between Scott and Lincoln.

Interviewer: So you purchased a home at that time?

Mr. Marra: No we rented.

Interviewer: You rented, you rented.

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: So then you all moved out of your sister's house and moved into your own house?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now during the early years while you were here, did your social relationships, the people with whom you associated were they all Italian?

Mr. Marra: No sir. I associated with American people which was really hard for me to understand them for a while I was here.

Interviewer: Now you say you associated with the American people.

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: Now were these people whose parents and grandparents had been in this country, were born in this country?

Mr. Marra: American born.

Interviewer: So these people were American born?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: But they were not of Italian ancestry?

Mr. Marra: No sir.

Interviewer: What percentage of your associates would you say they constituted would you say they were maybe 25% or 50% or greater or lesser?

Mr. Marra: I would say 50% of Americans.

Interviewer: When we speak of Americans were these people of say English background, German background, or Irish background?

[00:20:03]

Mr. Marra: Right, because the way it was then. Anybody that doesn't talk Italian they were an American.

Interviewer: So this is how the Italians, either you're an Italian or an American?

Mr. Marra: Correct, correct.

Interviewer: Nothing else.

Mr. Marra: There was nothing else.

Interviewer: So if you spoke English and you were born here you were an American?

Mr. Marra: You were an American.

Interviewer: Unless of course you were an Italian.

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: I see. Now could you tell me what sort of jobs you held as the years went by?

Mr. Marra: As years went by I worked as a shoemaker for about two years then I went to the Delaware hard Fiber Company in Marshall.

Interviewer: How did you get there?

Mr. Marra: Myself, went over and...

Interviewer: Did you walk or take a trolley?

Mr. Marra: I took the buss.

Interviewer: You took the bus? Okay. now this was two years from your arrival?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir.

Interviewer: Could you speak English by that time?

Mr. Marra: Very little. And as I kept on working.

Interviewer: Now you got the job there you said?

Mr. Marra: I got the job.

Interviewer: At Dalhart Fiber Marshall?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir.

Interviewer: How did you get the job?

Mr. Marra: let me rephrase that answer Frank. I wasn't 16 yet, I was about a year. I'm sorry it wasn't two years, it was about a year.

Interviewer: It was about a year.

Mr. Marra: It was about a year because I remember it well. My working paper called for 16 which I was not 16. But somehow or other I talked to the foreman and the general foreman the best I could. The general foreman, turned around to the foreman and said, "This boy wants to work. He says we've got a boarding to work." So they gave me the job.

Interviewer: What sort of work were you doing?

Mr. Marra: I was running what they call a hand screw machine in the machine shop.

Interviewer: What did you do with this machine? What did the machine do?

Mr. Marra: I operated *[inaudible]* [0:21:58].

Interviewer: Just fabricating various things from fibers?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now how long did you stay there?

Mr. Marra: I stayed there about one year.

Interviewer: Now how were you treated while you were there?

Mr. Marra: Wonderful.

Interviewer: Were there many other Italians who worked there?

Mr. Marra: Yes quite a few.

Interviewer: Quite a few so you had no difficulty in communicating as you could always find someone who spoke English well enough?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now how many hours a day did you work?

Mr. Marra: 10 hours a day.

Interviewer: 10 hours a day? What was the pay like?

Mr. Marra: 23 cents per hour.

Interviewer: Was there any additional compensation for overtime?

Mr. Marra: None whatsoever.

Interviewer: How many days a week did you work?

Mr. Marra: Six days.

Interviewer: Six days a week? And you had Sundays off?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: Now you stayed there one year?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now when you left did you leave of your own volition? Did you quit, were you laid off, were you fired or?

Mr. Marra: I gave the company a week notice which my father bought me a shoe shop at 7th and Harris.

Interviewer: So this is why you left because then you got a shoe shop?

Mr. Marra: I have to go business on my own. And that was one reason I left Delaware Fiber, to go in business for myself.

Interviewer: How long did you stay in business for yourself?

Mr. Marra: I stayed in business for myself from 1924 to 1950.

Interviewer: And you operated out of the same shoe shop all these years?

Mr. Marra: No sir, one particular shop at 7th and Harris from 1924 to 1947. From 1947 to 1949 at Tulips Street in Wilmington.

Interviewer: Whereabouts on Tulips was this?

Mr. Marra: Between Scott and Lincoln.

Interviewer: Between Scott and Lincoln?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now when you worked as a shoe repair main, now you didn't make shoes at that time did you?

Mr. Marra: I start when I first had my business at 7th and Harris.

Interviewer: You did make custom shoes?

Mr. Marra: I made shoes, yes.

Interviewer: Was the business for custom shoes very good or was it.

Mr. Marra: It was for a while.

Interviewer: For a while it was good.

Mr. Marra: But then it got sold and I had to turn it into a repair shop.

Interviewer: Right, now did you make a fairly good living from repairing shoes?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: Now while you were in the shoe repair business did you do any other kind of work or were you just limited to the shoe business?

Mr. Marra: No sir I had some more work to do. As the business slowed down a little, I got a job with John Hancock Insurance Company. That was 1935. From 1935 to 1936, and '37 I worked Bellanca Aircraft. Still having my place which I had made in a place to work in my little business place.

[00:25:13]

Interviewer: In other words while you were working for Bellanca you had other men working for you in the repair shop?

Mr. Marra: Not men but one.

Interviewer: One man?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Alright so he carried on the business and you paid him a salary a portion of what he made in the shoe shop, is that it?

Mr. Marra: Not exactly. The proposition with this man that he would pay whatever the rent, the material and whatever he made that's it.

Interviewer: In other words you didn't make anything out of the shoe shop while he was in it?

Mr. Marra: No, that's correct.

Interviewer: he just paid all the expenses and used your shop and whatever he could earn was his?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now you say you worked for Bellanca Aircraft? Now while you were there what sort of work did you do?

Mr. Marra: As I went in as apprentice and gradually I became a jig and fixture. As a jig and fixture as work slows down...

Interviewer: That was jig and fixture.

Mr. Marra: Jig and fixture. As the work slowed down in the jig and fixture department they didn't let me off they transferred me in the sheet metal shop.

Interviewer: Okay but as a jig and fixture what were you doing?

Mr. Marra: A jig and fixture is you make your jig, to make the parts for the airplane.

Interviewer: I see in other words as a machinist.

Mr. Marra: Right, well machinist is a different trade. As a jig and fixture. A machinist doesn't have anything to do as jig and fixture.

Interviewer: I see. Now you went into sheet metal after that?

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: What were you doing? Fabricating airplanes?

Mr. Marra: Fabricate, correct.

Interviewer: Now going back a little bit, I want to retrace these steps a little bit more, going back to the time when your parents first rented a house what was the house like?

Mr. Marra: Well it was not glamour the way things are now, it was very poor which we weren't the only family like I said no electricity, no rugs on the floor, no television, no radios. Very few homes had a bathroom and as I said was pretty poor.

Interviewer: It was basically a shelter, a place to sleep a place to live? Protect you from the weather.

Mr. Marra: That's about it.

Interviewer: What was the cooking stove like?

Mr. Marra: The cooking stove talk about the coal stove or gas stove?

Interviewer: It was either a coal stove for cooking or gas stove, is that it?

Mr. Marra: We had them both.

Interviewer: Did you use both for cooking?

Mr. Marra: To save a little bit of gas we cooked on the coal stove in winter time.

Interviewer: Now this coal, did you have central heating in the house?

Mr. Marra: No sir.

Interviewer: The rooms were completely unheated then?

Mr. Marra: Unheated.

Interviewer: The only stove in the house was in the kitchen, is that it?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: In your early years what were your social activities like? What did they consist of?

Mr. Marra: The social activities in the old days was you get together, friends and you congregate to a home, they had a piano, play a piano and maybe they had some girls and they come in then we dance a little bit. And that's about all activity it was.

Interviewer: Now during the summertime on Sundays which was the day you didn't work, what did you do?

Mr. Marra: What we did now it was like I said before it wasn't like it is nowadays that you go here to the beach and go there to the beach. Then there was the one and only Aribau Beach.

Interviewer: That's over in Jersey, it's still there.

Mr. Marra: Still there and Shawpank Park.

Interviewer: Where was Shawpank Park?

Mr. Marra: Located on 49th in Market [0:29:22] where Petril Quarry is not

Interviewer: Where Petril Quarry is now?

Mr. Marra: Yes. It's up further a little bit than where *[inaudible]* [0:29:33].

Interviewer: Where Sears is now that's where the Shawpank Park was?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: What did they have in the way of amusement there?

Mr. Marra: Amusement it was just like when you go to the carnival, they have a Ferris wheel and boat rides and shooting galleries and all these.

Interviewer: And this operated just during the summer?

Mr. Marra: Just during the summer.

Interviewer: And every summer the same thing.

Mr. Marra: Same thing.

Interviewer: All summer long?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: And this is where you would go?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: Now we've discussed your working, you had for one year after you came here you worked at Delaware Hard Fiber and then you got your shoe repair?

[00:30:08]

Mr. Marra: Pardon me, before I went to Delaware Hard Fiber I was working as a shoe repair.

Interviewer: That's right, shoe repairman then Delaware Hard Fiber then back into the shoe business?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Did you ever do anything else? Did you ever go anywhere else looking for a job?

Mr. Marra: No sir. I didn't because I always had a job through Bellanca I passed all the aircraft industry and Paseki, all American engineering, Atlantic Aviation and as I said previously, Bellanca. I was always had somewhere to always work.

Interviewer: Well there was never any time when you were looking for a job, walking for example from here and there seeking work?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir, to better myself as I said I walked back and forth every morning over to Bancroft.

Interviewer: Oh you also worked in Bancroft?

Mr. Marra: I didn't, I didn't get a job over there. But the reason was this that after six months while I had the shop I used to go to better myself to get something else. Because I made a living a shoe repairman but I wanted to better myself.

Interviewer: Right you wanted something that was a little better where there was some chance for further advancement?

Mr. Marra: Right. And I was never fortunate enough to get a job over.

Interviewer: Now during your earlier years here, did you ever experience any prejudice or bias against you because you were an Italian?

Mr. Marra: No sir. To myself I didn't.

Interviewer: You were never aware of anybody being prejudiced against you because you were an Italian?

Mr. Marra: No sir, as the story were going on, what you would call frontiers but to me I never noticed any prejudice towards me.

Interviewer: Well how were Italians treated in general? Would you say that they are treated the same as everyone else?

Mr. Marra: Well I don't know how to put this but we were not too well liked.

Interviewer: You were not too well liked.

Mr. Marra: Not too well liked.

Interviewer: Could you think of any reasons why you were not too well liked? Logical reasons?

Mr. Marra: For my own experience as I said for a while I didn't notice anything prejudiced towards me that I was an Italian but little later I began to

understand that I go some other places and they don't come right out but they look at you somehow or other they could tell that you were an Italian and it seems to me you are never the first one. You were always the second.

Interviewer: In other words if you went into a place for example a restaurant and you sat down to eat and someone else came in they would never take you in your turn for example to wait on you and always wait on everybody else like you said and wait till the end. Is that is?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: And this happened frequently?

Mr. Marra: Frequently.

Interviewer: So this is where you became aware of the fact that you were treated differently than others?

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: I see. Now when Mussolini started to rise to power in Italy what were the reactions of the people that you knew? The Italian people in this country? How did they react to his rising to power?

Mr. Marra: Well some of them agreed, and some disagree.

Interviewer: Alright now, how did this agreement or disagreement manifest itself?

Mr. Marra: Well as is ay I was too young and I can't because Mussolini went on in 1921.

Interviewer: Right, this was when he started?

Mr. Marra: Correct. Which I didn't know because we came in 1921 and I didn't know whether it was good for the idea that he had or whether it was bad.

Interviewer: But how did the other people express their feelings about him?

Mr. Marra: Most of the people that I come in contact that their opinion was great what he was doing.

Interviewer: Most of the people agreed with what he was doing?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: They thought he was good for Italy?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: This was the Italians that you knew?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: How about non Italians that you knew? How did they react to this man?

Mr. Marra: Well *[inaudible]* [0:34:55] go again on that subject because I was too young to realize what other because not knowing the English language in 1921 the only side I could hear from the Italians.

[00:35:11]

Interviewer: Alright now you told me before that you had a lot of friends who were not Italians?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir.

Interviewer: Did they ever discuss Mussolini while you were in their presence?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: And what was the gist of their discussion?

Mr. Marra: The discussion was two gentlemen they came in my shoe shop, very educated people and they started to talk about Mussolini and Ethiopia. And one of the men spoke out and told this other gentleman I won't mention any name, but he told him when you read something, don't read it at the present read way back. If you recall that ground that Ottawa in Ethiopia years back belonged to Italy. Mussolini didn't want what didn't belong to him, he want what belonged to Italy.

Interviewer: So this is how this gentleman approached it, now he was not an Italian?

Mr. Marra: He was not an Italian.

Interviewer: In other words he thought that Mussolini was justified in taking Ethiopia?

Mr. Marra: Was justified. Which he come out Mussolini wants ground for his people which he don't ask for anybody else's land he asked for what belonged to Italy.

Interviewer: In other words in taking Ethiopia this man felt that Mussolini was simply taking what did belong to the Italian people and nothing else?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now how did the other man react to what he was saying?

Mr. Marra: Well he didn't like the idea very much but I agreed with this man because I know a little bit about what went on and I know to be a fact that this particular place belonged to Italy, to history I've read it, belonged to Italy.

Interviewer: I'm just curious about this and I'm just going to ask this question not for any sake of mine but just to get further information. How would this thing be justified as belonging to Italy if it had an entirely different racial and ethnic group that lived in this area? For example they are Africans who lived there and it was in Africa and Italy was so far removed and in an entirely different culture, an entirely different area, an entirely different civilization. How could this possibly belong to Italy? I'm just curious.

Mr. Marra: Yes well that we don't know.

Interviewer: Is he going back to Roman times when Rome ruled all the known world?

Mr. Marra: Possibly.

Interviewer: Could he possibly be going back that far? I really don't know.

Mr. Marra: Evidently he was.

Interviewer: Well this brings up other questions Rome *[inaudible]* [0:37:52] and took it from another people so that if you go back even further then you can still say that it didn't belong to Italy in the first place.

Mr. Marra: Yes sir.

Interviewer: I suppose you could.

Mr. Marra: I'd like to say that it's not an argument.

Interviewer: No that was just for information, to try to get.

Mr. Marra: I agree with but if Mussolini went through Halle Selasie because Italy had grew up and he needed a grant in a nice way, in a peaceful way and they refused which there was too much for them and not enough for Italy. But they refused. So evidently he had to take it the hard way.

Interviewer: I see. Okay I won't pursue that any further. Now we spoke about your social activities somewhat political views you had none? Right?

Mr. Marra: No sir.

Interviewer: You had no political views? How did some other Italian people express their support for Mussolini when they did support him, how did they express their support? Were there any organization which formally and openly supported him?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir it was here. I recall that we had people some from Italy to explain what Mussolini tried to accomplish.

Interviewer: Where did they gather the people to explain this to?

Mr. Marra: We used to hire a hall Sons of Columbus and we go to somebody's house, we get the other and talk things over because we wanted to know for sure whether Mussolini was doing good for the Italian people.

Interviewer: Now these people who came over here to explain this of course were all members of Mussolini's political party, weren't they?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Did you ever have anybody hold a meeting to express an opposite point of view?

Mr. Marra: We had people in this society that we were for him and they were for this man and they would ask questions to these people that come from Italy and they answered and we were all satisfied the way the question was put to these people. And the answer we got from them.

[00:40:20]

Interviewer: In other words they answered all of your questions to your satisfaction?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now I want to ask you some other questions, when you first came here in what year did you say?

Mr. Marra: In 1921.

Interviewer: 1921, was there an Italian Catholic church in Wilmington?

Mr. Marra: In 1921 Italian Catholic Church I would say St. Thomas but it's not at time.

Interviewer: Right. When was Saint Anthony's founded? [0:40:48] 1923, right?

Mr. Marra: 1921.

Interviewer: Saint Anthony's [0:40:51] was founded in 1921? '23 I believe it was.

Mr. Marra: I'm sorry.

Speaker: It was founded in 1925.

Interviewer: In 1925?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir, in 1925 as a matter of fact I was the second couple to be married in the big church.

Interviewer: Right, now that's the big church

Mr. Marra: The big church.

Interviewer: But the little church was started. Was there for one year in 25?

Mr. Marra: In 25.

Interviewer: Alright. Now prior to St Anthony's church being open where did you go to church when you went to Church?

Mr. Marra: St. Thomas.

Interviewer: How were you received at St. Thomas, did you feel welcome at St. Thomas?

Mr. Marra: Very, very warm.

Interviewer: In other words the year when you were going there everything was alright because I had spoken with other Italians who said that prior to 1921 they had a priest at St. Thomas.

Speaker: Father Thomas.

Interviewer: Well whoever he was he didn't like Italians. There was a man there who did not like Italians he would stand at the door and if an Italian came to any mass other than the 9 o'clock which was considered the Italian mass he would turn them away, he wouldn't allow them to come in. But this all changed over the course of years and they treated?

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: I see now once St. Anthony's was founded and built the Italian people took on a completely different attitude I understand.

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: That they felt that they could now hold their heads high.

Mr. Marra: High and that's my church.

Interviewer: And they were very proud of having their own church?

Mr. Marra: Very proud.

Interviewer: Now in so far as the young men of Little Italy were concerned.

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: What sort of things did they do? Certainly they didn't lead a sterile life I'm sure they enjoyed themselves and they extend from more than just little conversational groups and houses here and there they must have done something else that kept them interested. Because let's face it when you get a group of young men they have to do something that is a little more than Ham John, something to entertain them in some way or another.

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: Now what sort of things did you do?

Mr. Marra: What sort of a thing? As I said previous we go through friends house, have a little party a little cake, a little soda just a little yippee yap.

Interviewer: Now I mean it wasn't just all cake?

Mr. Marra: No we got.

Interviewer: You guys had some drinks and.

Mr. Marra: Yeah sure we had some drinks, some dance as I said before.

Interviewer: Did you ever travel out of Wilmington did you ever take a run off to New York and things like that on a train or drive up?

Mr. Marra: No sir, very seldom. Because you had to travel by train well let's face it, in 1921 there wasn't much money to do things that we're really doing now.

Interviewer: Now when we get beyond this point we are discussing fairly recent times and most of these is well know. But when you look back on the years that you've spent here and you can vividly remember what it was like in Italy.

Mr. Marra: Yes sir.

Interviewer: Do you feel that if you have to do over again would you still do the same thing or would you stay in Italy?

Mr. Marra: Well that question is pretty hard because over there as I said I was young. Now I don't know what my reaction if I had to do it all over again I really don't know what will it be.

Interviewer: I see. Now looking back on the past also, I'm sure you have many fond memories, fine companionships that you had, of course you were a young man and you enjoyed yourself in many ways that perhaps you don't feel worthy of being mentioned now, you don't think they are worthy at all.

[00:45:06]

Mr. Marra: Right.

Interviewer: But do you ever have a yearning or a longing for the good old days?

Mr. Marra: Good old days? That I have.

Interviewer: Do you really think that they were good old days?

Mr. Marra: Well let me put it this way, they were good old days because we didn't know any better. Let me put it this way, like missing having something and taking it away from you you'll miss very much.

Interviewer: You'll miss it, right.

Mr. Marra: Not having.

Interviewer: Never having.

Mr. Marra: Never having you'll never miss.

Interviewer: In other words you don't miss what you don't know?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Now you certainly wouldn't want to go back to the good old days?

Mr. Marra: No sir that's for sure.

Interviewer: No? In other words the good old days are right now?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: These are the best times of your life, right?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Okay fine, I think that about covers it unless you have anything else you would like to mention? I'll ask you another question here, when the second World War started, when United States became involved against Italy and Germany and Japan. Now certainly when the United States became involved with Italy I'm sure you as having been born in Italy had many, many feelings about this whole thing.

Mr. Marra: Yes.

Interviewer: How would you say your feelings were?

Mr. Marra: Well my feelings were this when I took out my citizen papers I swore that this was my country regardless of the feelings. If I would have been called in the armed service I would **[inaudible] [0:46:47]** which I had to go.

Interviewer: Now during the war did you still continue as a shoemaker, did you work in the defense work or..?

Mr. Marra: Yes sir I worked in the defense work with Bellanca Aircraft.

Interviewer: You were with Bellanca then?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: How did other people... I'm sorry, go ahead.

Mr. Marra: I was at Bellanca as I said previous I still had my shoe shop which I had this man run it for me.

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Marra: And that was classified as a defense plan, which I was deferred from the... if I would have been in the shoe shop as a shoe maker I had to go into service.

Interviewer: You didn't have to go into service but since you were working for Bellanca in the defense work you were deferred and you were not called.

Mr. Marra: For the three months and then they put me over thirty eight year old which I was over age.

Interviewer: I see. Did they take you into service for three months?

Mr. Marra: No sir, that was the time I got the deferment for three months.

Interviewer: You were deferred for three months and then you were beyond the age that they were calling?

Mr. Marra: Correct.

Interviewer: Did anyone speak to you in a non friendly manner because you were an Italian and because Italy was at war with the United States? Did they view you in any way as an alien?

Mr. Marra: No sir.

Interviewer: In other words you ran into no difficulty at all.

Mr. Marra: No difficulty whatsoever.

Interviewer: At least that was known to your face, is that it?

Mr. Marra: Not that I know of.

Interviewer: Okay fine. Good is there anything else that you'd like to add onto this?
No, nothing. Okay fine.

[End of Audio] **[00:48:15]**